

### **Who is IRMA?**

Created in 2005, the International Rectal Microbicide Advocates (IRMA) is comprised of over 1,000 advocates, policymakers and leading scientists of six continents working together to advance a robust rectal microbicide research and development agenda - with the goal of creating safe, effective, acceptable and accessible rectal microbicides for the women, men, and transgender individuals around the world who engage in anal intercourse. IRMA works to confront the institutional, socio-cultural and political stigma around the public health need for rectal microbicide research, and to increase funding and commitment within this field of inquiry. [AIDS Foundation of Chicago](#) is the IRMA Secretariat and IRMA can be found on the web at [www.rectalmicrobicides.org](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org). IRMA has a blog and is on Facebook and Twitter as well.

### **What is Project ARM?**

*Project ARM- Africa for Rectal Microbicides* is a long-term, sustained project of IRMA. It aims to develop community capacity around rectal microbicide advocacy in order to ensure broad participation in guiding research activities and well-informed community input into the development of an African rectal microbicide research and implementation agenda. Project ARM was born out of a series of community consultations with African advocates and allies at the Microbicides 2010 and AIDS 2010 conferences and through the IRMA listserv.

First-year funding for Project ARM has been provided by the National Institutes of Health/Office of AIDS Research and the New Venture Fund. AVAC is also an organizing partner in this effort.

### **What are the main goals of Project ARM?**

- In order to develop an African rectal microbicide agenda that articulates research, advocacy and community mobilisation strategies, Project ARM aims to create an environment of sustained regional advocacy, education and communication around rectal microbicide advocacy and research in Africa.
- Project ARM's activities will lead to expanded African rectal microbicide education and advocacy.
- Project ARM's activities will support the planning and implementation of rectal microbicide clinical trials in Africa in an environment that is as safe as possible for participants.
- Project ARM's activities will support the eventual rollout of safe, effective, acceptable and accessible rectal microbicides for African men, women, and transgender individuals.

The centerpiece of Project ARM's current efforts is a working meeting planned for December 2 and 3 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in advance of the 2011 ICASA conference ([www.icasa2011addis.org](http://www.icasa2011addis.org)).

### **The objectives of the December working meeting are:**

- Capacity-building
  - To enhance the capacity of African community advocates to participate in rectal microbicide agenda-setting, research and mobilisation efforts.
- Setting the stage and context
  - To promote a common understanding of how rectal microbicide research is proceeding, the potential role that African rectal microbicide research and advocacy could play, and the various African contexts within which rectal microbicides would be introduced.

- Setting the agenda
  - To develop strategies for community mobilization and more African involvement in rectal microbicides; to put rectal microbicides on the biomedical HIV-prevention research agenda in Africa; and, to develop an African rectal microbicide research agenda that is part of global efforts.

Based on outcomes from the December 2011 meeting in Addis, IRMA will produce a report highlighting an African rectal microbicides research and advocacy strategy to be released at the Microbicides 2012 conference in Sydney, Australia (M2012 - [www.microbicides2012.org](http://www.microbicides2012.org)).

### **Why does Africa need a rectal microbicide and why is Project ARM important?**

- The risk of acquiring HIV during unprotected anal intercourse is 10 to 20 times greater than during unprotected vaginal intercourse.
- Globally, gay men and other MSM are 19 times more likely to be HIV-positive compared to the general population, and most of these infections are from unprotected anal intercourse. These disproportionate rates extend to Africa.
- Women also participate in receptive anal intercourse. A 2009 study from South Africa reported that 10% of women had engaged in anal intercourse. Further studies in Africa have had similar findings.
- Africa has a strong culture of denial of anal intercourse among heterosexual men and women and in many contexts pervasive homophobia and criminalization have denied the existence of gay men and other MSM. By raising awareness, Project ARM gives these issues the urgency and attention they require. This will hopefully lead to less stigmatization of gay men and other MSM, and anal intercourse, as secondary objectives of rectal microbicide advocacy.
- Studies have found that there is much confusion and false information about the real risks of unprotected anal intercourse in Africa. Project ARM works to circulate accurate and up-to-date information about anal intercourse and rectal microbicides throughout the continent.

### **Project ARM Video**

Project ARM, IRMA and the Population Council – with other partners – are working on a video to create awareness and advocacy around the urgent need for rectal microbicides in Africa. The main objectives of the video are:

- To educate communities and policymakers about the prevalence of anal intercourse among men *and* women in Africa and the associated HIV/STI risks;
- To make the case for why rectal microbicides are needed in Africa;
- To provide information about existing HIV prevention strategies for anal intercourse, including guidance about condom-compatible lubricants.

This video is intended to educate thousands of Africans about the high risk of HIV associated with unprotected anal intercourse and will be shown throughout the continent at workshops, trainings, community conferences and via webinars. A secondary objective is to hone the skills of advocates through a participatory approach to script writing and video production. While script development has been underway with a number of Project ARM working group members since early 2011, and initial filming has already taken place, funding is still being sought to produce this video.

### **Where can I learn more?**

Join IRMA's active email list at [rectalmicro@gmail.com](mailto:rectalmicro@gmail.com) or visit the IRMA website at [www.rectalmicrobicides.org](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org).