



FOREWORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.

Our dear esteemed readers,

I welcome you to yet another edition of the ICWEA quarterly newsletter and hoping that you and your families are staying safe.

This was a call from our community members to decode and echo Female HIV preventative measures where women controlled HIV prevention is encouraged. This time round, the priority was the Dapivirine Ring and its reception among HIV Advocates and women in all our diversity.

We are glad and happy that the Dapivirine ring has a place in HIV prevention. I hope that you will be inspired and educated about the Dapivirine ring and that you will share this information with as many people as you can and that you will join us to advocate with us.

I extend gratitude to the team at ICWEA and our chapters who made this issue of the newsletter happen. Special thanks to our partners who make our quest for information very smooth always.

Kindly share any inquires, comments and ideas with us through the contacts below:

Sincerely,

Lilian Mworeko

Executive Director-ICWEA



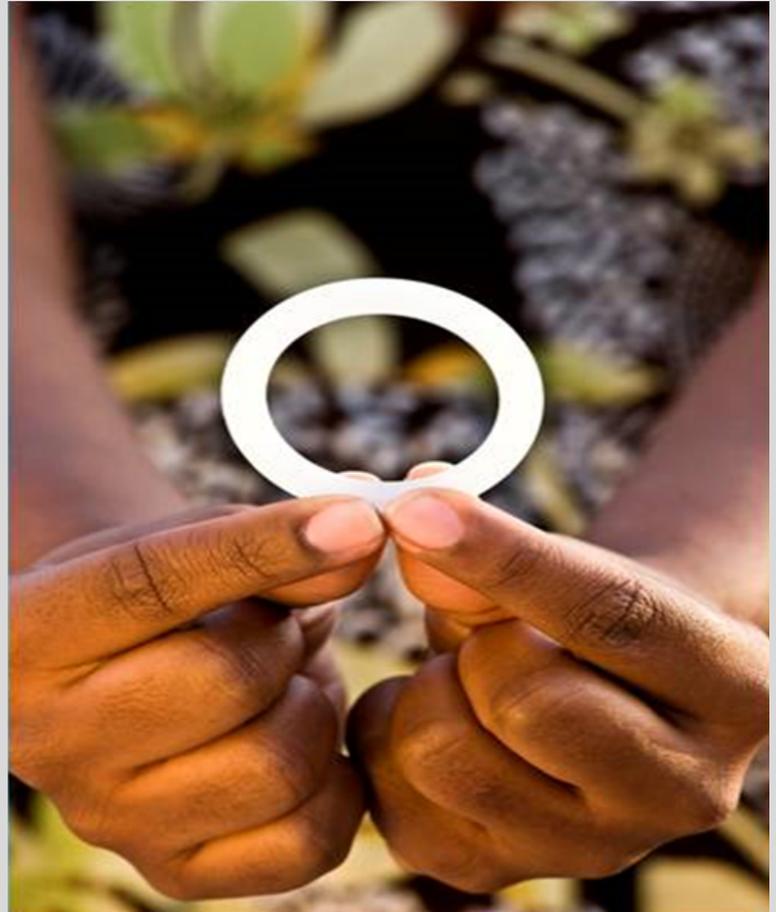
The Positive Opinion by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) on the Dapivirine Vaginal Ring for Women in Developing Countries to reduce their HIV Risk brings more hope: Women getting closer to more female controlled HIV prevention tools and options!



Introduction

In July 2020 the European Medicines Agency (EMA) gave a positive opinion on the public health benefits of the ring and it's being used by women in low- and middle-income countries outside of the European Union as a female controlled HIV prevention method for HIV prevention.

The International Community of Women living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA) joins the rest of the world to congratulate the International Partnership for Microbicides for this achievement. Adolescent girls and young women in many parts of East and Southern Africa continue to experience unacceptably high HIV incidence and any product that proves hopeful should be welcomed with a bang! ICWEA therefore is committed more than before to ensure that countries in Africa fast-track the next steps.



About the Ring

The dapivirine ring is an antiretroviral vaginal ring made of silicone, is inserted in the vagina and slowly releases dapivirine, an antiretroviral drug, in the course of a month.

The Dapivirine Vaginal Ring (DPV-VR) is intended to be used in reducing the risk of acquiring HIV during vaginal sex for women aged 18 years and above who are at a higher HIV risk.

What does Dapivirine Ring mean for Women in East Africa?

This new development has come with a lot of excitement! ICWEA spoke to women across East Africa to find out what the Dapivirine Vaginal ring means to them and here is what they had to say:



Winifred Ikilai - Uganda
HIV Prevention & Research
Advocate
AVAC Fellow 2020
National Forum of PLHA
Networks in Uganda

This is the greatest news in the HIV prevention research world! I welcome the ring with open arms because adolescent girls and young women in Uganda continue to be at high risk of acquiring HIV due to their level of vulnerability and yet have limited choices and control over the available protective options.

As advocates, we have work to do now, we need to engage our policy makers for rapid regulatory approval, provision and access to the ring. We need to adequately train health providers as a country in the roll out of this new prevention option. And, importantly, we must inform the community of this great news and ensure that young women, especially, are helping to design the plans for introducing the ring into Uganda.

As a young woman advocate, I feel certain that other young women in Uganda will greatly welcome the ring and use it with confidence.

This ring will be beneficial to most of our populations especially women in discordant relationships, sex workers and young women. It offers more HIV prevention choices to the women. Some women may experience side effects from the use of PrEP, this ring offers an alternative solution. Other women are not able to negotiate for safe sex or condom use with their partners, this ring is discrete and therefore keeping the woman safe even in the absence of a condom. The ring will expand the self-care biomedical interventions. This ring does not require a health care worker to insert and it is effective for a period of one month. Therefore, this ring does not invade the privacy of the woman since she can insert it by herself.



Queenter Mugweru
ICW-KENYA CHAPTER



Nsabimana Seconde -Burundi
ICWEA CHAPTER COORDINATOR

Burundi is among the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa which has a considerable number of women and girls living with HIV. News like this is cause for celebration. With the news of the Dapivirine vaginal ring, women will have more effective choices and less restrictive options.

Let decision-makers hear the voice of women in Sub-Saharan Africa by speeding up the provision of this new female controlled preventive option to women and girls.



Consolata Opio
KENYA VICE CHAIRPERSON -ICWEA

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The ring is a huge step for women's protection. We normally advocate for increased prevention choices for women and adding one more prevention tool is an added advantage. We cannot live in an ideology of a “one size fits all shoe”. Some women prefer PrEP, others prefer Male condoms, female condoms and from the grapevine others also prefer the Dapivirine ring.

Having a wide range of prevention options for women is the way to go.

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Dignity and Well-being of Women living with HIV in Tanzania and many other stakeholders in the country and beyond as well are cautiously optimistic about exploring the possibilities of having the Dapivirine vaginal ring put into effective use once there is greater evidence and approval together with WHO guidelines.

No single HIV prevention method will meet the needs of all people at risk, so a range of options is needed for individuals to protect themselves and to curb the HIV epidemic.

Dignity and Well-being of Women living with HIV in Tanzania, demand the need to scale up advocacy especially by women advocates, and community experts targeting young women and women at risk. In order to play a leading role in decision making and priority settings: including the process for WHO guideline development, country planning, and implementation research design and resource allocation.



Veronica Exaud Lyimo

Dignity and Well-Being of Women Living with HIV in Tanzania
COORDINATOR -TANZANIA CHAPTER



Catherine Nakidde – Uganda
ICWEA BOARD MEMBER

This is a remarkable shift in the HIV fight and just the beginning of so many wins we are yet to see even in other areas concerning women; the ring surely puts a mark on gender equality. Now more than ever as advocates and activists, we are more enthusiastic and eager to witness the end of HIV in Africa, to witness a shift in public health concerns where by HIV is not a battle any more but a victory.

The journey is still on as we witness the next phase of implementation.

Together for an AIDS free future

Despite the progress in HIV prevention and treatment that we have had over the years, HIV still has a female face.

Choice in HIV prevention is key and the Ring gives us women just that choice. Choice to choose an option that works best for us and also to reclaim our power of protection.



Shakira Namwanje -Uganda
HIV prevention Advocacy and Women's Health Activist,
Uganda Network of AIDS Service Organizations (UNASO)

Insights from women in the community

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“The Dapivirine Ring is a good innovation because it will serve as a contraceptive and PrEP hence reducing the burden of addressing both separately”

FAHE KERUBO ICWK GBV CHAMPION

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More than ever, women are thrilled to have an intervention that is controlled by them, an intervention that puts the control of HIV prevention in the hands of a woman. I hope that the regulatory processes and other bottlenecks in access will be fast tracked early enough to ensure that women reap the benefits of this intervention.”

LUCY GHATI, ED, ICW-KENYA CHAPTER

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There should be adequate sensitization on the ring since a large percentage of the populations are not aware about it. So, there is so much that needs to be shared about it’

CLAIRE LUNG’AHI – ICWK GBV CHAMPION

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I think the ring is an amazing product for young women because it is controlled by the woman. I love that it stays in the body for 28 days nonstop making it very advantageous.

However, I am not sure how comfortable it is and how young women are receptive to it.”

JOYCE OUMA

"Today, we have another reason to commit to continue what we started, to continue advocating and giving a voice to why prevention and options and choices for women in all our diversity is important. We now must go to our governments in Sub Saharan Africa and make them know how important it is to prioritize prevention for women in all our diversity in Africa", says Lillian Mworeko, an HIV advocate from ICWEA who has been at the forefront of advocating for this ring at sub-national, national, regional and global levels.



Lilian Mworeko (left), an IPM staff member (middle) Linda-Gail (right) in London after presenting to the EMA

What next for the ring in Africa?

ICWEA interviewed Leonard Solai the Senior Director of External Affairs for IPM Global who based in South Africa and this is what he had to say:

The positive EMA opinion for the ring is expected to facilitate country-level approvals. IPM is now preparing regulatory submissions through a WHO-facilitated process to countries in sub-Saharan Africa where the need is urgent (Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe).

In addition, the WHO is reviewing evidence on the ring as part of its guideline process and will consider using an abbreviated review of the product for prequalification. In parallel to these steps, IPM is collaborating with governments, funders and other partners to discuss and plan for ring introduction, pending approvals. The multisectoral and international partnerships that got the ring to this point will be critical to making it available to women in Africa.

What do women, human rights and gender activists need to do to have this effected in their respective countries in the fight against HIV?

HIV activists should ensure that policymaking and funding processes/mechanisms at local, national and international levels engage those who could benefit most from a woman-centered option like the ring—women themselves. Women’s voices should be at the table so that policies and programs adequately address their HIV prevention needs.

Announcements

Would you like to share your story with us?

Kindly write to us and share your story for our next edition on:

Facebook: @ICWEastern Africa

Twitter: @ICWEastAfrica

16 days of activism

Join ICWEA and other civil society organization in the 16 days of activism to end violence against women and girls from 25 November- 10th December 2020.

As the world retreated inside homes due to the lockdown measures introduced to curb the COVID-19 pandemic, reports showed an alarming increase in the already existing pandemic of violence against women we must speak out against violence against women and girls now more than ever.

World AIDS Day – 1st December 2020.

Join ICWEA in celebrating the International World AIDS Day which is celebrated globally to raise awareness among people towards the problem of AIDS and HIV.

Current Campaigns

Violence against women and girls is rooted in gender-based discrimination and social norms and gender stereotypes that perpetuate such violence.

Violence against Women and Girls is present in all societies and takes different forms in different contexts. Global estimates published by WHO indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. In Uganda wife battering is widely accepted, with 58% of women and 44% of men believing that it is justified for a man to beat his wife (UNDP assessment report – 2015). Early marriage and pregnancy stand at 22.3% for young people between 12-17 years (UNICEF, 2015). In Kenya, the 2014 KDHS showed that 45 percent of women and girls aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence and 14 percent have experienced sexual violence. In Tanzania, Discrimination, abuse and violence against women and girls (VAWG) is wide-spread and common and is due to patriarchal and traditional norms. and the TDHS, 2015 estimated that teenage pregnancies (27%); violence against women and girls.

The deadly COVID 19 pandemic has caused devastating consequences that include alarming rates of morbidity and mortality including in Eastern Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting women and men differently. Gender inequalities are typically worsened by crises and the coronavirus context is no different, as women are hit harder by its effects.

The International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa launched a one year Regional campaign on Eliminating violence against women and girls living with HIV. The campaign calls to action the policy makers, decision makers and duty bearers to take action against all forms of VAWG through formulation and implementation of policies and programs aimed at reducing the vice.

Conferences and Events

HIVR4P Virtual

The health and safeguarding of our community are our highest priorities. IAS the International AIDS Society – has decided that, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the HIV Research for Prevention Conference (HIVR4P) will be held virtually.

The conference, now named; HIVR4P Virtual, will take place over four days: Wednesday, 27 January - 4 February 2021. Access the conference via HIVR4 website below.

<https://www.hivr4p.org/>

ICASA 2021

The convening of the International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa (ICASA 2021) in Kampala, Uganda in December 2021 represents a tremendous opportunity to highlight the diverse nature of the African region's HIV epidemic and the unique response to it.

<http://icasa2021uganda.org/overview/background.htm>



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