

Multipurpose Prevention Technologies: Messaging Framework for South Africa

Purpose

The following framework for messaging was developed to support advocates in South Africa as they raise awareness and build support for multipurpose prevention technologies (MPTs) for reproductive health in South Africa. These messages were designed specifically for use with national and regional government stakeholders, the research and scientific communities, and nongovernmental organizations.

By using a shared messaging framework, MPT advocates in South Africa can build a coordinated approach to advancing support and development of MPTs in South Africa using a common voice and shared terminology.

Process

The messages were developed by PATH and the Global Change Network in collaboration with South African MPT stakeholders, researchers, and advocates who participate in the South Africa MPT Communication Advisory Committee.

Intended use

MPT advocates in South Africa should view the following messages as a menu of options. Each message is designed to be a complete thought that can be used by itself or as part of a longer narrative. MPT advocates can, therefore, choose individual messages or a series of messages to be used for a particular communication or advocacy effort depending on the audience and purpose. These messages can be used in presentations, brochures, websites, speeches, or other outreach efforts to help advance support for MPTs in South Africa.

The need for sexual and reproductive health options

Reproductive and sexual health outcomes in South Africa continue to improve.

- Deaths from AIDS-related causes have dropped more than 27% from 2001 to 2011.¹
- HIV prevalence among youth aged 15–24 years has declined significantly from 10.3% in 2005 to 7.3% in 2012.²
- With 60% of married women between the ages of 15–49 using a modern contraceptive method, South Africa has the highest rate of contraceptive use in sub-Saharan Africa.³
- South Africa's fertility rate continues to fall from 2.92 in 2001 to 2.35 in 2011 making South Africa among the countries with the lowest fertility levels in sub-Saharan Africa.⁴
- Although infant mortality remains high in South Africa, it has declined steadily since 2003 to 37.9 per 1,000 infants in 2011.⁴

While many health indicators are improving, there is still work to be done. Women and their families still experience alarming reproductive health consequences.

- The number of women who die from pregnancy-related causes is unacceptably high. The maternal mortality ratio has more than doubled over 13 years, increasing from 150 deaths per 100,000 births in 1998 to 310 deaths per 100,000 births in 2011.⁵
- Each year in South Africa more than 20,000 newborns die within the first four weeks of life, and an additional 23,000 births are stillborn.⁶
- The proportion of people living with HIV increased from 10.6% in 2008 to 12.3% in 2012.²
- In 2012 condom use at *last* sex act decreased to 36.2%, returning to levels similar to those in 2005 (35.4%), after a high of 45.1% in 2008.⁷
- The teenage pregnancy rate declined from 65 per 1,000 in 2001 to 54 per 1,000 in 2008 but still remains unacceptably high.⁸
- When women have the ability to space or limit births, child survival increases and maternal mortality decreases. Children born three to five years after a previous birth are more likely to survive through age five than children born less than three years following a previous birth.

Women, particularly young women, are some of the most vulnerable when it comes to HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

- In 2012, 36% of women between 30–34 years of age in South Africa are living with HIV. They have the highest prevalence of HIV among the general population.⁷
- Commercial sex workers, who are primarily female, have some of the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections and disease. Sex workers account for one in five new HIV infections and an HIV prevalence rate of between 44 and 69 percent.⁹

- High rates of transactional sex and sex between individuals of different generations, primarily young women with older men, combine with related power imbalances to put young women at high risk for HIV.
 - Girls 15 – 19 years old are 8 times more likely to have HIV than boys.⁷
- Women between the ages of 15–49 are almost twice (43%) as likely as men to have HIV.²
- Women between 15 and 24 years of age in South Africa get infected about five years earlier than men in the same age group.¹⁰
- Unmarried people are twice as likely to have HIV as married people—19.2% compared to 9.8%, respectively.²
- Approximately 55% of women in South Africa have herpes simplex virus 2 (HSV-2).¹¹

What are multipurpose prevention technologies?

Definition

Multipurpose prevention technologies (MPTs) are products that combine protection against unintended pregnancy, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections.

- MPTs or dual-protection products allow women to prevent at least two of the following reproductive and sexual health risks: unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV.
- Male and female condoms are existing MPTs that simultaneously prevent pregnancy, HIV, and sexually transmitted infections.
- Many new MPTs in development are female initiated in order to expand usability for women.
- Promising MPTs in development include a new one-size-fits-all diaphragm combined with drugs to prevent HIV and easy-to-use vaginal rings to prevent unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- Some microbicide gels in development are also MPTs as they could enable women to protect themselves against two or more sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Building upon more than 25 years of research in dual-prevention products, MPTs could have a profound impact on the health of women and girls in those regions of the world with high rates of HIV, other sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancy.

Products and technologies: existing MPTs

Male and female condoms are existing multipurpose prevention technologies (MPTs) that simultaneously prevent pregnancy, HIV, and sexually transmitted infections.

- New female condom designs have the potential to lower cost and improve acceptability for couples who choose to use them.
- Widespread use of female condoms has been inhibited by low awareness, acceptability, and barriers to access including cost to consumers or donors who purchase female condoms on behalf of consumers.

Male condoms have not been sufficient to address women's reproductive health needs.

- Male condoms are not always used consistently even though they are inexpensive and widely available.
- Issues of trust and power make it difficult for women to negotiate condom use.
- Condom use declined among all age groups in South Africa in 2012. In the same year, 399 million condoms were distributed falling far short of the one billion goal.²

Products and technologies: MPTs under development

Multipurpose prevention technologies (MPTs) are among the most innovative health products under development aimed at empowering women to simultaneously prevent unplanned pregnancy and/or more than one sexually transmitted infection, including HIV. Current options do not adequately meet these needs for all women.

MPTs or dual-protection products are being developed in a number of different formulations and products—including gels, vaginal rings, injectables, and films—that women can use to address more than one reproductive and sexual health need.

Promising MPTs being developed internationally include a new one-size-fits-all diaphragm combined with drug/s to prevent HIV and easy-to-use vaginal rings to prevent unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

- There are approximately 20 MPTs in clinical trials.
- Dual-protection products or MPTs addressing more than one reproductive and sexual health need could greatly improve convenience and reduce costs over products intended for only one health need.

Over the last few years, there have been advances in MPTs, like microbicides that could enable women to protect themselves against two or more sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

- A recent clinical trial in South Africa demonstrated that a microbicide gel, tenofovir, could effectively prevent infection by both HIV and the genital herpes virus (herpes simplex 2).
- If the Follow-on African Consortium for Tenofovir Studies (FACTS) show effectiveness, tenofovir gel used before and after sex could be an important HIV-prevention option for women because the gel can provide protection when they need it and where they need it.

New MPTs are expected by 2020 if clinical trials are successful. These MPTs include gels, one-size-fits-all diaphragm/gel combinations, and long-acting vaginal rings. Multipurpose vaccines to prevent sexually transmitted infections are expected to be available in five to ten years.

A combination of new technologies such as MPTs will move us closer to achieving the Millennium Development Goals calling for universal access to reproductive health care.

Call to action

Funding research on women’s acceptability of multipurpose prevention technologies (MPTs) is critical. When women have a choice among options to prevent unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, health outcomes will improve.

Funding the development of promising new MPTs—in addition to encouraging more frequent and widespread use of condoms—will provide women and men with a range of family planning options that also reduce their risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

- Evidence shows that when women have the ability to choose contraceptive methods, usage and health outcomes improve.¹²
- Contraceptive methods that are women initiated enable women to take a more active role in protecting themselves against unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Now is the time to prioritize the development of MPTs. South Africa’s commitment to improve the health of women has never been stronger.

- South Africa is a signatory of the African Union’s Campaign for the Accelerated Reduction of Maternal, Neonatal and Child Mortality in Africa (CARMMA).
- South Africa recently renewed its emphasis on access to high-quality health care, stronger health systems, and provision of national health insurance.
- South Africa is well positioned to prioritize the development of reproductive health technologies, including MPTs.

It is critical to prioritize initiatives that develop dual contraception and HIV-prevention products, such as MPTs, that can increase reproductive health options. By reducing the unacceptably high rates of HIV, teenage pregnancy, and infant and maternal mortality, South Africa is working to ensure healthier men, women, and families.

By continuing its commitment to research, South Africa remains a leader in the development of new HIV-prevention methods.

- South African researchers demonstrated the significant promise of a microbicide gel, tenofovir, for the prevention of HIV and STIs and have played leading roles in other HIV-prevention research.
- South Africa has the potential to advance the development MPTs—resulting in new prevention options for those in South Africa and beyond.

We must work together to support and advance development of MPTs to ensure women and couples have access to a range of high-quality reproductive and sexual health options.

While scientifically challenging, the development of safe and effective MPTs is feasible.

- Scientific groups are currently working to advance technologies—including gels and films, a one-size-fits-all diaphragm, vaginal rings, injectables, and drug combinations—that combine family planning and HIV and sexually transmitted infection prevention through drugs, devices, and vaccines.

MPTs can help cut the number of new HIV infections, saving millions of lives over time and helping to ease the burden of providing treatment and care for an increasing number of HIV-positive men, women, and children around the world.

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