

UGANDAN CONDOM CRISIS

Basic Facts¹

August 2005

- A condom crisis in Uganda has developed, as both the government and its primary donor for HIV prevention – the United States – have allowed condom supplies to dwindle, and have participated at least indirectly in a broader campaign to undermine public confidence in condom quality and effectiveness.
- The Ministry of Health of Uganda calculates that between 120 and 150 million condoms are needed per year to meet current demand for prevention of HIV infection.
- The two largest sources of condoms in Uganda are the Ugandan government and the U.S. government. Since the mid-nineties, the Government of Uganda has provided condoms free through government health clinics under the brand name *Engabu*.
- The United States government has a strong investment in and influence over the Ugandan National AIDS program. In FY 05, the Government of Uganda received \$137 million in U.S. Global AIDS funding alone, and is slated to receive more than \$170 million in U.S. Global AIDS funding in FY 2006. In FY 2004, 60 percent of all funds for prevention of sexual transmission under PEPFAR in Uganda went to abstinence/be faithful programs, and in FY 2005, approximately 56 percent of all funds for prevention of sexual transmission under PEPFAR in Uganda went to abstinence/be faithful programs. Under PEPFAR, safer sex programs and services, including public education for and social marketing and distribution of condoms are allowed to be directed only at “high-risk” groups in discrete locations.
- In a typical year, the Ugandan government would procure and distribute 60 to 80 million condoms, supplemented by 40 to 60 million or more condoms procured by the United States and other donors.
- However, a major shift in condom social marketing has taken place in Uganda under the Bush Administration. Policies written by and grant agreements secured through the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, in which the total number of condoms that may be procured through U.S. funding is limited to the number that will cover only those in “high risk” groups as calculated according to narrowly defined parameters and are to be distributed in only limited areas, rather than supplementing the supply available to the general population for HIV prevention.

- World Bank funding for the Ugandan health budget is being reduced, leaving the government with fewer funds with which to meet the health needs of the population, leaving in question the extent to which condom procurement will be covered by the budget of the MOH in Uganda.
- In the past three years, the Museveni government's support for safer sex education and for condoms has shifted considerably. From the late eighties until around 2002, the Museveni government was a strong supporter of comprehensive HIV prevention education and services. One piece of this strategy included providing condoms free through government health services while also supporting widespread public education on the use of condoms, and social marketing of condom supplies.
- Today, the government has shifted its position, alternately supporting or standing silent in the face of attacks on HIV education and prevention, safer sex, and condom use. Billboards and other public education tools providing information on condom use and information on access to condoms have been replaced with those promoting "only abstinence."
- In late 2004, the Government recalled *Engabu* condoms (see Timeline for details on the recall), causing an immediate crisis in condom supplies. This crisis has deepened as the Government of Uganda has failed to replenish condom stocks and as attacks on the *Engabu* brand have eroded public confidence in the brand and in condoms generally.
- Religious fundamentalists, some financially supported by the U.S. government and the Office of the First Lady Janet Museveni, have become prominent in attacking condoms and those who distribute them. First Lady Museveni, an extremely conservative evangelical Christian, has openly disparaged condoms, spread misinformation about condom effectiveness rates, and attacked those who procure supplies of and distribute condoms to people at risk of HIV infection. The Office of the First Lady receives funding from the United States government under PEPFAR, though how much funding has been made available to her office has not been disclosed. In addition, under PEPFAR, the United States has funded organizations that have spread disinformation about condom safety and efficacy.

¹ Prepared by the Center for Health and Gender Equity, www.genderhealth.org.