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A SUBMISSION TOTHE **COMMITTEE ON YOUTH, SPORT AND CHILD MATTERS** ON THE TOPIC OF **DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG THE YOUTHS IN ZAMBIA**

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**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AAZ – ActionAid Zambia

CDF – Constituency Development Fund

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

DEC – Drug Enforcement Commission

NDP – National Development Plan

NLTV – National Long Tern Vision

S.I. – Statutory Instrument

# ABOUT ACTIONAID ZAMBIA

ActionAid Zambia (AAZ) is part of ActionAid International, which is a global movement of people working together to further human rights and eradicate poverty for all. It works in Africa, Asia, Europe, and America to eliminate poverty and the inequalities and injustices that cause it. In Zambia, ActionAid is currently implementing the 2023-2028 Country Strategic Paper (CSP), which focuses on five (3) Strategic Priorities namely, Environmental Sustainability and Climate Justice, Civic Participation and State Accountability and Transformative Youth Led Engagement.

Under its third strategic priority, ActionAid implements and fosters youth-led transformative action and programming through its youth hub, the **Global Platform Zambia**, which led the development and preparation of this memorandum.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Zambia is a youthful country, with approximately 74% of its population being under the age of 30, 28% of which are aged between 15 to 29 years old. The plight of drug and substance abuse among youths is a global health concern, whose impacts are cutting across sectors and issues. According to the UNODC’s 2023 World Drug Report, 70% of people in treatment for drug and substance abuse in Africa are under the age of 35. To bring it home, according to the Former Zambia Drug Enforcement Commissioner, Mary Chirwa, 50% of the drug abuse cases recorded in the first quarter of 2022 had been among school going children. Young people in Zambia are notably consuming drugs, with the most abused being alcohol, cannabis, heroin, tobacco, codeine which is mostly accessed through a cough syrup called Benylin, and other concoctions such as ‘volo’, a combination of heroin and cannabis.

This paper therefore seeks to make an appraisal of the efforts of the government and other stakeholders and actors in addressing the rising scourge of drug and substance among youths in Zambia. It will ascertain the adequacy of the policy and legal framework supporting programs against drug and substance abuse among young people, appreciate current government interventions as well as the role of state and non-state actors, outline the challenges in combatting the vice, and lastly, make recommendations for improving efforts in addressing drug and substance abuse among young people in Zambia.

# POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK SUPPORTING PROGRAMMES AGAINST DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

The Constitution of Zambia amendment of 2016, in section 235 (b) provides for the establishment of the Drug Enforcement Commission (DEC), whose mandate is to apart from investigating, provide oversight and control of the use and trafficking of illicit drugs and substances. The DEC is the state’s primary institution for curbing illicit drug use, abuse trafficking and is operationalized by the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 2021.The legislation that supports programmes against drug and substance among young people are:

The previously mentioned Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 2021, which in section 4 (d) emphasizes the use of special measures and strategies for the prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of children and youth who are victims of drug abuse.

The Controlled Substances Act of 2023 in section 38 subsection 1 provides for the deterrence of the sale of controlled substances to children, some of which are addictive and can lead to abuse.

The Children’s Code Act of 2022, which in section 20 states that ‘A person shall not subject a child to the use, production, trafficking or distribution of hallucinogens, alcohol, tobacco products, drugs or precursor chemicals.’ In section 170 (h), the act mandates the provision of treatment, rehabilitation, and counselling services for children proven to be abusing drugs.

The Mental Health Act of 2019, which could be used to explicitly support programmes that address drug and substance addiction among young people, provided that drug and substance addiction is explicitly included in the definitions of mental illness as outline in the act. As well as a close that mandates the National Mental Health Council to implement drug counselling and rehabilitation programmes.

Other laws and legislation that enable interventions include the Public Health Act of 2020, which should be more explicit towards the proactive prevention non-communicable diseases caused by drug and substance abuse. While others are the Tobacco Act of 2022, as well as the and the Tobacco Control Bill of 2020, which will address the widespread use and abuse of tobacco among young people in Zambia.

Among the policies that inform or support programmes that address drug and substance abuse among young people are the eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) which speaks of strengthening public health through mental health and substance abuse management, the National Health Policy that aligns with the National Long-Term Vision (Vision 2023) and the National Health Strategy for 2023 -2028. Further, the National Youth Policy of 2015 also provides for strategies for healthy living among youths, of which drug and substance abuse are cited. The Zambia Education Curriculum Framework of 2023, the National Free Education Policy, the National Standards and Guidelines for Youth Friendly Health Services, the National Alcohol Policy of 2018 and its accompanying implementation plan, and the National Budget, which through the allocation of resources, operationalizes the interventions.

As it is said, the mere existence of a service, policy or legislation does not reflect its quality and efficacy. The above legislations and policies do have gaps in progress and implementation, some of which are highlighted below:

* The Children’s Code Act of 2022 in section 20, does not state any consequences for persons who abrogate the provision, making it of no effect. The Controlled Substances Act of 2023 in section 38 does speak to the consequences in part, but there is need to harmonize the two legislations.
* The use of the word ‘unknowingly’ in section 36 of the Liquor Licensing Act of 2011 allows for liquor traders to continue to sale to underage persons or children in the pretext of ignorance. The Act under section 36 provides that a licensed vendor shall not knowingly sell or deliver intoxicating liquor to a child.
* The Tobacco Control Bill is yet to be enacted since the bill was first presented in Parliament in 2020.
* The Mental Health Act of 2019 provides for the establishment of a National Mental Health Council, which to this date has not been put in place. Its establishment will foster the development of interventions that address mental health issues among young people, which time and again have been cited to be a cause for drug and substance abuse.
* Noting that sport and recreation have been noted to be effective in keeping young people engaged and away from drug and substance abuse, the resources allocated to the sector in the national budget do not reflect a commitment to address the vice. In both the 2023 and 2024 budgets, only 0.3% of the budget was allocated to sports and recreation.

# MEASURES PUT IN PLACE BY GOVERNMENT TO ADDRESS DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Currently, very little to no measures have been noted to be taken by the government apart from the policies and legislations that have been highlighted above. There are some efforts such as sensitizations and education campaigns aimed at mitigating against drug and substance abuse by various government agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Commission (DEC). Its worth mentioning that facilities such as play parks that used to be managed by the local authorities in most communities helped to deter drug and substance abuse. This was because many young people were preoccupied with different activities in the play parks and had no time to engage in drugs and substance abuse. Unfortunately, most of the land that housed the play parks was sold or leased to private entities majority of whom opted to invest in other ventures such as bars and shopping malls.

The government made commitments in 2022 to ensure that in the 2023 budget an allocation is made towards the construction and establishment of the National Rehabilitation Center, which is yet to be done, even for the 2024 budget. Another commitment was to establish the Drug and Substance Control Policy, yet also to be put in place.

# THE ROLE OF STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS IN ADDRESSING DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG YOUTHS IN ZAMBIA

**The Role of State Actors**

The role of the **Drug Enforcement Commission** as a state actor, as highlighted in section 4 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 2021 includes:

* (a) prevent, investigate and control the supply and demand of a drug and precursor chemicals;
* (c) provide counselling and rehabilitation services to drug addicts in consultation with the ministry responsible for health;
* (g) develop strategies for the prevention of abuse of drugs and ensure the treatment and rehabilitation of victims of drug abuse with particular emphasis on special measures for children and youths;
* (g) promote and coordinate policies for the control of drug trafficking, drug abuse and money laundering; and
* (j) maintain a national database on drug trafficking, abuse, money laundering and other related information.

The role of the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) is to impose a sin tax on all legalized but abused drugs and substances making them expensive for young people to purchase or access.

The role of the local authorities and the police is to enforce legislation such as the Liquor Licensing Act of 2011 and the S.I. No. 86 of 2021 through the frequent patrolling of bars, nightclubs, liquor stores and other similar establishments to ensure adherence.

The role of the Social Welfare Department is to ensure that children and youths are kept from living on the street, provide interventions, respond to alerts on child drug and substance abuse and taking action accordingly, as well as to ensure that the rights of children as provided for in the Children’s Code Act of 2022, are respected.

**The Roles of Non-state Actors**

The role of the private sector is to establish affordable and well-resourced rehabilitation centers that meet the provided standards and guidelines as provided for by the Health Professionals Council of Zambia. It also has a responsibility to make ethical and socially responsible advertising of their products, as well as to adhere to the Zambian laws and legislation such as the Liquor Licensing Act of 2011. It further has a responsibility through CSR to educate the public on drug abuse as well as to establish platforms and facilities that contribute to the reduction of the vice.

The role of The Church is to provide education and awareness on drug and substance abuse, as well as recreational activities, guidance and counselling to victims of drug and substance abuse.

The role of families and friends is to educate young people on drug and substance abuse and its dangers, as well as refer them to the necessary health care centers, counsellors and rehabilitation centers.

The role of the media to also raise awareness on drugs and their dangers, to make aware of the laws, legislation and policies that address the vice, as well as to cover stories that communicate the dangers and effects of drug abuse on young people, families, communities and the nation at large.

The role of civil society organizations such as ActionAid Zambia and the Global Platform, is to:

* Advocate for appropriate budget allocations to the sectors and programs that play a key role in addressing drug and substance abuse among youths.
* To provide opportunities for volunteerism, from which youths can learn skills, gain work experience, network, and overall prevent idleness.
* To provide for safe recreational spaces such as the Global Platform Zambia Youth Hub from which youth can meet and share their experiences with substance abuse, as well as co-create ideas for their development.
* To provide training and capacity building on drugs and other related issues.
* Advocate for gender responsiveness in the implementation of policies and interventions that address drug and substance abuse among young people in Zambia.
* Conduct awareness raising activities such as community town hall meetings, school assemblies, public lectures, and other engagements, with young local people and relevant stakeholders to discuss and draw possible solutions to the vice of illicit drug and substance abuse.
* Conduct stakeholder engagement meetings to identify and address the bottlenecks that exist in drug demand and supply reduction efforts in Zambia, as well as collaborate with them.
* Tracking and analyzing the legislation, policies and guidelines addressing drug and substance abuse among youths, presenting analyses and recommendations that ensure the alignment of the different instruments, as well as their effective and strict enforcement.
* To collaborate with and support grassroots organizations that are addressing drug and substance abuse among young people with resources and capacity building.
* Conduct research in order to gain in-depth understanding on the causes, prevalence effects, to mention but a few, of drug and substance abuse among youths in Zambia.

# CHALLENGES FACED IN ADDRESSING DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

* There is a lack of compliance of sections 27, 29 and 36 of the Liquor Licensing Act of 2011 and the Statutory Instrument No. 86 of 2021, allowing for easy access to alcohol, which is the most abused among young people in Zambia. Young people have access to alcohol from unlicensed persons and areas, at any time of the day, and even when they are obviously underage.
* Further, sections 33 and 34 of the Liquor Licensing Act of 2011 are also not strictly enforced as there is widespread illegal production of unlicensed liquors and brews, as well as the production of counterfeit alcohol, both of which distort markets and make alcohol affordable and more easily accessible to young people.
* Limited information on drug and substance abuse is incorporated into the Zambian school curricula.
* Young female victims of drug abuse rarely seek help due to stigma, resulting from the notion that illicit drug and substance abuse is a masculine habit.
* There is poor reporting and documentation on youth and adolescent health as well as drug and substance abuse in Zambia. DEC does not have its publications in public domain. Further, the data that is shared by DEC is not disaggregated by age or gender, making it challenging to get true numbers and appreciate the prevalence of drug and substance abuse among young people, and the extent of the problem for effective decision-making.
* Recreational tobacco in its various forms such as shisha, snuff (insunko), cigarettes, and vapes (electronic tobacco) are very easily accessible and sometimes heavily advertised.
* It has been noted that young people living on the street use drugs such as ‘jenkem’ to keep warm. Despite efforts to get them to their homes and shelters, they continue to get back to the streets, making it difficult to address the vice.
* It is further challenging to address drug and substance abuse by children living on the streets, as well as out of school youth due to the lack of establishments and platforms to bring together these young persons.
* There still is no state-owned rehabilitation center from which victims of drug abuse can receive affordable rehabilitation services.

# ROCOMMENDATIONS

* Revise section 20 of the Children’s Code Act of 2022 to include the consequences for providing or engaging a child in illicit drug use, and/or trafficking. This will deter people, even close family members and relatives from exposing children to drug and substance abuse.
* Section 36 of the Liquor Licensing Act of 2011 should be revised to make it a provision for persons who purchase liquor to produce identification to ascertain their age, as opposed to leaving it to personal judgement.
* Local authorities and the police should conduct frequent and random patrols of bars, liquor stores, taverns, nightclubs and other similar establishments to ensure that they are not serving children. If found wanting, revoke their licenses, and or fine them.
* Strictly enforce sections 27, 29, 33 and 34, of the Liquor Licensing Act of 2011 and the S.I. No. 86 of 2021 to ensure the controlled supply of alcohol, which is subsequently available to young people.
* Expedite the establishment of the National Rehabilitation Center.
* Establish the Drug and Substance Control Policy to guide and balance drug demand and supply reduction efforts by the state and other actors, taking into account international instruments.
* Establish the National Mental Health Council, which will complement efforts of the DEC, Ministries and other actors in drug and substance abuse prevention.
* The government should establish programmes that deliberately and specifically aim at addressing drug and substance abuse so as to complement the efforts of DEC and other stakeholders such as civil society and the private sector.
* The CDF guidelines should have an allocation towards sports and recreational facilities such as skills training centers, which will be instrumental in providing youth with employability skills and crafts and reducing idleness among young people, which has been cited to cause drug and substance abuse.
* Increase the national budgetary allocation to sport and recreation from 0.3% to at least 0.5% of the national budget.
* Intensify efforts to keep children and youths from living on the streets.
* Raise awareness of the laws and regulations on child illicit drug and substance use, to deter commission of illegal acts.

# CONCLUSION

ActionAid Zambia and its Global Platform acknowledge and commend the government and the state institutions for the work and efforts made to address drug and substance abuse among youths in Zambia. We however do recognize that there is so much room for improvement and anticipate that the challenges and recommendations stated herein will be addressed and adopted for better and improved interventions that address drug and substance abuse among youths in Zambia.