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Prison officers undergo training on promoting harm reduction

THE Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN) has this year held two capacity building workshops on promoting harm reduction in the country's prisons.

The two workshops held in August and October were attended by senior Zimbabwe Prison and Correctional Services officers and middle management officers.



Wilson Box, the ZCLDN director in a discussion with senior correctional officers at a workshop held recently in Harare

The capacity building workshop was attended by senior officers from the Harare Metro province based at the Harare Central, Chikurubi Maximum, Women and Farm prisons.

ZCLDN director, Wilson Box said the workshops were meant to enhance knowledge of drug and substance use among prison officers and change attitudes and values towards drug use and reduce risk behavior associated with substance use among key populations including drug users.

"Prisoners are key populations and they are vulnerable to be infected by diseases. Therefore, there is need for humane treatment of prisoners including those who use drugs and we need to introduce the concept of harm reduction and drug policy reform," Box said.

The prison officers went through the process of implementing and disseminating drug use and harm reduction strategies to inmates.



One of the participants from ZPCS making a presentation at the harm reduction workshop in Harare

In his remarks ZPCS Chief Superintendent C. Mandave, expressed his gratitude to ZCLDN for its effort and support to his organisation and government.

"I want to appreciate efforts by the ZPCS towards preventing alcohol and illicit drugs within our prisons. However, it is evident that much needs to be done to spare us from enormous negative consequences of drugs and other substance use," said Chief Sup Mandave.

He said the workshop had increased awareness and knowledge of drug and substance use among prison officers.

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“Therefore, change attitudes and values towards drug use and reduce the risky behaviours associated with drug and substance use among our inmates, officers and dependents. This can be achieved when organisations such as the ZPCS consider approaches, strategies, policies, procedures and interventions that impact positively on the psychological or safety of its officers and inmates,” he further explained.



Hilton Nyamukapa, the ZCLDN programmes manager making a point at one of the workshops in Harare

Speaking at one of the workshops, ZPCS mental health coordinator, Trustmore Chigwete thanked the ZCLDN for partnering with the ZPCS in promoting harm reduction not only in prisons but in local communities as drug use was on the increase and affecting every community.

“The use of drugs goes deeper. Even if you are not into drug use, you are affected as you have a close relative or friend who uses drugs and these have to be assisted by you. As ZPCS, we appreciate that this is not the first interaction that we have had with ZCLDN and we have already seen from the first group of officers that attended an earlier workshop some positive outcomes,” said Chigwete.

During the workshop, ZCLDN programmes manager, Hilton Nyamukapa took the correctional officers through various topics including; what is drug and its therapeutic uses, the commonly used drugs in Zimbabwe, the human and health rights of prisoners including those who use drugs.

ZCLDN board members in Europe for training

THE board chairperson of the Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN) Pauline Nyagotsi and her deputy, Sandra Mapa will be travelling to Geneva, Switzerland and Budapest, Hungary respectively for training on drug policy reform programmes.



Chairperson Nyagotsi

Chairperson Nyagotsi will be at the Graduate Institute in Geneva for a highly specialised executive course on drug policy reform, global health and diplomacy while Deputy Chair Mapa is travelling to the Central European University in Budapest for a course in drug policy reform and human rights.



Deputy Chair Mapa (left)

The two leaders travel to Europe at a time when the ZCLDN has engaged parliamentarians to push through a legislation that will see the country adopting a national drug policy. Zimbabwe is one of the few nations across the globe that does not have its own national drug policy.

ZCLDN provincial Support, Don't Punish chapters

THE Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN) launched Support. Don't Punish provincial chapters in Matabeleland (Bulawayo), Manicaland (Mutare) Mashonaland West (Chinhoyi) and Mashonaland East (Marondera) in October.

These support groups are meant for People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs) to participate, support, promote and advocate for their human and health rights. The chapters are also for non-drug users to participate amplify the call for Zimbabwe to adopt a national drug policy and drug policy reforms.

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Drug users during the launch of Matabeleland Support. Don't Punish chapter launch at Amakhosi Arts Theatre in Bulawayo

The Matabeleland chapter was launched at the iconic Amakhosi Arts Theatre in Makokoba, Bulawayo, Manicaland chapter at Beit Hall in Danganvura, Mashonaland East at Rujeko Market Hall while the Chinhoyi launch was held at Occasions Place in Chinhoyi's CBD.

Similar support groups have also been established in Harare province where PWUDs have chapters in Mbare, Mufakose and Dzivarerekwa in the past with hundreds of drug users holding regular meetings in their communities.

The support groups are an initiative adopted through the Partnership to Inspire, Transform and Connect the HIV response (PITCH).

This partnership works to uphold the sexual and reproductive health and rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, sex workers, people who use drugs and adolescent girls and young women.

This is done by strengthening the capacity of community-based organisations to engage in effective advocacy, generate robust evidence and develop meaningful policy solutions.

Issues and subjects discussed among drug users during their regular meetings touch on sexual reproductive and health rights (SRHR), stigma and discrimination.

During the recent launches People who Use Drugs (PUDs) raised concerns over the increase of harassment from law enforcement agents, lack of access to medical treatment as they, on most occasions, were turned away by health workers when they visited public health centres seeking treatment. Lack of access to counselling and rehabilitation for PUDs.

During the meeting, the PUDS managed to elect interim committees that will work closely with the ZCLDN national office in advocating for better SRHR and human rights.

ZCLDN's aspiration to have the Support. Don't Punish support group in every community to enable PWUDs to support each other and fight against stigma, harassment and discrimination.

Sen Timveos calls for National Drug Policy in Zimbabwe

SENATOR Lilian Timveos (*pictured right*) recently moved motion in Senate calling for the adoption of a National Drug Policy and Legislative Framework in Zimbabwe.

In the motion, the senator said the proposed National Drug Policy was critical in ensuring that all drugs in the national drug distribution systems are safe, efficacious, effective and of good quality whilst it also strengthens administrative, and regulatory controls of the same.

"The existing legal framework, such as the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform), the Dangerous Drugs Act and the Medicines and Allied Substances Act are either outdated and do not sufficiently provide for procurement and use of drugs," she said in her motion.

"These current laws criminalise drug and substance use resulting in drug users fearing to seek treatment for TB and HIV infections. Decriminalisation of drug use and drug policy reform as adopted globally by other countries are vital strategies to addressing the drug problem," said Sen Timveos.



She called upon the government to come up with a national drug policy and legislative framework that is grounded in science, public health and human rights to effectively minimise the effects of drug use within communities.

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Illicit drug sales flourish in Harare CBD

THE Harare central business district (CBD) has seen the flourishing of illicit drugs especially at popular public transport ranks.

The ZCLDN has been informed by various sources drug peddlers, driving latest luxury vehicles are pushing the drugs during the day at public ranks in Harare such as; Copacabana, Fourth Street and Charge Office. The Charge Office rank is situated across the Harare Central Police Station.

“The buyers are mostly rank marshals, kombi drivers and their conductors, sex workers and informal traders,” a concerned Harare resident told the ZCLDN recently.



The sale of illicit drugs has flooded the streets of Harare with drug dealers peddling the drugs during the day

Another CBD worker said the dealers were well-known and connected individuals who were peddling drugs in full view of police officers.

“They usually come here around mid-day and spend the day peddling the drugs.

“They mostly sale bronco (Bronco Cleer, dagga and mutoriro (a mixture of cocaine and dust from florescent

bulbs. This has been going on for some time and the watchful eye of the authorities,” he said.

“What worries me is that the drug users are from the high density areas and the peddlers are from the low density areas. The users will at most times fail to access proper health care and facilities and die painful deaths,” he added.

At recent workshops the ZCLDN held with correctional officers, it was observed that drug use was on the rise and it was not possible to arrest all drug users but instead to push for drug policy reforms and policies.

By adopting a national drug policy, Zimbabwe will be able promote health services among People who Use Drugs (PUDs).

“If we continue saying drug use is illegal and ignoring the increase in the use of the drugs it is that disregard, which is actually harming the citizens,” one of the participants noted.

It was noted at the workshops that harm reduction came from the realisation that all drugs used are harmful. However, the harms can be reduced or minimised as harm reduction does not focus on abstinence but an intervention for safe drug use as drugs will always be available.

ZCLDN Events in Pictures:



ZPCS officers pose for a group photo with the ZCLDN team during one of the Harare workshops



Launch of the Mashonaland West Support. Don't Punish Chapter



Mashonaland East Chapter



Manicaland Chapter



Some senior ZPCS officials following proceedings at a ZCLDN harm reduction workshop



ZPCS officers making presentations during ZCLDN harm reduction workshops in Harare



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