

ISG management response to the End of Term Evaluation of the UAFC Joint Programme

15 November 2011

1. The UAFC Joint Programme 2008-2011 was designed as an ambitious, innovative and experimental programme, with a threefold strategy (support for research and development, advocacy, large-scale pilot programmes in selected countries - supported by linking & learning and communication interventions). Due to its innovative nature, part of the programme took shape during the initial years.

Since implementation started, a system of monitoring and risk management has been put in place in order to be able to quickly respond and adapt to developments and circumstances.

2. The End of Term evaluation shows that considerable progress has been achieved in the last three years, but that a lot remains to be done in order to make female condoms available, affordable and accessible for all. This is in line with the ISG decision to prepare for a second term for the UAFC Joint Programme (2012-2015).

3. The ISG is very content with the overall conclusions of the evaluation:

- UAFC has managed to place the issue of female condoms on the international agenda; some changes in policy documents and statements of multilateral actors have been noticed; donors appear to be more interested and willing to include the female condom in their programmes.
- WHO has become more active in the development of standard criteria on female condoms and accelerated its pre-qualification process; it is expected that in 2012 at least two more manufacturers will be pre-qualified; the functionality study that UAFC has commissioned is of strategic importance for this.
- The large-scale country programmes have proven the existence of a current (and potential) market by investing substantially in social marketing and education, and by guaranteeing a sustained supply of female condoms.
- The choice to implement the threefold strategy concurrently proved both effective and efficient – the different components have reinforced each other. This underlines one of the original assumptions made, i.e. the added value of the holistic approach of the UAFC programme.

4. Conclusions regarding the Research and Development component

The ISG recognizes and acknowledges the conclusion that in the beginning of the implementation of the UAFC Joint Programme, the R&D strategy was still very much a work in progress, which in hindsight lead to a 'weak strategic design' as the evaluation stated.

This can be explained by the fact that in early 2008 the consortium member responsible for implementing this component of the programme withdrew from the consortium. i+solutions was then asked to take responsibility for both the procurement and the R&D component of the UAFC Joint Programme. The following year, i+solutions had to build the knowledge base of the female condom market and identify external female condom experts that could be involved in the implementation of the R&D component.

In order to justify the reservation from the UAFC budget of EUR 1 million, an R&D strategy was designed and approved in September 2008. Based on the fact that the Medtech FC was effectively on the market and had been involved in a comparative acceptability study, the Medtech condom was included in the R&D strategy to enable UAFC to give future users in one of the programme countries the choice between two different models of the female condom.

The decision to invest in expanding the technical production capacity of the Medtech factory was based on an assessment in which the financial situation of the company was indeed raised as an issue of concern, but where at that time the expectation was justified that the investment would help to attract a large Brazilian order for female condoms, which would help improve the financial situation of the company. The owner of Medtech, Dr Reddy, had a proven track record in producing male condoms and had an established name, which contributed to the choice of Medtech as one of the manufacturers that the UAFC Joint Programme chose to work with.

The ISG has limited its support to technical assistance in the strict sense to enable manufacturers to comply with the requirements for the WHO pre-qualification process.

The ISG agrees that the process of selecting manufacturers for support should have been better documented.

The evaluation questions the rationale for UAFC investments in a commercial manufacturer. This decision was taken on the basis of the assumption that without sustainable market prospects, private investors would not easily invest in the expansion of the technical production capacity; UAFC could thus play a catalytic role, and with the investment i+solutions negotiated an acceptable procurement price for UAFC.

The evaluation states that the issue of pricing for female condoms has been firmly put on the agenda. Our expectation is that in 2012 a lower price for all procurement agencies that buy the FC2 can be expected on the basis of a well-designed pooled procurement system. UAFC will be part of these discussions, which will probably take place in the context of the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition.

Our assumption is that one of the main goals of UAFC – a substantially lower price – will then be achieved.

5. Recommendations for the R&D component

2.1: The ISG will include a sound risk and opportunity analysis in future decisions to give support to manufacturers; in the light of the modest resources, a comprehensive capacity development plan for female condom manufacturers that we support might be a little too unrealistic.

2.2: Developments on the female condom market and in the WHO regulation and qualification process will be monitored and taken into account, and appropriate action will be taken.

2.3: UAFC will indeed advocate that donors invest more in female condom procurement and programming, and – if that is successful – we expect private investors to put more money in increased female condom production. However, for specific investments that are required for WHO prequalification, UAFC may invest donor money and will continue to give technical advice to manufacturers.

6. Conclusions regarding the Advocacy component

The fact that UAFC has become 'a legitimate and credible advocate for female condoms' that has put the female condom firmly on the international agenda is an excellent stepping stone towards the next phase, in which UAFC and its allies will intensify the advocacy to realize concrete policy change and additional financial commitments.

The International Platform has been an important tool for collaboration between a diverse group of stakeholders. The Platform will discuss its future strategy and ways of working on Nov 16, 2011 and we will include the outcome in the planning for the next phase.

The experience in the programme countries shows that it takes a long time and a more intense and strategic approach to change government policies and specifically to improve the functioning of the public sector as an effective distribution channel for female condoms.

In the next phase, UAFC aims to put more financial resources into strengthening Southern national level advocacy, as there is still a long way to go before mainstream female condom programming in government policies and budgets is achieved. UAFC will continue to work with a broad range of actors, and will develop a specific proposal for funding and strengthening Southern advocacy capacity.

7. Recommendations:

3.1 The ISG fully supports the conclusions drawn. UAFC will expand the range of bilateral donors and multilateral actors like UNFPA with which it cooperates in a strategic collaboration in order to influence international and national policies. This process has already started, as we can observe in the list of participants of the November 2011 Female Condom conference.

3.2 UAFC will maintain and intensify the link between international and national advocacy; together with an active group of Southern advocates, UAFC will advocate for increased female condom procurement and female condom programming. Building advocacy capacity of programme country partners will be done according to their needs and interests.

3.3 The ISG underlines this recommendation – a clear strategy for selecting strong advocacy and campaigning partners in programme countries will be part of the country and partner selection process.

3.4 The work plan for 2012 (for which the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs has secured bridge funding) will include the adaptation and distribution of the developed toolkit for advocacy and female condom implementation guide.

8. Conclusions regarding the country programmes.

The country programmes clearly have demonstrated that a demand can be created by investing substantially in social marketing and by guaranteeing a sustained supply of the commodity. This is an important result after 2 years. More information on the frequency of use of the female condom will be available in Spring 2012.

The evaluation states that the product still needs to be pushed in the market, requiring continuous social marketing interventions. This is one of the reasons why UAFC will draft a second phase strategy during 2012, in order to secure sustainable donor funding for social marketing and promotion of female condoms.

The evaluation also stresses the need to intensify the advocacy to achieve full integration of the female condom in the private and the public sector, which will be another component of UAFC phase

Involvement of the private sector and the civil society has worked well, and will be advocated for future programming through the Implementation Guide.

Involvement of the public sector has been a complex and tedious process. On the one hand, the representatives of the public sector have been part of the country steering committees, and have supported the work of SFH and ACMS. On the other hand, it has not been possible to include female condom programming in the public sector in both countries in an effective way. This will require a strategic discussion in the individual countries, and in the future advocacy in general.

9. Recommendations regarding country programmes:

The ISG agrees with all three recommendations 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4, and will work towards integrating them into our strategies for 2012-2015.

(4.3) On 'strengthening effective advocacy': When selecting partners for increased Southern advocacy, criteria other than pre-existing connections with UAFC partners will become more important. Local advocacy has proven to be difficult and a previous track record in advocacy can become a leading factor in selecting a partner, both for the existing country programmes and for future programmes.

UAFC will continue its support for bringing more than one female on the market in specific countries. This will take place in 2012 in Mozambique and Cameroun. The outcomes of the expert meeting on parallel programming will be integrated into the implementation guidelines

10. Recommendations regarding the threefold strategy:

(5.1) The ISG agrees that this should continue; appropriate strategies and communication lines will be developed for the next phase.

The ISG will ask the implementing staff to look at the findings regarding the internal governance and efficiency, and to make concrete proposals to the ISG to build internal mechanisms that are in line with the ambitions of phase 2 and that are efficient and effective. Special attention should be given to efficient internal communications between the stakeholders in the programme.