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Why pleasure is central to safer sex

"People thought we were wasting time talking about sex and pleasure, when maternal mortality is so high ... But I was convinced that if this delicate, taboo thing – sexual pleasure – could be negotiated by women, then almost anything can be negotiated." --Dorothy Aken' Ova, INCREASE, Nigeria

As the International AIDS Conference gets underway in Mexico City we will watch eagerly to see whether sex gets much of a mention. Whilst unprotected sexual intercourse is the main route of HIV transmission there is often squeamishness within the development sector when it comes to discussing matters related to intimacy, emotion, desire and pleasure.

Realising Rights, an IDS research consortium, has supported The Pleasure Project in order to highlight the importance of sexual pleasure to safe sex. The organisation will launch *'The Global Mapping of Pleasure A directory of organizations, programmes, media and people who eroticize safer sex'* at a satellite session at the International AIDS Conference, on Sunday 3rd August.

The Global Mapping of Pleasure is for everyone tired of hearing the same-old prevention messages – that sex is dangerous, something to be feared, and that safer sex is un-sexy – and anyone looking for a new, exciting and sexy approach to safer sex and sexual health.

First published in 2004 as a training tool for sexual health educators in Cambodia, it has been widely referenced in the media and health sector. The Pleasure Project recognized the need to update *The Global Mapping* to include the many pioneering organizations and individuals they met since that first edition was published. They received support and funding from Realising Rights to produce an updated edition.

The Global Mapping has been instructive in highlighting that:

- Safer sex projects should recognise that what is pleasurable or erotic is subjective – a one size fits all approach just won't work.
- The best way to understand what turns people on is to ask them, and this information should be built into interventions.
- Creativity is key – from erotic safer-sex tea towels for gay men in Australia, to dildo-making contests for nuns who do marriage counselling in Mozambique – and novel methods of communication are useful.
- Erotic interventions tell you 'How to do it'. What distinguishes an erotic safer-sex intervention from one that is 'sex-positive' is the level of detail about sex acts and safer-sex methods, particularly how to negotiate safer sex in a sexy way. As Cheryl Overs of the Asia Pacific Network of Sex workers says, "A Mongolian sex worker once said the workshop led her to see that just telling people to use condoms is like telling

someone to use saddle to ride a horse – there’s a lot more to both safe sex and horse riding!”

- We need more cross-cultural research into erotic interventions: Very few controlled trials or systematic monitoring and evaluation systems have been used to measure the effectiveness of projects which eroticize safer sex in diverse cultures and among diverse populations.

Notes for editors:

- For further information on The Global Mapping contact:
Wendy Knerr, wendy@thepleasureproject.org, +44 7962 545 160
India – Anne Philpott, anne@thepleasureproject.org, +91 99 53110958
- To download the report please see The Pleasure Project website
<http://www.thepleasureproject.org/section6/>
- The Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium is funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) under grant HD43. The views expressed here do not necessarily represent those of DFID.
- To find out more about IDS at the International AIDS Conference see our HIV web pages
www.ids.ac.uk/go/hiv
- Realising Rights is a Research Programme Consortium funded by the UK Department for International Development. Our website is www.realising-rights.org.
- The satellite session is entitled ‘*Pleasure, desire and safer sex: Can they come together?*’, Sunday 3 August, 15.45 – 17.45, Session Room 6. To download an invitation see the Pleasure Project website:
http://www.thepleasureproject.org/content/File/Pleasure%20Project_satellite%20flyer_1p_g.jpg
- Other pleasure related sessions:
[‘Pleasure, Desire and Safer Sex: Can they come together?’](#) - Satellite Session, Sun 3rd Aug 15.45 - 17.45 ([printer-friendly invitation](#))
[Promoting sexual health and women’s empowerment through pleasure](#) - Oral presentation, Mon 4th Aug 14:30 - 16:00, session Room 8
[Draw a vagina for the Vaginal Wall](#) - Global Village Workshop, Wed 6th Aug, 11:45-12:45, session room 2
[The Global Mapping of Pleasure](#) - Poster, Wed 6th Aug, 12:30 - 14:30, Poster number WEPE0294