THE DRUG MENACE AT THE KENYAN COAST

Drug abuse is one of the biggest problems confronting Kenya, especially among the youth. Incidents of drug and alcohol abuse and related anti-social behaviour have increased in recent years. This has resultantly become a matter of concern to the government, parents, teachers, non-governmental organizations and all other relevant agencies.¹

Statistically, according to UNODC² data for the year 2009; there are an estimated 680,000 to 2.9 million opium users in Africa: In Kenya, the prevalence of opium use among the age group between 15 and 64 was 0.7% the prevalence of cannabis use among the age group between 15 and 64 comprises 7.1%.³

Another report indicates that by the age of 15 years in Kenya, 34% of this age group had used tobacco, 18% cannabis sativa, 32% had abused khat (commonly known as miraa) and 5% cocaine; with the age group at most risk put at between 16 and 18 years.⁴

According to a report by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB, 2006), the East African region has become the fallback for drug dealers following increased control of traditional routes through the Netherlands and Spain.⁵ The warning followed the discovery of cocaine worth 6.4 billion Kenya shillings in Malindi and Nairobi on

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
³ Brown D, Web Kenya ‘Drug Abuse and Drug Dependence Treatment Situation’
⁴ Supra note 1
December 14, 2004 with a vessel being blown up in the high seas containing 1.3 billion Kenya shillings worth of heroin in 2014.

In a household survey of drug and alcohol use and abuse in Kenya conducted by NACADA in 2009 with a quantitative sampling of 4,200 households in 140 cluster areas; namely Nairobi, Mombasa and the coastal islands, the results were alarming. 33.6% of all respondents ever consumed alcohol tobacco, glue, khat, cannabis, (bhang), heroin or cocaine with 16.9% of the total being children aged between 12-17yrs.

The problem of drug abuse in the Coastal areas has been growing at an alarming rate. The ease of access and availability of cannabis among community members is a contributing factor to its greater use. While the fact that production and consumption of khat is legal, its abuse has been on the increase worldwide. Although Tobacco and Cannabis are the major drugs that most users start experimenting with, heroin has been found to be the most favorable drug to most users.

In Mombasa County, there are approximately 40 ‘maskani’ (meaning location in Swahili) where drug abusers meet to share drugs. Bhang smoking has until recently become a drug of choice, but heroin has increasingly become popular. A survey by Teens Watch

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6 The Daily Nation newspaper, March 2, 2006, accessed on 5th September 2015
8 National Campaign Against Drug Abuse
Organisation shows Kwale having over 3,000 drug users injecting themselves or sniffing cocaine and heroin.12

Youth in Mombasa are not only involved in the consumption but also in the trafficking of drugs. Children as young as 12 are used to transport “white gold” across borders and international waters and with a significant number of youth between the ages of 12 and 31 being regular users of bang, miraa, white gold and heroine.13

In a recent admission by the NACADA chairman, John Mututho indicated that Mombasa County has more than 23,000 heroin drug addicts, during a meeting with security officers at Mombasa Beach Hotel on 3rd September 2015; he insisted that the addicts needed to be rehabilitated.14

A further survey conducted among the youth on why they engage in drugs, gave the reasons as being based on cultural factors, social factors, economic factors, political factors, environmental factors amongst others.15 Most respondents, 83.33% strongly believed that cultural factors influence youth into drug/substance abuse and therefore a major area of concern.16 Researchers also include the family, peer association, school performance and social class membership as other factors to be considered. The families, especially the parents, are the child’s basic socializing agents.17 Others cited include, Low self-esteem, media influence TV, magazines, internet), rebellion against teachers, religion, curiosity, lack of knowledge of drugs, Poor role models.18

12 The Daily Nation newspaper, August 30, 2015 http://www.nation.co.ke/counties/We-are-ready-to-fight-drug-abuse-at-Coast/-/1107872/2852350/-/format/xhtml/-/54w7ikz/-/index.html accessed on 5th September 2015
16 ibid
18 Infra note 29
Media influence has highly contributed to this vice; the problem with abuse is associated with the introduction of western lifestyles through the media that have been undermining cultures of the indigenous society which restricted the use of some substances such as alcohol to senior age groups and to special occasions.19

However, to add to the aforementioned reasons of why youth engage in drug abuse, Mombasa has two unique initiation and habituation factors - idleness and unemployment.20 The largest number of unemployed people is in the 20 to 24 age bracket. Only 1.5 percent of the unemployed have any formal education beyond secondary school level, and21 naturally, the high unemployment levels contribute to alcohol and substance abuse as many youth remain idle and have time to engage in drug abuse.22

**Strategies rolled out to curb the drug abuse**

The fight against drug abuse has been tailored into an African affair. The continental minimum quality standards’ document23 highlights important facets of a national drug control master plan, which envisaged elements of Minimum Quality Standards (MQS) for Drug abuse Prevention and treatment; and an evaluation and monitoring component.

In the 6th session of the African Union conference of ministers in charge of drug control24, member states (including Kenya) declared to raise drug control to the same level of and learn from coordinated efforts of the HIV response, mainstream drug control

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20 NACADA, (2011) ‘Promotion of Evidence-Based Campaign’ National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Research Workshop report, held on 29th and 30th March 2011


23 African Union Commission has developed a continental minimum quality standards policy for drug abuse prevention and treatment, one of the tenets to strengthen cooperation and coordination in the fight against drugs and crime, as defined by the 4th Session of the AU Conference

24 Held at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 6-10 October 2014
into national policies and development plans to leverage national financial resource allocation, together with considering dedicating a percentage of national budgets towards drug control and to establishing a public drug dependency treatment and rehabilitation facilities and where they exist, to expand them.\textsuperscript{25}

The Kenyan government has announced that the drug, methadone, will be soon available in three facilities in the coast region to take care of the many heroin addicts as the crackdown on drug trafficking continues. The treatment will be given for free to the addicts on a daily basis to assist them recover from the strong attachment to the heroin.

Dr Nicholas Muraguri the Director of Medical Services said that previously, methadone treatment was inaccessible to the majority of addicts in Kenya, many of whom are struggling to break from the vicious cycle of addiction to heroin.\textsuperscript{26}

A consultative meeting was held on 1\textsuperscript{st} September 2015 with key stakeholders in the fight against illicit drug use including USAID, the UNODC, the Kenya Red Cross Society among others to shape the way forward on how to alleviate drug abuse. There is functional medically assisted therapy facility offering services to opioid dependent persons in Kilifi County, with two health facilities in the process of introducing the similar facilities in Mombasa County at Coast General Hospital and Kisauni Health Centre.\textsuperscript{27}

The Authority\textsuperscript{28} supported setting up/strengthening of treatment and rehabilitation services at the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital by providing Kshs. 4.4 million

\textsuperscript{27} My Gov, 3\textsuperscript{rd} September 2015 ‘Government to treat drug addicts in coast region’ http://www.mygov.go.ke/government-to-treat-drug-addicts-in-coast-region/ accessed on 8\textsuperscript{th} September 2015
\textsuperscript{28} NACADA
towards the cause. It also trained nurses and social workers for 20 days on basic addiction counseling at the Coast General Hospital.\(^{29}\)

NACADA further states that there are about 75 treatment centres in the Country, both private and public. They deal with all drugs types of drugs ranging from alcohol, tobacco, khat, bhang, heroin and cocaine.\(^{30}\)

The government in its effort to fight the drug menace voiced its concerns through President Uhuru Kenyatta asking coast residents and local leaders to come together and hand over names of suspected drug barons to the government in order to help fight the rampant addiction in the region. Speaking at Fort Jesus in Mombasa during the official launch of the National Youth Service (NYS) Youth Empowerment Program, President Kenyatta said it is only the local population that can help the government to get factual information on drug trafficking in the area.\(^{31}\)

NACADA further reiterated on the president’s stand by assuring all people helping in curbing the drug menace in the Kenyan Coast and other parts of the country that their security will be ensured to make sure the war on drugs and drug abuse succeeds.\(^{32}\)

From this directive, More than 100 people have been charged with drug trafficking and millions of shillings of narcotics have been seized at the Coast. The police action was part of the drugs, crime and terror crackdown ordered at the Coast by the President. Police officers and county inspectorate departments intensified operations in parts of Changamwe, Mombasa Island, Kisauni and Likoni areas.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{30}\) Supra note 12

\(^{31}\) Citizen digital, 2\(^{nd}\) September 2015, By Maureen Murimi ‘War on drugs tops Kenyatta’s Mombasa visit agenda’ [https://citizentv.co.ke/news/war-on-drugs-tops-kenyattas-mombasa-visit-agenda/](https://citizentv.co.ke/news/war-on-drugs-tops-kenyattas-mombasa-visit-agenda/) accessed on 8\(^{th}\) September 2015


\(^{33}\) The Star, 1\(^{st}\) September 2015, By Calvin Onsarigo ‘100 arrested in Mombasa raids on drug dens’ [http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/100-arrested-mombasa-raids-drug-dens](http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/100-arrested-mombasa-raids-drug-dens) accessed on 8th September 2015
inspectorate department had been deployed to drug-prone areas prior to the raid\textsuperscript{34}. However, as good and admirable it may be, will this crackdown once done and forgotten be a permanent solution?

**Conclusion**

If the government, (both County and National), CSOs, FBOs and the community dedicate themselves to eradicate the drug menace like they did the illicit brew recently, then the Coast youth and all youth in general will be saved.

NACADA in its endeavor to eradicate drug abuse, should effectively coordinate a two-pronged campaign which if adhered to will get rid of this vice through supply suppression and demand reduction. Demand reduction, involves providing preventive education, public awareness, life skills, treatment, rehabilitation and psycho-social support to the general public. Supply suppression on the other hand is through policy formulation, legislations, eliminate production, trafficking, and enhance capacity building.\textsuperscript{35}

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\textsuperscript{34} The Star, 31\textsuperscript{st} August 2015, By Ernest Cornel, ‘Kenya: Spies Lead Mombasa Drugs War’ [http://allafrica.com/stories/201508310183.html](http://allafrica.com/stories/201508310183.html) accessed on 8th September 2015

\textsuperscript{35} NACADA, ‘About Us’ [http://www.nacada.go.ke/about](http://www.nacada.go.ke/about) accessed on 8th September 2015