PROMOTING SELF-CARE FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN NIGERIA AND UGANDA DURING COVID-19

INCREASING WOMEN’S ACCESS, AGENCY AND CHOICE

UPDATED JANUARY 2021

The Children’s Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF)-funded Delivering Innovation in Self Care (DISC) project is supporting health marketing campaigns in Nigeria and Uganda to promote self-care for sexual and reproductive health during the COVID-19 pandemic. At a time when access to health care providers is constrained, DISC is helping safeguard SRH services by promoting opportunities like call-in family planning counseling and online contraceptive purchases.
LAUNCHED IN JANUARY 2020 AND IMPLEMENTED IN NIGERIA AND UGANDA BY POPULATION SERVICES INTERNATIONAL (PSI), POPULATION SERVICES INTERNATIONAL UGANDA, AND THE SOCIETY FOR FAMILY HEALTH, THE FIVE-YEAR DISC PROJECT AIMS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT SELF-CARE — BEGINNING WITH CONTRACEPTIVE SELF-INJECTION — IS A Viable CORNERSTONE OF SRH.

Like most global health initiatives, DISC was confronted with adapting to a set of new and unique needs as COVID-19 mushroomed into a worldwide emergency. Early estimates suggested that millions of women using a modern contraceptive method would be unable to get refills due to restricted mobility and that prolonged school closures in many African countries would lead to a precipitous rise in unintended pregnancies. To preserve hard-fought gains in SRH access, agency and choice, it became necessary to identify solutions for bringing commodities and services closer to consumers.

By flexibly reallocating portions of its budget, DISC was able to launch agile marketing campaigns in the second half of 2020 to help sustain the relevance of family planning during COVID-19, raise awareness about clinic-based SRH services that could still be accessed during lockdown and promote alternate means of obtaining contraceptive commodities.

Two aspects of DISC’s COVID-19 adaptations are offering insights into the potential for digital technology to steer self-care in SRH. In Nigeria, urban women and mothers are accessing an e-commerce platform to order contraceptive refill delivery. In Uganda, they are dialing into a geo-locator to find the nearest SRH service delivery point, such as a clinic or pharmacy. Evaluating the ability of the campaigns to increase the use of these tools will help understand how best to use media to expand the uptake of self-care SRH services and inform DISC’s longer-term interventions.
Marketing campaigns in Nigeria and Uganda had the identical objectives of helping women make informed choices about contraception and facilitating their access to self-care options. For several reasons it was not feasible to focus solely on self-inject contraceptive or link directly to self-injection uptake – however all learnings can be applied to DISC’s longer term self-injection consumer engagement strategy.

While a common thread can be seen in the use of social media to engage women and with call-in SRH information resources to serve them, DISC tapped into a different mix of communication channels and consumer resources to effectively meet consumers’ needs in Nigeria and Uganda. In both countries, however, one of the most important success factors was the project’s ability to forge local partnerships for planning and executing the campaigns, as well as providing suitable SRH self-care opportunities and resources to consumers.

**DISC’S SRH MARKETING CAMPAIGN DURING COVID–19**

Key learnings on how to use media to expand the uptake of self-care SRH services and to inform DISC’s longer-term interventions

**Channels to Promote SRH Self-Care**

- **Radio**
- **Social Media**
- **Text and Voice Messaging**
- **Television**
- **Hotlines**
- **Geo-location of Clinics and Pharmacies**
- **E-commerce for contraceptives**
- **Community-based distribution of self-injectable contraceptives**
- **Community-based counseling**
NIGERIA

Starting in late September 2020, the campaign in Nigeria was mainly delivered via paid advertising on radio and social media. Additional efforts were made to provide community-based distribution agents (CBDAs) with the personal protective equipment (PPE) they would need to continue offering counseling and dispensing contraceptives at the household level, and a new partnership was developed to facilitate on-line contraceptive purchasing (i.e., e-commerce).

RADIO AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Developed through a partnership with international mass media expert Population Media Center, the initial messaging strategy prompted consumers to contact a toll-free call center hosted by Marie Stopes International (MSI) for information on where to access contraceptives and for family planning counseling. A strong radio campaign was developed and aired on 24 stations across Kaduna, Kano, Oyo and Lagos. 1,795 jingles (radio spots) and 25 interactive live programs were aired from September through December. Radio programming focused on two key topics: the use of contraceptives and acceptable SRH practices during COVID-19 and beyond; and myths and misconceptions about contraceptives. The social media component leverages influencers and already existing pages to share SRH information. 50 social media graphics, 1 animation and 6 video skit were created in three local languages: Yoruba, Pidgin and Hausa. The campaign hashtag on Twitter has reached 3,175,561 Twitter users and made 6,910,471 impressions.

COMMUNITY-BASED DISTRIBUTION AGENTS (CBDAS)

In recognition of the critical role that in-person support plays in SRH programs, the campaign included efforts to ensure the safety of community-based distribution agents (CBDAs), and enabled them to continue their work raising awareness about SRH and providing contraceptive access at the household level. DISC procured PPE for 855 CBDAs, including hand sanitizer, face masks and gloves. In addition, coordinators were given information on the pandemic, mentored to take World Health Organization (WHO) courses on COVID-19 and led through a training of trainers on COVID-19 protocols and safety procedures. The coordinators were then expected to train all CBDAs. Finally, the project worked with CBDAs to integrate COVID-19 prevention and protection messaging into their regular communications with community members.
E-COMMERCE

DISC also used the campaign as an opportunity to build a partnership with Konga, Nigeria’s largest national e-commerce site, to move family planning products to consumers’ doorsteps, and further understand the role e-commerce can play in access to SRH services. The project is currently supporting a revision of the contraception landing page on Konga’s website to create easier navigation and purchasing of commodities. In this initial stage, the landing page will feature condoms and emergency and oral contraceptives, enabling urban-based users to easily purchase these SRH commodities for free home delivery. Upon completion of the page, the mass and social media campaigns will begin to integrate messages promoting online contraceptive acquisition as well.

“E-COMMERCE IS A VERY GOOD PLATFORM FOR CONTRACEPTIVE PRODUCTS BECAUSE IT GIVES CONSUMERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUY THEM CONVENIENTLY AND DISCRETELY FROM THE COMFORT OF THEIR HOMES. IN MOST CASES, KONGA OFFERS SAME-DAY DELIVERY.”

– NICK IMUDIA, CEO OF KONGA
UGANDA

Starting in June 2020, the campaign in Uganda was built around a set of multimedia assets developed in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH). Limited initial dissemination of these materials on television led to the extensive use of digital channels, including social media and telephones.

The campaign has focused heavily on driving traffic to two SRH hotlines. Hosted by African digital technology powerhouse Viamo, the “Dial 1-6-1” call center includes SRH among a menu of health information topics and allows callers to make self-referrals. Separately, PSI Uganda developed a geo-locator that was set up to enable women to easily find clinics offering SRH services in their area.

DIGITAL

Working with an African digital media agency, Blu Flamingo, DISC devised an end-to-end digital advertising campaign that combined the use of social media. The campaign centered around the #NdiSteady theme and hashtag to increase awareness of SRH during the pandemic. Messages were built around four key pillars: male involvement; economic development; a bright future for young people; and self-care/access.

The cell phone component began in June 2020 when PSI “blasted” the first of 287,000 texts and 166,000 recorded voice messages to encourage individuals on its existing SRH and HIV client database lists to use Dial 1-6-1’s e-referrals option.

August 2020 marked the start of the campaign’s social media interventions, housed on PSI Uganda’s YoSpace Facebook and Twitter pages. DISC purchased ad space on Facebook and websites to reach over 3.5 million users with a series of videos and graphics to maximize awareness of the campaign’s overall SRH themes and to create interest in the two self-care calls to action.

Efforts were also made to enroll well-known influencers to repost the information on their social media accounts and increase reach and engagement. The project also ran a smaller set of ads to prompt audience members to click through to the clinic locator. These instances were notably the first time PSI’s hotline had been promoted through social media alone rather than as part of a chat bot.
WANJI GAME

DISC is supporting the addition of a Wanji game on self-managed family planning methods, including self-injection, to Dial 1-6-1, went live in October 2020. With more mobile subscriptions than people worldwide, mobile phones are now the most effective and convenient way to reach a mass audience. But most mobile interventions either use smartphone applications or SMS (text), which require recipients to be literate—sometimes in languages that aren’t their native tongue. The Wanji games platform uses basic telephones to provide interactive, educational, story-based games through spoken audio. This allows a geographically remote audience with limited literacy to access information in their own language through appropriate technology. Introduction of the Wanji game will provide a vital learning opportunity on the use of gamification as an approach to engage and educate SRH consumers. To date, 6,394 individuals have engaged with the Wanji Game.
CAMPAIGN RESULTS

The campaigns in Nigeria and Uganda have reached hundreds of thousands of women with messages about SRH and calls to action to adopt self-care products. While it is not possible at this early stage to definitively link DISC’s media activities to contraceptive continuation and first-time adoption, there already is a great deal to learn from both countries about how to engage women of reproductive age on contraception and other family planning aspects through social media, mass media and e-commerce.

NIGERIA

Data from Nigeria were gathered from September through December.

HOTLINE USE

From September through December, the DISC-supported marketing campaign in Nigeria prompted 3,340 people to contact the MSI hotline, with 66% receiving direct contraceptive counseling and 34% being referred to clinics for SRH services and commodities. Approximately three fourths of these callers (74%) were women of reproductive age. Both married and unmarried individuals were well represented among the callers, with 38% identifying as single, 32% engaged, and 30% married.

OUTCOME OF CALLS

With roughly 14% of the hotline callers indicating they had learned about the hotline opportunity through radio, it can be inferred that DISC’s series of spots and live shows achieved a significant impact. It is interesting to note, though, that more frequent radio advertising does not appear to have translated into greater call volume. It is equally interesting to note that 38% of callers to the hotline said their contact had been motivated by social media, indicating the importance of further outreach via this channel. As notably, 48% of callers found out about the hotline from other channels including CBDAs, word of mouth, marketing and mobilization, suggesting that person-to-person channels may have a high referral success rate.

**OUTCOME OF CALLS**

- Callers counseled on contraceptives (1727)
- Callers referred to clinics for contraceptives (351)
- Callers referred for other services (542)

**AGE OF CALLERS**

- <15 (30)
- 15-19 (592)
- 20-24 (1273)
- 24-34 (1,347)

**GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION**

- Lagos (1678)
- Oyo (624)
- Kano (606)
- Kaduna (432)

**CALLER ATTRIBUTION**

- Social Media (1226)
- Radio Program (474)
- Other (1564)
- Konga (3)
COMMUNITY-BASED DISTRIBUTION AGENTS (CBDAS)

Training provided on COVID-19 guidelines and the provision of PPE was key to engendering courage and confidence among CBDAs to continue creating awareness for SRH and distributing contraceptives. In fact, monthly CBDA distribution rates for the self-injectable contraceptive DMPA-SC increased by 63% after the COVID-19 lockdown began.

E-COMMERCE

A full activation plan has been developed in partnership with Konga that includes:

- Building awareness of contraception availability on e-retail through radio and social media
- On-site advertising to educate existing e-retail shoppers that they can purchase contraception
- Improving category visibility and category navigation to heighten shopper/user experience online
- Free delivery for contraception for a limited period to incentivize women to trial
- Connect women to MSI call center for more SRH information

All activities will be monitored through a tracking tool to understand performance and optimize over time.

Initial sales have been slow, which is to be expected given the purchase of contraceptives on ecommerce is a very new behavior. Additionally the political unrest in Nigeria during October affected sales. However, we expect sales to improve with the new landing page and other traffic driving activities kicking off.

KONGA E-COMMERCE SALES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Unit sales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Top: General sexual wellness page prior to partnership. Left: New contraceptive landing page resulting from our partnership.
UGANDA

The campaign in Uganda achieved considerable reach, particularly after paid social media began in September 2020. The way in which communications activities were consumed has provided as many lessons as the results they produced. In particular, telephone and paid digital and social media were cost-effective means to reach and interact with a large audience. They did not appear to significantly increase traffic to Dial 1-6-1 but were successful in driving the clinic locator on PSI’s hotline. Instead, they were much more efficient as a way of raising awareness of COVID-19-related SRH issues. DISC’s digital partner, Blu Flamingo, has gathered important insights into how best to target and drive engagement.

SOCIAL MEDIA

By reaching over 3.5 million people, DISC’s Facebook effort cost US$0.04 per recipient, and resulted in around 57,076 clicks to dial 1-6-1 for information on e-referrals (i.e., counseling). The top performing post embedded contraceptive use in the context of personal and family financial security. It reached 45,862 people and generated 50 likes, 1 share and 117 link clicks on the clinic locator on Facebook. Other popular posts employed themes like empowering the pursuit of personal goals by avoiding unplanned pregnancies and taking charge of one’s sexuality and sexual health. Posts specifically meant to drive traffic to hotlines achieved relatively less traction.

TEXT AND VOICE OUTREACH

On the surface, telephone-based programs appears to have been suboptimal in directing people to the hotlines. This is not to say that text and voice messages should be disregarded as a tool for promoting SRH, but rather that efforts must be made to ensure greater conversion of messages into action. This means recognizing that texting is a one-way channel that lacks interaction and that successfully engaging targets with voice messaging requires careful targeting. At the same time, voice is considerably more expensive to deliver than texts.

In examining the performance of telephone-based programs, it is also important to note that nearly all targets reached with text and voice messages had received SRH messages in the recent past, and may have either been less apt to pay attention to similar content or had already taken the desired actions. MSI had conducted increased promotional activity in the months prior to COVID-19 and PSI Uganda’s own distribution lists had been the targets of previous SRH programs. Therefore, it will be important to reconsider who should be targeted with text and voice messaging.
### Digital Campaign Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unique reach</th>
<th>Clicks to locator</th>
<th>Clicks to 'Dial 161' dial-pad</th>
<th>Impressions</th>
<th>Engagements</th>
<th>Link clicks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUG 2020</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>681,818</td>
<td>6,249</td>
<td>6,249</td>
<td>1,090,909</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>3,140</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>7,801</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEPT 2020</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>833,334</td>
<td>12,496</td>
<td>12,496</td>
<td>1,333,334</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>1,000,272</td>
<td>20,127</td>
<td>3,017</td>
<td>4,066,844</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OCT 2020</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>757,575</td>
<td>18,745</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1,212,120</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>1,363,090</td>
<td>42,077</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5,422,585</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOV 2020</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>757,575</td>
<td>18,745</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1,212,120</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>1,633,124</td>
<td>27,244</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>4,584,319</td>
<td>2,933</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUG-NOV 2020</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>2,272,727</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>9,740,259</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>3,581,054</td>
<td>57,076</td>
<td>4,459</td>
<td>15,548,751</td>
<td>24,211</td>
<td>3,325</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| % Achieved     | 158          | N/A               | N/A                           | 160         | 161         | 67          |

---

**People Who Would Like to Refer Themselves for a Service – Beyond Awareness – Trial**

Self-referral is a proxy indicator for behavior after listening to FP messages.
CLINIC LOCATOR

The objectives of the clinic locator component were to check consumers’ appetite for such services as well as to create visibility of the facilities nearest to clients. A total of 209 facilities were included, with information about the location, opening hours and services provided. Results showed 57,076 clicks to the locator, with over 3.5 million unique users reached. This was the first time PSI used a standalone clinic locator and will continue to optimize the platform based on these initial encouraging results.

INFLUENCERS

Collaboration with influencers led to sharp increases in mentions around the hashtag #NdiSteady, registering a reach of over 540,331 people. The influencers were especially useful in making Twitter an active social media source for the DISC campaign. Reposting proved to be much more common on Twitter than on Facebook, with messages on the themes of self-care and “a bright future” driving the highest organic engagement on Twitter.

Influencers’ posts elicited consumers’ concerns with SRH products, such as perceived side effects of contraceptive use. This highlighted the need to provide influencers with the right content to respond to our audiences’ technical questions.

Uganda’s influencer channels generated an impressive reach, with 15,548,751 impressions, 105,935 engagements, and 101,087 video views.

Top: Ad encouraging users to use the clinic locator. Bottom: The project worked with influencers to share campaign messages
REFLECTIONS

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Balancing broader contraceptive messaging with self-care messaging was challenging as in many media channels there is a need to be single-minded in communication. This was paired with a need to focus on keeping contraceptive relevant during the pandemic and helping women access a range of family planning options. Specifically, it wasn’t possible to have a significant focus on self-inject contraceptive. As the project looks beyond this campaign, it will be necessary to consider how to develop an effective messaging hierarchy to achieve self-injection and self-care objectives within the larger context of propelling women’s voices, choice, agency and access in SRH. In Nigeria and Uganda alike, paid social media has shown promise for generating higher, cost-effective engagement compared with other media. This will be a key area of focus for the upcoming expanded campaign and DISC will conduct a further analysis of cost-effectiveness and the impact of social media messaging on behavior change.

Enrolling influencers was also revealed as a potentially robust way to accelerate the reach of messaging. But influencers must be carefully managed to ensure high-quality outputs and impact. Teaching them about technical SRH subject matter is crucial. DISC observed a significant difference in the value of content posted by influencers who had participated in the project’s briefing sessions versus those who had not.

In general, more analysis is needed to compare levels of behavior change achieved across channels in order to determine the best use of DISC resources moving forward. Non-digital channels may indeed provide relatively less impact, but their use is essential in reaching target population segments without mobile phones and will also benefit those in rural areas without mobile communication presence or internet access. Optimizing the media mix in the next phase of DISC’s work will mean sensibly factoring in demographics that pertain to specific states and districts.

In the specific case of Nigeria, more research is needed on the cost considerations that go into e-commerce for contraceptives — in particular the high ratio of shipping costs to product costs. The e-retailer Konga currently offers free shipping as an incentive to consumers, but this is likely unsustainable, and it is important to ask what type of risk for purchasing volume will be created if and when shipping fees are introduced.

PROCESS

DISC’s early effort to involve key stakeholders — especially Ministry of Health partners — resulted in good buy-in from a wide array of organizations in both countries. However, the engagement process requires acute recognition of what different partner organizations are funded to do and how competing interests can arise within the project and between partners. This is a key consideration in ‘normal’ times but even more of a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic where there is a heightened sense of uncertainty. In Nigeria and Uganda, DISC experienced some amount of reluctance among stakeholders to cooperate in the manner or timeline that would have been ideal for the project.

Similarly, a mix of partners brings with it a mix of perspectives for messaging. Negotiation can be required to ensure that messages remain single-minded and focused against the original campaign objectives. Negotiation is also an important part of navigating branding, which is a high priority for organizations and was an obstacle in Uganda, where the MoH requested that messages not include organization-specific branding. Unlike the process of setting up vendor contracts, the process of building relationships with strategic partners takes substantial time — especially in the context of a pandemic like COVID-19. This was certainly the case with Konga in Nigeria and Blu Flamingo in Uganda. Although they took several months to become fully onboarded, DISC’s partnerships are now well-established and are an indispensable part of the project’s work moving forward.

A key to relationship building with partners is first providing as much clarity as possible in terms of roles and contractual obligations. These include things such as deadlines and expectations with respect to data.
sharing. Accessing data as close to real time as possible is very important but can be a challenge at the contract negotiation stage. When partners are used to sharing data at a certain frequency, it requires a lot of adaption for them to provide it more frequently.

Finally, once the campaign is planned, setting performance targets can also be a challenge because it is hard to find good quality, relevant data for setting benchmarks. To best measure performance, it would be most useful to collect data in real time and measure improvements over time.

**CONCLUSION**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a need to reinvigorate SRH promotion. At the same time, it has presented an opportunity to showcase the potential of self-care as a way to increase women’s voices, choice and agency when it comes to accessing SRH services, and to shift some of the burden for providing those services away from governments, health systems and health providers.

As DISC plans its broader SRH self-care marketing campaign, the lessons from the project’s COVID-19 adaptations will be instrumental in improving efforts to engage consumers through multi-channel marketing. The pandemic response allowed for the cultivation of partnerships that will transition to the expanded campaign and showed how to bridge the often-conflicting interests and practices of different stakeholders.

The follow-on campaign will also benefit from insights gained on the use of social media for engaging women on SRH. While platforms like Facebook can help to achieve rapid and extensive reach, attention to the way messages are consumed, shared and ultimately translated into actions or behaviors must be better understood if campaigns like these are to use social media optimally.