

WHO WILL END THE DRUG WAR? A WHITE PAPER ON THE ROLE OF RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS IN NIGERIA

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Introduction:

In June 1971, US President Nixon declared “a war on drugs”. Most African countries, including the most populous country in Africa–Nigeria, replicated the US-adopted and -encouraged research modalities, legal framework and law enforcement techniques. This study explores the potential role of relevant stakeholders in Nigeria in ending the war on drugs.

Methods:

A focus group was held among key stakeholders across five domains including health care professionals, media personnel, legal representatives, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and youth in Calabar, Nigeria. Each organizations sent 5 representatives each. Groups roles were driven using flip charts, card boards and the conversation was recorded. The recordings were transcribed by two volunteers and qualitative content analysis was done on the script by two researchers.

Results:

The participants reported that the current Nigerian drug policy was not evidence-based. Stakeholders expressed the belief that law enforcement were galvanized and enacted a war on drugs. Participants reported a prevalent perspective promulgated by the media of PWUDs as criminals and socially unproductive undercutting and rejecting public health strategies such as harm reduction. Participants offered diverse solutions ranging from overhaul of current policy in the country to media projecting accurate and respectful information on drug use and PWUD; they cited that addressing knowledge, representation of PWUD and stigma is key. Stakeholders suggested that “drug issues should not be criminal justice concern but should be of public health”. Criminalization of drug use was cited to drive prevalence of HIV, hepatitis C virus and other blood borne diseases in marginalized populations such as people in prisons and migrants.

Conclusion:

The role of stakeholders in ending the war on drugs reflects the interconnectedness between the health sector, media, government, youth and CSOs. This study calls for the adoption of evidence-based and multifaceted approach in specifics area of needs identified in the different sectors.

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