

# NHVMAG Echoes

A publication of Nigeria HIV Vaccine and Microbicide Advocacy Group (NHVMAG)

AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2005

In Africa, Nigeria inclusive, the preference is for the male child. Thus the birth of a son is highly celebrated with mothers reserving the bigger food portion for the "growing boy". In the time of financial constraints, the girl-child drops out of school so that the son gets educated. When in dire need of funds the daughter could be "given out" in marriage to get money for the sons (and the whole family) for sustenance. While some cruel cultural practices have been discarded, sexist discriminations are still firmly entrenched in many Nigerian communities.



## Saving marriages, protecting the woman

Women empowerment in the area of sexuality and HIV/AIDS in Nigeria may be a tough nut to crack, because basically, the woman belongs to the man. Thus many married women cannot decide when to have a child and at what number to stop child bearing. In essence many women are unable to exercise a right over their reproductive health. The few who do are said to be 'too opened eye' - promiscuous! Thus, a

married woman whose husband indulges in risky behaviour, oftentimes cannot negotiate for condom use with her husband to protect herself. No wonder a growing number of women living with HIV in Nigeria, are married women - those in regular

heterosexual relationships.

**"If the woman knows the usefulness of the microbicide, then the issue of introducing it to her male partner becomes secondary".**

The ABC of HIV prevention says to Abstain; married couples need not abstain except for mutually agreed reasons. 'B' is to be faithful.

However, one can only vouch for oneself even if one is married. While 'C', is for consistent and correct use of condoms. Condom negotiation is a skill many females - both married and single - do not have. Yet they (women) are naturally more prone to contracting HIV because their physiological make-up - during and after every unprotected sex, their body remains in contact with the body fluid containing the HIV for a longer period of time.

The good news: women could use the microbicide to prevent STI, HIV and even pregnancy! However there are varying views about Nigerian marriages and microbicides. Mrs. Mary Yusuff, a Microbiology graduate who works with a bottling company in Lagos says, microbicides are most likely the answers to the prayers of many married women in Nigeria.

### Advocacy challenges for new HIV prevention technologies

**A**DVOCACY means many things to many people. In NHVMAG, the focus is on the concept of advocacy, meaning the need to shape or influence the ideas and decisions that influence policy and



Continue on pg. 5

Scientists and researchers also advocates for New HIV Prevention tools

Continue on pg. 7

## Reaching out to students

**S**OLA Abati is a medical student with the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), Idi-Araba, Lagos.

Ever since he received advocacy and community mobilization training given by NHVMAG in 2004 and 2005, Abati has been spreading the gospel on new prevention technologies among youths and medical students in his institution.

well as the different strategies for community advocacy also generated a lot of discussion from the students, Abati reported. Though they expressed pride in the fact that there are quite a number of trial sites in Nigeria, many of the students had many questions to ask such as: When are we going to have microbicides

**“When are we going to have this microbicide in the market? How soon is the vaccine going to be available?”**



girls between the ages 18-24 in his community. Their reaction - they all wanted copies of the film because it was a source of joy knowing that there some organized groups that are still very concerned about women.

Abati has reached over 200 medical students with information on new prevention technologies. He looks forward to training more medical students in LUTH and

• **Abati addressing members of the Nigeria Youth Service Corps (NYSC)** Through his organization - Jolade Foundation, Lagos, Abati has organized awareness creating sessions for medical students at LUTH and serving members of the National Youth Service Corps.

“The response from the student doctors was just marvelous” he noted. They were happy to know that there is research going on into alternative methods of HIV prevention.”

Many expressed much interest in knowing more about the ethical issues involved in the clinical trials of microbicides and the HIV vaccine, he said.

The issue of getting informed consent from trial participants as

available in the market? How soon is a vaccine going to be available?

Still on his advocacy expedition, Abati showed the film ‘Women Need to Know’ to young

students of other tertiary institutions such as the University of Lagos, the Lagos State University, the Lagos State Polytechnic and the Olabisi Onabanjo University.

The challenges he has encountered so far include securing a no-cost venue at hospitals, getting resource persons for his events and getting enough information materials to satisfy the demand by the medical students.

From the NHVMAG secretariat, we say, “walk right in, grab useful resource materials and walk out beaming with smiles!”



• **Abati**

# Civil servants strive for Microbicide

Community Development Support (CDS), an Abuja-based NGO recently held a session on new prevention technologies (NPT) to participants of a four-day training of peer educators in the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism and her parastatals.

CDS, an organization trained by NHVMAG, was appointed as technical support partner to the HIV critical mass team of the ministry. The training of the civil

servants was conducted between the 11th and 15<sup>th</sup> of September, 2005.

According to Emma Atuma, Project Director of CDS, "issues of new prevention technologies generated a lot of discussions during the training. The participants showed great interest as they were hearing about NPT for the first time. They were impressed that research was ongoing in Nigeria and it gives hope that one day HIV will be defeated. Of course

the challenge of human volunteers was also raised."

Having acknowledged the relevance of NPT in the bid to curb the spread of HIV, Mr. Atuma pledged to include topics on NPT in all the programmes the organization is opportuned to carry out.

"We have already began discussing with other organizations in Federal Capital Territory and it is hoped that we shall form a strong advocacy team in the FCT soon".

## Preaching the gospel of Microbicides

Inspired by the training he received at NHVMAG's community mobilisation workshop held in Abuja last July 2005. The Carpenter's Foundation, based in Abuja has conducted three key advocacy activities for its stakeholders.

The activities were to a peculiar and critical sector of the society - the faith based organisations!

As part of their effort at promoting VCCT campaign within Churches in the Kubwa District of the Federal Capital Territory, the Carpenter's Foundation led by the Executive Director, Arc Julius Ibecheole, had a 6-hour event in three different churches. The total number of persons reached was approximately 1,500 involving youths and adults with ages ranging between 13 to 47 years.

The programmes discussed New HIV Prevention

technologies in addition to offering free Voluntary Confidential and Counselling Testing (VCCT) service to all in attendance. According to Ibecheole, the reactions from married women who attended the

*Churches are now beginning to realise the importance of creating room for informed decision making among Christian faithfuls*

training was highly positive as they look forward to the opportunity of having access to the products.

On the other hand, about 60 percent of the men seem to be worried about the consequences

of the availability of these NPT products, especially the microbicide, on female youths. Their concern bordered on what they fear could be an increase in promiscuity amongst the young females due to the protection that a microbicide would offer.

Predictably, quite a handful of the youths felt the new technologies would be a welcome development.

Ibecheole believes that faith leaders will be quite receptive to NPT if they are properly enlightened.

"For us, we have learnt that churches are now beginning to realise the importance of creating room for informed decision making among Christian faithfuls. We recommend that more efforts be put into bringing more information about these new HIV preventive methods to the doorsteps of our people in Nigeria," he said.

# A history microbicid research

ZENA Stein, a South African researcher who spent years as a health worker in black townships first proposed the idea of the microbicide in a paper that appeared in the American Journal of Public Health in 1990. It took her three years to get it published.

"Women didn't get AIDS," she said. Or at least, that was the thinking then. Scientists believed a successful vaccine, a shot in the arm that would protect people for years, was just around the corner. Microbicide research was dismissed as uninteresting science.

Still, not everyone was discouraged. Anne-Marie Corner, a former biochemistry researcher who was then a business student at the University of Pennsylvania, learned about "c31g," the

active agent in Savvy, from a retired chemist who liked to cook things up in his kitchen sink. Ed Michaels, the retired chemist and a cantankerous man had spent a career formulating women's hair colour. He had hit upon the compound, a powerful antibacterial and thought it could be useful in mouthwash.

Biosyn's CEO, Corner and her colleagues discovered that it also killed other things, including the HIV virus, but were not financially capable of going ahead with their findings alone. This was because Biosyn began as a project to satisfy a class requirement.

But pharmaceutical companies, which usually fund the long idea-to-marketable-drug

***"As the '90s wore on, scientists began to acknowledge that an AIDS vaccine was still years away. They needed to explore other avenues such as preventives"***

process, were not interested. They felt AIDS prevention trials are

scientifically arduous and ethically sticky. Tests must be conducted in poor countries, where residents can't always afford the drugs that

are produced. Companies would loathe to invest in a product they saw as unlikely to turn a profit.

So Corner turned to friends and relatives for cash. She felt certain that there was a U.S. market for microbicides, and not just among the poor. "And that hasn't changed - if anything, sexually transmitted diseases are affecting more of what people think of as 'nice girls' communities," she said. Over the years, Corner, a svelte 43-year-old, has raised about \$50 million in investments and grants to develop Savvy. In 2004, her persistence paid off. Her company was purchased by a Silicon Valley biotech firm in a deal valued at \$30 million.

As the '90s wore on, scientists

began to acknowledge that an AIDS Vaccine was still years away. They needed to explore other avenues such as preventives likely to be only partially effective and not likely to win anyone a Nobel Prize. Eventually, philanthropies such as the Rockefeller and the Bill and Melinda Gates foundations stepped in and, with the help of public funds, paid for research to develop a microbicide.

Some 60 products are now in the pipeline; they include substances that range from seaweed extract to advanced antiretroviral drugs. Five are in the last stage of testing. There is no guarantee



● Women will most l

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that any of them will work.

"We all have to be careful about over promising," cautions Zeda Rosenberg, who heads the International Partnership for Microbicides (IPM). Microbicides are being tested in many locales, from Los Angeles to Thailand, but testing a product's actual effectiveness against HIV requires that the trials be done in places like Africa, where the infection rate is high.

For African women, there is a link between sex and survival. In these communities, a woman's right to property is traditionally gotten through

marriage. In the modern capital, the way it works is more subtle: A woman who comes to the city to trade might use casual sex to pay for a night's bed in front of a marketplace kiosk. University students commonly keep "sugar daddies" to pay their tuition, buy essentially needed things like cell phones and books.

One of the organizations involved in microbicide studies in Africa, is Family Health International. In Nigeria, FHI is conducting conducting trials to test the efficacy of Savvy and Cellulose Sulphate, two potential microbicide products. The trials are conducted on several thousand women volunteers who get either the gel or a placebo. At the end, their infection rates are compared. Both groups are told to use condoms. But the researchers know that not everyone will. It is a foregone conclusion that some women in the study will become infected with HIV.

But even if Savvy or another microbicide works well enough to satisfy regulators - the target for Savvy is at least 50 percent experts estimate the soonest it might be available is around 2009. They also believe that such a product, even one that's only partially effective, could prevent 2.5 million people from being infected with HIV in three years.

Culled from 'Waiting for an answer' By RACHEL SCHEIER, August 14, 2005, published in HERALD NEWS (New Jersey)



Benefit from microbicide when available

Continue from pg. 1

## Advocacy challenges for new HIV prevention technologies

individual/group practices

Advocacy creates the political will and momentum necessary to move the process forward. It is needed to sustain the needed pressure on the government for ensuring that structures are put in place that would facilitate the prompt and wide access of people to developed products. The interest of the public on new HIV prevention technologies would continue to be sustained long before the product development thereby ensuring the demand for and use of the product when developed

Advocates need to maintain the sense of urgency and ensure that the sober realities of the HIV epidemic in the every day-to-day discussions of other pressing national issues. We need to monitor deliberations and create political pressure for action when the process fails to move fast. As advocates, we need to ensure that the views and perspectives of all those who stand to gain or lose from the process have a voice in important decisions.

This means representing our constituencies/communities appropriately. It also means that we need to work to ensure that the all stakeholders' interest and perspectives in the outcome are supported to engage effectively in the research process. We need to work to ensure that the community interest is protected with respect to the licensing of the product, pricing and its access

The goals of advocacy are many. These includes awareness raising so as to create a supportive political and provider environment as well as for timely development, introduction and use of product. Creating awareness in our communities also helps sustain the needed pressures to ensure political commitment and support for the development and uptake of products

Advocacy also helps to accelerate product development by facilitating the timely development and approval of safe and effective products. This entails building the capacity of our communities so as to promote their involvement in and support of the various research process while they themselves effectively advocate for their rights

Through targeted advocacy, we help to ensuring access of products to ALL who need them. This would also entail that individuals have the knowledge, skills, power and social

Continued on pg. 7

# Reaching out Door-to-door

**H**ENRIETTA Ikediashi is a NHVMAG-trained advocate. She carries out her advocacy work using a strategy she calls 'door-to-door awareness campaign'.

I organise sessions for young people and show them the documentary "Women Need to Know" which aims at enlightening women on the need to protect themselves against HIV and STIs. So far, their response to it has been tremendous."

This strategy has reached out to up to 60 people including members of staff at her place of work.

Another concept of hers is that of printing "Microbicide What is it?" on T-shirts and face caps and distributing it to every NPT advocate.

"The aim is for questions to be raised by people who see such words on display and I perceive it to be one of the fastest means of creating awareness on NPT. I strongly believe that no matter the concept adopted by us all, we'll definitely pass on some messages though in various ways."



• Henrietta Ikediashi

## Stepping up Knowledge among NGOs

**C**HIBUIKE Amaechi wears many caps. He is director of The Good Neighbour, a



• Chibuike Amaechi

community-based NGO in Lagos State. He is also Lagos State coordinator of the Civil Society Network for HIV and AIDS in Nigeria (CiSHAN), the umbrella network for NGOs working on AIDS in the country.

At the monthly meeting of CiSHAN Lagos in August 2005 he facilitated a session titled "Sensitising civil society organisations on New HIV Prevention Technologies".

The session had representatives from 40 NGOs in attendance and exposed participants to an understanding of current research efforts on microbicides and vaccines in Nigeria.

Amaechi has spoken at other training programmes on the topic

of new prevention technologies. He co-facilitated a training programme on NPT for NYSC anti-AIDS clubs in Lagos state. The programme was organised by NHVMAG advocate Sola Abati and co-facilitated by Dr Sade Ogunsola, the Principal Investigator of one of the two phase III Cellulose Sulphate trial (a microbicide trial) in Nigeria.

He discussed on "Seven reasons for being involved in HIV vaccine and microbicides advocacy", "Ten Things You Can Do" and "Five Conclusive Timely Reasons Why You Must Act Now!"

In attendance were over 30 youth corps members.

## Saving marriages, protecting the woman

According to her, "Nigerian women are not as docile as many people would want to believe. They have wised up from when they would allow anything to befall them to the detriment of their health and that of their children. But since they just have to keep their marriage, many would rather protect themselves and stop killing themselves over the wanton behaviours of their husbands." She concluded by saying, "With or without the consent of the husband, many women would rather protect themselves because when they die, the man would continue in his ways!"

Mr. Kingsley Obom-Egbulem works in the HIV/AIDS field. "If my wife brings a product into the home, she would naturally tell me the relevance and implications if any. Women are naturally not promiscuous, so the average Nigerian man would think he is being suspected of unfaithfulness if the wife brings in stuffs like the microbicide into the house. But if the woman knows the usefulness of the microbicide to protect herself against STIs, which are slow killers for women especially, then the issue of introducing it to their male partners becomes secondary."

Mrs Ollanma Azubuike is a banker with a young daughter below two years. She is of the opinion that a woman who wants her husband to accept her view would know how to go



● Community advocates champion NPT advocacy

about getting his approval. "It is not something one has to be taught to do. Agreed she needs enlightenment on which type of microbicide it is that she has, as in if it is the contraceptive type or just for HIV prevention and any side effect.

All the respondents agreed that conviction skills are needed by the users of microbicides for its successful uptake in the Nigerian society. All that is needed is for the media to "Keep bombarding the society with information about microbicide such that when it is finally in the market, women would not need to practically break the man's head before he understands the advantages of using it!"

Mr. Obom-Egbulem says, "Women must know and acknowledge the benefits of microbicides for themselves first, then by hook or by

crook, they would use it in their relationship. Once they know the benefit, they may not even need the man's consent because ultimately it is mutual satisfaction that matters. The man may not even know something is being used, as long as the two parties continue to derive the same satisfaction as when nothing was being used!"

Mrs Azubuike says "We women know how to get what we want if we really want it. Just tell us the usefulness of the thing then leave the convincing for us to do! No woman would quarrel about something that would be beneficial to her health besides no body is placed in an uncompromising situation by her use."

As Mr Obom-Egbulem concluded, a woman using a microbicide is not only protecting herself but other women too. Let sit back and think on this!

## Advocacy challenges for new HIV prevention technologies

support necessary to use them.

However, there are a number of challenges in achieving these. Advocacy for new HIV prevention technologies would need to mobilise large numbers of people who have not been personally touched by the epidemic. This may create some difficulty in generating focus and commitment.

It also entails mobilising interest in what does not exist and sustaining that interest long after product development. Vaccine is a known and understood concept and so is the use of drugs for the prevention of infections (Pre exposure prophylaxis development) but microbicide is an entirely new concept.

Vaccines and microbicide trials necessarily involve the need for healthy

volunteers who may become infected in the course of the trial. This presently is generating a lot of discussion with respect to the ethical obligations for these trial participants.

We together need to build capacity at the grassroots and within the wider NGO community so we all understand the science, ethics and issues around product development. We also have to facilitate the continued discussion on new HIV prevention technologies at all levels let it echo on all corridors of power.

It is equally important to build strategic alliances to help move the NPT agenda forward. Every possible contact is important for the advocacy movement. Everyone in the population

needs to be educated on the need to support and facilitate the NPT research and development process. This would include the development of synergy between local, national and international actors.

As advocates, we need to communicate coherently and consistently about new HIV prevention technologies. Also, we should ensure policy analysis, monitoring and facilitating implementation of NPT related policies and programmes.

While we facilitate NPT development processes, we as advocates need to monitor the process so as to ensure the protection of the rights of trial participants and those of end users.

## NEW RESOURCES @ NHVMAG



### \* Training Kit on the Ethics of New HIV Prevention Technologies

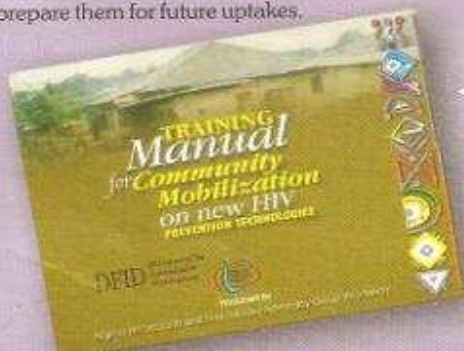
This training course targets members of Institutional Review Boards in the various research organisations. This training would help strengthen the capacity of these institutions to review New HIV Prevention Technology Research and Development related protocols.

The course is also targeted at NGO/CBO/FBO interested in new HIV prevention technology (NPT) research and development efforts and aims at helping them understand the ethical issues involved with New HIV Prevention Technology Research and Development. This information further strengthens the advocacy efforts.

### \* Training Kit for Community Mobilization on New HIV prevention Technologies

The content of this training kit (CD) is targeted at NGO/CBO/FBO interested in community mobilisation efforts for new HIV prevention technology (NPT) research and development.

This reader-friendly PowerPoint presentation training course is designed to provide NGO/CBO/FBO with the information and introductory skills necessary to facilitate mobilisation of communities to support NPT research and development as well as prepare them for future uptakes.

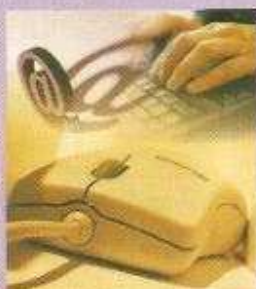


### \* Community Mobilization Training Manual For New HIV Prevention Technologies (NPT)

This 54 page Training manual is an invaluable source of help for groups and organizations interested in mobilizing communities for New HIV Prevention Technologies (NPT) advocacy efforts. It is a guide to understanding the 'why' and 'how' of the NPT process.

www.iavi.org  
 www.zvac.org  
 www.niaid.nih.gov/daids/vaccine  
 www.nigeria-aids.org  
 www.naca.gov.ng  
 www.gedefoundation.org  
 www.nhvmag.org  
 www.saaavi.org  
 www.aidsvaccineclearinghouse.org

International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI)  
 AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition (AVAC)  
 Division of AIDS, National Institute of Allergy  
 Journalists Against AIDS  
 National Action committee on AIDS  
 Gede Foundation  
 Nigeria HIV Vaccine and Microbicide Advocacy Group  
 South Africa AIDS Vaccine Initiatives (SAAVI)  
 AIDS vaccine clearing home



Continue from pg. 7

## Advocacy challenges for new HIV prevention technologies

We need to plan also in advance and prepare proactively to manage oppositions. This entails establishing a national platform for new prevention technologies advocacy. This entails mobilizing media involvement in advocacy, organizing public education activities for community awareness and mobilization, engaging key political and government leaders in advocacy efforts and interventions as well as providing platforms for fostering interaction between the media, scientific community, policy makers and civil society.

Mobilized communities can

advance the dialogue and debate on NPT, ensure community buy-in and support for NPT research and development, prepare potential volunteers for acceptability of research process, provide tools and capacity-building for researchers and communities, advocate for new approaches that emphasize development and empowerment (not just participation or involvement) as well as document and disseminate lessons learned.

All it takes is a determination to make the needed change. Together, we advocates can achieve this.



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