

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

Press Release No: _____/2022
Venue: Ekurhuleni, South Africa

Date: 09 November 2022

African Union Pilots Integration of Traditional Leaders in Drug Dependency Prevention, Treatment and Care Interventions at Community Level



The African Union (AU) has begun integrating traditional leaders in drug dependency prevention treatment and care to widen the reach of community interventions amid a growing burden of substance use and related mental health disorders on the continent especially among youth, women and children.

This comes against the backdrop of [damning statistics from the African Union's continental drug surveillance sentinel - the Pan African Epidemiology Network of Drug Use \(PAENDU\)](#) - which captures the number and characteristics of people who use drugs and sought drug treatment/rehabilitation services on the continent.

A two-day meeting convened by the African Union Commission in Ekurhuleni, South Africa (01-02 November 2022) for the country's Traditional and Khoisan Leadership culminated in the formation of a Chiefs' national network of champions for drug demand reduction – the first on the continent. The meeting, organized in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and South Africa's Department of Justice and Correctional Services, was aimed at affirming the role of traditional leaders as first line responders in addressing the challenge of drugs at community level.

The South Africa traditional and Khoisan leadership, drawn from the national and provincial houses, cemented their commitment by signing the Ekurhuleni Pledge committing themselves to prompt action including coming up with national, provincial and community structures as well as work plans to address drugs challenges.

African Union Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, Amb. Minata Samate Cessouma, who was represented by Ms Angela Martins, Ag. Director for Social Development, Culture and Sport, said it was important to explore indigenous and inclusive ways to brace communities at risk and in need especially youth, children and women to strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors for drug use, offer mental health support and galvanize young people with resilience to withstand the tide for drug initiation and use.

“What we seek is collaboration of our Chiefs not consultation. The traditional leadership institution has remained a custodian of culture, customs, origin and history in many parts of Africa and its high time we integrate them in drug demand reduction interventions on the continent,” said Amb. Minata Samate Cessouma.

The Commissioner noted that African countries were been experiencing an upsurge in public health problems as a result of increased availability and use of psychoactive substances trafficked into the continent and also produced locally.

Nkosi Phathekile Holomisa, South Africa's Deputy Minister of Justice and Correctional Services and a traditional chief himself said communities in rural areas were no longer insulated against social ills that affected urban areas such as drug trafficking and use which was worsened by increased internet connectivity, high unemployment and climate change dynamics. "There are difficulties in controlling the problem but because our people continue to listen to traditional leaders it is necessary to engage traditional leaders to address substance drug abuse. We are here to confirm our commitment as traditional leaders that we are part and parcel of the solution to this scourge," said the Deputy Minister.

Kgosi Thabo Seatlholo, Chairperson on National House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders in South Africa told the meeting that communities in the country were facing a meltdown because of SUDs. "So we have agreed to be champions. We will be the first ones to go to our communities to say here is the problem we have not been addressing. But we need training to scientifically understand various aspects of drug addiction and intervention tools available," said Kgosi Seatlholo.

UNODC Regional Representative for Southern Africa, Dr Jane Marie Ong'olo said it was imperative to bring everyone onboard as drug use was a common and shared responsibility. "In South Africa, many people access services from the Community leaders, so it's important to begin to have a discussion with traditional leadership as the first line of intervention for people experiencing challenges with drug use," she said.

Mr Bill McGlynn, Senior Adviser, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, US State Department, who fund the African Union Drug Demand Reduction Programme said, "the US appreciates being part of this important effort by the Government of South Africa and traditional leaders to strengthen drug demand reduction and looks forward to cooperating with them, the AU and UNODC and other partners".

The African Union Commission will closely monitor the work of traditional leaders in drug demand reduction in South Africa with a view to rolling similar networks throughout Africa.

Read more about the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019-2023) @ <https://au.int/node/36768>

For further information related to the Global Dialogue on Drug Demand Reduction, please contact:

Dr. Abel Basutu | Senior Drug Control Officer, Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, African Union Commission | Email: BasutuA@africa-union.org

For media inquiries, please contact:

Mr. Gamal Eldin Ahmed A. Karrar | Senior Communication Officer | Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | E-mail: GamalK@africa-union.org

Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | E-mail:

DIC@africa-union.org

Web: www.au.int | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia | **Follow Us:** [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)