

# The Ligne Verte

Toll-free hotline spreads information on family planning services throughout the DRC



# *Ligne Verte* family planning hotline

- In 2005, PSI/ASF launched the *Ligne Verte* family planning hotline – the first-of-its-kind pre-paid toll-free hotline in the DRC in order to:
  - See if the rise in mobile phone use meant a cell phone FP hotline could be successful in DRC
  - Provide confidential, accurate FP information
  - To refer potential users to *Confiance* network clinics
- Received over 80,000 calls (2005-2008)
- An effective low-cost intervention that can easily be replicated in challenging settings



# Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

- Population is nearly 70 million people, making it Africa's fourth most populous country
  - Current annual growth rate: 2.9% a year; UN estimates DRC's population will be 180-230 million by 2050
  - Kinshasa is Africa's third-largest city (est. 6-8 million)
- DRC's land mass is comparable to that of Greenland
  - Less than 3,000 km of paved road; it is virtually impossible to travel from one end to another by any means other than air travel
- 1998-2003: engaged in the deadliest conflict since WWII
  - 5.4 million excess deaths; 3.4 million displaced (IRC, 2008)
  - Outbreaks of conflict persist in the eastern provinces; ongoing risks to the country's stability



# DRC FP indicators:

- **TFR: 6.3 children per woman** (DHS 2007)
- **CPR modern methods: 5.8 %** (DHS 2007)
  - Access to FP products and services were severely limited for over 10 years
  - Contributed to a **10% decline in CPR** since the 1980s: 15% in 1985 (UNFPA); 4.4 % in 2002 (MICS2001); 5.8% in 2007 (DHS 2007)
- **24% unmet need**
  - This translates into over *3 million Congolese women* with an unmet need for modern contraceptive methods
- PSI, with its local affiliate Association de Santé Familiale (ASF), has implemented an FP social marketing network of clinics and pharmacies in 14 key urban areas since 2003



# Cell phones in DRC

- Data is limited, but it is clear that cell phones in DRC are becoming increasingly popular
  - Still, in 2007 only 10% of Congolese owned cell phones and 50% lived within network range
  - Cell phones in resource-poor settings like DRC are often shared, increasing the accessibility of cell phones to non-owners
- In 2005, worked with Vodacom to sett up a toll-free hotline - the first demand of its kind in the DRC
  - Each call costs PSI \$.36, is limited to 2 minutes and free only from Vodacom phones
  - PSI advances \$1,500 per quarter and reimburses charges over this amount; annual costs for the hotline around \$8,000



# Operations

- The *Ligne Verte* uses a single fixed line in a room in the PSI/ASF office; calls are answered by trained community mobilizers
- Total costs are approximately \$8,000 a year (for call fees and community mobilizer payments)
- Operations are much less sophisticated than CDC-DRC's HIV hotline but costs are substantially lower



# Calling the *Ligne Verte*

- All calls are confidential
- Calls are answered in French/Lingala/Swahili
- Each caller is asked his or her:
  - Location
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Marital Status
- If necessary, caller is referred to a *Confiance* clinic or local health center (where *Confiance* clinics are not available)



# Promotion of the *Ligne Verte*

Hotline is promoted through:

- FP IEC events:
- Mass media
- Pocket calendars distribution:
- Inclusion in product packaging and communication materials:
  - To encourage users to call the hotline to ask questions or raise concerns about the product
- Word of mouth



# 2008 Call Data

Province	Men	Women	Total	% of total calls
KINSHASA	4,072	1,682	5,754	28%
KATANGA	7,188	677	7,865	39%
BAS CONGO	603	124	727	4%
SOUTH KIVU	481	52	533	3%
NORTH KIVU	236	44	280	1%
PROV. ORIENTAL	972	158	1,130	6%
EQUATEUR	615	148	763	4%
KASAI OCCID.	1,191	151	1,342	7%
<i>Maniema</i>	557	27	584	3%
<i>Bandundu</i>	564	66	630	3%
<i>Kasai Oriental</i>	374	54	428	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,853</b>	<b>3,183</b>	<b>20,036</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

# Findings: Callers

- Men, a traditionally hard-to-reach segment of the population, make up the overwhelming majority (80%) of callers
  - Consistent with other PSI FP hotlines in Benin and Pakistan, where men make up 77% and 78% of callers
  - Many questions are general but many also call regarding side effects of their partners
- A higher proportion of women call from Kinshasa than from other provinces
- Nearly 8% of total calls in 2008 were from provinces where PSI/ASF have *NO* FP activities and no promotion of the hotline



# Findings : Operations

- Call volume from different provinces appears to be determined more by Vodacom coverage than population size
  - Information on network coverage per province is nearly impossible to find; must rely on anecdotal information
  - Calls to the hotline are higher in areas where Vodacom appears to be the predominant network
- This hotline model can easily be replicated with minimal costs in challenging and low-tech environments

# Lessons Learned:

- The hotline is a promising opportunity to reach men with FP information
- The concept of a toll-free hotline is unfamiliar in DRC and should be explained clearly in *Ligne Verte* promotion
- Call time should be increased from the original 2-minute ceiling

# More Lessons Learned

- The hotline's call data has potential to provide base information FP in DRC, particularly given the severe lack of FP research in DRC
- Understanding the communication environment is key (e.g. who is the biggest cell operator)
- The *Ligne Verte* model can be run on a shoe-string budget in low-resource settings
  - This type of hotline can easily be replicated with minimal costs in challenging and low-tech environments





For more information on PSI/DRC's FP hotline:

<http://www.psi.org/resources/pubs/USAIDCaseStudyDRC.pdf>

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