

Upcoming



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Our Vision: Healthy people, empowered communities.

Our Mission: To improve health and well-being among communities through capacity building and promotion of innovative leadership



Theme of the month: Support don't punish in the Eastern Africa region

The Global day of action themed 'Support Don't Punish' is commemorated every year on the 26th of June and seeks to address harms caused by the war on drugs , advocating against harmful policies, ideologies and prejudice against the people who use drugs.

The Eastern Africa region was not left behind in the global campaign, though its regional network, the Eastern Africa Harm Reduction network and partners across Africa, were in the front line through various activities aimed at advocating for appropriate responses to drug use ranging from media engagement, road shows and banners, publications and community actions, creating awareness and drumming support for harm reduction in the region.

Eastern Africa's role in drug trade, both as a route and a destination has seen a growing population of drug users and hence the rise in the incidences of HIV and other blood borne transmissions. The time is ripe for the region to ensure it responds accordingly to ensure the health and well being of drug users is well served.

On the Road to Regional a Harm Reduction Policy



KANCO and The EAC HIV and AIDS secretariat, member states representatives during the Kampala policy review meeting

One of the most notable gaps in harm reduction programming in the region is the lack of policies addressing harm reduction and generalized drug war that often hamper harm reduction efforts. This has subsequently affected the voice of the community of People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs), coupled with the haphazard programming due to lack of accurate information and data on these populations.

Though the Eastern Africa HIV and Harm Reduction Grant supported by Global Fund, KANCO

has been advancing policy advocacy in the eight implementing countries as well as pushing for a regional law that governs harm reduction.

In a meeting held in Kampala, Uganda convened by KANCO and chaired by the EAC HIV and AIDS secretariat, under the EAC HIV and TB multi-sectorial strategic and implementing framework 2015/2020 aimed at reducing the incidence and mitigating the impact of HIV, TB and STIs in the region, the EAC member states got a chance to review the draft policy and make recommendations.

This policy dubbed the **East African Community Policy Guideline for Reducing Harm of Drug Use** holds the promise of not only being the first policy specifically addressing harm reduction as a public health issue in the region but will also provide general guideline for harm reduction service delivery in the region to effectively safeguard the right to access health and human rights for people who use

drugs. The policy is expected to metamorphose through a series of consultations among the EAC and with harm reduction partners, to in country stakeholder consultations for review cascading to the council of ministers and finally to the East African Legislative Council (EALA).

Speaking at the opening of the meeting EAC representative Alison Gachohi observed *'The EAC is an important forum for deliberating strategies aimed at addressing HIV infection in the region especially among key populations, it is therefore imperative that the EAC and partners collaborate to promote implementation of HIV and Harm Reduction interventions for PWUDs by seeking and advocating for the best legislative and programmatic approaches.'*



Tan-PUD coordinator, Happy Hassan addressing participants at the Regional Oversight Committee

Running a multi country program with a number of partners spread out across a region is a task that requires adequate planning and accountability. KANCO convened technical experts from key government, NGO and civil society institutions for a two day meeting to institutionalize a Regional oversight Committee for the regional HIV and Harm Reduction Project. The ROC is a regional mechanism that will provide overall project oversight, ensure

proper planning, accountability and reporting of the project..

The meeting aimed to orient the members of the ROC on the regional project, sharing on the status updates on implementation the Project; Review the Terms of Reference for the Committee (TORs) and the roles and responsibilities of the ROC going forward.

Speaking at the meeting in the ROC formation meeting in Dar Es Salaam Tanzania, KANCO Executive Director, Allan Ragi

challenged the members of the ROC saying we need to *'Provide the leadership that we need in the region to help us create a movement that can make a difference in the region'*

The meeting ended with the review of the terms of reference for the ROC, with emphasis on involvement of the members of the community in future forums held by the ROC

Formation of the Regional Oversight Committee

Sabrina Vidot: What Support Don't Punish Means to Me



Sabrina Vidot, former drug user, presently on Methadone

My interaction with Sabrina brought to life the real meaning of Support Don't Punish and the critical role of each stakeholder in making it a reality.

*Peter Kamau
– KANCO*

While the world marks Support Don't Punish - a Global Day of Action dedicated to championing support for people who use drugs (PWUDs), for many the day may whisk away just like any other. However, for Sabrina Vidot, a 33 year old Seychellois woman who has been using drugs for 17 years and currently on methadone (a form of opioid substitution therapy), it's a very personal and definitive day as she observes 'this is my day'. To her, the call for health and human rights based policies for PWUDs is central to her day-to-day life and to the lives of hundreds of thousands of PWUDs the world over.

My interaction with Sabrina gives a very clear picture on the daily struggles of PWUDs and their families, and why it's important for policy makers and health programme leaders to fully understand the policy and health challenges affecting PWUDs. *I was lucky I did not get hepatitis C, although most of my friends contracted it along the way because they could not access clean needles and syringes.*

Sabrina's addiction to drugs dates back 16 years ago, to when she was living in Canada with her mum and brother. In 2006, in one of the many attempts to get her off drugs, her mother sent her back home to the Seychelles for a detox programme. The assumption was that with the change of environment and the perceived 'unavailability' of hard drugs, she would easily be weaned off and

be back home in a years' time. However, six years later, she was still in a rehabilitation centre, on and off drugs.

Sabrina's initial drug of choice was cocaine, but soon after landing in the Seychelles, she transitioned to heroin due to the scarcity of cocaine. In 2015, she joined a facility-based methadone detox programme for a year and a half, after which she relapsed, three months after her discharge from the facility. Sabrina's mother relocated back to the Seychelles, to help take care of Sabrina's two children, so that she could join the community-based methadone programme at a hospital. Since October 2016, Sabrina has adhered to the methadone programme, taking her dose every day. Despite the constraint associated with the daily visits to the hospital, she highly appreciates remaining integrated in the community as she undergoes the programme. *I am feeling that my life is back, I am able to think of my children and mum.* Sabrina is grateful for the methadone programme, however she observes that one of the major setbacks is the notion that methadone is a quick fix, resulting in Ministry of Health officials wanting to wean clients off methadone rapidly. This has resulted in low titrated doses that often do not meet the clients' needs, thus forcing them to use other drugs such as heroin and alcohol to manage the cravings. This has resulted in clients being expelled from the programme. *Presently, we have only 19 out of 120 people left who started the programme. With methadone, you need enough time to go through the process.* Sabrina's present unemployment brings to focus the socio-economic struggles faced by recovering drug users. Challenged by the need to access treatment every day, and coupled with mistrust by potential employers due to her drug use record, she observes that everyone

thinks she want to steal from them. Sabrina joined the Drug User Network Seychelles (DUNS) in January 2017. The network was formed by the HIV AIDS Support Organisation of the Seychelles (HASO) with the support of the HIV and Harm Reduction for Eastern Africa project managed by KANCO, and funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. Through the network she believes they could influence some policies and practices such as needles and syringe exchange programmes. *Twice, I have been able to take clients to hospital for Hepatitis C screening and management. Together we can create a world where users can start a new life.* She sees the network as a great avenue to advocate for issues of concern to PWUDs. Through DUNS, Sabrina has been trained as a peer educator and is currently a peer mobiliser. My first meeting with Sabrina was at a meeting where she had mobilised 16 PWUDs to participate. Her past experience as a drug user makes her a better peer educator. Sabrina is reaching about 150 drug users who have access to her house, which to her is a great achievement.

My interaction with Sabrina brought to life the real meaning of Support Don't Punish and the critical role of each stakeholder in making it a reality.

Blog by Peter Kamau

Deputy Executive Director,
KANCO

Regional Support Don't Punish Campaign Pictorials



Partners in Harm reduction E-Banner Championing the Support DON'T Punish Campaign 2017 in Kenya spearheaded by the Ministry of Health



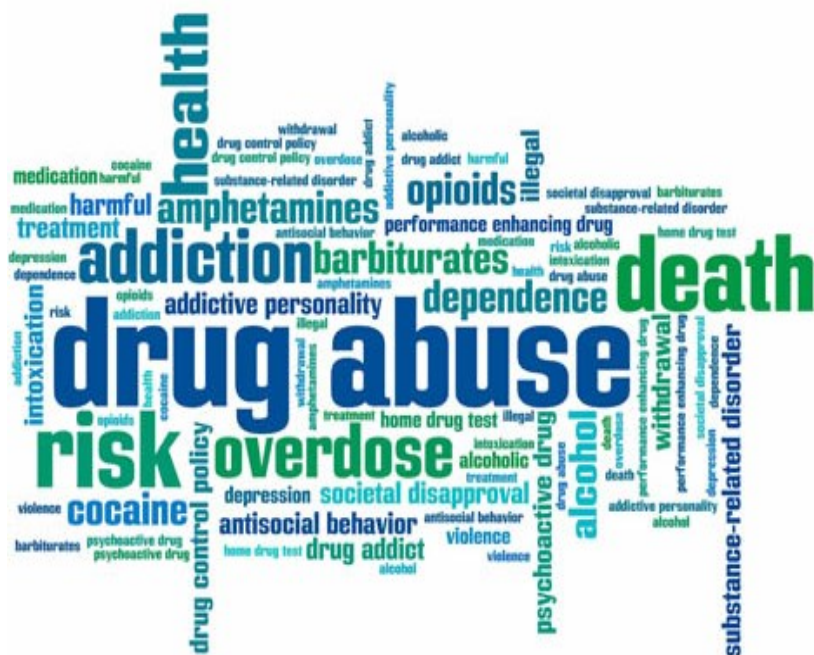
Regional Project Implementing Partners drumming support for Support Don't Punish form top left– Seychelles, Burundi ,Uganda and Kenya Respectively



Left- The Chair of the East African Harm Reduction Network (Twaib Wamala) and Police commissioner and Harm Reduction Champion (Tinka Zerubaga) on national TV interview during the Support don't Punish Celebrations



Article by Project implementing Partners– UGHRN



Dr. Izaq Odongo, who represented the Cabinet Secretary for Health Dr. Cleopa Mailu, noted the Protocol's role in enhancing access and quality of treatment for drug use, which was creeping onto young people in the country who comprise 2/3 of the population. KANCO looks forward to receiving and disseminating the protocol to facilitate appropriate management of drug use and the related health and social consequences

