

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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In the face of increased availability and use of psychoactive substances on the continent of Africa especially among youth, women and children, the African Union Commission (AUC) organised a webinar to engage youth on drug use prevention in commemoration of the International Youth Day 2024 celebrated 12th of August.

Dubbed “*African Union Youth Indaba on Drug Use Prevention*” under the theme “*Leveraging Africa’s demographic dividend for sustainable development: Youth engagement in substance use prevention*”, the webinar was jointly organised by the AUC in collaboration with the US State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), and the Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Programme.

The Webinar witnessed the participation of youth across the continent and was addressed by Mr. George Ochieng, Co-chair of the African Civil Society Forum on Drugs, Mr. Maxwell Matewera, Program officer, UNODC Malawi, Dr Abel Basutu, Senior Drug Control Programme Officer, African Union Commission, and Ms Dichen Choden, Programme Officer, Drug Advisory Programme, Colombo Plan.

Their remarks focused on engaging youth as leaders and partners in substance use prevention. According to the 2023 report of the African Union’s Pan-African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (PAENDU), about 70% of people who sought treatment for substance use and related mental health disorders (SUDs) on the continent were aged 15 to 34 years old. In addition, children as young as nine years old reportedly sought treatment for SUDs implying early initiation of substance use in some settings.

“The question that confronts us is whether the blessing of having the youngest population in the world presents a demographic dividend or burden for Africa,” remarked Dr Basutu. He emphasized the need to amplify youth voices as prevention influencers and effectively engaging youth as leaders or partners in planning, executing implementing, and/or evaluating substance use prevention programming towards health, security and socio-economic wellbeing of African citizens espoused in Agenda 2063 – the Africa We want.

Ms Dichen Choden (Ms), highlighted the Declaration of the Fourth Global Forum for Youth Leaders in Drug Use Prevention held in Thessaloniki, Greece (23-27 June 2024) which noted that “...the youth of Africa are concerned that despite youth making up most of the population, youth engagement and participation in implementation has been minimal and non-existent in many cases. We ask that the youth of African be engaged at every level of policy development, decision-making and programme implementation”.

Mr Ochieng and Mr Matewera both spoke on the World Drug Report which revealed increased availability and use of psychoactive substances trafficked into the continent and also produced locally. They implored youth to make themselves relevant through involvement in upstream prevention programmes in their communities.

Several youth spoke of the need for robust prevention infrastructure including the training of prevention professionals who work with youth in youth development and youth/adult partnerships.

The Webinar was held just a few days after the Fifth Ordinary Session of African Union Ministers of Health, Nutrition, Population and Drug Control (05-09 August 2024) which called on the African Union Commission to establish an internship/volunteer programme for youth in drug control and crime prevention as well as a media-fellowship/network of practitioners in media-based prevention to facilitate dissemination of factual information on the subject.

The Commission is currently facilitating the establishment of national youth corps in drug prevention and integrating traditional and religious leaders in drug demand reduction to widen the reach of community interventions among other programmes. Mr Aliyu Usman Mukhtar, a Youth Leader and representative, African Union Youth Forum on Drug Use Prevention moderated the discussion.

Youth engagement in drug control and crime prevention is a key pillar of the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019-2025).

For more on the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019-2025), visit [AFRICAN UNION PLAN OF ACTION ON DRUG CONTROL AND CRIME PREVENTION \(2019-2025\) | African Union \(au.int\)](#)

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