

## WOMEN WHO USE DRUGS IN TANZANIA

2021

*SALVAGE is working for women and youth with children who are engaged on drug using*

Women living with HIV from key populations are doing extraordinary work in the face of extra stigma and discrimination. For example, work on drug use rights and harm reduction specifically in relation to women is carried out in Tanzania by Salvage, a sister organization of TaNPUD, coordinated by Happy Assan.

Doroth Hassan shared who has pass away within few months from the time when the record of her story was taken “Before the pandemic, life was a bit simple and better somehow as we were used to work on daily bases and as we were used to work conducting sex work and other sort of small scale works available within streets and beach areas or surroundings before the upcoming f COVID 19 diseases but since the pandemic we have been struggling as everything has turn around to be very hard even sex work is double hard and we face double stigma and discrimination as well as harassment and brutality with family rejections and tolerance from society. I used to do activities at the beach, such as cleaning fish, helping people load and clean their boats, and they would pay me. I would help my daughter wash her clothes; I would escort her to school and cook food for her. Life was simple,” said Doroth Hassan as she sits in the office of SALVAGE, a sister organization of the Tanzania Network for People who Use Drugs (TaNPUD), in Kigamboni, Dar es Salaam.

Ms Hassan would normally provide for herself and her daughter by doing sex work and other informal jobs, such as the work on the beach. But this has become a challenge since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Now life has changed. I live in fear and worry. People who I worked for don’t want to pay, with the excuse that they have no cash because of the coronavirus. Everything changed. Life is tough. Clients disappeared, vanished. And the few who are still coming cheat; they pay less for sex,” said Ms Hassan.

She is not alone in her worry. Most of the women who use drugs in Dar es Salaam survive in the same way as Ms Hassan does, by doing sex work, trading and doing other jobs in the informal sector. They live in camps for people who use drugs or in informal and densely populated settlements.

With support from UNAIDS and other partners, local community-based organizations, including TaNPUD and SALVAGE, have been able to provide some relief to women in the camps and settlements in Dar es Salaam.

Happy Assan – I am so sad to have lost so many friends and members of my community (many being women and few we are in number compare from men users) from the start of the pandemic to date and we still keep on losing so many day to day. TB is also another issues leaving aside the COVID 19 Pandemic, PWUID and Women are used to the life style of sharing cigarrates and other smoke joints such as cocktails of Marijuana and Heroin as well as pipes and with COVID 19 and TB it takes many of us simple as if we aren’t humans just because there is so much lacking for us leaders of PWUID to achieve in order to help and support our community.

“Together TaNPUD and SALVAGE raised awareness, provided buckets, soap and food with other hygiene materials to PWUID and women users as well as youth users in the community, shared

information materials of how one can prevent herself or how society who reads the leaflets provided by SALVAGE and TaNPUD can understand how to prevent from COVID 19, why us why do we end like we aren't humans, being stigmatized, rejected and tolerated by families, communities and society? Why always women is the one who is so wrong? Have you ever asked yourself What if it was me?

No one seems to know what we are going through, many thinks we are doing what we like purposely but that isn't what we feel or live , I do know there are different stages of drug using , some do it for leisure, some do it to be able to get certain relaxation of mind only but for us who mostly now rely on drugs every day and almost every after four or three hours of one use we must get another join or jab it is very different we are struggling and suffering we need help so to survive and live at list better and without so much agony. I feel so bad when I look on my kids, my life how it has turned around and everything, I just can't find better words to express this anymore, I have spoken and spoken but up now little is reaching us more than the facilities were its not even where we are respected or given respect and being served with dignity. I wish that Happy someday can be able to achieve much support so she can build this re creational area for us were we will go find our humanity back, by getting treatment so we can get off drugs, be given or taught life skills so after there we can be able to do work of our own and earn an income to feed ourselves and our children. We are growing older day by day and I always think what will happen if I be so old not to even be able to walk? How will I survive?

SALVAGE has for the past three years been providing shelter space for women and youth of all genders at Kigamboni area, we support women, youth who have issues with place to sleep for at list 4 month for one who have issues of place plus one meal and breakfast, gender violence challenges support and information shared and sessions for women and girl youth conducted at office and at the shelter with Income generating activities and skills provided with HIV and TB prevention gears and sessions of information and harm reduction conducted, women mentored on grouping up and forming own small org and provided with leadership skills as well as financial skills and peer to peer mobilization and much more including peer support and peer talks and phone support with overdose prevention and support skills provided plus prevention of STI, and other infections prevention education and support on education and information of how they can deal with such challenges and other different issues as they always share different challenges and issues that affects their wellbeing and recovery as well as cause them to decide to remain active users at times issues, SALVAGE sometimes faces difficulties supporting women with children as one can have as many as four to seven children and as said sometimes a women can seek shelter for herself and children too and this gives us difficulties sometimes and cause us to make difficult decisions of finding the families of the women so they can support on taking the children but sometimes those women have no one at all and this brings headache but what is there must be solved and we do it in any how that we can manage. Other times there happens to come many who seek for shelter and it got to be over whelming so we were not able to sustain the larger group of women, youth and even male users who wanted to have shelter, so we had to change our direction from anyone to most in need, SALVAGE also rented additional four rooms on other districts, were women and youth in need can go get rest time when they need, but because land loads get to be frustrated or angry when they see people gets in and off the rooms we also had to change the strategy and demanded our clients to stay quietly, no in and offs frequently, no more than 7 people at once in the room (meaning if there are already seven people who sleeps in the room no other can be allowed to sleep until the there is one or more who leave then others can get in so to avoid troubles with land lords). SALVAGE also conducts life skills sessions and workshops to women and youth so to allow them

to learn life skills that will help them be able to start their own small scale businesses when they get capitals. About 45 women now do have their own small scale businesses after they learned from SALVAGE, have changed their behaviors as well they have formed up small groups of up to 30 women with youth and now there are four groups which 3 are already registered and 1 waiting to be registered at municipality level. This allows the women and youth mentored to have capacity to also join on other platforms that are conducted by other CSOs and other partners. Some have been given peer work on other orgs and some are doing with us as peers and outreach when there are such kinds we oprioritis our members. SALVAGE conducts outreach on areas were our peers advise us to reach out and by this way we reach out to most marginalize women and youth often, the need is still so huge and we need to have additional resources so t be able to add more of what we see is being needed.

2021 SALVAGE has conducted 3 need assessments, one in secondary schools, other within the community and society too so to understand the issues that women who use drugs and their families go through, within schools we learned that there are so many youth girls who drops out of schools because they get into needy situations where they get boyfriends who lies to them that they will help them with their padlock needs, fares and school pocket money but soon when they get those youth girl pregnant they leave them and that become the end of the education of those girls. Some ends up joining bad behavioral groups were they start to use marijuana and in the end a join in groups that use heroin without knowing and they fall into ghettos were they then get to be chased from family homes were they were taken care of and become sex workers without knowledge even of how to conduct sex working business something that leads for those younger girls to acquire HIV and other blood borne infectious diseases. The number of drop outs of girls seemed higher than that of boys but boys too falls out of school.

SALVAGE is advocating and representing women and youth nationally and Globally and we have now engage with International org and groups of women who supports and help SALVAGE members to learn best ways of how to present and advocate for women who are within prisons, up now SALVAGE has mentored and engaged about 7 women led org within this workshops.

SALVAGE is at the forefront to advocate and raise the youth and women's users' voice but there are different challenges working with women as they are being driven by their husbands and partners often, this gets SALVAGE to work in difficulties at times but our ambition of supporting women and youth is higher and we can never let the challenges destroy the good work done and we shall always do our best to make the women and youth girls with boys voice heard.

TaNPU always advocates for our health rights," said Oliver Kinanda, a person who previously used drugs and is now on opioid substitution therapy and is a member of SALVAGE and works as an outreach worker of SALVAGE and as a peer educator at MAT Temeke Clinic.

Ms Kinanda also volunteers at the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) clinic in Temeke, where she lives. Here, she informs people on prevention of tuberculosis (TB) and takes samples from clients for TB screening. With the onset of COVID-19, however, her tasks have shifted.

"As a peer educator I have knowledge of prevention of COVID-19 and provide education and awareness. Together with other people who use drugs I also got help; for example, face masks," said Ms Kinanda. She has also received information and support from other local community-based organizations, including donations to the community and the clients she works with in the Temeke MAT clinic.

Ms Hassan received the same support.

“TaNPUD is raising a voice on our behalf, and SALVAGE, as the sister organization of TaNPUD, supporting women and mentor women and youth on different topics and advocate for our challenges and issues affecting us, has been linking us to care and treatment with other services and providing shelter, food and hygiene support to us,” she said.

The support, distributed with financial and material assistance from UNAIDS, will help to alleviate some of the consequences of the global pandemic, even as the effects of COVID-19 are slowly wearing off in the United Republic of Tanzania.

Happy Assan, the Coordinator of TaNPUD, said this support has so far reached 55 families of women who use drugs in Dar es Salaam.

“The support covered food and hygiene needs. It also provided women with the ability to stay at home instead of going out, for example to do sex work, and to negotiate less risky sex. The support reduced fear and worry about meeting the food needs of families with children,” said Ms Assan.

Many of the women who use drugs are living with or at risk of HIV infection and depend on reliable access to treatment and care, including harm reduction services. Despite the support in the community, some services that the women who use drugs depend on have been halted.

“Harm reduction services have been interrupted; they are less. No condom distribution or other commodities, only needle and syringes distribution. At least now SALVAGE is helping with sanitary items. At hospital there is no other support; HIV treatment only,” explained Ms Hassan.

Ms Hassan and Ms Kinanda both recount facing increased stigma during the pandemic—some derived from unintended consequences of the support, since the face masks they received were a certain colour, making the wearer identifiable in the local community as a person who uses drugs. Stigma and discrimination at hospitals is also reportedly high, adding to the difficulties of accessing services. But most difficult is the financial loss because of the pandemic.

As Ms Kinanda puts it, “No clients, and no pay. Financially it is hard because my clients say they have no cash because the coronavirus has affected their jobs. I continue providing awareness and education to the community and my family too. I financially suffer, but what can I do other than continue pushing on?”

From 2018 to 2021 SALVAGE has conducted more than 7 workshops to women and youth on HIV/TB and Hepatitis so women and youth can understand on how to prevent themselves from new HIV /TB infectious diseases with Hepatitis and other diseases too as well as conducted sessions and workshops on leadership skills and mentored more than 30 women from 5 groups that are women led groups on leadership and resource and community mobilization. From the past three years to date 4 groups have been supported to register under municipality level as well as provided support to meet when they need at SALVAGE office so they can talk and do there work at the office.

SALVAGE has been able to change more than 90 women behaviors and they got re united with their families too.

SALVAGE has been able to re present women's voice at Global and share issues that affects the wellbeing of a women and youth here in Tanzania. SALVAGE with the support from GI has been able to conduct shelter space for women and youth as well few male users who were very much in need of shelter support. SALVAGE conducts outreaching activities to camps, hotspots, homes and streets and link women and youth to HIV centers and TB clinics as well as supports food for the needy women and youth, conducts surveys and assessments within community and documents their issues, challenges and advocate for them when we get a chance and opportunities to do so. SALVAGE has distributed several harm reduction materials that were printed within different times for the community and shares information oral and by phone as well. SALVAGE helps women with issues of gender base violence and help them know how they can stand for their rights within families too.

SALVAGE has been doing so much from its being formed to date and we share a side attached document that has pictures too for more sharing's.

WE encourage bigger org to remember SALVAGE needs your technical support as well as financial support so remember to support SALVAGE a women and youth who use drugs led org.

*Suggested citation: SALVAGE (2021) Women who use drugs in Tanzania*