Leaders of Female Sex Workers and PSI-Madagascar Join Forces to Promote Female Condoms in Madagascar

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ISSUE
With a 0.13% HIV prevalence rate among the general population, Madagascar is classified as a country with a concentrated HIV/AIDS epidemic. Prevention efforts focus on key populations at risk, such as female sex workers (FSWs), where HIV prevalence is 0.5%. As part of its HIV prevention activities, PSI has promoted and distributed male condoms since 1999. In June 2007, PSI introduced the female condom. With the brand name "Feeling", this condom was targeted to FSWs.

DESCRIPTION
Distribution of female condoms and interpersonal communication programs to support this distribution began in June 2007. 8 cities were chosen as pilot zones for the country. Condoms are distributed by FSW peer educators. In addition to distributing condoms, these peer educators discuss the benefits of the female condom, teach FSW how to use it and help their peers build skills in condom use negotiation.

Due to the limited number of peer educators able to distribute female condoms, availability was low in some hot zones. To keep up with demand for the product and to ensure program sustainability, peer educators engaged FSW leaders (FSWL) to identify unreachable and hidden FSW.

FSWL were trained in interpersonal communications, condom sales and promotion and skill building for condom use negotiation. FSWL distribute condoms and increase demand, and can influence other FSW's willingness to use condoms.

By the second month of the project's pilot, PSI distributed 13,560 female condoms. Exceeding its target of 12,000.

CONCLUSIONS
• Scale up to another 5 sites (Moramanga, Sambava, Antalaha, Fianarantsoa, and Antsirabe) is planned with the support of other donors.
• The process, participants, challenges and successes of the project need to be documented. This documentation will help develop strategies for expanding activities in Madagascar and assist other countries facing challenges in introducing the female condom with FSW.
• A robust monitoring system needs to be developed to better track project activities as the program is scaled-up.

LEARNED
• FSWLs are willing to take ownership of female condom programs, serving as a strong liaison between PSI and FSWs.
• FSWLs are also willing to act as a sales point for female condoms at the community level. FSWLs can and do make a profit from this activity.
• Public health programs promoting female condom use among FSW should work with FSWL to ensure continuous and sustainable availability of condoms in sex work establishments.