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**Getting from Awareness to Use:
Lessons Learned from SOMARC III about
Marketing Condoms**

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Executive Summary

Special Study #9

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although condom use has increased in numerous developing countries around the world over the last decade, a significant proportion of married and unmarried couples continue to engage in unprotected sex that may result in an unintended pregnancy or the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI). Through its consumer research, the Social Marketing for Change (SOMARC) project has identified numerous factors that serve as obstacles to the increased use of this method: concerns about reduced sexual pleasure; problems of discarding used condoms; concerns about quality; difficulty in obtaining condoms when needed; images of condoms as being appropriate only for extramarital or "illicit" sexual relations; and uncertainty about how to use a condom correctly. Another barrier to increased condom use is the fact that many distributors and retailers are reluctant to carry condoms because of the relatively small profit margins that they provide.

This paper presents key lessons learned from SOMARC III about overcoming many of the above obstacles to increased condom use. The paper relies on case studies of SOMARC programs in Ghana, Malawi, Uganda, Indonesia and Ukraine.

Lessons Learned

- Mass media messages can be highly effective at reducing the belief that condoms are appropriate only for extramarital relations. Moreover, the reduction in this belief appears to translate directly to increased condom use within marriage and decreased use of condoms with CSWs only.
- Condom campaigns that stress the disease-prevention aspect of condoms can be highly effective at increasing condom use among high-risk individuals. On the other hand, they can also cause a drop in use among couples who use condoms primarily as a pregnancy-prevention method within marriage because of an increased perception that condoms are for people at risk of contracting STIs and AIDS rather than for monogamous married couples.
- Increasing the number of condom brands can increase overall condom use as long as the brands appeal to different market niches and appear to address the different needs and preferences of those niches.
- Product positioning can have a strong influence on the benefits that consumers perceive a particular condom brand to have (e.g., quality versus strength versus thinness). In Ghana, the same exact condom is packaged and positioned in three different ways to three different market segments, and consumers perceive the benefits of each brand to be different.

- Innovative promotional approaches such as condom lotteries can be highly effective at bringing consumers quickly “in the door” and thereby reducing the reluctance of retailers to carry condoms.
- The perception that condoms are not appropriate for use with “those we love” is particularly strong among commercial sex workers (CSWs). As a result, it is easier to increase the use of condoms among CSWs with their clients than it is to increase the use of condoms among CSWs with their husbands or boyfriends.
- The creation of a specialized (and subsidized) distribution network for rural, non-traditional points of sale can significantly increase the availability of condoms nationwide and lead directly to increased condom use. However, in subsidized markets, there is little incentive for private sector distributors to take over this type of high-intensity distribution network. Consequently, unless donors are prepared to fund this type of distribution system over the long run, it is a short-term solution to problems of access in “hard-to-reach” settings.