

A report by Monica Carriere, Policy Officer for Kenya at Mainline

# HARM REDUCTION IN THE MASKANI (DRUGS DEN) IN MALINDI, KENYA

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Visiting a drug den - or Maskani in the Swahili language - and speaking openly with the people who hang out there, isn't something I get to do every day. With the help of our partner organisation The Omari Project and two of their outreach workers, I was able to do just this.

Due to the November rains, the streets were muddy and slippery which made it very difficult to walk and the smell was an overwhelming mixture of sewage and rotting garbage. Most of the people in the den don't have shoes and their clothes are an ochre colour from a combination of dust and mud. As we reached the den, the outreach workers were swarmed by people wanting to receive sterile injecting equipment, or deposit used gear in the Safety Box which was hanging on the side of his motorbike.

## Needle and Syringe programme (NSP)

In a narrow and dirty alleyway I had the chance to speak with some men while they were shooting up. It was encouraging to see that they were all using sterile gear and that outreach workers were advising them as to the safest way to inject. This was likely due to the recent refresher training on safe injecting practices which Mainline offered the outreach workers. I asked the men what the situation was like before the Needle and Syringe programme (NSP) was implemented, and they said that they used to shoot up with any needle they could find or share needles. Now they don't need to share or reuse needles because they get them for free from Omari.

Another benefit of the NSP program is that the people using drugs feel that someone cares about them and their well-being. They appreciate the NSP programme so that they can prevent being infected with HIV or hepatitis. I asked one of the men about his drug use and he told me that 10 years ago he had his own car and drove taxi - he had a wife and kids and contact with his extended family but since he started using heroin 9 years ago, he's lost everything and everyone. He said "It was never my dream to be sitting here with a needle in my arm".

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Outreach worker Maperera brought 3 women to speak with me about their experiences as women who use drugs, sex workers and mothers. One woman in particular wouldn't make eye contact and stared at the ground while she spoke to me in a soft voice. It was only when I asked her if she had children that her eyes met mine and a smile lit up her face. With light in her eyes, she told me that she has 2 children - a boy and a girl - and that they live with her mother because she can't care for them right now. She smokes heroin in order to do sex work to earn the money for the heroin she needs to smoke to do the sex work, etc.

**Each of the women shared their hope of getting accepted into the methadone programme**

Unfortunately, due to understaffing at the MAT clinic there has been a stop to new inductees since May 2015. The Omari Project was pleading with the MAT clinic to make an exception and induct one of the women because she was pregnant. The clinic wouldn't make an exception and the baby died a week after he was born due to the mother's heroin use. This story illustrates the importance of the MAT programme as a part of a strong Harm Reduction strategy.

**With the follow-up to the Bridging the Gaps programme, Mainline hopes to continue its support**

for the excellent work of its partners at the coastal region in Kenya. Together with a broad group of Kenyan organisations, government and other stakeholders, we will work to align our efforts and build towards comprehensive harm reduction services in Kenya.

**MAINline**

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