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PSI / UNFPA launch female condom brand

April 30, 2008 – Population Services International (PSI) Malawi, with the support of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Ministry of Health has launched the CARE Female Condoms, a branded, social-marketed female condom which offers dual protection against unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections including HIV.

PSI/Malawi has trained and employed a team of female CARE promoters to distribute the condoms in hair salons countrywide. The CARE Promoters will train hair salon staff on how to demonstrate the correct use of female condoms to their customers, encouraging them to purchase the product and empowering them to protect themselves against unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

Speaking at the event in Lilongwe, Hon. Khumbo Kachale, Minister of Health said, "With our contraceptive prevalence rate at 28 percent and HIV prevalence for 14 - 49 year olds at 12 percent, it is imperative that condoms must be readily and universally available. These condoms should indeed be given either for free or bought at a low cost, and promoted in ways that help overcome social and personal obstacles to their use."

Esperance Fundira, UNFPA Representative stressed that, given high infections rates among women and youth, intervention programmes that target them is critical. She said that every year 110,000 new infections occur in the country and 58 percent of them are women, while 46 percent of these new infections are among young people age 15 and 24 years.



Hon. Khumbo Kachale (left) and Esperance Fundira at the event to launch the CARE female condom

"It is evident therefore, that women in Malawi need an intervention that they can control to combat unwanted pregnancies, STIs and HIV infection. This is why the CARE female condom is so crucial," said Fundira.

With the availability to CARE female condoms, Fundira said, Malawian women and girls now have the power to make reproductive health choices which are otherwise left to men.

"It can not be stressed enough what an asset the CARE female condom will be to women. Dear Malawian women the power is now in your hands," she said.

John Justino, PSI/Malawi Country Representative credited social marketing programme to "the incredible determination and drive" of the Ministry of Health's Reproductive Health Unit (RHU)

"At PSI/Malawi, we are very pleased with the partnership with the RHU and UNFPA and we are proud of our joint achievements and the launch of Care Female Condoms. We

are particularly pleased as this programme demonstrates clearly the Government of Malawi's efforts, as well as those of UNFPA and PSI, to help empower Malawian women to make choices that enable them to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and HIV," said Justino.

Country Representative for PSI/Malawi, John Justino says the launch of a female condom social marketing programme in Malawi was made possible through "the incredible determination and drive" of the Ministry of Health's Reproductive Health Unit (RHU) and UNFPA.

UNFPA Condom Coordinator Sandra Mapemba explained that as the lead agency UN agency in HIV prevention, UNFPA has the expertise and experience in procurement and educating communities on correct and consistent use of male and female condoms to help safeguard sexual and reproductive health.

"UNFPA provides quality condoms and provides the best prices because it is the largest public-sector procurer

of condoms in the world," said Mapemba and added that UNFPA also supports the RHU in the Ministry of Health through technical assistance

in comprehensive condom programming.

Mapemba said the female condom programme begun

in 2000 mainly through the Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM) and selected health centres throughout the country.

Global Environment Facility, Small Grants Programme stakeholders meeting, UNDP

April 2008 - The GEF is a financial mechanism structured as a trust fund. It operates in collaboration and partnership with the three implementing agencies, UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank. The Small Grants Programme is part of the GEF and focuses on providing small grants to non-governmental and community based organisation and grass root organizations to assist communities in attaining better livelihoods while stressing the importance of the environment and addressing local environmental issues.

Projects under the Small Grants Programmes address climate change mitigation and adaption, land degradation, persistent organic pollutants among other areas aimed at ensuring environmental protection.

The first stakeholder meeting was held in April with participation from various stakeholders including Bunda College of Agriculture Fisheries Department, Coordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment, (CURE), Meteorological Department, Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM), Environmental Affairs Department, Evangelical Lutheran Development Service



Dr. Charles Jumbe, Bunda College (standing) in discussion with Duncan Warren, NASFAM at the GEF/SGP stakeholders meeting

(ELDS), National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM), Lilongwe City Assembly, Mzuzu City Assembly, Blantyre City Assembly, Ministry of Health and Population, Concern Universal, Mzuzu University and other non-governmental and community based organisation.

The meeting outlined the GEF/SGP is structure and role of UNDP as hosts of the programme and UNOPS as implementing agency.

At the meeting the selection process and eligibility criteria for the grants and how funds are channelled to beneficiaries was elaborated.

Participants raised concern that due to limited capacity in smaller community based organisations, more established 'bigger' NGOs are mostly selected and called for an urgent need to strengthen smaller local organizations in the running of projects and management of funds.

Project launch - Improving Food Security and Nutrition Policies and Programme Outreach

April 2008 – Malawi's Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security Hon. Frank Mwenefumbo M.P., launched "Improving Food Security and Nutrition Policies and Programmes Outreach" in Kasungu.

The project aims to strengthen food security and nutrition at the household level among vulnerable communities in Kasungu and Mzimba.

The Agricultural Development Programme managed by the Ministry of Agriculture has identified food security, commercial agro-processing and marketing development and sustainable land and water management as the three pillars under which intervention and activities are classified.

The programme will focus on empowering communities with skills to increase harvest yields, better nutrition at household level, improved sanitation and income generating activities.

This is a 3 year project funded by the Government of Flanders to the tune of US \$ 5.5 million.



In the last two years, Malawi has had bumper harvests due to good rainfall patterns and the agricultural inputs subsidies programme. With approximately half of Malawi's population below the national poverty line, they remain vulnerable to any climate shocks as the country largely depends on rain-fed subsistence farming.

Project launch - Improving Food Security and Nutrition Policies and Programme Outreach

April 2008 – Global production from aquaculture or fish farming, is now contributing substantially to the world food supply of finfish, shellfish, algae and other aquatic organisms. It now nearly equals the wild capture fisheries harvests and is projected to increase to 83 million tonnes by 2030, a staggering 37.5 million tonne increase from 2004.

Aquaculture has the potential to contribute significantly to Africa's efforts towards food security, poverty reduction and economic growth. If managed appropriately, fish farming has minimum impact on the environment but huge economic and social benefits. However, taking full advantage of this opportunity requires the trade in aquatic animals and products between countries. This trade has biological risks associated with the introduction or spread of pathogens which can cause diseases in aquatic organisms and introduce pests or invasive species.

FAO Rome recently organised a workshop to look at an aquatic biosecurity framework so that risks are minimised when trading aquatic products. The workshop attracted aquatic scientists from 11 countries - Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, Malawi, Italy, Botswana, Australia and Angola.

The session was opened by Alexander Bulilani, Director of Fisheries Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and addressed by FAO Representative Mazlan Jusoh and Mr Rohana Subasinghe an Aquaculture Scientist based at FAO HQ Rome.



Properly managed aquaculture in Africa is a lucrative business for small scale and medium entrepreneurs.

Notes: The term 'biosecurity' can by definition cover a range of matters including pathogens, invasive pest species, genetically modified organisms and food safety. In this document, biosecurity refers specifically to managing the risks associated with exotic or emerging pathogens of aquatic organisms and managing risks associated with invasive aquatic pest species.

Enhancing agricultural inputs scheme in Malawi

April 2008 – In 2005, the Government of Malawi embarked on an ambitious seed and fertiliser subsidies programme to increase agricultural productivity, reduce incidents of hunger and increase food security. The droughts of 2001/2002 and 2004/2005 depleted the livelihoods of an already vulnerable majority of the population. With limited income, the subsidy scheme has provided additional opportunity for smallholder farmers to access affordable agricultural inputs.

The subsidy scheme and favourable rainfall contributed two consecutive years of bumper harvests and the same is expected this harvest season.

The programme is now central to national and household food security. With basic food needs met for many households, it is opportune to step up to commercialisation and crop diversification.

The Government of Malawi recognises that now, the inputs programme must respond more efficiently and timely to new expectations and therefore the technical and operational efficiency is imperative.

At the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security's request, the Earth Institute at Columbia University and MDG centre convened a joint workshop to develop recommendations to enhance the agricultural inputs programme in time for the October 2008 planting season.

Funded by UNDP Malawi and AGRA, the workshop brought together 36 national and international participants from planning, extension and research professions. Organisations included Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Bunda

College of Agriculture, NASFAM, international agricultural research institutes, the private sector, international development partners, private individuals and the Earth Institute.

Key recommendations

The meeting focused on agricultural management that will maximise maize production and promote crop diversification to improve food security, nutrition, soil fertility and incomes. Agricultural extension services and timely communication on the inputs programme should be developed further.

To maximise maize production, the correct timing of planting and fertilizer application is critical and the fertilizer should reach farmers by end of September. A 4-week delay in application of basal fertilizer could reduce national maize production by 30%.

Citing increased fertilizer costs, the team recommended that fertilizer use should not be reduced because it could threaten national food security and force Malawi to import food, whose increasing costs are creating global concern and strife.

Malawi remains heavily dependent of rain fed agriculture and is still vulnerable to climate shocks. Crop diversification is minimal and maize is the staple crop grown for food and income. A five year market driven national programme was recommended for the production of groundnuts, pigeon peas and other legumes which can be intercropped with maize. Their potential to improve nutrition, incomes and soil fertility is untapped.

Key considerations

Approximately 30 percent of crop is lost after harvest due to poor storage. Extension services must provide farmers with the evidence based alternatives to reduce this substantial loss.

Sustainable agriculture cannot depend solely on mineral fertilizers and it is recommended that integrated soil fertility management should be incorporated into the agricultural inputs programme. Quick wins include increased agro forestry.

Other areas that will need further deliberation include increased research, irrigation and water management and more options for crop diversification such as cotton and sorghum.

With more than 1.5 million households benefiting from the scheme, the agricultural inputs subsidy scheme's potential is enormous. To achieve the objectives of the scheme, the Government cannot implement it in isolation. It requires the involvement of other stakeholders – private sector network, civil society, politicians, local authorities and opinion leaders.

It is recommended that local and national level communication on the dynamics of the scheme should begin immediately so that farmers make informed and timely choices before the planting season.

The Government is encouraged to proactively engage the stakeholders and create opportunities to discuss challenges and perspectives that will influence the success of the scheme as well as create an entry point to discuss other innovative efforts that will tackle food security in the long term.

Global Environment Facility, Small Grants Programme stakeholders meeting, UNDP

March, 2008 - Malawi's Making Pregnancy Safer Programme under the Ministry of Health has received basic emergency obstetric care equipment and skills development material worth \$ 69,815.

The donation is part of a World Health Organisation, European Commission and Government of Malawi partnership signed in February 2007, to support the government's efforts to reduce the high number of deaths during pregnancy and child birth. Malawi's maternal mortality ratio of 984 per 100,000 is among the highest in the world. In 2007, the ministry received equipment worth US \$ 93,841.

Speaking at the function, Deputy Minister of Health Honourable Juliana Guga, M.P., said, "It is known that however knowledgeable a health worker is, if he is not provided with tools to put the knowledge into practice, they are not able to make the impact for which their training was designed to."

Technical literature received includes guidelines on pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum and newborn care for doctors, nurses and midwives. The equipment donated comprises 100 vacuum extraction machines, 100 blood pressure machines, 100 stethoscopes, 100 manual suction machines for newborn babies and demonstration models for teaching.



WHO Representative Dr, Felicitas Zawaira (right) hands over a suction machine to the Deputy Minister of Health Honourable Juliana Guga

In March 2007, Malawi launched its road map to combat maternal and infant death, with the theme "Maternal Death is Preventable; No More Silence, Act Now!" The national plan of action is based on 2000 African Union recommendations on development of national Road Maps to accelerate achievement of MDGs related to maternal and newborn health. The roadmap has set a target of increasing basic obstetric care by 50% by 2020.

WHO Representative Dr. Felicitas Zawaira said the equipment and the skills development materials to support both pre and in-service training will improve the quality of care and should attract more women to deliver at health facilities and prevent the deaths of women during childbirth.

The European Commission, WHO and Ministry of Health partnership is a 4 year programme.

Upcoming Events

Candlelight Memorial this May 2008

What is the Candlelight Memorial?

The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial, a programme of the Global Health Council, is among the world's oldest movements by civil society for HIV/AIDS remembrance, awareness and community action.

The historic memorial started in 1983 and takes place every third Sunday in May and is led by some 1,200 volunteer Candlelight Coordinators in 119 countries who host vigils for their communities.

The Candlelight Memorial is an opportunity to educate people on HIV and AIDS, advocate for policy change, foster partnerships and community dialogue, and improve skills for community mobilization.

With 33 million people estimated to be infected worldwide, the Candlelight serves as an important uniting intervention among civil society and their governments, breaking down social barriers, and giving hope to future generations.

The Candlelight Memorial program encourages governments and international leaders to improve policies that affect the conditions of affected communities.

What is the significance of the event this year?

This year's theme is 'Never give up, never forget' and marks the 25th anniversary of the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial.

The global event will be in Malawi on 18 May 2008 at the Memorial Tower Lilongwe, and will be presided over by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Malawi, Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika.

The event is expected to attract international dignitaries to learn and appreciate efforts being taken by Malawi.

This is the first time, since 1983, that the global event will be held outside the United States of America.

Can UN Staff participate?

The UN family will join the national celebrations and will present their programmes at an exhibition planned. An all staff event will be held during the May Staff Town Hall meeting at the UN Resource Centre.

Who are the contact persons?

For more information on the national and staff event, contact Ulanda Chilezi, UN HELP Coordinator and Emebet Admassu, UNAIDS Partnership and Social Mobilisation Advisor.



UNDP's Wyson Banda and other UN staff at a previous candlelight memorial

End Hunger Walk the World 2008

WFP is organising the 4th annual fund raising event "End Hunger Walk the World" to be held on 1 June 2008 in support of the school feeding programme in Malawi. Walk the World campaign is a global event held annually by WFP and its corporate partner TNT, to raise awareness and contributions to help alleviate child hunger. All contributions will go directly to the Government's school feeding programme.

Currently, 635,000 children benefit from the school feeding programme in 13 districts - Dedza, Lilongwe, Ntcheu, Kasungu, Salima, Mangochi, Zomba, Phalombe, Chikwawa, Nsanje, Mulanje, Thyolo and Chiladzulu.

Last year, 52,000 people from the beneficiary districts participated in the walk and raised US\$ 23,000. WFP is targeting a turn out of 60,000 people this year and has begun mobilisation in the districts.

A pre-walk event "End Hunger Golf Tournament" will be held on 17 May 2008 at the Lilongwe Golf Club.

For more information on participating in this year's End Hunger Walk the World please contact Joyce Mkandawire on (265) 0 9972424 or joyce.mkandawire@wfp.org.



Last year's event attracted 52,000 from 13 districts in Malawi

Programme Update

Preparations underway for 2009 General Elections

In recent months, the controversies of elections in Africa have hit front page headlines; results have been disputed by losing parties, ending in political chaos and sadly loss of lives.

Legitimate and constituted governments emanate from credible, free and fair elections where the electorate duly prescribes executive powers to one party after a vote. Free elections mean voters can

support the candidate or party of their choice without fear of intimidation or violence and fair means that elections have been conducted on an open and level playing field for all candidates and according to the law. The responsibility to deliver such an ideal election in Malawi rests with the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), the country's electoral management body.

MEC was founded in 1998 and has since conducted and

supervised two general elections and one local election. Though there has been progress, the most recent general elections in May 2004 revealed a number of challenges in Malawi's electoral regime.

Major problems included inadequate and delayed funding disbursements to MEC, inadequate capacity in the electoral management body, a flawed voters' register, and inadequate civic and voter

education that resulted into a low voter turn out and a high number of null and void votes.

To address these problems and weaknesses, MEC and UNDP developed a reform programme which committed to building institutional capacity for MEC in both the short and long term, improving civic and voter education system, supporting the management of 2009 elections and the establishment of a credible computerized voters' register.

A Project Support Document (PSD) of a "between-the-ballot-box" programme of longer term assistance in this regard was developed and is being implemented through a three-year project, from 2007 to 2009.

UNDP was designated the lead development partner on electoral issues by development partners in Malawi as well as the MEC and Government. UNDP, is coordinating a "Support to Electoral Reform and Election in Malawi" project. The objective of this project is to support

the reform programme of the MEC into a more effective, responsive, accountable and credible electoral management organization and to provide support to elections in Malawi. The project serves as a mechanism for harmonized donor and government support to the reforms and elections. The donor partners in the Trust Fund are DFID, Norway, EU, Germany, USAID, Ireland and Canada.

The project has among others implemented the following institutional capacity building initiatives at MEC: relocation of the MEC to its new;

headquarters; procurement of ICT equipment and software implementation of an Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS); implementation of a procurement system; and the provision of technical assistance in the fields of financial management, procurement management, and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT).

Field testing for technical options for the new Voter Registration System and the development of the civic and voter education strategy have also been conducted with support from the Elections Trust Fund project.

Significant progress has been made in the one year of the project implementation. UNDP has engaged an IT consultant to work with MEC to oversee the creation of a new voters' register that would help the electoral body during the forthcoming presidential and general elections and beyond.

In April 2008, development partners pledged a total of US\$16 million in support of the 2009 elections in Malawi, which will be channeled through UNDP. On its part, UNDP has committed US\$ 1 million to the project for project management and long-term electoral management technical assistance. The total budget for the Support to Electoral Reform and Elections project is estimated at US\$18 million.

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