



## **Microbicides: An Essential HIV Prevention Strategy for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals**

**A policy paper prepared by the International Partnership for Microbicides**

### **Executive Summary**

Attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is critically dependent on reversing the AIDS pandemic. The International Partnership for Microbicides (IPM), an organisation working to develop a new method of preventing HIV transmission to women, argues that unless the world is able to halt and reverse the devastating spread of HIV among the poor, and especially among women and girls, there is a strong probability that many of the MDGs will not be reached. Microbicides — a new prevention technology currently under development — could give women a new option for protecting themselves from HIV. This could indirectly reduce HIV infection in men and children, and therefore substantially reduce the global spread of the virus.

The rapid transmission of HIV, particularly among the young and most productive members of society, has contributed to turning HIV/AIDS into the world's most devastating infectious disease. The statistics — 33.2 million cases worldwide, 6,800 new infections per day and an increasing incidence among women in resource-poor nations — reveal how critical it is that the pandemic be halted. Nearly two-thirds (68 percent) of all people living with HIV/AIDS are in sub-Saharan Africa. Of these, women account for 61 percent of the HIV-infected adults.<sup>1</sup>

*"Microbicides are a development priority. I can think of no other technology that has the potential to dramatically improve the health of women in developing countries. Moreover, I do not see how we can meet the MDGs without safe and effective microbicides."*

Stephen Lewis, former UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa

New prevention technologies such as microbicides and vaccines are urgently needed to significantly reduce and ultimately halt the spread of new infections. Globally, the vast majority of HIV infections are transmitted through heterosexual sex. If men and women had an equal say in their sexual relations, then abstinence, condoms and mutual monogamy, the so-called 'ABC approach', could make a considerable dent in the incidence of HIV transmission. But the unequal gender relations that characterise most relationships, particularly in cultures where the epidemic is growing the fastest, leave women and girls little control over the conditions under which sexual intercourse takes place. This limits the effectiveness of current prevention strategies, as the growing number of new infections each year demonstrates. A female-initiated HIV prevention strategy is needed — one that does not interfere with sex and is not necessarily contraceptive. Microbicides would be one such HIV-prevention strategy.

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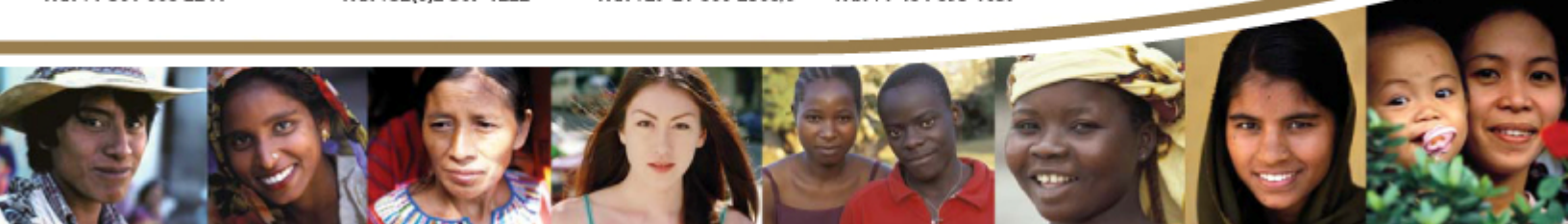
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### **What Are Microbicides?**

Microbicides are vaginal products being developed to reduce the transmission of HIV during sexual intercourse. Microbicides could take the form of a gel, film, sponge or vaginal ring that releases the active ingredient gradually, or a new formulation or delivery method yet to be invented.

With the appropriate financial resources and political leadership, a microbicide may be available by the MDG goalpost year of 2015. Equally important, the ongoing support and innovative participation of the international community is needed if the promise of microbicides is to become a reality. IPM, working with the Global Campaign for Microbicides and the Alliance for Microbicide Development, has estimated that investment will need to increase dramatically from US\$222 million in 2006<sup>2</sup> to over US\$300 million per year for the next five to 10 years to significantly accelerate microbicide research and development.

As world leaders consider the progress that has been made towards reaching the MDG goals — and what remains to be done to ensure that these goals are met by 2015 — they must acknowledge the extent to which HIV is undermining human development and thwarting progress. Microbicides could play an important role in helping to address the challenge that HIV presents to poverty reduction and the human development agenda. World leaders must accord greater priority to the development and delivery of much-needed public health goods such as microbicides, without which many of the MDGs will not be met.

For more information, please read *Microbicides: An Essential HIV Prevention Strategy for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, available online at:  
<http://www.ipm-microbicides.org/publications/english/>

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS, "AIDS Epidemic Update: December 2007."

<sup>2</sup> HIV Vaccines and Microbicides Resource Tracking Working Group. "Building a Comprehensive Response," Nov. 2007.