

Dear colleagues,

Last week, the MC team in collaboration with the Government of Zambia and PEPFAR convened a three-day meeting in Lusaka focused on ways to generate robust demand for voluntary medical male circumcision in sub-Saharan Africa.

The convening has mainly three objectives:

1. Share available best practices in demand generation for MC being currently implemented in some of the priority countries.
2. Generate innovative ideas by bringing in non-traditional MC actors with expertise mass media (e.g. advertising, marketing, and product promotion), mid and interpersonal communications and other disciplines that can provide novel approaches to demand generation.
3. Match program implementers and researchers for potential collaboration to design, implement and rigorously evaluate innovative demand creation strategies in the field.

About 180 people from all the 14 Africa priority countries attended the meeting, including Ministry officials (VMMC focal points and staffs in charge of communication), program implementers, PEPFAR staff (from headquarters and also country) and representatives from other donors and normative bodies (WB, WHO, UNAIDS and UNICEF) from USA, UK and Switzerland. A unique feature of the meeting is its inclusion of perspectives from non-HIV-related fields, including product advertising, social marketing, and behavioral economics.

**The first day** set the stage. Available evidence was presented on men's motivations for seeking circumcision and reasons for avoiding or delaying being circumcised. Investigators described several demand creation studies that are ongoing or underway, using such strategies as food vouchers, financial incentives, motivation of professional soccer players, and dedicated clinical service sites. What is clear is that demand for circumcision is much greater for adolescent males than for the older men whose circumcisions would more likely result in immediate reductions in HIV incidence. In addition, it is apparent that many men who seek circumcision do so for non-HIV-related reasons, such as personal hygiene or the perception that circumcision would be attractive to sexual partners.

**The second day** focused on various strategies that have been tried for generating demand for circumcision. Results from the work we contracted BBC Media Action to do were presented, a documentation of best practices in demand creation for VMMC in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda South Africa and Malawi. They highlighted various ways that programs were experimenting with such demand creation strategies as message development, interpersonal communication, use of communications technology (such as SMS), and collaborations with local and national media.

An afternoon session of panel discussions brought together field experts to discuss the role of community mobilizers in demand creation for VMMC, the role of sexual intimate partners and women's groups in VMMC demand creation, the role of traditional and religious leaders in overcoming potential cultural resistance to circumcision and encouraging men to seek VMMC. On the later panel Chief Mumena (from Zambia) and Princess Eunice Muparutsa (a Village Headwoman for Muparutsa Ward in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe) shared their experience in increasing demand for VMMC in their communities.

A highlight of the meeting was a unique panel discussion of non-HIV-related marketing experts, who offered advice about how best to encourage men to become circumcised. They suggested that most marketing materials for VMMC were overly informational and insufficiently evocative. In particular, they encouraged programs to work to present an enticing image or identity for the circumcised adult male. It was also suggested that marketing efforts for circumcision should comprehensively analyze and understand the broader target audience, as well as important market segments, and that demand creation efforts should address men's decision-making processes.

**The third day**, chaired by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) was a matchmaking meeting where program implementers, researchers' private sectors advertising experts were brought together to brainstorm about innovative ideas that can be piloted in the context of the actual programs and rigorously evaluated. With a grant from the foundation, 3ie issued a draft Request for Proposals for innovative demand creation strategies, with the expectation that at least 8 demonstration projects and associated impact evaluations will be funded this year. Multi-disciplinary teams worked during the day to develop mock project plans for demand creation, helping them anticipate and address potential challenges that might arise in the process of preparing applications responsive to the RFP. Each sub-grant will bring together three pieces: an idea for an innovation, an organization to implement a pilot intervention of that idea, and a team to conduct the rapid impact evaluation of the pilot intervention.

A meeting report is being finalized, and PEPFAR has committed to host a webinar in the near future to disseminate results of the meeting. To provide a platform for information sharing on demand creation, BBC Media Action is developing a web portal specifically devoted to demand creation, where all best practices documented will be posted as well as the videotapes of the three-day.

The organizing team is extremely pleased by the outcome of the meeting. We've received extensive positive feedback, both from the government of Zambia, other country attendees and from our PEPFAR and UN partners.

The MC team