

Shaping Policy Climate to Increase Family Planning Use

DKT International is a service delivery organization, with a mission to provide couples with affordable and safe options for family planning and HIV prevention. However, in undertaking this mission, DKT is sometimes hindered by obstructive policies or adverse working environments. To overcome these obstacles, DKT works with governments to enhance the legal and policy climate for birth control. Examples from Indonesia, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Brazil illustrate ways in which DKT has influenced and partnered with governments to shape specific policies and promote an environment more conducive to family planning. By leveraging cooperative relationships

with governments, DKT is able to increase the variety, availability, and affordability of contraceptives within a country.

Indonesia's National Condom Week

The idea for National Condom Week in Indonesia was sparked by the poor image of condoms. While Indonesia has a comparatively low HIV/AIDS incidence rate, 76% of HIV/AIDS transference originates from unsafe sex. With an estimated 10 million Indonesians visiting sex workers each year, the increased likelihood of spreading the disease makes safe sex education and HIV/AIDS awareness critical.

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Volunteers for Indonesia's National Condom Week 2007 carry inflated condoms as part of a parade

To put the media spotlight squarely on the issue of safe-sex and condom use, DKT Indonesia acted as a catalyst for the first National Condom Week in 2007, bringing together the Ministry of Health, the National AIDS Commission and the National Family Planning Board (BKKBN).

By centering the week-long event around the December World AIDS Day celebrations, National Condom Week became the springboard for a nationwide conversation on condom use. With conferences, concerts, promotional events, and contests for online, print and photo journalists, media coverage of National Condom Week helped provide a unique opportunity to raise the profile of condoms in Indonesia. The events created an enabling environment where open discussion about safe-sex practices could take place without stigma. With the participation of several condom brands, DKT leveraged the increased focus on condoms to address sexual health and HIV/AIDS problems. National Condom Week started a dialogue about healthy sexual choices.

With support from the government, condom distributors and other health groups, National Condom Week is now an annual event. In 2012, new initiatives



like a mobile campaign and celebrity performances and endorsements aimed National Condom Week towards a broader audience. By using the popularity of National Condom Week to recast the image of condoms in Indonesia, DKT promotes condoms as a wise sexual health decision that can be fun, too.

Empowering Sudanese Midwives

Working with the Sudanese Ministry of Health, DKT helped outline policy proposals to improve contraceptive availability in Sudan. The proposed policies allowed mid-level health practitioners (especially midwives) to insert IUDs and distribute oral contraceptives. "Empowering midwives to fill a role as family planning practitioners wasn't a new concept," said DKT Sudan country director Ambrose Alagiri. "We'd seen it work with other DKT programs, in Indonesia and in India. We knew it could work in Sudan too."

As part of the process to change regulations concerning IUD administration, DKT Sudan ran a pilot study in which a select group of literate Sudanese midwives received additional training from OB/GYN experts. After a period of education, these midwives conducted IUD insertions and removals under the supervision of OB/GYN specialists. With the success of the pilot program, regulations were relaxed and literate midwives can now, after instruction, insert and remove IUDs. Today, there are over 200 midwives who conduct IUD insertions and removals on their own, mostly in rural health centers and even in their own homes.

Increasing the number of family planning practitioners in a country where there is approximately one reproductive health specialist for every 275,000 citizens makes a real difference. With the change in health policy in Sudan, midwives helped DKT sell over 160,000 IUDs in 2012 alone.

Abortion Policy in Ethiopia

34% of women in Ethiopia had an unmet need for contraception in 2005. The lack of contraceptive options combined with restrictive abortion laws left women with unwanted pregnancies little choice but to seek unsafe abortions. This contributed to Ethiopia's high incidence of maternal mortality: one in five deaths amongst Ethiopian women of reproductive age (15-49) resulted from pregnancy-related causes, according to Ethiopia's Ministry of Health. The Ministry further estimated that a third of all maternal deaths were caused by unsafe abortions.

By this time, DKT was already part of the Abortion Advocacy Working Group, a coalition of organizations advocating for women's health and reproductive rights issues started in 2003. Using data like unmet need and maternal mortality to support the need for abortion reform, this group garnered support within the Ethiopian Parliament to legalize medical abortion (MA).

As a result of the efforts by the coalition, the Ethiopian government reformed the abortion law in 2005. With this new legislation passed, DKT successfully secured a pre-registration permit for MA pills from



After helping change regulations concerning MA, DKT introduced the Safe-T Kit in Ethiopia

the Ministry of Health and the Food and Drug Administration. In 2007, DKT imported its first combination packs of MA drugs (which include one tablet of mifepristone and four tablets of misoprostol). A decade after becoming involved in the movement to legalize MA in Ethiopia, today DKT is the primary provider of MA drugs to the Ethiopian government. Since 2007, DKT has provided over 625,000 combination packs of DKT's MA brand, the 'Safe-T Kit,' to Ethiopians in need.

Tax Reform in Brazil

Another method for increasing contraceptive availability is decreasing unnecessary taxes and duties on such products. In Brazil in 1991, condoms were inaccessible to the poor because sales and import taxes were exorbitant. In order to make both male and female condoms more affordable, DKT Brazil worked with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Industrial Affairs to reduce taxes and secure tax exemptions.

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DKT's advocacy work reduced taxes and tariffs on all condoms, making DKT Brazil's Prudence brand cheaper and more popular than ever

As a result, most female condoms are now free of import taxes. Import duties on male condoms were lowered from 40% in 1993 to 13% in 2000, and averaged 10% in the decade that followed. Sales taxes (VAT included) were lowered from 36% in the early '90s to less than 4% today.

As to whether the lowered taxes made a difference for low-income Brazilians, "it is a cascade effect," said Dan Marun, DKT Brazil's country director. "When import taxes were reduced, DKT Brazil had fewer expenses as an importer. That meant lower costs for retailers; individual vendors were selling at lower prices and still making a profit. In the end, reducing tariffs at a national level meant seeing less expensive condoms at the local level." Coinciding with DKT Brazil's early efforts for tax reform,

male condom sales in Brazil have risen tenfold, from 11.5 million in 1994 to 114.5 million in 2011. The future for condom sales in Brazil has never looked better.

Effecting Change for the Most Good

By reforming national policies that have wide-ranging effects, DKT uses governmental collaboration as a way to effect large-scale change. DKT's ability to successfully implement programs in the wake of policy change has helped make these changes permanent. DKT has been persistent in developing creative programmatic changes that align with governments' interests and DKT's mission to make contraceptive and HIV/AIDS prevention products as cheaply and widely available as possible.



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