

Chapter 21

Happy's Story

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It was way back in 1999 when I started using deep. Because there were issues with police, this work of being with the community started back in school. So, after being in drugs, everything was done for me – no more school ... and at one point I was fed up with myself. Everyone kept talking and it was confusing, so I started thinking of doing my own thing.

There was this lady, another mama, from the municipality. She was the only one from the outside who used to listen to me meaningfully. One day she called me and started saying, 'can you tell me how it is with your drug use?' And I said, 'you want to know? Why?' And that was kind of cool, so I started telling her. She was like, 'yeah, it's good – you can help me'. She also shared part of her life with me, like her husband was like nuts and that really pained me. I said, okay, I'll join this mama. It seemed like her putting me there would also support her in some other way. For me, supporting someone else means a lot. So, I started teaching in workshops of the municipality.

In 2010, I heard about something ... and it was similar to what I do now, though I didn't know that I was doing harm reduction. Then in 2010, mama died, and I had no one with me. I was left alone. The boy was there for me to look after and I said, 'if mama gave me knowledge, then who will give this boy knowledge? Because I'm the one'. My family wanted to take him away from me when mama passed away, and I was like, 'no, you're not taking this boy away'. Anyway, I knew I'd stay because when I would look at him, I would wake up from my sleep. It was hard at the beginning, but I was doing some small business around the town, so I put food on the table. In the end, I joined the methadone clinic in 2011 ... and I was there for three years.

Then in 2013, that's when I joined the Network of People Who Use Drugs ... I started working as a coordinator at the network and it was hard. We had nothing at that time, but there was this person from France and she was cool. She

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started teaching me many things and getting me in touch with different people. In the end, we made it. We got the first grant from UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) to educate in 12 schools about harm reduction and effects of drug use and maternity/childcare – things like that. It went well, and when it was finishing, we got another grant from OSIEA (Open Society Institute East Africa) which was for two years. That's when I started being invited to different areas, getting to be known and getting to know other people.

After what happened this year to me and my team – to some of them – I really don't know why they are counting on me in my country now. There are some big leaders and they say, 'Oh, Happy you are doing a great job, really, it's kind of helping'. But then ... I was doing the *Support Don't Punish* initiative and they [the police] just jumped on me just because some motherfucker made a call. That was the excuse of the head of the intelligence because that's who came and caught me. They had guns and everything They were believing that there's some white people somewhere that are teaching me to do what I'm doing, which is not right. I'm a human. I know what I'm supposed to get, what are my rights, what are the rights of the people that I lead. It's totally unfair.

If you look at our constitution, it says if you're a Tanzanian, you're free to move as long you don't commit a crime, like stealing. I remember in 2011, we had this meeting in the parliament because we were amending some sections within the law, the drug bill. They took seven of our opinions, but it hasn't been put in place yet They say if you will be found with some amount [and] if you confess that you are a user then you'll be taken to a treatment centre, but it's not implemented yet. So, I can see our policies going against each other because the Ministry of Law says we need treatment and the law says, no, these are criminals that are supposed to be behind bars.

I saw it when we were caught. I had a colleague who has small kids, and she was really peaceful. She was crying all the time. I was in pain because of all those beatings, but I felt for her more. She was in agony for her child and never knew what would happen We were there [jail] for more than 30 hours. Someone brought my medication, I have to take my meds, and they said, 'No, get the hell out of here. You're not supposed to see Happy at all'. She said, 'Okay, I don't want to see her, just take these meds and give it to her'. They refused.

So, it's kind of shit. The policies are not friendly or the police We went to the academy, it's in KCMC (Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre) in Moshi, where they teach the police – the big academy for police. We educated more than 4,000 police, but it seems that we know no one.

There is really no law that speaks to sex work directly. It's just that when they see you somewhere, like in the street in the night standing with some friends, they'll just come and say you are in the wrong spot They will take you to this court, it's not a high court, but it's some sort of business people They will charge you a fine of 50,000 (Tanzanian shilling).

There was a colleague, a friend, and she was doing sex work and when they found her on the street one police motherfucker was just opening his zipper and saying, 'come, lick me'. It was really tough for her because the guy was in front

of everyone. What he demanded was, 'you will do this, and then you can go for the night and early in the morning, come back to the police'. It was really painful And another one [sex worker] was left with HIV. When she wanted to follow up, the police really turned the issue on her. He said, 'oh, this person came in and took off her clothes and forced me ...'. You know, it was like she was all over him while it was he who was all over her. He left her [HIV] positive.

These different places for selling [sex] are very high, medium and very low. If you go to a place called Manzese Uzuri, it's a piece of shit. It's like the slums and there it's less than a dollar to sleep with a girl – a beautiful girl. This male can treat this girl however he wants The police aren't friendly at all, because ... now that they learned that we are there to help each other they take them [sex workers] to another district ... so that it's not easy for us to trace where they are. There are many police stations, so when you go yourself they will get to threaten you, and some people were caught just because they followed their colleagues.

One day, there were people who were using drugs who were caught without possession of drugs. They were in the den, just on the beach where many things happen, not only drugs. They said, 'no, we were doing something else, carrying an icebox to the boat'. This was true, really, they were just searching for money. So, when I went there [to the police station] they said 'you, you use too and now you are going to come in yourself'. I said, 'What did I do? Just because I followed friends? What did they do?' They said, 'you are a big mouth, and now we will start beating you. We will lock you up and beat you'. I had to just lay low.

I can pick up my needles when I want a jab and they give me enough information. Before, I was just taking my own precautions, but I didn't know how I could do it better. Now I'm kind of like, 'Okay, Happy you have not taken for a while, don't go using your normal dose, you haven't been in it for a while. Start slowly with a little; you can increase later'. I know I can also save a life because I know these rules of overdose, like saving a person.

I'm glad for the methadone that's in the country because many people now get to take methadone, and that's really helpful. MDM [Médecins du Monde] left the country, I mean they are there but they have stopped providing services. They are just doing trainings, so the services are not there anymore. I'm trying to see with other organisations that are women-led if someday ... they can supply services. With Tanzania Network for People who Use Drugs (TanPUD) I can't, because it's only advocacy based.

I just can't go and say I belong to the LGBT community because they would be like, 'What! Now you are too much. You always had your words of being a user and trying to advocate for users. Now you are more'. It's about living under the radar.

I also have my friends in the MSM (men who have sex with men) community and others, like trans women and trans men. They are not happy with their life. You can see when they travel outside Tanzania, they put on their gowns, for the trans women, and the trans men can put on their suits. But, when they are there it's very different. It's like living a lie because the police are there.

I remember one day we were in the TNCM (Tanzania National Coordinating Mechanism for Global Fund) and that's where we are supposed to be heard when

we are writing proposals for the Global Fund. When the issues of LGBTI started coming up, the Chair stood up and said, ‘When you are done, I’ll come back’. You are the Chair! If you start choosing whom to hear and whom not to, who will advocate for this? So, for them, it’s a matter of the money only. It’s not how they serve the people who need it the most It’s not okay for LGBTQI in my home, they can’t talk.

I stand for all key populations Now, TanPUD is leading a key populations committee, and I really see that it’s important for us all to be together and address our issues They closed all of DICs (drop-in centres) for LGBTI communities, even ours Peer services are very helpful – rather than going to a stranger and explaining your sicknesses and then having them pull out a Bible or a Koran and saying, ‘this verse says you are wrong’. I know maybe I might be wrong, but who knows if you are right? We are not here to point fingers. I’ve come here to have this service provided to me. If I need the Bible, I’ll go to the church. If I need the Koran, I’ll go to the mosque. But it’s not that way, so I’d really love to see the law and help come together.

Stigma isn’t good, especially for women. You can see even within the community itself there is stigma because the male users can really undermine the female users. They sometimes even hurt them. If a woman came in with money and she’s getting her dose, they’ll come grab it and just go out. We’ve got to respect one another and love each other.

I hope for my community of people who use drugs to have a recreational centre ... I hear these policymakers, decision-makers that are like, ‘these people, we treat them and it’s good for nothing’. They The people who use drugs (PWUD) go back, but because they don’t have anything to do. So, if they will learn, get skills, they’ll be better. I really want to establish this recreational centre – it can be like an academy where all the users are.

Governments need to adopt harm reduction principles and implement harm reduction services as much as possible. Friendlier policies need to be put in place as punishment can never make a great change to communities that are harassed and mistreated for their acts. Providing support and building skills can bring impact and create change that can never be achieved by punishment. Care, support, unity, knowledge sharing and building skills can allow the community to earn their own bread and search for a better life, rather than doing something that brings down their dignity and respect. When friendlier policies and knowledge are in place, many will be able to find a better way of reducing harms to their own bodies and lives.

We need to see friendlier policies being put into place and harm reduction services being allowed in countries. Communities need to be supported and be able to support one another. Change is not easy, but if we need to reduce new HIV infection within the drug users community, we have to remove policies that are unfriendly and provide services and psychosocial support to those at risk and stigmatised such as the LGBTIQ community. Criminalising key populations isn’t helpful. Remove unfriendly policies and build harm reduction principles!