Program Objective: To ensure the timely, efficient and sustainable introduction of safe and effective microbicides by facilitating the development of multi-stakeholder advocacy coalitions that plan and execute advocacy strategies that facilitate microbicide research and accelerated access.

Program Aim 1: Create innovative and flexible multi-stakeholder coalitions where microbicide research is being implemented and where future early introduction may take place.

Program Aim 2: Develop and strengthen civil society advocacy capacity to influence decision points, and issues associated with planning.

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I. Executive Summary

The overall objective of this project was to ensure timely, efficient and sustainable introduction of safe and effective microbicides by facilitating the development of multi-stakeholder advocacy and introduction plans in countries likely to be early adopters. “Research-to-rollout” or implementation-focused advocacy is a relatively new arena in biomedical prevention—and one which AVAC has helped to define with work on the female condom, PrEP, voluntary medical male circumcision and treatment as prevention as well as microbicides.

From May 2013 through July 2016 – the duration of the grant period - AVAC has built and strengthened its partner base by identifying and collaborating with new and existing partners through several in-country programs and processes including the Advocacy Fellows program, national stakeholder engagement, conference-related activities and specific projects related to microbicide trials. Of special note is that two of the seven 2014 Advocacy Fellows and three of six 2015 Advocacy Fellows were awarded sub-grants as their Fellowship projects aligned with the goals of this USAID Award. In addition, all the other 2014 and 2015 Fellows have been actively involved in and/or coordinating women’s HIV prevention advocacy in their countries, integrated in their Fellowship projects.

In each priority country – Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and, from 2015, Malawi - AVAC worked with country partners in managing dialogue around the VOICE results and preparing for and responding to the FACTS 001 and Dapivirine Ring results. The project was nested in a broader focus on women’s HIV prevention and access to new tools, therefore regular updates and training on research for multi-purpose prevention technologies (MPTs), pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and other relevant areas was provided. In addition, AVAC facilitated strategy development on advocating for PrEP access for women, and ensuring that there are platforms for advocates, researchers, media and some policymakers to engage on prevention priorities for women. Working with key partners in each country ensured that activities and strategies were contextualized.

During the grant period, AVAC also continued to build civil society capacity and understanding of research through training opportunities at several national and regional events. A focus on understanding HIV prevention research for women and the ongoing trials was a cornerstone of publications, webinars and meetings in the award year, especially in the five priority countries noted and in Malawi. These include specific focus in annual reports, blogs, updated fact-sheets on PrEP, microbicides and multi-purpose technologies, linking the issues around hormonal contraception and HIV into the landscape of HIV prevention research issues specific to women.

We have partnered on key global, regional and national activities to help shape the larger discussion around a women’s HIV prevention agenda and to help partners understand, engage in and influence some of these processes. This includes the various trials that are women-specific, the PEPFAR DREAMS Initiative, the PEPFAR COPs and GFATM processes, relevant conferences and national campaigns on reproductive and sexual health and rights.

Each bi-annual report has detailed information on the activities, outputs and plans for the subsequent period. In this report, we provide summaries, highlights and reflections on the project and its impact.
II. Reflecting on the Impact of the Project

Trials and tribulations: CROIs, gels, rings and predictions – an important time for the field

We began the project in May 2013 at a critical juncture in the microbicides field. Results from MTN’s VOICE study – studying oral TDF/FTC, oral TDF and 1% Tenofovir gel in over 5000 women in South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe – had just been released at CROI 2013. The study found that all three products under study were safe but not effective. These results put the microbicides field under intense scrutiny, as well as raising concerns on the use of oral PrEP in women. At the same time, the South African FACTS 001 trial was underway as a confirmatory trial on the use of coitally-dependent 1% tenofovir gel as per the CAPRISA 004 dosing schedule. This trial was keenly looked at as perhaps the last effort in proving gel based products could work. Finally, two ongoing efficacy trials of the dapivirine ring (ASPIRE and The Ring Study) were evaluating a potential next-generation product with results expected in 2016. It was therefore possible that the microbicide field would be making multiple decisions about product introduction in the next two to three years.

Through the duration of the grant, several new initiatives began – many supported by USAID – to look at introduction pathways for new prevention products for women including oral PrEP. The VOICE results, however, continued to be raised as cause for consternation in considering oral PrEP for women. The FACTS 001 results were released at CROI 2015 and showed that tenofovir gel was not effective for women in the study. At the same time, additional analysis released from the VOICE study in Feb 2015 showed that among women in the tenofovir gel group whose blood tests indicated use of the gel, HIV risk appeared to be reduced significantly. A great deal of pressure was on the dapivirine ring trials – to work. At CROI 2016, results from the ASPIRE and Ring studies showed a modest decrease in infection in those using the vaginal ring. At the International AIDS Conference in Durban, further analysis of the ASPIRE results showed that for those who used the ring, it was possibly highly effective.

The last three years have been dramatic to say the least. This project was well positioned to support accurate and nuanced communication and interpretation of the results with several stakeholders and continue to emphasize the importance of research for and rollout of new options. Explaining and interpreting the VOICE results became a key element in discussing microbicides with advocates, media and policy-makers. The FACTS 001 results dashed hopes for many advocates who had been following microbicides research for the last decade. What did this mean for the field of researchers, advocates and media following microbicide studies; for trials targeted at women; for gels as a vehicle for microbicides; for the design of future studies; for who was recruited; for adherence measures; for the importance of GPP etc.? This discussion absorbed many in the field and gave rise to predictions on the demise of the field. And then the dapivirine ring results were met with restrained applause. Was the effectiveness level enough to move forward on? Will women really use a completely new product? Are young women bad adherers or are there biological causes for poor effectiveness? That discussion still continues. In addition, there has been increased interest in the vaginal microbiome and its relationship to HIV acquisition. At the same time, PrEP rollout initiatives are well underway with concerns about how scale up will be financed and programmed. How does this affect ongoing research, standard of prevention in trial designs and the cost-effectiveness of adding new options to the toolbox?

Through and because of this project, there are now many advocates, policy makers and media partners who better understand research and the field. There are savvy advocates who have learned – the hard way – to not get too attached to one product or the other and manage expectations when working with civil society partners. Also, as one of its expressed goals, this project has helped many situate HIV
prevention research for women within a larger sexual and reproductive health framework with a greater emphasis on the needs of young women and girls. This multitude of smart, informed and well-positioned advocates who can respond to emerging issues and trends and bring to bear their perspectives those from their communities. They are at the right place, at the right time and have the right information and training to be able to engage, influence and advocate for HIV prevention research that truly meets the needs of women and girls.

III. Key progress towards objectives during final 6 months of the grant

The final six months of the project has been an exciting culmination of the three-year project. In the first few months, we focused on preparing for the dapivirine ring results and second half interpreting and disseminating the results and preparing for the 2016 International AIDS Conference in Durban in July. This included several specific activities with country partners as well as a workshop for over 75 participants in April in Johannesburg.

The International AIDS Conference provided an excellent showcase for the culmination of this grant – affording partners who have been engaged in project activities to participate in the conference and lead discussions related to women’s prevention, and especially microbicides. AVAC was also able to support several events with research, advocate and media partners and to create and support training opportunities.

This final period also included key milestones for the 2015 Fellows’ work, the close-out of their grants and planning for the sustainability of their work. The new class of the 2016 Fellows were oriented, ensuring the handover and linkages to previous Fellows and anchoring their projects with a women’s prevention focus where relevant.

Below, please find descriptions of key activities in this period.

Preparing for and interpreting dapivirine ring results

From January through March, much of the focus was on preparing for the ASPIRE and Ring Study results, and then helping to share, debrief and interpret them. Activities included the following:

Before...

- A key part of the planning for the results was scenario planning, expectation setting and message development. AVAC worked with advocates in the six priority countries to develop messages for the main results scenarios so they would be prepared to speak to media as well as other stakeholders.
- AVAC worked closely with the ASPIRE and Ring study research teams - and especially with the core team managing communications and community engagement efforts. This included weekly calls and sharing of materials. This was linked closely with the work under AVAC USAID-supported project with a focus on Media, Messages and Mobilization (CA AID-OAA-A-13-00030).
- Before the results were announced at CROI 2016, AVAC held two global calls to prepare advocates for the results of the trial and helped them consider how they would respond to the various scenarios.
- We also held several calls with country partners to provide refreshers of the background and the studies, lay out the possible scenarios and help prepare them to discuss with their networks and coalitions. In addition, we strategized together on possible follow-up actions to respond to each scenario. In each country, we ensured that advocates were also present at media briefings to
provide an additional viewpoint and highlight the advocacy issues.
- AVAC key team members attended IPM’s Stakeholder Mapping Strategy Session (Feb 2016, London) to support their preparatory efforts.
- AVAC, IPM and MTN had several calls before the results were released to support preparation and then after to support planning for the open label extension studies. We supported a call for the Communications Working Group in preparation for CROI.

During...
- At CROI 2016, AVAC was present to engage with the advocates and media at the conference to help provide the civil society perspectives, the nuances of what the results meant and ensure that the demand for ongoing research in women’s prevention was heard.
- A special WhatsApp group was created “Ringing in the News” where over 30 advocates watched the online press briefing together and shared thoughts and questions.
- The AVAC team had a regional call with advocates the night the results were announced to share and interpret the results and help them consider how they would respond to it.
- AVAC members who were in Kenya to co-facilitate a regional media workshop, supported through USAID-supported Objective 2, organized a session for 20 journalists from across Africa to watch, in real time as the ring results were announced at CROI. Journalists were able to field a few questions through AVAC staff in Nairobi who in turn sent them to AVAC staff attending CROI, for the researchers to answer in real time.
- We followed the media reports closely, sharing them widely amongst stakeholders. We also created special infographic and released an AVAC statement. A special page was created to share all relevant materials. Please find it at [http://www.avac.org/dapivirine-ring-results](http://www.avac.org/dapivirine-ring-results)

After...
- After CROI, we had debriefing calls with each country partner to help them understand results and prepare for results dissemination meetings.
- Two AVAC Fellows were invited to the NIH Consultation on the next steps after the ASPIRE results on March 9. We supported their travel and helped prepare them for the meeting.
- At the AVAC Fellows orientation in Johannesburg in April, the AVAC team explored the experiences of preparing for the ring results and results dissemination.
- On April 14, AVAC brought together seventy-five advocates from across Africa to discuss the recent dapivirine ring results, what they mean in the broader context of women’s HIV prevention, what comes next and key milestones to plan for. Please see more info below.
- In late April, AVAC convened the annual Joint Communications Working Groups Meeting in New York under the USAID grant supporting communications work. A few advocates joined this meeting as well – including Ntando Yola, an AVAC alumni Fellow and partner in South Africa and Esther Nakazzi, a journalist and women’s health advocate and AVAC partner from Uganda. At this meeting, communicators from MTN and IPM provided insights and lessons learned from dissemination of results at CROI.
- At the International AIDS Conference in Durban, AVAC co-hosted several workshops and satellites about women’s HIV prevention that included discussing the dapivirine ring results.
- Several blogs and publications (including AVAC Report 2016, PX Wire, the ARV-based prevention pipeline, Microbicides by the Numbers and microbicides and MPT factsheets) were created or updated to pay special attention to the ring results. Links to these can be found in the annexes.
Workshop: Update on the Ring Results and Next Steps for Women’s Prevention

Seventy-five advocates from across Africa came together for a one-day AVAC meeting on April 14 in Johannesburg, to discuss the recent dapivirine ring results, what they mean in the broader context of women’s HIV prevention, what comes next and key milestones to plan for. With new programs, funding initiatives and research specifically targeted for women and girls—it was an important juncture to pause, take stock, consider the next few years and plan key advocacy priorities. The meeting objectives were to (1) provide opportunity for advocacy partners to unpack and interpret dapivirine ring results, understanding and interrogating next steps; (2) situate the next two years for women’s HIV prevention (research, implementation and funding/policy) and (3) identify advocacy opportunities and areas for further engagement. The agenda, participant list and presentations can be found at http://www.avac.org/ring-results-and-next-steps

AVAC Report 2016: Big Data, Real People focus on Women’s HIV Prevention

AVAC Report 2016 – Big Data, Real People – was launched at the International AIDS Conference in Durban, July 2016. It argues that today’s prevention data don’t reflect real people in nearly enough detail. Much of the data on services offered to people who test HIV-negative is inadequate. Countries, funders and implementers report on "people reached" with referrals and condoms, yet data on who is being reached—particularly among key populations—are inadequate. And in the era of strategies such as VMMC (voluntary medical male circumcision) and PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) that have direct impact on HIV risk, reports on referral rates are unacceptable. The new prevention data paradigm should provide detailed information on who is being reached and track linkages to evidence-based tools. The Report calls for improvement in the quality, quantity and detail of data on the world’s women and girls. Without improvements in the type of information it is not possible to design good programs and track progress.

The Report also includes a spread on women’s biomedical HIV prevention in 2016, including a look at PrEP and women, dapivirine ring access, the need to focus on delivery platforms instead of product-specific programs, support for women-led grassroots civil society and more. Action on the myriad recommendations are needed to ensure that the surge of activity focused on adolescent girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa leads to impact.

AVAC at AIDS 2016

The International AIDS Conference was an important milestone for all those who have been affected by and/or working in the field. AIDS2000 in Durban was seen as a turning point for treatment access in Africa and many worked hard to make the return to Durban in 2016 a milestone for HIV prevention in Africa. AVAC was involved in several ways – as part of the program and scholarship committees, supporting partners to attend, on-site partner support, presenting at conference sessions and facilitating and co-sponsoring several activities, including the Research Literacy Zone and Women’s Networking Zone (link to report) in the Global Village. Please see AIDS 2016 for links to relevant sessions and activities. In addition, we produced daily dispatches on prevention at the conference – many of which highlighted discussions on women’s HIV prevention including microbicides and oral PrEP.

Supporting Advocates at AIDS2016

AVAC sponsored thirteen advocates to attend the 2016 International AIDS Conference through this USAID grant. Each advocate contributed to the prevention movement by offering their point of view and
sharing experiences and best practices on the ground. For instance, several of the advocates contributed and wrote for What’sUpHIV, a blog that brought live reports from AIDS 2016. Through their writings, advocates shared their hopes, the inspiration they received and suggestions for future AIDS conferences. In addition to blogs, one advocate made her voice heard by chairing a satellite session on the PEPFAR DREAMS Initiative; another used his skills with media to record the voices of others at the conference so that they could be shared beyond the walls of AIDS 2016. Supported partners organized HIV prevention training sessions at different global village zones, including the Research Literacy Zone and Women’s Networking Zone. Several supported partners were panelists at satellites, workshops and symposiums.

Supporting AIDS2016 Bloggers

Writing is a key tool for advocates to use in their advocacy work, but not all advocates start out as strong writers. One effective way to communicate is through blogs. AVAC collaborated with South Africa’s Community Media Trust to train advocates from key countries to get skills in blogging. Most of the advocates who were trained were scheduled to attend AIDS2016, and they would use their newly-acquired writing skills to good use by writing blogs to report on the key issues at the conference in their own voices. Many of the advocates who attended wrote blogs for the What’sUpHIV blog during the conference. It was an efficient and effective way to have themselves heard and to share their hopes, inspiration and concerns about the state of the field.

Speaking your Truth at AIDS2016

AVAC partnered with Zimbabwean social media expert Heeten Bhagat to execute The Truth Booth at AIDS 2016. This was a confessional tent that enabled willing participants to share key responses and opinions to issues being discussed at the conference in a unique and provocative space. These recordings then generated a series of products, including an edited and stylized daily overview of conference goers’ commentary. The booth was strategically located in the Global Village where a lot of conference attendees ended up. Over four days, 80 people shared their opinions and comments on issues about the conference, key goals towards preventing HIV infection amongst girls and young women, prepping the world for PrEP and key issues for key populations. These recordings were loaded onto the What’supHIV blog and later picked up by AllAfrica.com and the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation.

Figure 1: Truth Booth at AIDS2016
Webinars, Materials & Photos from project events: Jan-July 2016

Reports and photos

- AIDS 2016 Women’s Networking Zone Report (Report)
- AIDS 2016 Media Training Agenda (Agenda)
- What’s Up HIV Blog (Blog posts by those AVAC funded to attend AIDS 2016)
- Ring WhatsApp Group (snapshots of whatsapp discussion)
- Photos from Ring Consultation and Fellows Orientation (photographs)
- 2016 Fellows Orientation Agenda (Agenda)
- Update on the Ring Results and Next Steps for Women’s Prevention (Workshop materials)
- AVAC at AIDS 2016

Webinars specific to women’s HIV prevention: most of these hosted in collaboration with partners:

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<tr>
<td>ARVS in Women’s Bodies- Where does the Drug Go?</td>
<td>Jan-16</td>
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<td>PrEP and Women in the US: Update on the science, research and implementation</td>
<td>Mar-16</td>
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<td>Exploring the Dapivirine Ring Results</td>
<td>Mar-16</td>
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<td>PrEP in the Wild: A tour of the who, what, where &amp; how of PrEP use and provision outside of approval</td>
<td>Apr-16</td>
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<td>Community Perspectives from CROI 2016</td>
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<td>Webinar: When the Evidence Is Not Enough - Hormonal Contraception and HIV</td>
<td>May-16</td>
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<td>Webinar: The Dapivirine Ring – What’s the story?</td>
<td>Jun-16</td>
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Infographics, blogs and publications

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<tr>
<td>January-March 2016, Volume 9, Number 1</td>
<td>PX Wire</td>
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<td>AVAC’s take on ring trial results—breaking news in HIV prevention</td>
<td>AVAC list</td>
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<td>ASPIRE and The Ring Study Results — A Snapshot</td>
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<td>The Years Ahead in Biomedical HIV Prevention Research</td>
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<td>Why Africa needs PrEP: A two-in-one pill to prevent HIV infection</td>
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<td>Move On Down the Road: The vaginal dapivirine ring will enter open-label extension</td>
<td>Blog</td>
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<td>Dapivirine Ring—Past, Present and Future</td>
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<td>Dapivirine Ring—Past, Present and Future</td>
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<td>Patchwork of Prevention for Women: Oral PrEP and the Dapivirine Ring</td>
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<td>Blogging Basics</td>
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<td>2016 AVAC Report: Big Data, Real People</td>
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<td>July-September 2016, Volume 9, Number 3</td>
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<td>A Cycle of Transmission in South Africa</td>
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<td>Map of Missed Chances: Oral PrEP rollout &amp; further research on dapivirine vaginal ring</td>
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<td>Contraceptive: A global access emergency</td>
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<td>Data Gaps on Women and Girls</td>
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<td>Demographic Shift in Southern Africa: 10- to-29-year-olds</td>
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<td>Picking up the Pace: A global look at PrEP introduction</td>
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<td>MPT Products in the Pipeline: Selected highlights</td>
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<td>Ongoing and Planned Efficacy Trials</td>
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IV. Key progress towards objectives during grant period

The last three years have been an important period for microbicides research and this project (from May 2013 through July 2016) has had a key role in supporting advocacy and knowledge building in the field during this period.

We set out to achieve the project goal through two key mechanisms (1) creating innovative and flexible multi-stakeholder coalitions where microbicide research is being implemented and where future early introduction may take place; and (2) developing and strengthen civil society advocacy capacity to influence decision points, and issues associated with planning.

With respect to the first aim, within the first six months of country-level work several partners emphasized the importance of building on current platforms for discussion and deliberation rather than building new forums or coalitions. Each country required a context-specific engagement approach in the levels and kinds of coalition engagement.

- In Uganda, this has involved working through different engagement platforms at policy-maker, researcher and grassroots levels, rather than building joint platforms. This has included working with the Uganda Civil Society Coalition, the Vaccine Interest Group (VIG) and the Uganda cross-CAB network. Key partners/collaborators were ICW-EA, UNASO, HEPS Uganda, MUWRP, UVRI-IAVI HIV Vaccine Program, Medical Research Council, Infectious Diseases Institute and others. Partners here have emphasized focusing on PrEP as a pathway to future microbicide introduction.

- In Kenya, we have worked primarily through Fellows and partner organizations, namely Teresa Otieno (GEM), Everlyne Ombati (KEMRI) and Carol Njoroge (KESWA). Their Fellowship activities created ad-hoc coalitions of women’s health advocates interested in new HIV prevention. Alumni Fellows working through NEPHAK have also been key. In addition, AVAC’s key partner Health GAP has ensured that future planning for new prevention has stayed on the agenda during COP and GFATM engagement.

- In South Africa, Fellows and alumni have continued to lead efforts to ensure that civil society voices are heard in planning for microbicides trial results and the planning for the rollout of PrEP. Fellows Yvette Raphael and John Mutsambi were key in preparing for and helping to explain FACTS 001 and ASPIRE/RING results to community groups. In addition, we partnered with key groups such as the South Africa National AIDS Council (SANAC) Women’s Sector to support their advocacy in prevention research and link to Fellows’ efforts. It has been essential to bring in coalitions that focus on other issues such as gender-based violence. Other key partners have been the International Partnership for Microbicides, Wits RHI, Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation, Soul City, the Treatment Action Campaign, TB/HIV Care and others.

- In Zambia, work on microbicides advocacy had to be carried out cautiously as the country is still recovering from the controversies that rose around the MDP 301 trial results in December 2009. Zambian regulators and other government department have not fully re-embraced the idea of microbicides research in Zambia, and advocates are using PrEP as an entry point to have conversations about prevention options for women, including microbicides. Some of these conversations are spearheaded by Fellows and Alumni who created the Zambia Microbicides Working Group, a civil society network. Key partners have been the Treatment Literacy and Advocacy Campaign (TALC), the Zambia Institute of Mass Communications (ZAMCOM) and the
Zambia-Emory HIV Research Project (ZEHRP).

- In Zimbabwe, AVAC Fellows and alumni – Definate Nhamo, Anna Miti, Chamunorwa Mashoko and Rumbidzai Mapfumo – have been at the forefront of ensuring that advocacy efforts on new prevention options are coordinated, and that there is community and national discussions on new prevention research for women and girls. Other Alumni including Munyaradzi Chimwara and Paul Sixpence have also actively engaged with policy makers and the media regarding women’s HIV prevention. Key partners are Pangaea Zimbabwe AIDS Trust (PZAT), UZ-UCSF and Center Stage Media Arts. In addition, Alumni Fellows have been instrumental in the creation of the Advocacy Core Team that engages on COPs, GFATM and policy discussions with respect to HIV prevention and treatment.

- In Malawi – which was important to engage as the host of two ASPIRE sites – 2015 Fellow Maureen Luba has been critical to coalition-building around HIV prevention research. Her work on prevention options for women has strengthened a bond between key civil society groups including the Center for the Development of People (CEDEP), Malawi Network of AIDS Services Organisations (MANASO), Malawi Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (MANET+), Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living with HIV/AIDS (MANARELA+) and others. Although the Malawi coalition is not as strong as others elsewhere, the work that these groups are doing collectively shows promise for a vibrant and strong coalition in coming years. 2016 Fellow Kingsley Chasanga is already reaping rewards of this by driving some of his own advocacy for combination prevention options through this loose coalition.

With respect to the second aim – this was achieved beyond expectations. Several advocates and partner organizations who have been supported or trained through this initiative have been sought after by other organizations in prevention advocacy roles, have developed their own initiatives, have been invited to join national technical working groups, are seen as go-to civil society contacts in priority countries and have capacity to influence decision points, and issues associated with planning. Key accomplishments include:

- Emergence of clearly identified and trusted advocates, organizations and established or ad-hoc coalitions in all the priority countries and regionally, to some extent – that focus on new HIV preventions for women and girls;
- Stronger relationships between advocates, media and relevant research networks and researchers in priority countries;
- A greater number of informed and connected advocates in countries that had previous projects, and new advocates in countries where microbicides advocacy was non-existent
- Development of materials (publications, fact sheets etc.) that speak specifically to HIV prevention research for women and girls;
- Creation of original articles, blogs, op-eds from advocates specifically on women’s prevention advocacy and/or microbicides in particular
- Advocates who are now primed to engage with the PEPFAR DREAMS Initiative, especially to discuss the role of PrEP in HIV prevention for young women – and also to engage in advocacy and consultations around MPTs, LAIs, passive immunization and HIV vaccines research

Please see following sections for summaries of key accomplishments and success stories.
V. Success stories and best practices

Advocacy Fellows Focus on HIV Prevention for Women

During the project period, AVAC’s Advocacy Fellows program provided an excellent platform to strengthen and expand AVAC’s partner base and integrate a focus on women’s HIV prevention research. Of special note is that five Advocacy Fellows - two of seven 2014 Advocacy Fellows and three of six 2015 Advocacy Fellows - were awarded sub-grants, as their Fellowship projects aligned with the goals of this USAID Award. In addition, all the other 2014 and 2015 Fellows were also actively involved in following and/or coordinating women’s HIV prevention issues in their countries.

Working through Advocacy Fellowship projects in key countries proved itself as an effective strategy for country engagement. Ensuring that Fellows (current and alum) have support to run workshops and explain science has built their own capacity and established them as resources in their communities among peers and with other policy stakeholders. As a result, Fellows and other partners have been invited to join national technical working groups, high level meetings in their countries and regionally and played important roles in key global discussions. In addition, Fellows have been selected to participate more broadly in discussions and consultations around research (such as vaccine research in Malawi, long acting injectables in South Africa, and passive immunization regionally) and played a key role in advocating for civil society engagement in the PEPFAR DREAMS Initiative.

Below, please see a sub-section titled Nurturing Champions for Women’s HIV Prevention that describes some of the Fellows that have been either directly supported through USAID sub-grants and/or involved in various project activities. It highlights the sustainability of this support as they have each stayed involved and – more importantly – are seen as leaders and resources in their communities.

The Science of ARV-Based Prevention in Women: Webinar Series

The ARV-based Prevention in Women Webinar Series began in November 2015 and ended in January 2016. The six-part webinar series focused on how HIV and ARVs work in women’s bodies and provided its participants, a core group of 12 advocates who follow women’s prevention, a unique opportunity to delve deeper into the science and converse with leading researchers in the field of HIV in preparation for the Ring results. The series created an intimate and safe space for advocates to ask questions that they may not necessarily feel comfortable asking in a large setting. In addition, distributing relevant materials a week before the webinar gave participants the time to become familiar with the webinar topic and have questions ready. The webinar series also piloted a WhatsApp group that allowed for easier communication between advocates and facilitators and was noted as one of the most useful tools in the webinar series. Overall, the series was a success and participants shared that the small group webinars conducted via Blue Jeans, a video conference platform, in conjunction with the use of WhatsApp was a “perfect” arrangement. 100% of survey responses post-webinar also stated that they would join a similar webinar series in the future.

“Ringing in the News” - Whatsapp Group

A Whatsapp group, labeled “Ringing in the News”, was created to better facilitate communication and questions on the release of the dapivirine ring results at CROI 2016 for over 30 advocates who had been part of AVAC activities, leading up to the results. The group was an exciting way to communicate, capture and share the anticipation felt as results were announced. For instance, the group erupted in cheers when the results were revealed. In addition, the group served as a tool to ensure that advocates
understood how to interpret results and to clarify any questions. Post results, the group became a platform to quickly mobilize a call the night of to explain the results in further detail and to hear from advocates their thoughts and concerns. Currently, the WhatsApp group is still active and advocates use it to update each other on news regarding women’s prevention, share information from meetings and panels and as a tool to encourage one another’s’ advocacy work. Please see http://www.avac.org/sites/default/files/u44/Whatsapp.pdf for snapshots from the animated discussion.

![WhatsApp Group – Ringing in the News](image)

**Figure 2: Snapshot from the Whatsapp Group “Ringing in the News”**

**Influencing the research agenda – NIH Consultation on the next steps for the ASPIRE study**

Influencing key research and/or funding decisions is part of what AVAC’s Advocacy Fellows are mentored to be able to do. The USAID-supported 2015 Fellows Anna Miti (Zimbabwe) and Maureen Luba (Malawi) were able to do that when they participated in a special consultation on March 9, 2016, at the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) to determine the next steps for the ASPIRE study, after the results had been released a few weeks earlier. It took much advocacy behind the scene to have African advocates included as meeting participants. We were able to suggest Anna and Maureen as participants and spent many hours helping them prepare for the meeting. At this meeting, NIAID made a decision to fund further study of dapivirine vaginal ring for HIV prevention through the HIV Open-label Prevention Extension (HOPE) or MTN-025 study. Anna and Maureen made their mark, representing their own and voices of the young women they have worked with over the past year. It took a year’s worth of capacity building to get them there, but it was worthwhile.

**Collaboration with Microbicide Research Partners**

Collaboration with research partners has been a critical element of this project. From VOICE to FACTS to ASPIRE and the Ring Study, it has been essential to support research partners in planning for the release of results, engage and consult with advocates and media, prepare messages that speak to the questions of civil society and other stakeholders and keep them informed. In addition, through this project we have convened neutral platforms for the relevant research partners to link with each other around communications planning as well as discuss key and emerging issues related to microbicides research.
and – more generally – women’s HIV prevention research.

**Building media engagement skills for advocates**

The media are an important stakeholder in our advocacy work. This project was tied closely to activities conducted under another USAID-supported project – *Advancing Microbicide Research, Development and Introduction: Media, Messages and Mobilization (CA AID-OAA-A-13-00030)* – that looked to develop media capacity in reporting on microbicides research within a context of women’s HIV prevention. A key role of community advocates is to be able to work with the media and communicate effectively. Through one-on-one mentorship and other trainings, Fellows and other advocacy partners have become more savvy in working with the media. Many have written opinion pieces, letters to editors, blogs, conducted media interviews and press conferences among other things. Examples are John Mutsambi’s [Op-Ed in the Mail & Guardian](#) and [blog post on demand for PrEP in South Africa](#), Yvette Raphael and others’ [response to the dapivirine ring results](#), Maureen Luba’s [Letter to the Editor of Malawi24](#), Anna’s [Miti’s Blog](#), Carolyne Njoroge’s [blog demanding PrEP access for Kenyan sex workers](#) and many others.

We have also strengthened and, in some cases, established relationships between civil society advocates and the media through the media science cafés program, described in more detail in the report for CA AID-OAA-A-13-00030. Media science cafés conducted in Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe in partnership with health journalist networks have enabled media to get the latest updates from the field, connections to the leading scientists, advocates, policy makers and other stakeholders. Many cafés were co-hosted with civil society groups. This platform also gave access to civil society partners to health journalists, senior health reporters and editors and created linkages for ongoing engagement. In countries where these activities are ongoing including, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, we have observed better, more balanced and more accurate reporting as well as multi-stakeholder engagements between advocates and journalists.

**Changing it up – using several methodologies for engagement**

AVAC used several modalities to engage civil society individuals, organizations and coalitions and to help strengthen their capacity to understand and engage with the research and researchers. These include Advocacy Fellow sub-grants, regular calls, in-country meetings, linkages, dedicated webinar series, conference participation, regional workshops, customized activity support, materials, training on media engagement, help writing blogs and editorials, using social media and the creation of specialized WhatsApp groups. Staying flexible and responsive to how and when to best engage partners has ensured that we can tailor support to the partner and their contexts.

**Collaborative Activities to help shape Women’s Research Agenda**

Through the last three years, AVAC has convened, co-hosted, participated and partnered with several organizations to help articulate and shape a women’s prevention agenda. They include workshops, webinars, national, regional and international conferences, and special projects. The details are available in previous reports. They can be categorized as:

- Engagement with research teams around VOICE, FACTS 001, ASPIRE and the Ring Study including co-sponsoring consultations, workshops, conference satellite and think tanks with MTN, IPM, CONRAD, Wits RHI.
- Key research conference participation and side-meetings with civil society partners. This includes the R4P 2014; CROI Conferences 2014-2016; IAS conferences; and the MTN and IPM
Annual and Regional Meetings.

- Co-sponsoring the Women’s Networking Zone and training specific to prevention research at AIDS 2016, ICASA 2013 and 2015 and SAAIDS 2014.
- Co-sponsoring the annual SANAC HIV Women Summits.
- Partnership with CAMI on multi-purpose prevention technology advocacy to ensure optimal use of resources and partners including through the Kenya and South Africa MPT Advocacy & Communication Working Groups and co-sponsoring activities.
- Partnership with CHANGE to run workshops on integrating HIV prevention and SRHR, launch a report, launch a listserv, and engage partners in ongoing efforts and activities.
- Active engagement on the PEPFAR DREAMS Initiative including supporting civil society input, providing feedback on processes, co-hosting panel discussions and involving key players in project activities.
- Helping to establish and steer the South Africa Health Technologies Advocacy Coalition (SAHTAC).
- Co-coordination of the US Women and PrEP Working Group and ensuring its linked to the efforts of African advocates.
- Participation in the MTN Community Working Group (CWG), providing feedback on plans, presenting updates on CWG calls and helping to develop CWG agenda for regional MTN meeting.
- Engaged in the development of a regional African advocacy platform to bring advocates together around joint campaigns for prevention research.
- Ongoing customized support to civil society groups interested in being more engaged in women’s HIV prevention, and especially with the ‘unusual suspects’.
- Engagement of GPP partners through the Stakeholder Engagement Community of Practice which included microbicides-specific trainings and webinars.

Priority Country Activities

Across all five priority countries and Malawi, current and alumni Fellows and partners have been supported to lead and move forward relevant activities including training, mobilizing civil society and influencing relevant processes and processes, as well as advocating for new ones. The goals of these have been country-specific but all fall across the spectrum of highlighting R&D for new HIV prevention options for women - and especially microbicides - to building the capacity to interrogate processes that would accelerate research to rollout and eventually future access.

Country profiles have been regularly updated and country plans maintained and revised to ensure programmatic synergies across AVAC and responsiveness to new developments in the field; plans have also been revised to align with USAID and partner activities and informed by ongoing international and national discussions; key advocates have been linked to relevant organizations and processes in an ongoing way; activities to show solidarity with and support to women’s health civil society groups and coalitions working on context-specific issues have continued; briefings have been conducted with key research and implementation players; and closely coordinated within AVAC to ensure activities are well aligned with the media engagement work planned in USAID objective 2. Details on country level activities can be found in bi-annual project reports.

Nurturing Champions for Women’s HIV Prevention

Through this project and using the focus on women’s HIV prevention, there are many new informed and well-placed advocates in priority countries. Many of the Fellows supported through this project (either
as USAID sub-grantees or involved in project activities) have been sought after and now have leadership roles at different organisations after their Fellowship years. A few examples include:

2014 Fellows

- **Yvette Raphael** (Fellow 2014) worked to empower young women to demand HIV prevention interventions designed for them in her Fellowship, which was supported through a USAID sub-grant. She worked with the ZAZI training program to incorporate information about new prevention technologies and mentored young prevention advocates. She also worked with the media to overcome “HIV fatigue” and promote accurate messages about prevention. Some of her writing included a piece on why Africa needs PrEP, a Mail and Guardian op-ed demanding for PrEP, a poster about her working on preparing young women for the FACTS001 microbicide results, among other things. Yvette has developed into an exceptionally vibrant, relentless champion, and has continued her engagement on women’s prevention in her current work at her former Fellowship host organization, the Centre for Communication Impact. She mentored a number of young women during her Fellowship and has carried this forth in her current work. As a direct result of her Fellowship, she has joined two other Fellows alum to co-found **Advocacy for Prevention of HIV and AIDS (APHA)**, a new South Africa-based HIV prevention civil society coalition that has one of its key goals to advocate for ethical research and rollout of new interventions for women and girls, and a key partner in the new USAID-funded and AVAC-led Coalition to Advance and Support Prevention Research (CASPR).

- **Definate Nhamo** (Fellow 2014, Zimbabwe) advocated for comprehensive HIV prevention options for young women and for their integration into sexual and reproductive health programs in Zimbabwe during her Fellowship, which was supported through a USAID sub-grant. She has now taken on a leadership role in the new USAID-funded OPTIONS Consortium (Optimizing Prevention Technology Introduction on Schedule), a collaboration led by AVAC, FHI 360 and Wits RHI with other partners including Pangaea. She’s responsible for running the Zimbabwe secretariat for the PrEP technical working group. The WG influences the PrEP rollout agenda, working closely with the MoH.

- **Everlyne Ombati** (Fellow 2014, Kenya) who focused on microbicides and multi-purpose prevention options during her Fellowship has become a global leader on MPTs. She’s working with **CAMI Health** under their **Initiative for MPTs (IMPT)**. She’s the IMPT Kenya Task Force Coordinator, and is responsible for coordinating MPT activities in Kenya, in addition to implementing MPT communications and advocacy strategies and conducting MPT outreach in communities.

- **Teresia Otieno**. (Fellow 2014, Kenya) worked with discordant couples and sex workers to shape the PrEP agenda in Kenya by increasing their participation in HIV prevention forums and committees at the county and national levels. When she completed her Fellowship, she went on to found the **Personal Initiative for Positive Empowerment (PIPE Kenya)**, an organization that advocates for a better HIV/AIDS response, gender equality, SRHR, economic justice and against violence against women and children. She is the Vice Chairperson of ICW-EA, and represents the region in the ICW global International Steering committee. She is currently volunteering with ATHENA Network in community engagement on gender equality and HIV.
2015 Fellows

- **Maureen Luba** (Fellow 2015) focused on advocacy for more prevention options for young women and girls in Malawi in her Fellowship which was supported by a USAID subgrant. The final report on Maureen Luba's advocacy details how she worked to ensure that HIV prevention for young women and girls in Malawi is prioritized and that they are involved and engaged in the processes of developing and rolling out current and future interventions for them. Maureen developed different resources and documents as part of her advocacy, including a policy brief, a 15-minute documentary, a letter to the editor of Malawi24, and a strong policy document appealing for treatment for all in Malawi, among other documents. Maureen is one of the strongest and freshest civil society voices in Malawi. She continued her Fellowship advocacy work by taking a new hybrid advocacy position with two leading Malawi civil society organization MANERELA+ and CEDEP, created specifically for her. She transitioned from a quality control officer in service delivery to a visible and respected advocate in her country.

- **Anna Miti** (Fellow 2015) has a background as a broadcast journalist and this gave her a unique advantage to bring those skills into her advocacy for HIV prevention options for women. During her Fellowship, supported as a USAID sub-grant, Anna started a blog to directly engage young women and those who develop and deliver programming for them to help raise issues of HIV prevention and young women, and to help find solutions to them. As a Fellow, she wrote different pieces including a challenge for better investment and engagement in the search for a vaccine, another cautiously celebrating the microbicide ring results, and a really reflecting personal one emphasizing #mybodymypolitics. After her Fellowship, she re-enrolled into school, continues to run her blog, AnnaMiti’sBlog, and runs a show on Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation on which she has continued to highlight issues of prevention options for women. Through the visibility from her Fellowship, she was invited to facilitate PEPFAR DREAMS’ satellites and workshops at AIDS 2016.

- **John Mutsambi** (Fellow 2015, South Africa) has taken on a new role as a PrEP implementer in the DREAMS Initiative at TB/HIV Care (THCA) where he was hosted during his Fellowship. His fellowship was supported as a USAID sub-grant. As a Fellow, John pushed for accelerated rollout of PrEP for key groups including sex-workers and young women, and he is doing exactly that in his new role. He continues to advocate for increased access to PrEP. During his Fellowship, John led the process of developing a petition to push the South African government to accelerate the approval of Truvada as PrEP. This was turned into an Op-Ed in the Mail & Guardian. The op-ed got lots of hits, and shortly after it ran, the South African Medicines Control Council approved Truvada for PrEP in South Africa.

- **Carolyne Njoroge** (Fellow 2015, Kenya) was offered a program coordinator role at KESWA where she was hosted during her Fellowship. She coordinates a number of sex workers’ projects and programs to ensure effective and efficient programmatic management, supports the development of new partnerships and conducts assessments to new groups joining the sex worker alliance. She is seen as champion of PrEP advocacy and sits on key technical working groups.
VI. Key Lessons and Unanticipated Results

Whereas we had begun this project with a clear focus on planning for introduction of new interventions, early discussions with partners demonstrated that the realities of country priorities and resource limitations make the discussion on future access to microbicides hard to focus on or discuss with policymakers, without specific, proven, effective products available. It became quickly evident that we needed to tailor our strategies to working with partners in their contexts paying mind to what the best entry points were to discuss microbicides and more broadly HIV prevention research for women.

Introducing the project goals and plans to some country partners and new contacts has served to catalyze their interest and engagement in this work. The scenario-planning exercise at several events including R4P and the series of Ring Consultations, for example, re-energized partners across Africa to consider concrete plans to prepare for microbicide trials results.

Another outcome of discussing issues around introduction with country-level partners was the piquing of their interest to the roadblocks in PrEP implementation. Many partner groups have suggested that AVAC support efforts to better comprehend and support advocacy for PrEP implementation, especially for women, as it is this pathway that could be eventually be beneficial to charting ARV-based microbicide introduction.

Advocacy for PrEP rollout and access grew in focus in all priority countries from 2013 to current date. In talking about PrEP, advocates in all countries have been able to allude to future ARV-based research that also affect women. Talking about PrEP rollout has also been a way to consider barriers to access for SRH services for women – which can only help any future rollout of vaginal microbicides, should they prove effective.

As we had originally planned to, and from specific requests from partners for ongoing research literacy, more online and country-level training opportunities have been created in collaboration with partner groups. Media specific engagement and training was also prioritized with support for media science cafes in several priority countries. This aligned well with the step-wise strategy adopted – to help build capacity and prepare for upcoming trial results, before considering advocacy required for introduction efforts.

Building research literacy across several interventions has helped created a more comprehensive understanding of prevention research and has helped build understanding and capacity to engage in research-to-rollout processes. As a result, there are advocates in each priority country who have a more nuanced understanding of microbicides research and are eager to help prepare their colleagues for upcoming results.

In particular, AVAC’s tools to describe the complicated research-to-rollout process have been welcomed by advocates, trial staff and researchers alike - they have requested further training and materials on this process. With a wide variety of post-effectiveness and implementation studies being conducted, there seems to be much confusion about how to estimate timelines, next steps and messages about introduction. Introducing the project goals and plans to some country partners and new contacts has served to catalyze their interest and engagement in this work.

It was important to collaborate with a wide array of global and national organizations in helping to
shape a HIV prevention research agenda for women. They have been important in building solidarity and also to identify unusual suspects, especially those working in broader SRHR and with young women and adolescents.

AVAC activities have been timely in synergizing and/or building on the work of other USAID Microbicide Program Collaborative Partners under the Shared Vision and Strategic Plan for Microbicide Introduction. For example, developing the www.prevention4women.org website with WHO; collaboration and communication with FHI 360 on their gender analysis work in Kenya and South Africa and exploring partnership into the future; collaboration with CAMI and IMPT on advocacy and communication working groups, conference sessions, webinars and materials; and supporting IPM to engage with civil society partners.

VII.   Key Gender Considerations

In this project generally, and in the activities undertaken to date as described above, AVAC used a gender transformative approach:

- By galvanizing links with women’s sexual and reproductive health advocacy in key project countries.
- By contextualizing discussions on future prevention options within their national contexts and agendas.
- By putting special emphasis on engaging young women as champions across all activities.
- By ensuring that platforms for engagement are sensitive to gender dynamics.
- By paying special note to analyses of how outcomes can help advance broader gender goals around HIV prevention.

As the success stories and lessons learned above describe, gender consideration has not only been integrated across the project design but women, and women from key populations, have been supported to develop their leadership roles in this work. The work they have done in championing women’s HIV prevention has been integrated into other ongoing activities and they have leadership roles in coordinating new activities that relate to advocacy for women and girls’ SRHR issues.

VIII.   Materials & photos from project events

The full Annex of materials produced over the life of the project from May 2013 through July 2016 can be found at http://www.avac.org/sites/default/files/u44/USAID_Annex_2013-2016_1.pdf and includes links to the following materials:

- Materials and Photos from events
- Publications and Infographics
- Blogs and media articles
- Webinar recordings
IX. Recommendations regarding unfinished work and/or program continuation

Under this grant, AVAC has built and strengthened its partner base with new and existing partners through several in-country programs including the Advocacy Fellows program, national stakeholder engagement, conference-related activities and specific projects. There are several stronger coalitions and others bourgeoning, who are developing their own prevention research advocacy agendas.

AVAC has also supported and trained several advocates and partner organizations who are now identified as trusted advocates, organizations and coalitions that focus on new HIV preventions for women and girls.

The work that has been supported by this grant is ongoing and it is important for it to continue and expand as the prevention research and implementation landscape changes.

Much of the work from this grant will be continued, leveraged and expanded under the new USAID-funded Coalition to Advance and Support Prevention Research (CASPR). AVAC leads this coalition with a number of partners that have been cultivated and nurtured through this award that is ending. Through CASPR, AVAC and partners will continue to work in the six countries and be expanded to additional countries where appropriate. Through CASPR and other funding sources, we will also be able to support, mentor and in some cases incubate the newer coalitions. Support to the Fellows Program, including ensuring that there is a strong emphasis on research advocacy and that advocacy around engaging women and girls is prioritized will continue. In addition the interest in research specific to women and girls will continue to be priority throughout our programs. In addition, the CASPR program will allow us to build on the experience from this project of nurturing champion advocates through the development of an Advocacy Institute.

While this project and CASPR are both focused on prevention R&D advocacy, there are obvious and important links with the OPTIONS Consortium, also funded by USAID and co-led by AVAC, FHI 360 and Wits RHI, and the Gates Foundation-funded Prevention Market Manager project that AVAC is implementing in partnership with CHAI. Taken together, these new initiatives are all building on the strong foundation created under this Advocacy in Action project; these new projects are stronger because of it and will help sustain the strong results reported here

X. Budget Report and Analysis

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<tr>
<th>Line Items</th>
<th>Total Budget May 3, 2013 to July 31, 2016</th>
<th>Total Actual May 3, 2013 to July 31, 2016</th>
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<th>% variance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Staff salaries</td>
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<td>350,826</td>
<td>60,276</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Office Expenses</td>
<td>87,163</td>
<td>102,745</td>
<td>15,582</td>
<td>18%</td>
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</table>
Budget analysis

Overall, the budget of $1,499,963 is underspent by $56,875 or 4% of the total budget over the life of the project. The grant period was approved initially from May 3, 2013 through May 3, 2016 and was extended through July 31, 2016.

**Personnel**: Total expenses over the life of the project are $539,784 including benefits compared to $498,110 budgeted. The budget variance of $41,674 or 8% over budget is primarily due to the fact that the grant was extended from May 3, 2016 to July 31, 2016 thus resulting in additional costs.

**Consultants**: Total expenses over the life of the project are $116,789 compared to $72,000 budgeted. The budget variance of $44,789 or 62% over budget is due to increased LOE to support programmatic activities, specifically communications training and mentoring to advocates in writing op-eds and blogs in the lead up to the release of the dapivirine ring results and the AIDS 2016 Conference, and in part due to the fact that the grant was extended as mentioned above.

**Travel and meetings**: Total expenses over the life of the project are $350,826 compared to $290,550 budgeted. The budget variance of $60,276 or 21% over budget is primarily due to the fact that USAID supported the participation of 13 advocates to the meeting Women Now that took place before the 2016 International AIDS Conference in July in Durban, South Africa.

**Publications and dissemination**: Total expenses over the life of the project are $84,427 compared to $102,140 budgeted. This budget line item includes publications, conference calls and web support. This budget line item is underspent by 21% or $17,713.

**Sub-grants**: Total expenses over the life of the project are $248,517 compared to $450,000 budgeted resulting in a budget variance of underspend of $201,483, or 45%. The main reason for the underspend is that sub-grants issued to Fellows typically range from $35k to $60k which is a relatively small grant. In addition, Fellows engaged on advocacy around AIDS prevention do not always focus on microbicides. Finally, the Fellows grants for 2016 were to start on April 1, 2016 thus it was not possible to allocate any sub-grant to this grant which was originally scheduled to end on May 2, 2016.

**Office expenses**: Total expenses over the life of the project are $102,745 compared to $87,163 budgeted. The budget variance of $15,582 over budget or 18% is primarily due to the fact that the grant was extended by 3 months.