

The femidom is launched!

Story and photos by Liz Frank

In April this year the Minister of Women Affairs and Child Welfare, Hon Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, officially launched the femidom at a well-attended event in Windhoek. Regional governors and members of parliament occupied the front row of a packed hall to witness the launching and observe a “hands on” demonstration on a plastic model showing how the female condom is used.

Namibian society if other factors such as gender roles and power, including some cultural and religious practices, were dealt with.

At the launching the Minister of Women Affairs stressed that the use of the female condom required open communication between sexual partners, stating that “we have no choice but to talk about sex and sexuality ... We must note that there are going to be certain cultural barriers, such as women not being in a position to

talk about sex, but we have to realise that AIDS is real so we have to use all possible methods to try and stop its rapid spread.”

Statistics on the rates of HIV/AIDS infections over the years show that women accounted for 53% of all reported new HIV cases in Namibia in 1998. Young women aged between 15 and 19 are six times more likely to be HIV positive than young men in the same age group. Every reason then for women and men to acquaint themselves with the femidom, which protects women not only from HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases but also from unwanted pregnancies.

The femidom is being distributed free of charge during mobilisation and education meetings being conducted by the regional offices of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare in the local constituencies. Written instructions for using the female condom are provided in English, Afrikaans, Oshiwambo, Nama/Damara, Otjiherero and Tswana.

Last year *Sister Namibia* published information on the femidom in English (Vol 12 # 3&4) and Oshindonga (Vol 12 # 5&6). Readers can contact our



Participants at the launch observing the “hands on” demonstration with great interest.

The launch followed a pilot study conducted in 5 regions of Namibia to assess the acceptability of the femidom in different Namibian communities. Almost 300 volunteers were identified through the pilot study to try out the female condom with their partners. Of these, less than half gave feedback on their experiences with the femidom to the research team. However, 90% of those who did respond indicated that they were in favour of using the female condom. The research concluded that the female condom would be widely accepted in



The Minister of Women Affairs and Child Welfare, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, stressed the need to talk openly about sexuality at the recent launching of the female condom.

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