

A new country starting OAT :The Burundi case and the lessons learned on the process towards the process towards the start of OAT in 2025



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Background

The 2021 Integrated biological and behavior survey estimated that 15.3% of people who use drugs (PWUD) are living with HIV. Civil society organizations played a key role in providing services to PWUD in the country, including prevention, awareness, advocacy, and community integration. However, these interventions lack funding to develop a comprehensive harm reduction package to address drug users' needs.

Methodology

From 2023 onwards, Médecins du Monde (MdM) provided technical assistance to local stakeholders to build skills in harm reduction and with the aim of opening a pilot opioid agonist treatment (OAT) center in Bujumbura, with plans to expand to the whole country later. Local players, including national stakeholders and community organizations, played a key role in developing an enabling environment and laying the foundations for the project

Results

The National OAT guideline was approved by the Ministry of Health in July 2024, enabling the procurement of medicine. The Global Fund under GC7 2024-2026 will fund the OAT center, which is integrated into the Service Yezu Mwiza health clinic. Community participation has been integrated at various stages through focus group discussions and workshops, where the needs, challenges, and recommendations from the community's perspective were contributed to the national guidelines. The efforts to develop harm reduction interventions in the country will continue, led by key stakeholders, including representatives from the Ministry of Health and civil society organizations

Conclusion

The technical assistance by MdM was provided in collaboration with Expertise France. A team of medical professionals and community workers/peers, has been established and made a study visit to Tanzania in March 2025 to learn the daily operation and linkage with CSO. Integration of OAT in a health center is today recognized as a major intervention addressing drug users' needs. Further efforts should focus on developing comprehensive harm reduction services as part of ongoing advocacy to provide appropriate care for marginalized groups, such as drug users.