

# Kenya Pledges Support for Harm Reduction in Africa

## • Health

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By George Okore

Kenya is committed to fund interventions that fight the menace of drug misuse, Health Minister Sicily Kariuki said.

Speaking at the First Eastern Africa Harm Reduction Conference (1st EAHRC), Ms Kariuki (see photo) said the Ministry of Health will continue to provide financial resources for these interventions.

She noted that research shows that People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs) are an important bridging population for HIV transmission and other blood infections.

**By: Africa Science News**

Despite these efforts, drug policies in the region focus on the criminal justice approach and law enforcement rather than public health rights. “Addiction is an illness that needs to be treated not a crime that needs to be punished,” she said.

To manage the HIV epidemic, Minister Kariuki said Kenya is implementing WHO recommendations Medical Assisted Therapy (MAT), Needle and Syringe Program (NSP).

Under regional project HIV and Harm Reduction for Eastern Africa Project, several organizations have been working in the region to expand the demand for harm reduction interventions in the Eastern Africa region.

KANCO Director Allan Ragi said effective policy responses to drug use are among major outcomes envisioned by the project, as well as laying a solid ground for harm reduction interventions. Mr Ragi urged counties to focus on highlighting best practices and innovations in harm reduction in the region, and promoting leadership for effective drug use responses. To strengthen harm reduction, Ragi said Antiretroviral Therapy (ART), condom programs for People Who Inject Drugs (PWIDs) and targeted information, education and communication for PWIDs and their sexual partners.

“To end AIDS by 2030 as envisioned in the global health goals, all marginalized groups including PWUDs need to have access to health services,” said Dr. Saade Abdullah of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

The conference was an initiative of KANCO, Kenyan government and Global Fund , and was attended by several key national and international players such as National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) and National AIDS and STIs Control Program (NASCOP) Kenya.

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