

**Step 4: Design Message Strategy**

OBJECTIVES			
<p>Demand generation objectives should articulate clearly what activities will be implemented, and what they will achieve, including the changes in audiences’ knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors they will bring about, as well as the timeframe within which results will be achieved. The framework of measurable communications objectives and related performance indicators linked to female condom demand creation programs should include the following hierarchy of objectives. <b>Illustrative objectives and corresponding performance indicators are presented under Step 6 below.</b></p>			
Process Objectives	Program Output Objectives	Behavioral Outcome Objectives	Health Impact Objectives
E.g. Targets for new outlets, numbers of health workers trained in promotion, and numbers of education, media, or advocacy activities executed	E.g. Distribution targets, and increase in audiences’ opportunity, ability and motivation to use female condoms	E.g. Increase in use contributing to increased % of sex acts protected by any condom	E.g. Reduction in HIV incidence, STI incidence and maternal mortality
POSITIONING			
<p><b>Overarching considerations</b></p>			

Positioning should emphasize the female condom's uniqueness and convey the important emotional and functional benefits of female condom use that research has shown to drive trial and adoption. Key factors to consider include:

- De-emphasizing disease prevention in the female condom's positioning aims to remove a critical barrier to condom use within relationships – the association of condoms with mistrust and cheating – and thereby offers a key emotional benefit, more harmonious discussion and agreement on dual protection. This is likely to be the most complex and nuanced aspect of positioning but, if it can be achieved, it has the potential to greatly enhance acceptability.
- Another emotional benefit for women is knowing that they have the means to protect themselves, even in situations where male condoms cannot be used for any reason.
- The female condom's functional benefits relate to its effectiveness in preventing STI/HIV and unintended pregnancy, its usability for women, the fact that it is a woman-initiated product, and the ways in which it creates a pleasurable sexual experience for both partners and offers a different experience to using male condoms.
- For all target users, an emotional benefit of use that derives from a functional benefit (efficacy) is the peace of mind they gain from knowing they are protected against STI/HIV and unintended pregnancy.

#### **General population audiences**

In most settings, positioning of the female condom for general population audiences (i.e. women and their primary partners) will need to retain relevance and appeal as audiences move from contemplation through trial, adoption and regular use. Whereas contemplation is driven by women's desire for greater control over STI/HIV prevention, negative perceptions of the female condom's attributes and functionality must be overcome in order to motivate trial. Long-term adoption requires both partners to accept the female condom as a method of contraception and/or health protection. The fact that the female condom is woman-initiated is one of its key points of differentiation. In positioning for couples, care should be taken not to present female condoms in a way that is disempowering to men, but rather as empowering to both partners.

For single, sexually active women, the fact that the female condom is a female-initiated method of STI/HIV prevention is more central to its appeal for health protection. It should be possible for niche marketing of female condoms to emphasize the female condom's uniqueness as a proactive dual protection tool for women without compromising the female condom's overall positioning. This approach has been used in

female condom interventions targeting university students as early adopters in countries including South Africa, Mozambique and Lesotho.

Thus, an illustrative, inclusive general population positioning statement for female condoms in high HIV prevalence settings might be:

*“The female condom is the only woman-initiated method that, once users are familiar with it, is easy, convenient and pleasurable for both partners to use, and places the security of dual protection in women’s own hands”;*

or

*“The female condom is the pleasurable and empowering option for safe sex”.*

### **Female sex workers**

For female sex workers, the female condom is most commonly positioned as a female controlled / female initiated method of STI/HIV prevention that offers an essential alternative to male condoms and increases their ability to protect their health. In generalized HIV epidemic settings where female condoms are positioned principally for appeal to married and other long-term couples, their niche positioning for use in commercial sex must be approached with care, using highly targeted approaches. If general population audiences come to associate female condoms with sex work and/or disease prevention, the product could be stigmatized, impacting its overall acceptability. In concentrated epidemic settings, where the key audience for female condoms is female sex workers, an inclusive positioning that emphasizes user control and efficacy for HIV prevention would be appropriate.

An illustrative positioning for female sex workers might be:

*“For ladies who care about their health, the female condom is the only product that, once you are used to it, is easy, convenient and pleasurable for you and your partner to use, and places the power of protection against STI/HIV infection and unintended pregnancy in your own hands.”*

#### KEY PROMISE

The female condom’s key promise, derived from its positioning, should highlight the main benefits associated with use, for example:

- (a) The fact that it is a **woman-initiated / woman-inserted method**.
- (b) It is **effective** for use as a contraception method and to prevent STI/HIV;
- (c) Its **usability** for women – it is strong, dependable, convenient, and easy to use with a little practice;
- (d) Product features that create a **pleasurable experience for both partners**; and
- (e) For influencing audiences, the key promise should also address its programmatic viability in the local context and **potential health impact**.

The relative emphasis of each element of the female condom’s overall promise will depend on the target audience of each program component, the predominant stage of behavior change within that audience, and context-specific evidence regarding drivers of and barriers to change.

Implicit in the female condom’s promise to women is that it removes two of men’s biggest objections to using male condoms – interrupting their flow during sex and reducing their sensitivity – thus making it more likely that men will agree to use a form of protection. These promises may be more overt in niche marketing of female condoms to single, sexually active women. More generally, however, promises should focus on the emotional benefits of female condom use and its important functional points of differentiation from male condoms and other contraceptive

methods. Promises of efficacy for STI/HIV prevention should be implicit or 'taken for granted' in general population demand generation interventions.

- To male partners, the female condom promises a pleasurable sexual experience because it can be inserted during foreplay, is not constricting during sex, and does not require immediate withdrawal after ejaculation. The female condom also offers women and men the opportunity to share responsibility for protection and increases couples' options for protection.
- In concentrated HIV epidemics where female sex workers are the priority target audience of female condom programs, acceptability to men who do not like to use male condoms is likely to be explicit in the key promise, and comparable protection against STI/HIV infection to that offered by the male condom may also be emphasized more strongly.

For the female condom to be a dependable method of protection for all target users and their partners, the key promise must include dependable access.

Health providers and national stakeholders in high HIV prevalence settings are overwhelmed with urgent health needs, and to make the female condom a priority they must really believe it can make a difference. The female condom's key promise to health providers hinges on its credibility as a viable dual protection alternative to male condoms. Providers must be presented with evidence that female condoms are not just efficacious but usable and acceptable for women and men in their local context. Stakeholders must believe that renewed efforts to promote the female condom will not drain scarce HIV prevention and women's health resources, but bolster other strategies.

For the female condom to regain and retain credibility with providers and national stakeholders, the key promise must include long term political commitment, and be backed by a dependable female condom supply, as well as effective training, tools and workplace support.

*If multiple female condom products are distributed, key promises must either be delivered by all the female condoms distributed in that country,*

or clearly associated with a particular brand of female condom, to avoid confusing, misleading or alienating audiences.

#### SUPPORT STATEMENT

Each key promise should be accompanied by a support statement that explains why the target audience should believe it. The key promises above are substantiated by the following support statements:

- **Potential health impact:** Program evaluations show that, when female condom interventions have (a) included insertion and negotiation skills training and (b) targeted men as partners and health providers as influencers in addition to female users, *overall condom use* has increased.
- **Woman-initiated** dual protection method: The female condom is the only woman-initiated product on the market that prevents both STI/HIV and unintended pregnancy. A woman does not have to depend on her partner to wear a male condom.
- **Effectiveness:** Trial data shows that the female condom is 95% effective for prevention of STI/HIV infection and pregnancy. Trials have also shown that female condoms are less likely to break than male condoms.
- **Usability:** (1) The female condom can be inserted during foreplay and left in for hours after intercourse. (2) Behavioral trials show that after practicing 2-3 times, women find the female condom easy to insert and comfortable to wear. (3) The female condom makes it possible for couples to share responsibility for protection.
- **Pleasurable experience for both partners:** (1) Because the female condom moulds to the woman's body, the man does not feel constricted by it during sex. (2) The spontaneity of sex is not interrupted, because the woman can insert a female condom during foreplay. (3) Many women enjoy the clitoral stimulation that the female condom's outer ring gives during sex. (4) Because the female condom does not require an erection to stay in place, the man does not need to withdraw immediately after ejaculation.

#### KEY MESSAGES

Key messages should enable the target audience to self-select, emphasize key emotional and functional benefits of female condoms, and include a call to action. Messages should be based on formative research and tailored to:

- (a) The predominant stage of change within the audience; and
- (b) Identified barriers and facilitators to creating new users in the country context.

### **MESSAGES TO ENCOURAGE CONTEMPLATION**

Messages designed to move target users and influencing audiences from pre-contemplation to the contemplation stage of behavior change should encourage them to think, or think again, about female condoms and showcase the potential benefits of doing so. Illustrative message components at this stage of behavior change could include:

*For general population women, their male partners, and female sex workers:*

- The female condom was invented to help women to protect themselves when they have sex.
- Women now have an alternative means of dual protection against STI/HIV infection and unintended pregnancy, the female condom.
- Ask for female condoms and more information at your nearest health center or pharmacy.

*For influencing audiences:*

- Female condoms are back on the agenda. The government is making a commitment to female condoms because they are the only available product that women can use to protect themselves against both unintended pregnancy and STI/HIV.
- The female condom is not a substitute for the male condom, but a complementary alternative that increases overall condom use.
- Find out more about the female condom program (e.g. from this document or at this meeting).

## MESSAGES TO ENCOURAGE PREPARATION / TRIAL

Messages to move target users and influencing audiences from contemplation of female condoms to trial of the product should present them with important, immediate benefits of trying female condoms, as well as managing new users' expectations so they do not become discouraged by any difficulties they encounter with the first few condoms. Illustrative message components at this stage of change could include:

*For all target users:*

- Many men like female condoms because they do not feel constrained by the female condom during sex.
- After practicing a few times using instructions, most users find the female condom easy to insert and remove and comfortable to wear.
- Try female condoms for yourself. They are available at your local health center or pharmacy.

*For women:*

- Empower yourself with the female condom.

*For all influencing audiences:*

- The female condom can prevent HIV transmission in this community by offering couples a dual protection alternative to male condoms.
- For women, the female condom is easy to use but it takes practice. After practice on the demonstration model and two or three practice insertions following the instructions, women will be comfortable inserting and using the female condom.
- Many men say that sex is more pleasurable with a female condom – because it molds inside the woman's body, men can hardly feel it during sex.
- Play your part in making this essential commodity available in this community.

*For health providers and health educators:*

- Including the female condom in counseling sessions will only take a few minutes and that is a worthwhile investment of your time.

*For stakeholders:*

- You will have the commodities, support materials and training you need to integrate female condom promotion into existing programs with minimal opportunity cost.

### **MESSAGES TO ENCOURAGE ACTION**

Messages to achieve the critical step of translating female condom trial into ongoing use must encourage target users and influencing audiences to truly embrace and identify with the product, by presenting them with important benefits of doing so that resonate with the experience of trial and outweigh the perceived costs of female condom use or promotion. Illustrative message components at this stage of change could include:

*For target female users:*

- Once you are used to the female condom, it is convenient, easy and comfortable to use.
- The female condom makes sex pleasurable for both partners.
- With the female condom, you are in control.
- With the female condom, you can take responsibility for protection when your partner does not use a male condom.

*For women in generalized HIV epidemics and their male partners:*

- Use female condoms to avoid unintended pregnancy and keep yourself healthy.

*For female sex workers:*

- The female condom is comfortable to wear and gives you effective protection.
- Use female condoms to stay in control and protect your health.

- It can be easier to negotiate female condom use with a client or non-commercial partner than it is to negotiate use of male condoms.

*For influencing audiences:*

- Many couples who try the female condom like it, and they will use any condom more often as a result. The more couples we can introduce to female condoms, the more STI/HIV infections and unintended pregnancies can be prevented.
- The government is serious about female condoms as a long-term strategy. Don't be scared to create demand; the female condom users you create will always have a reliable supply.
- Help to build on the success of the female condom program so far.

### **MESSAGES TO ENCOURAGE MAINTENANCE**

Messages to translate medium term programmatic gains into sustained use and support should remind users and female condom champions of the long term benefits of female condoms. These might be benefits that capture the most positive aspects of regular use from the user's perspective, or that remind them of benefits so inherent in the experience that they are now taken for granted. Illustrative message components at this stage of change might include:

*For all target users:*

- The female condom offers convenient, pleasurable dual protection for both partners.
- The female condom is strong and reliable, yet men barely notice it during sex.
- Make female condoms part of your relationship.
- Don't be caught without the female condom. You can always find them at the [e.g. clinic / pharmacy / other outlet].

*For female sex workers:*

- Always keep a supply of female condoms to hand, to ensure that you can protect yourself if a client refuses to use male condoms.

*For influencing audiences:*

- Female condoms are here to stay, and they are helping to save lives thanks to your efforts to promote them.