

PHOTO-VOICE

True Life Stories
of Drug Users in
Pictures



#WEAREPEOPLE
#DrugPolicyReform

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"At a time, I decided to have an abortion at 7 months due to the constant stigma..."



"After returning to school, my classmates started avoiding me since I had been to a psychiatric home..."

"Women often experience intimate partner violence. Many of these cases go unreported due to fear of further abuse by their partners."



"People who use Drugs (PWUDs) are mostly vulnerable youths who get caught in the hype of peer pressure or through misinformation from their peers."

"Now I am HIV positive and selling drugs to survive."



"I became HIV positive. Now even as I know my status I still share."

"When I was giving birth to my baby, the nurses were very harsh on me the kept calling me names."



"For many young female drug users, sex becomes a transaction"

"I have been surviving on my own ever since, living in a batcher and selling drugs to my friends to survive."



Access to Treatment



While there is high treatment need among People Who Use Drugs, the criminal nature of drug control deters many people with drug problems from accessing treatment due to fear of arrest, stigma and discrimination...

Until drug use is seen as a public health issue and treated as such, we will not be able to bridge the gap in meeting the needs for treatment and care for people who use drugs

As a young pregnant woman without a husband I find it really difficult to access ante-natal services as the nurses discriminate against me and call me names making me feel unwanted. At a time, I decided to have an abortion at 7 months due to the constant stigma I was getting each time I went to the clinic. But it was not successful. I eventually lost the baby due to complications from my attempt to abort it and I am now in constant pain and need drugs to function.

“At a time, I decided to have an abortion at 7 months due to the constant stigma...”





Forced Rehabilitation

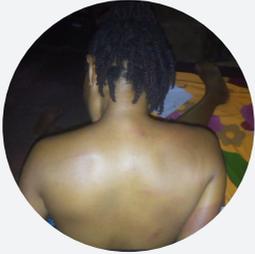
“After returning to school, my classmates started avoiding me since I had been to a psychiatric home...”



Have you ever wondered what goes on behind the closed doors of many treatment and rehabilitation facilities? Many times, drug users experience human rights violation and poor treatment while undergoing drug rehabilitation, instead of evidence-informed public health strategy...

Drug Treatment and Care will be ineffective if we continue to ignore the unorthodox treatment and experiences of people in treatment facilities.

I got admitted into the university at a very young age. I felt lonely and uncool so I started rolling with the popular girls on Campus who were doing drugs. One night, the security guard busted me smoking weed in the toilet and the management referred me to a psychiatric hospital for 6 months. I did not have access to my family and friends. I felt emotionally abused by staff who made me feel I was the worst person on earth. This made me unbothered about the treatment, I just wanted the 6 months to pass. After returning to school, my classmates started avoiding me since I had been to a psychiatric home and they did not want to associate with a drug user. The school authority was always breathing down my neck, policing me around and conducting random search. Even after the “treatment” I still take drugs.



Gender Based Violence

Women often experience intimate partner violence. Many of these cases go unreported due to fear of further abuse by their partners. Cultural and religious norms also allow stigma and discrimination to thrive. Hence, these women continue to endure this ill-treatment without respite.

I got married at age 21 and gave birth to 2 female children. My husband wanted a male child and at some point stopped giving me money which made me to get a job. This terrible relationship affected me and i started taking drugs to calm myself. One night my husband returned home as usual but his dinner was

not ready and so he started beating me with his belt until I fainted and he ran away thinking he had killed me. I am tired of this marriage I want to pack my load and go because my life is in danger.



“Women often experience intimate partner violence. Many of these cases go unreported due to fear of further abuse by their partners.”



Drug Education

People who use Drugs (PWUDs) are mostly vulnerable youths who get caught in the hype of peer pressure or through misinformation from their peers.

This is why peer-led drug education is very effective especially among PWUDs enabling them to know the consequences of their decisions and how it affects their lives and community.
#SayKNOWtoDRUGS

After I got pregnant and I faced a lot of rejection from my friends and family. I continued in my lifestyle until I met a friend who I know also used to inject drugs but has now stopped I asked him how he did it and he introduced me to YouthRISE As a young girl, I was introduced to drugs by my boyfriend and soon after, we started injecting, he left me Nigeria Treatment Center, where we were educated about the dangers of using drugs. During my treatment, I was counseled and trained to become a community mobilizer and now my life is better as I help my fellow peers to make better life choices.







Arrest and Detention

The criminal justice response to drug use thrives at the expense of human rights and the health of people who use drugs, particularly the young population. The continuous arrest and imprisonment of drug users has been ineffective in addressing the drug challenge.

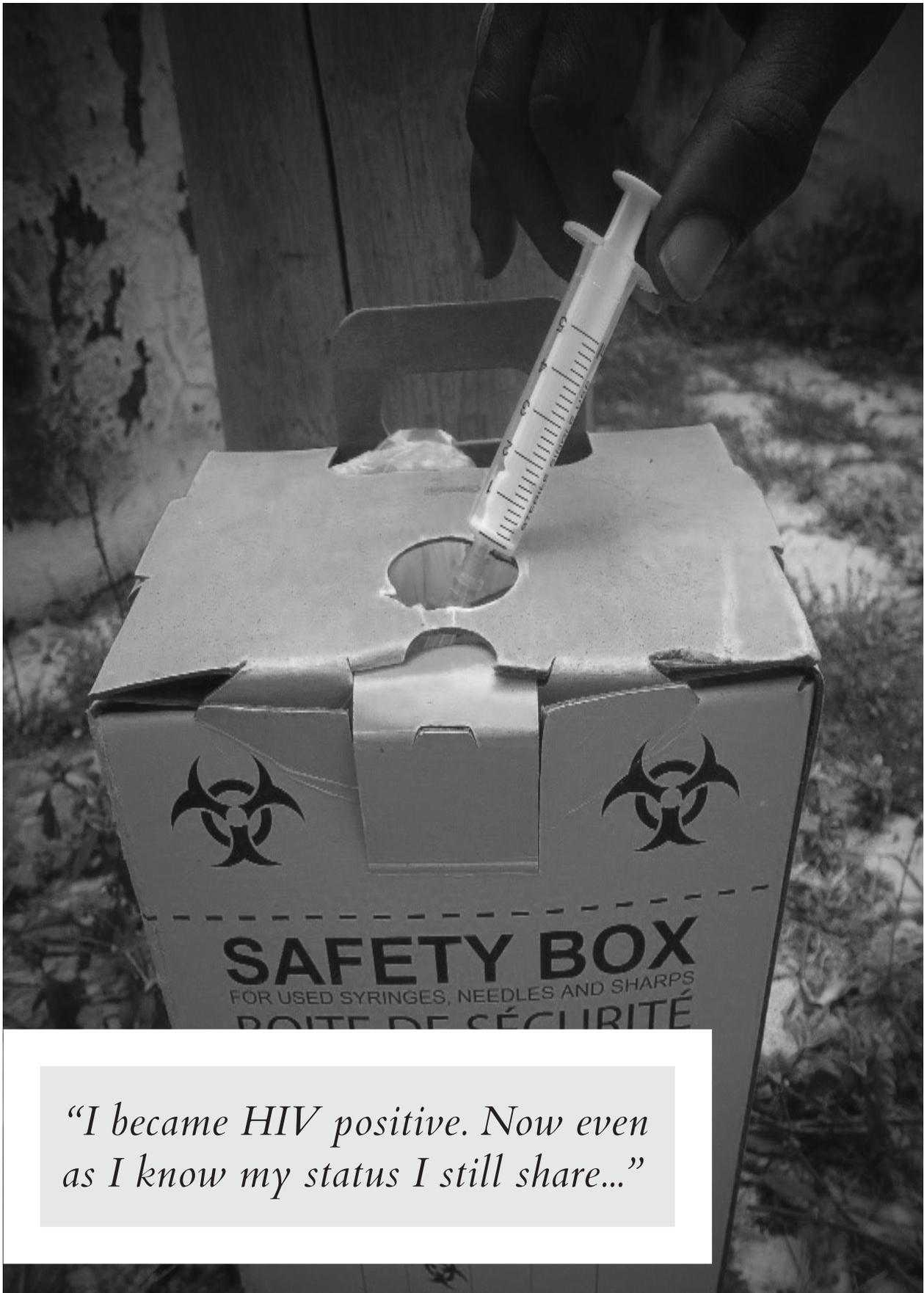
The ‘war on drugs’ is targeted at the poor and economically disadvantaged. Usually, a public health approach is considered when it concerns the rich but individuals at the base of the ladder are simply tagged criminals.

As a young youth growing in the slum, I liked the lifestyle of the “big boys” who could do anything they wanted and people either feared or avoided them. I thought that smoking cannabis would make me more like them but at my first try, the bunk was raided and we were all taken to the police station and asked to bail ourselves. As an orphan staying with my eldest brother who was just a bricklayer I was charged to court and ended up spending 2

years in Maiduguri prison called “CRACK” as most of the inmates were drugs users or brought there for drug-related crimes. During my time, learnt how to start dealing and also started injecting drugs. When I returned home I was a major drug seller in my area and used the money I made to even help my brother and his family. Prison didn’t help me, it only made me a worse person. Now I am HIV positive and selling drugs to survive.



*“Now I am HIV positive and
selling drugs to survive.”*



“I became HIV positive. Now even as I know my status I still share...”

Harm Reduction



Do you Know that ONE of FIVE high risk drug users in Nigeria, inject drugs? Are you also aware that HIV prevalence among this population is 28 times higher than among the rest of the population? Female drug users are even more at risk because it is a tradition that they are ‘second on the needle’ when it is passed around a group. We do a lot of work raising awareness on the dangers of needle sharing in the community, but without readily available clean needles and syringes, the problem persists. A Comprehensive Package of Harm Reduction Interventions is urgently needed.

I was a Dembgie fighter (traditional wrestler) I was introduced to drugs by my coach he told me it will give me the power to defeat my competitors. I became addicted to it and when I left the fighting profession I became heavily dependent on drugs so much

that I started sharing needles because they were scarce and expensive. Soon after, I became HIV positive. Now even as I know my status I still share because it is hard to get injections so it is the only way.



“ When I was giving birth to my baby, the nurses were very harsh on me they kept calling me names...”



Access to SRH

Everyone is entitled to access effective Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) care, especially pregnant female drug users. The discrimination towards them only makes their situation worse and gives no solution.

Health workers should be trained to respect and lend a helping hand so as to enable them take better life decisions.

#MyHealthMyRight

As a young female drug user, I got pregnant at 19, the father of my baby was also a drug user and stays in a batcher. I moved in with him because I was sent away from home by my uncle who I stayed with. I was not able to go to the clinic to check my pregnancy because I didn't have money and the few times I went to the clinic, the nurses used to insult me and call me names. This makes me feel that they do not like me and do not want to treat me. When I was giving birth to my baby, the nurses were very harsh on me they kept calling me names like "Ashawo" until I left the hospital. They looked down on me I will not advise anyone to go there.



Transactional Sex

“For many young female drug users, sex becomes a transaction”

For many young female drug users, sex becomes a transaction and they are exposed to abuse and sexual violence. These abuses go unreported due to fear of stigmatization and discrimination.

Until we address drug use as public health, human rights, and development issue, women will continue to be forced to put their health and wellbeing at risk in every ‘transaction.’



I am 20, I started using drugs at age 16. When my parents found out I was into drugs, they got angry and sent me out of the house. I didn't have money to get my usual fix, so I started dating one of my dealers to give me the drugs I want. Later I moved in with him and we agreed he would be "doing me" for me to have free drugs. I was one of the many girls he had this deal with. Each time I complained about his relationship with other girls, he

would get angry and beat me. One day I started feeling sick and had to visit the YouthRISE centre and realised I had been infected with a disease. Thank God for their support and treatment, I would have died. Now I know better and I am currently undergoing treatment to stop my drug use habit.



Family Neglect



Most people who use drugs are easily abandoned by friends and family which leads them to a life of uncertainty. This can cause them to turn to a life of crime or push them to more risky choices which can further impact them negatively.



My parents died when I was just 18 and my uncle took over my father's property and when he discovered I was using drugs, he claimed I was a cultist and called the police to arrest me. I ran away from home and settled in the bunk and I have been surviving on my own ever since, living in a batcher and selling drugs to my friends to survive.

“I have been surviving on my own ever since, living in a batcher and selling drugs to my friends to survive.”

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