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Criminalizing Poverty: How Current Drug Policies Harm Poor Communities

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Criminalizing Poverty: How Current Drug Policies Harm Poor Communities

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Harm Reduction is an approach to drug use aimed at decreasing the negative impacts of use:

- Accepts that drug use is a part of our society and chooses to minimize harms rather than disregard or condemn them.
- Recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, and other social inequalities affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with drug-related harm.
- Does not aim to minimize or ignore the actual danger associated with drug use.

DRUG POLICY IS ONE OF THE MOST OVERLOOKED DRIVERS OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN THE WORLD and current drug policies make it harder for individuals to obtain employment after prison due to criminal records.

Drug policy reform should:

Embrace harm-reduction policies and programs for the use and abuse of illicit substances **and** Adopt decriminalization/legalization policies for use and small-scale distribution

Ideally...

Decriminalization removes or lessens criminal punishment for drug use AND small-scale distribution, though civil penalties remain.

Legalization fully removes laws that ban the use of some (or most) drugs, and creates a legal, regulated market for these drugs.

CURRENT DRUG POLICY PERPETUATES POVERTY AROUND THE WORLD

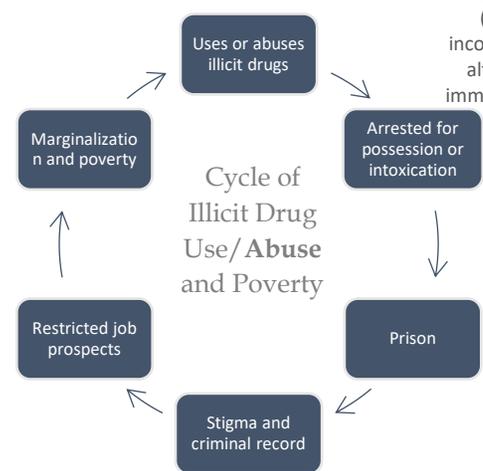


Decriminalization/ Legalization & Poverty

- Decriminalization and legalization can help reduce stigmatization of poor individuals for their drug use or small-scale distribution, while shifting monetary resources from law enforcement to better prevention and treatment programs for drug use.
- With less funding for law enforcement, more funding can be placed into poverty prevention and reduction efforts.
- Both approaches can result in better employment prospects for drug users and small-scale distributors, such as jobs within the legal drug industry.

Harm Reduction & Poverty

- HR helps to empower individuals living in poverty by not criminalizing their drug use or addiction, but rather providing them with proper resources and services to effectively assist them with their addiction.
- Drug users have a better chance of employment prospects after treatment due to not having a criminal record.



Steps to end the damage of the 'war on drugs'

| For governments | | | For the development sector | |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| STEP 1 | STEP 2 | STEP 3 | STEP 1 | STEP 2 |
| Decriminalise low-level engagement and end crop eradication | Consult affected communities on their needs | Increase state support for poverty reduction and public services | Advocate for moves away from prohibition towards alternatives such as legal regulation | Ensure reforms are pro-poor and bolster rather than undermine the health of marginalised communities |
| GOAL: Legal, regulated drugs markets that support public health | | | | |

