

## **NOTHING FOR US WITHOUT US- COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP FOR DRUG POLICY ADVOCACY GAINS IN KENYA.**

### **Authors:**

Gatonye R<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Women in Response to HIV/AIDS and Drug Addiction

### **Background:**

The most notable win in drug policy reform in Kenya since advocacy efforts began in 2012 was the amendment of the Narcotics Act in 2022, decriminalizing needle and syringe provision. This was attributed to multi-stakeholder efforts that centered people who use drugs (PWUD). However, community-led drug policy advocacy remains minimal due to pervasive stigma normalizing the idea that PWUD lack capacity to organize and advocate; limiting communities' abilities to effect meaningful and lasting change.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a United Nations (UN) mechanism that presents an opportunity to hold member states accountable for the advancement of human rights. Unlike other key populations, people who use drugs had never made an independent submission to this mechanism and have had little success in holding the Government of Kenya to task to propagate evidence and rights-based drug responses.

### **Description of model of care/intervention/program:**

In 2024, Women in Response to HIV/AIDS and Drug Addiction (WRADA) led the development of a community-led UPR shadow report for Kenya advocating for increased government investment in harm reduction services and the enactment of the Harm Reduction Bill-2024. Engaging stakeholders from service delivery, community, and policy spaces, we developed and submitted the first ever UPR shadow report by and for people who use drugs in Kenya, and presented it to UN Member States at the 49<sup>th</sup> UPR Pre-session in Geneva in 2025.

### **Effectiveness:**

This activity sparked an important shift in Kenya's drug policy advocacy strategy going forward. Civil society organisations have since acknowledged the expertise of PWUD in implementing high-level advocacy, and national PWUD networks have been empowered with effective advocacy skills.

### **Conclusion and next steps:**

WRADA and her partners will conduct supplementary advocacy on commitments made by some UN member states to make harm reduction recommendations to the Kenyan Government.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

This work was enabled through financial support from the International Network of People who use Drugs.