



MEDIA RELEASE

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WOMEN'S SECTOR SUPPORTS THE DAPIVIRINE VAGINAL RING, AN ALTERNATIVE HIV PREVENTION METHOD FOR WOMEN

The status of Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) is often a representation of the social and political status of women in a country. A core part of SRHR is the freedom and liberty of women and girls in their diversity to make informed decisions about their bodies. The Dapivirine Vaginal Ring is the most recent development in alternative methods to prevent HIV infection and simplification of adherence. It is somewhat of a beacon of hope for women and girls who require multiple prevention options which meet their needs and within the context of their lives. The Dapavine Ring will soon be launched in South Africa and the SANAC Women's Sector supports these developments in South Africa's effort to reduce HIV prevention. These developments align with the preliminary goals in the National Strategic Plan on HIV, TB and STIs 2017-2021 (NSP). Goal 1 of the NSP is to accelerate prevention in order to reduce new HIV infections. Preliminary finding on the progress of women, girls and gender equality Mid Term Report (MTR) shows that 4.5 million women in South Africa live with HIV. The HIV prevalence in South Africa remains significantly higher among females (21.3%) than males (13.1%).

The SANAC Women's Sector Leader, Silungile Ntambo stated "Women are diverse and should have the ability to make conscious decisions about what suites them best. South Africa has to pave the way for new HIV prevention methods." Ntambo spoke about the importance of opening up dialogue with national stakeholders and mainstreaming of the developments in HIV prevention. "Women are highly vulnerable to HIV, TB and STIs and the reason for this is linked to systematic stigma and discrimination, gender-based violence, poor economic status and poor access to information." SRHRs are oppressed where women and girls do not have or have minimum control over their bodies, minimum control when it comes to child planning or negotiating safer sex. The SANAC's Women Sector looks forward to further developments in women's health and research and the realisation of SRHR. Ntambo added "With the

upcoming launch of the vaginal Dapivirine ring, we hope to open a discussion and conduct and informative and solution-based engagement.”

The Dapaivirine vaginal ring is female initiated multi-purpose technology. It is an HIV prevention method that is easily sustainable and long lasting. The ring improves PrEP effectiveness by simplifying adherence. It provides women with the option to protect themselves from HIV and unplanned pregnancy. The previous vaginal ring has been described to give women a sense of control over their bodies and reproductive health therefore promoting the human rights values of self-determination, bodily and physical integrity and dignity. The Dapaivirine vaginal ring only elevates these rights.

The importance of the Dapivirine vaginal ring is acknowledge by the sector and we aim to take the initiative to ensure women in South Africa are able to access it.

We call for the Department of Health to:

- Establish accurate information and communication material on the Dapivirine vaginal ring. Communication material must be shared widely in all South African official languages.
- Create channels for easy accessibility to the Dapivirine Ring for women.
- Upscale local research on the impact and accessibility of vaginal rings.
- Community and stakeholder dialogues on HIV prevention methods.
- Create a national road map and guidance on the use of the Dapivirine ring.

For more information contact Sector Leader Silungile Ntambo on: 073 196 3790 or lustar94@gmail.com