

# **DRUG POLICIES IN AFRICA: ANY PROGRESS?**

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- IDPC is a global network of nearly 200 NGOs
- Promoting drug policy debates and NGO participation
- Policies based on evidence, health, rights and development

## NATURE OF DRUG POLICIES IN AFRICA

- Drug laws and approaches are rooted in prohibitionist interpretations of the international drug conventions.
- Criminalisation-centred, focused on seizures and arrest.
- GDPI scores for Africa were one of the worse performers in terms of drug policy.
- We still have countries like Mauritania, Libya, Sudan, South Sudan and Egypt retaining the death penalty for drug offences (source: HRI).

## IMPACT OF THESE APPROACHES

- Public health crises and widespread violence
- Widespread human rights violations
- Overburdened prisons
- Marginalization and discrimination of people who use drugs
- Destruction of human health and the ecology
- Inadequate access to essential medicine



## A SHIFT IN AFRICA?

- Africa is seeing a shift - albeit very slow - towards more comprehensive, health-oriented policies.
- Some countries recognizing the importance of human rights and public health.
- AUPA (2019-2023) is progressive: harm reduction, civil society engagement, alternatives to punishment, access to medicines, and the review and reforms of drug laws

## SOME SHIFTS TOWARDS:

- Providing Naloxone to address opioid overdoses
- Providing needle and syringe programmes to prevent HIV / hepatitis.
- Regulating cannabis cultivation for medical and/or industrial purposes.
- Prioritising the access and availability of essential medicines for pain relief.
- *See latest data of HRI 2022-Global State of Harm Reduction*

## EXAMPLES OF PROGRESSIVE POLICIES

### Ghana:

- Introductions of fines instead of custodial sentences for drug use
- Harm reduction officially recognised in the new drug law
- Pilot harm reduction services to start in November 2023
- Cannabis cultivation for medical and industrial purposes

### Morocco:

- Parliament adopted a law in 2022 to regularize cannabis production for medical, cosmetic and industrial purposes
- Legally adopted harm reduction as a national policy

## EXAMPLES OF PROGRESSIVE POLICIES

### South Africa:

- In 2018, Constitutional Court ruled that the private use of cannabis by adults is legal in private spaces

### Kenya & Mauritius : NSP, OSP

### Senegal:

- Harm reduction supported by the government
- Mobile clinics now have over 12 sites across Senegal

### Lesotho:

- First African country to legalize the cultivation and production of medical cannabis in 2017



## PRIORITY AREAS FOR AFRICAN DRUG POLICY

- Implementation and awareness of the AU Plan of Action, the UN Common Position, the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy, etc
- Continued scale-up of harm reduction and domestic funding
- Decriminalization: ‘Gold Standard’ = no sanctions
- Access to pain medications (including tramadol and ketamine)
- Engagement of African governments and NGOs in international and regional debates
- Cannabis use and markets

### 1. Don't punish

Remove all sanctions for drug use and related activities, for all substances



### 2. Support

Promote voluntary access to systems of care and support



### 3. Community engagement

Meaningfully involve people who use drugs in design and monitoring



### 4. Redress

Expunge previous convictions and develop reparations for affected communities



### 5. Compliance

Comprehensively train authorities to ensure implementation and adherence



### 6. Health & rights

Redirect resources away from punitive systems towards rights-affirming services



## CONCLUSIONS

- There are wide disparities between state policies and how they are implemented on the ground.
- Drug policies disproportionately affect people marginalised on the basis of their gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.
- We need to build bridges and engage states across Africa to make further progress.

## CONCLUSIONS (2)

- Secure the commitment of governments to understand and support harm reduction.
- Divert monies spent on police, courts and prisons towards health services and harm reduction.
- Develop constructive debates that will lead to more humane and evidence-based policies in the region.
- Fund civil society to “audit” national government against their international commitments. (e.g GDPI)

**THANK YOU!**

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