

Govt urged to decriminalise drug use

THE Zimbabwe government has been called upon to decriminalise drug use in the country and instead put in place measures that will allow users to access, treatment, counselling and rehabilitation at public health centres.

The call was made by Wilson Box, the Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network director at a workshop on; “Mainstreaming drug use harm reduction in public health and community development interventions,” held at the ZESA Training Centre in Harare.

The Workshop was also attended by medical doctors, senior police officers, drug users and officials from various non-governmental organisations in public health delivery.

Presenting a paper titled; “Illicit drug use in Zimbabwe and Drug Policy Reform”, Box said there was need in Zimbabwe to decriminalise drug use.

“Decriminalising drug use is not legalising use of illicit drugs. But it is putting in place measures that will allow users to have access to treatment, counselling and rehabilitation,” he said.



Wilson Box

The objective of the workshop was to sensitise and the participants in public health delivery and community development on mainstreaming drug use harm reduction strategies in their work.

“Harm reduction in drug use refers to all efforts to minimise or eliminate the negative consequences that comes with drug use. While the goal of inventions directed towards drug use might strongly revolve around the elimination of use, not all users are willing to stop or may never be able to, and the consequences are now manifest in our communities,” said Box.



Hilton Nyamukapa

Speaking at the same workshop, Hilton Nyamukapa, the ZCLDN programmes coordinator, said the Harm Reduction concept, although fairly new in Africa had been well embraced by governments in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Seychelles and Mauritius.

“The Harm Reduction concept does not only focus on abstinence, but incorporates a spectrum of strategies from safer use to managed use leading to abstinence,” he said.

Concern was raised by the participants on the prevalent abuse of psychiatric drugs by people not on prescription.

“The reason on why the prescription drugs for psychiatric drugs were easily available on the black market was due to the porosity of the hospitals where a patient would easily collect drugs

from Parirenyatwa Hospital, Harare Central Hospital and their local clinics in the same month. The excess drugs would then be off-loaded onto the black market. She said young people affected by unemployment and lack of opportunities were mostly involved in drug use in order to handle stress. As a result most patients admitted in psychiatric hospitals were drug users,” one of the participants said.

Drug users form association

DRUG users in Zimbabwe last month at the Zimbabwe Women’s Bureau in Eastlea, Harare launched the Zimbabwe People Who Use Drugs (ZimPUD), a national organisation that seeks to promote the health and defend the rights of people who use drugs.

Tania Marumbwa from Bulawayo was elected interim chairperson of ZimPUD with Kembo Sibanda also from Bulawayo being elected secretary general while Feiton Mupakami was elected the organising secretary and Ronny Makondo coming in as the deputy organising secretary.

Both Mupakami and Makondo are from Harare.

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Other committee members of ZimPUD are Raymond Kanyemba, Vimbai Jani and Freeman Konza.

ZimPUD is a movement of people who use drugs – current and former – who support the Vancouver Declaration.

The Vancouver Declaration sets out demands for drug users and emphasises that their human rights must be respected and their health and wellbeing prioritised. **To page 3....**



Drug users pose for a picture after the launch of their association – ZimPUD - in Harare last month. The chairperson is Tania Marumbwa in blue shirt.

“We believe that people who use drugs should be meaningfully represented in decision-making processes that affect our lives, Marumbwa said in her acceptance speech as the ZimPUD interim chairperson.

“ZimPUD is committed to demonstrating at country level how people who use drugs can constructively contribute to the development and delivery of services for our community,” she said.

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Drug users complain of police harassment

DRUG users have raised concerns over how some police officers were trampling upon their human rights and illegally arresting them or asking for protection fees.

Addressing participants at a recent workshop organised by the Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN), drug users complained bitterly on how some police officers had taken over the illegal trade of selling drugs and were now in charge of the drug cartels in the high density areas.

“The police officers carry out periodic raids on targeted drug users and they will ask you to pay protection fees,” one drug user said.

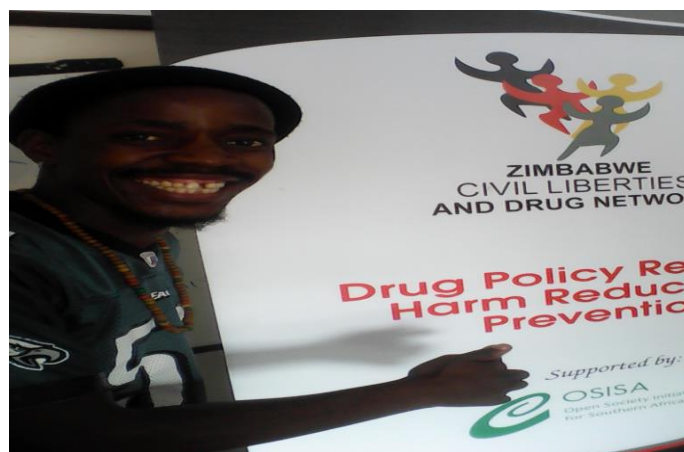


“If you have no money on you, they will arrest you and detain on flimsy charges something which is against our constitutional rights. The same police officers have also taken over the supply and selling of drugs in our communities,” he said. Another female drug user from Mufakose in Harare said users were also failing to access medical treatment at public health centres as the health professionals were turning them away.



“We are told to go away because they have no drugs for drug users as it is a waste of resources and time to entertain drug users. At the end some of our friends are suffering or dying silently at home because nurses at the clinics and hospitals are very arrogant to us and scold us in front of other patients,” she said.

ZCLDN and ZimPUD events in pictures



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