



WORLD FORUM 2026

***Building Resilient and
Inclusive Responses to
Substance Use and Addiction***

WFAD CAPACITY TRAINING SERIES

REPORT

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Introduction

The WFAD Capacity Building Webinar Series on *Building Resilient and Inclusive Responses to Substance Use and Addiction* was organised as part of this year's World Forum series. Developed based on input from WFAD's global network, the series aimed to strengthen the knowledge, skills, and capacity of organisations, practitioners, community leaders, and advocates working in prevention, treatment, recovery, and public advocacy. Across five sessions, held between 30 April and 27 May 2026, participants from different regions and professional backgrounds came together to exchange experiences, explore emerging challenges, and discuss practical approaches for strengthening responses in substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery.

The series recognised that effective prevention and recovery efforts require comprehensive and coordinated approaches that address the complex social, psychological, and environmental factors influencing substance use. Throughout the webinar series, speakers and participants explored a range of interconnected topics, including trauma-informed and gender-sensitive approaches, meaningful youth engagement and leadership, recovery-oriented systems of care, emerging trends in substance use and behavioural addictions, and strategies for strengthening organisational and advocacy capacity.

A common theme throughout the series was the importance of people-centred, evidence-informed, and community-based approaches. Speakers repeatedly highlighted the value of collaboration across sectors, the meaningful inclusion of people with lived experience and youth, and the need to strengthen protective factors within families, schools, communities, and wider society. The discussions also reinforced that prevention, treatment, recovery, and advocacy are interconnected and that sustainable progress requires coordinated action from governments, civil society organisations, communities, families, and individuals.

The webinar series brought together a diverse group of experts, practitioners, researchers, advocates, grassroots representatives, and youth leaders from across the world. Through presentations, panel discussions, interactive polls, practical exercises, and audience engagement, participants explored various regional experiences, practical tools, and approaches that can be adapted to their own contexts.

This report summarises the key presentations, discussions, and lessons emerging from each session. In addition to the session summaries, readers will find links to the webinar recordings and presentation materials shared by speakers throughout the series. These resources are intended to support continued learning, knowledge sharing, and the ongoing strengthening of prevention, treatment, recovery, and advocacy efforts around the world.

Session 1: Gender- and Trauma-Sensitive Prevention

Session Resources

- Webinar Recording
- Monica Barzanti's Presentation

Speakers

- Amy Ronshausen, WFAD
- Wadih Maalouf, UNODC
- Karen Peters, UNODC
- Susan Maua, NACADA
- Caroline Kahiu, NACADA
- Monica Barzanti, San Patrignano

The first session focused on gender- and trauma-sensitive prevention, exploring how substance use is often connected to wider life experiences, including trauma, family stress, social norms, gender expectations, and access to support. Through perspectives ranging from international and national agencies to community-based organisations, the session highlighted the importance of understanding the circumstances that shape vulnerability, resilience, and prevention outcomes.

WFAD International President Amy Ronshausen opened the session by stressing that substance use does not occur in isolation. It is often linked to experiences such as violence, instability, loss, and other forms of trauma. She highlighted the importance of shifting the focus from asking "What is wrong with you?" to "What has happened to you?", and underlined that prevention must be adapted to the different realities people face.

Wadih and Karen from the UNODC introduced the foundations of trauma-informed and gender-sensitive prevention. They elaborated on how prevention efforts need to consider both the individual and the environment around them, including family relationships, caregiving settings, stigma, peer influence, and exposure to violence. Using Ukraine as an example, they showed how family-based prevention interventions can be adapted in contexts affected by conflict and high levels of stress.

The presentation highlighted how strengthening parenting skills, positive family relationships, and supportive environments for children can serve as important protective factors, while also reinforcing that trauma-informed approaches should be embedded across prevention systems rather than limited to specialised services.

Susan and Caroline from NACADA shared their experiences from Kenya, focusing on prevention in low-resource settings. They described how trauma can appear in many forms, including neglect, violence, abuse, and chronic stress, and how these experiences are often closely linked to substance use and mental health challenges. They also highlighted the need to recognise the different vulnerabilities of women, men, girls, and boys. While women and girls may face risks linked to violence, exploitation, and stigma, boys and men may experience pressure to suppress emotions, engage in risk-taking, or avoid seeking help.

The speakers stressed that gender-sensitive prevention should not be limited to targeting specific groups but should seek to understand how social expectations, cultural norms, and unequal access to resources shape risk and resilience. They also highlighted the importance of strengthening collaboration between health services, schools, families, and communities in order to create more supportive systems around children and young people. Their presentation reinforced the need for prevention approaches that are not only trauma-informed, but also trauma-responsive in practice.

Monica Barzanti from San Patrignano continued the discussion by focusing on gender-specific prevention. Drawing on San Patrignano's long experience in prevention, recovery, and social reintegration, she explained how girls and boys may experience risk, emotional distress, and substance use differently. She emphasised the importance of supporting young people's emotional resilience, self-esteem, relationships, and ability to cope with difficult experiences in healthier ways.

Monica also presented San Patrignano's WeFree Prevention Project, which uses peer education, personal storytelling, and safe spaces for dialogue to engage young people in prevention. The project encourages young people to reflect on choices, emotions, relationships, and the consequences of substance use, while also empowering selected students to act as peer educators in their schools and communities. Her presentation showed how prevention can move beyond information-sharing and instead help young people build confidence, connection, and healthier ways of responding to challenges.

The discussions throughout the session showed a strong interest in strengthening trauma-informed approaches, family-based support, early childhood prevention, mental health services, and stigma reduction. Participants reflected on how trauma often remains overlooked within prevention efforts and shared experiences from their own contexts where family support, community engagement, and early intervention have played important roles in reducing vulnerability and strengthening resilience.

Across all presentations, a common message emerged: effective prevention requires understanding the experiences and circumstances that shape behaviour, such as the risk and protective factors, rather than focusing solely on substance use itself. Trauma, gender, family environments, and social conditions all influence outcomes and therefore need to be considered when designing prevention strategies.

Another theme that emerged throughout the session was the importance of shifting from reactive responses towards earlier and more proactive forms of prevention.

Speakers highlighted that strengthening protective factors such as positive family relationships, emotional wellbeing, social connectedness, and supportive communities can reduce vulnerability before substance use problems develop. This requires sustained investment in prevention efforts and collaboration across sectors, including education, health, social services, and civil society.

The session reinforced that gender and trauma are central to effective prevention. By creating safer environments, supporting families, listening to people's experiences, and reducing stigma, prevention efforts can become more relevant, inclusive, and better able to support long-term wellbeing.

Session 2: Engaging and Empowering Youth

Session Resources

- Webinar Recording
- Shalini Jacob's Presentation

Speakers

- Moderator - Mohammed Husni, IMPACT VOICES
- Keynote Speaker - Shalini Jacob, Fourth Wave Foundation

Panelists

- Drusilla Blinker, SLH Youth Initiative
- Yoni Torbijn, Rotary Action Group Addiction Prevention
- Aliyu Usman Mukhtar, AU Youth Forum
- Kaitlin Nichols, Drug Free America Foundation
- Astle Pereira, Fourth Wave Foundation

The second session focused on meaningful youth engagement and explored how young people can contribute to prevention, recovery, and community wellbeing as leaders, advocates, and changemakers. Bringing together youth leaders and young practitioners from different regions, the session highlighted the importance of moving beyond viewing young people as beneficiaries and instead recognising them as active partners in designing and implementing prevention initiatives.

Opening the session, Mohammed Husni emphasised the need to work “with youth, for youth”, highlighting that meaningful youth engagement requires creating opportunities for young people to contribute, lead, and shape solutions within their own communities. He also stressed the value of learning from different experiences and perspectives, noting that the session would explore both the opportunities and barriers affecting youth participation.

The keynote presentation was delivered by Shalini Jacob, Head of Communications at Fourth Wave Foundation, who shared the organisation’s experience of integrating youth leadership into prevention efforts. Speaking on behalf of the organisation’s founder, Diana Joseph, she explained how Fourth Wave Foundation views young people not as beneficiaries, but as “architects of prevention”.

Rather than limiting youth engagement to awareness-raising activities, the organisation invests in training, mentoring, and creating opportunities for young people to lead initiatives within their communities.

Drawing on nearly two decades of experience, Shalini highlighted how properly equipped and supported young people can influence not only their peers, but also families, schools, local institutions, and wider community systems. She shared examples from Project VENDA in Kerala, where youth-led prevention initiatives have reached more than one million children, as well as broader efforts promoting inclusion, education, and community engagement. Throughout the presentation, she stressed that meaningful youth engagement requires both structure and trust, allowing young people to develop skills while also having genuine ownership over their work.

The keynote was followed by a panel discussion featuring five young leaders: Aliyu Usman Mukhtar (Nigeria), Astle Pereira (India), Drusilla Blinker (Suriname), Kaitlin Nichols (USA), and Yoni Torbijn (Belgium). As young people actively engaged in prevention, recovery, youth empowerment, public health, and community engagement, the panellists brought direct experience from their own regions while reflecting on both the opportunities and challenges of youth participation.

The discussion started with the panellists sharing their motivation behind their involvement in prevention work. Some had been involved in the field from a young age alongside their parents' organisation, while others became involved through their education, community work, and personal concern about substance use among peers. It showcased that while they enter prevention work through different pathways, they share a common desire to create safer and healthier communities.

Answering the question on why youth engagement is essential, the panellists highlighted that young people are often best placed to understand emerging trends, social pressures, and the realities faced by their peers. They emphasised that youth involvement strengthens prevention efforts by ensuring programmes remain relevant, responsive, and grounded in lived experience. The discussion also explored barriers that prevent young people from participating, including peer pressure, fear of judgement, lack of opportunities, limited access to decision-making spaces, and a lack of awareness about their right to participate in issues affecting them.

The panellists also shared practical examples from their own work. Drusilla Blinker reflected on youth-led prevention and life skills initiatives in Suriname that combined leadership development, mental health support, and creative activities. Astle Pereira highlighted Fourth Wave Foundation's Alternative Pursuits Programme and the VENDA Cup football tournament, which use sports as a platform for prevention, inclusion, and youth empowerment.

Kaitlin Nichols discussed the role of the Young Professionals Advisory Board in developing prevention messaging and outreach strategies that better connect with young audiences. Yoni Torbijn reflected on the importance of understanding local contexts and adapting prevention approaches to different cultural realities. Aliyu Usman Mukhtar shared experiences from Nigeria and the African Union Youth Forum on Drug Use Prevention, demonstrating how youth-led initiatives can contribute to workforce development, policy discussions, and regional collaboration.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the distinction between meaningful youth engagement and tokenism. Panellists stressed that inviting young people to participate is not enough if their perspectives are not genuinely considered and acted upon. Meaningful engagement requires creating opportunities for young people to contribute to decision-making, influence programmes and policies, and see how their input translates into action.

The session also explored how organisations can sustain youth engagement over time. Speakers highlighted the importance of creating a sense of ownership, connecting prevention work with young people's interests, and providing opportunities for leadership, learning, and personal growth. Activities such as sports, arts, media, and community service were identified as valuable entry points for engaging young people and building long-term commitment.

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The session reinforced that youth are not only an important target group for prevention efforts, but also essential partners in shaping healthier communities. By creating meaningful opportunities for participation, investing in youth leadership, and ensuring young people have a genuine voice in decision-making processes, organisations can strengthen both the effectiveness and sustainability of their prevention efforts.

Session 3: Treatment and Recovery-Oriented Care

Session Resources

- [Webinar Recording](#)

Speakers

- [Mulka Nisic, ISSUP](#)
- [Asia Ashraf, Greenfield Hospital of Psychiatry](#)
- [Elroy Stuurman, Substance Mentorship Programme](#)
- [Warren Cornelius, Recovery Walk Cape Town](#)

The third session focused on treatment and recovery-oriented care, exploring how recovery can be supported not only through treatment services, but also through families, communities, peer support, and broader social inclusion. Bringing together perspectives from ISSUP, Greenfield Hospital of Psychiatry in Pakistan, community-based recovery services in South Africa, and Recovery Walk Cape Town, the session highlighted the importance of person-centred, trauma-informed, and recovery-oriented approaches that extend beyond clinical care.

Opening the session, Mulka Nisic from ISSUP provided an overview of recovery and the concept of recovery capital. She described recovery as a process through which a person moves from problematic substance use towards improved health, wellbeing, and participation in society. Drawing on international research, she explained that recovery is often a long-term journey that involves not only treatment and professional support, but also family relationships, social networks, employment, education, and community engagement.

A central focus of her presentation was recovery capital, which refers to the internal and external resources that help individuals initiate and sustain recovery. Mulka explained that while treatment and personal motivation are important, long-term recovery is strongly influenced by social and community factors. Supportive families, meaningful activities, positive social relationships, education, employment, and community belonging all contribute to recovery, while stigma, discrimination, social exclusion, and unstable environments can undermine it. Mulka also highlighted the close connection between prevention and recovery, noting that many of the same protective factors that help prevent substance use also support long-term recovery.

Throughout her presentation, she emphasised that stigma remains one of the greatest barriers facing people in recovery. Research presented during the session showed that although many people support recovery in principle, there is often resistance to fully accepting people in recovery as neighbours, colleagues, friends, or family members. She stressed that recovery must be made more visible and that communities have a critical role to play in creating supportive environments where people can rebuild their lives.

The second presentation was delivered by Asia Ashraf from Greenfield Hospital of Psychiatry in Pakistan, who explored gender-sensitive and trauma-informed treatment practices for women. She explained that women entering treatment often face challenges that extend far beyond substance use itself, including trauma, fear, shame, caregiving responsibilities, violence, and social stigma. In many cases, these experiences shape both the development of substance use disorders and the barriers women face when seeking help.

Asia highlighted the strong relationship between trauma and addiction, describing how substance use often becomes a coping mechanism for emotional pain, while substance use itself can create additional trauma and vulnerability. She stressed that trauma-informed care is not an optional addition to treatment, but a necessary foundation for effective recovery support.

Drawing on the work of Greenfield Hospital of Psychiatry, she shared practical examples of how trauma-informed principles can be translated into everyday practice. These included creating safe and supportive treatment environments, using trauma-sensitive screening methods, addressing shame and stigma, involving supportive family members, and adapting services to the realities of women's lives. She also introduced the hospital's SAFER model of care, which emphasises safety, acknowledgement of trauma, flexible services, empowerment, and the importance of relationships and social support throughout the recovery journey.

The session then shifted to community-based recovery support through a presentation by Elroy Stuurman. Drawing on his work in South Africa, he highlighted the importance of peer support, aftercare services, and community engagement in sustaining recovery. He reflected on the challenges of providing support across large rural communities with limited resources and described how these challenges led to the creation of a Substance Mentorship Programme in Western Cape Town.

The programme trains community volunteers to provide practical support, guidance, and early intervention for people affected by substance use. These mentors often become the first point of contact during times of crisis and help connect individuals with treatment, social services, support groups, and other community resources.

Stuurman also described how peer-led support groups and community partnerships have strengthened recovery services and increased local ownership of recovery efforts. Throughout his presentation, he emphasised that recovery is most sustainable when communities themselves become active participants in supporting it.

The final presentation was delivered by Warren Cornelius from Recovery Walk Cape Town, an initiative that seeks to make recovery more visible and challenge stigma through public engagement and community mobilisation. He explained that Recovery Walk Cape Town is more than an annual event; it is a year-round community effort that brings together people in recovery, families, professionals, volunteers, and allies to celebrate recovery and promote social inclusion. Cornelius emphasised that visibility is a powerful tool for reducing stigma. By creating public spaces where people can openly share their recovery journeys, Recovery Walk Cape Town helps challenge stereotypes and demonstrate that recovery is possible.

He highlighted the important role that people with lived experience play in shaping recovery-oriented communities and stressed that recovery should be understood as a shared community responsibility rather than solely an individual or clinical issue.

Across all presentations, a common message emerged: recovery extends far beyond treatment. While access to gender-sensitive and trauma-informed treatment remains essential, long-term recovery depends also on supportive relationships, opportunities for participation, community acceptance, and environments that promote hope, dignity, and belonging. The session highlighted the importance of strengthening recovery capital at the personal, social, and community levels, while also addressing stigma and creating spaces where people in recovery can be recognised as active and valued members of society.

The session reinforced that recovery is not simply the absence of substance use, but a process of rebuilding lives, relationships, and connections. By combining evidence-based treatment, trauma-informed care, peer support, community engagement, and social inclusion, recovery-oriented approaches can support lasting change for individuals, families, and communities.

Session 4: Emerging Trends

Session Resources

- Webinar Recording
- Rogers Kasirye's Presentation
- Liang Suet Lay's Presentation

Speakers

- Rogers Kasirye, Uganda Youth Development Link
- Merve Karataş, YEDAM
- Liang Suet Lay, Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association

The fourth session focused on emerging trends affecting prevention, treatment, and recovery efforts, with particular attention to synthetic drugs, gambling addiction, and the growing influence of social media and digital environments. Through presentations from Uganda, Türkiye, and Singapore, participants explored how rapidly evolving new psychoactive substances and technological developments are creating new challenges for individuals, families, communities, and prevention programmes.

Opening the session, Rogers Kasirye presented emerging substance use trends in Uganda and East Africa, highlighting the increasing presence of synthetic drugs, pharmaceutical misuse, and changing drug markets across the region. Drawing on regional data and survey findings from Uganda, he noted that while cannabis remains the most widely used substance, synthetic drugs, opioids, stimulants, and the misuse of prescription medicines are becoming more common, particularly in urban settings. He also highlighted concerns related to heroin trafficking routes, nightlife culture, peer influence, and the growing role of online spaces in shaping young people's exposure to substances.

Rogers emphasised that prevention efforts must adapt to these changing realities. While alcohol continues to be a significant public health concern across the region, emerging risks increasingly involve synthetic substances, pharmaceutical misuse, and digital influences. He stressed the importance of early intervention, stronger surveillance systems, and improved collaboration between schools, communities, health services, and policymakers. Throughout the presentation, he encouraged organisations to look beyond substances themselves and pay closer attention to the environments and social factors that contribute to risk.

Rogers also highlighted the increasing complexity of today's drug landscape, noting that emerging substances often spread more rapidly than awareness and prevention efforts can adapt. This creates challenges for families, schools, healthcare providers, and policymakers who may not always have access to timely information about new substances and patterns of use. He stressed the importance of strengthening data collection, monitoring systems, and regional cooperation to ensure that prevention responses remain relevant and evidence-informed.

The second presentation was delivered by Merve Karataş from YEDAM (Green Crescent Counselling Centre) in Türkiye, who explored the growing challenge of gambling addiction and the support services available to individuals and families. She explained that the rapid expansion of online gambling platforms has made gambling more accessible than ever before, particularly among young adults. As a result, gambling addiction is becoming an increasingly significant public health concern with serious psychological, social, and financial consequences.

Merve outlined YEDAM's comprehensive support model, which combines individual counselling, family support, group therapy, and social reintegration activities. She emphasised that gambling addiction often co-occurs with challenges such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and financial difficulties, highlighting the need for holistic and long-term support. Family involvement was presented as a particularly important element of recovery, recognising that addiction affects not only individuals but entire family systems. Through counselling, peer support, and follow-up services, YEDAM works to support sustainable recovery and social reintegration.

The final presentation was delivered by Liang Suet Lay from the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA), who examined the relationship between social media and youth drug use. Drawing on recent research, she highlighted the increasingly central role that digital platforms play in young people's lives. While social media can provide connection, information, peer support, and access to helpful resources, it can also expose young people to misinformation, social pressures, drug-related content, and online environments that normalise risky behaviours.

Suet Lay described social media as presenting a "dual reality". On one hand, it can serve as a source of support and connection. On the other, repeated exposure to drug-related content, influencer messaging, and algorithm-driven recommendations can contribute to the normalisation of substance use and increase perceptions that drug use is common or socially acceptable. She also highlighted concerns regarding online drug promotion and the use of digital platforms to market and distribute substances.

Rather than relying solely on restrictions, Liang advocated for prevention approaches that strengthen digital resilience and critical thinking. She emphasised the importance of media and digital literacy, helping young people evaluate online content, identify misinformation, and understand how social media platforms influence attitudes and behaviours. She also highlighted the role of parents, educators, and peers in supporting young people to navigate digital environments safely and responsibly.

The presentation also highlighted the importance of recognising that digital environments are now a central part of young people's everyday lives rather than a separate space from the offline world. As a result, prevention efforts increasingly need to consider how online experiences influence identity, social norms, mental wellbeing, and decision-making. Participants discussed the importance of equipping both young people and adults with the skills needed to navigate these environments critically and responsibly.

The discussions throughout the session reinforced the need to address emerging risks in a holistic and forward-looking way. Participants highlighted concerns about synthetic drugs, pharmaceutical misuse, gambling, social media influence, misinformation, and the normalisation of harmful behaviours online. In interactive poll revealed that many participants viewed digital environments and online behaviours as some of the most pressing challenges facing prevention efforts today.

Across all presentations, a common message emerged: prevention systems must continuously adapt to changing social, technological, and substance use trends. Effective responses require collaboration across sectors, early identification of emerging issues, digital literacy, family engagement, and accessible support services.

As digital environments increasingly shape how young people access information, build relationships, and engage with the world around them, prevention efforts must evolve accordingly while remaining grounded in evidence, resilience-building, and community support.

Session 5: Strengthening Organisational and Advocacy Capacity

Session Resources

- Webinar Recording

Speakers

- Maik Dünnbier, Movendi International

The fifth and final session of the Capacity Building Webinar Series focused on strengthening advocacy capacity and equipping participants with practical tools to influence policy, mobilise communities, and promote evidence-informed responses to substance use and addiction. Led by Maik Dünnbier of Movendi International, the interactive workshop combined presentations, discussions, and practical exercises designed to help participants reflect on their own advocacy efforts and identify opportunities for strengthening their work.

Maik opened the session by emphasising that advocacy is most effective when done collectively and when it is rooted in the values that motivate people to take action. Through an interactive exercise, participants reflected on the values that guide their work, sharing concepts such as solidarity, resilience, community, knowledge-sharing, and giving back. Maik explained that values are a powerful foundation for advocacy because they connect policy issues to the concerns and aspirations that people care about most deeply. Rather than relying solely on statistics and technical evidence, advocates must also communicate why issues matter to individuals, families, and communities.

Building on this discussion, Maik introduced a framework for effective advocacy centred on helping people perceive a policy solution as desirable, achievable, and beneficial. Using examples from alcohol policy, he explained that successful advocacy demonstrates both the harms caused by a problem and the positive outcomes that can be achieved through action. Evidence remains essential, but it becomes more persuasive when combined with lived experiences, community perspectives, and clear examples of how people benefit from change. He also stressed the importance of understanding the wider information environment and recognising that many different actors compete to influence public opinion and policy decisions.

Throughout the workshop, Maik highlighted several elements that contribute to successful advocacy. These included leading with values, demonstrating public support for change, clearly communicating the consequences of inaction, identifying the factors driving harm, and presenting realistic solutions that improve wellbeing and strengthen communities. He also emphasised the importance of partnerships, coalition-building, trust, and long-term engagement, arguing that advocacy efforts become stronger and more sustainable when organisations work together around shared goals.

The session also explored advocacy as a broader process of social change. Maik described advocacy as putting a problem on the agenda, proposing a solution, and building support for action. He explained that advocacy can take different forms, ranging from reactive responses to emerging issues to systematic and proactive efforts that seek to shape policy discussions before problems become more deeply entrenched. Participants shared experiences from their own countries, reflecting on challenges related to implementation, political resistance, competing interests, and limited resources. Discussions highlighted the importance of adapting advocacy approaches to local realities while maintaining a clear long-term vision.

A significant part of the workshop focused on understanding power and influence within policy processes. Maik introduced what he described as three phases of power in advocacy: advancing positive policy decisions, preventing harmful decisions, and influencing how issues are framed and understood by the public and decision-makers. He emphasised that policy debates are often shaped by competing narratives about the causes of problems and the solutions required to address them. As a result, advocacy is not only about influencing decisions, but also about shaping the language, assumptions, and perspectives that guide those decisions.

The discussion on framing generated significant engagement from participants. Maik stressed that language matters because it influences how people understand problems, assign responsibility, and evaluate solutions. Drawing on examples from public health, climate change, and alcohol policy, he illustrated how different terms can shape perceptions and influence policy outcomes. Participants reflected on the importance of using language that reduces stigma while remaining clear, accessible, and relevant to local communities. The discussion also highlighted the need to adapt advocacy messages to different cultural and social contexts, recognising that effective communication often depends on how messages are received and interpreted by the intended audience.

Community engagement emerged as another central theme throughout the workshop. Maik argued that communities are often the strongest advocates for change because they understand the realities they face and can identify both problems and potential solutions.

Rather than viewing advocacy as a process driven solely by experts, he encouraged participants to create pathways for communities, families, young people, and people with lived experience to participate in policy discussions and decision-making processes. In his view, advocacy gains strength when it amplifies community voices and helps connect people around shared concerns and goals.

Towards the end of the session, Maik presented Movendi International's advocacy planning framework, which emphasises continuous learning, adaptation, and coalition-building. He outlined key components of advocacy planning, including gathering evidence, understanding the policy environment, identifying stakeholders, mapping supporters and opponents, defining clear objectives, and developing strategies for mobilisation and communication. Participants were encouraged to combine data with personal stories, analyse the broader societal impacts of substance-related harms, and clearly communicate both the costs of inaction and the benefits of policy change.

The session concluded by reinforcing that effective advocacy is both strategic and people-centred. While evidence, research, and policy expertise remain important, lasting change depends on the ability to connect with communities, build coalitions, communicate shared values, and create broad support for action. Participants left with practical tools and frameworks that can be adapted to their own contexts and applied to strengthen prevention, treatment, recovery, and public advocacy efforts moving forward.

Closing Reflections

The Capacity Building Webinar Series brought together practitioners, advocates, researchers, youth leaders, and community representatives from diverse regions and backgrounds to explore current challenges and opportunities in prevention, treatment, recovery, and public advocacy. While each session focused on a different theme, several common messages emerged throughout the series.

Across the discussions, speakers repeatedly highlighted the importance of people-centred and evidence-informed approaches. Whether discussing trauma-sensitive prevention, youth engagement, recovery-oriented systems of care, emerging addiction trends, or advocacy, participants emphasised the value of understanding the experiences, needs, and realities of individuals, families, and communities.

Another recurring theme was the importance of collaboration. Effective responses to substance use and addiction require engagement from multiple sectors, including civil society, families, schools, health services, researchers, policymakers, and people with lived experience. The webinar series demonstrated that meaningful progress is strengthened when diverse perspectives and experiences are brought together in pursuit of shared goals.

The discussions also highlighted the need to remain responsive to changing realities. Emerging substances, behavioural addictions, digital environments, and evolving policy debates continue to shape the prevention and recovery landscape. Addressing these challenges requires continuous learning, innovation, and adaptation, while remaining grounded in evidence and community needs.

Finally, the series reinforced that prevention, treatment, and recovery are deeply interconnected, with advocacy efforts being essential to create comprehensive supportive environments. Strengthening one area contributes to strengthening the others. By investing in prevention, supporting recovery, engaging communities, and advocating for effective policies, organisations can help build healthier, safer, and more resilient societies.

The World Federation Against Drugs extends its sincere appreciation to all speakers, moderators, participants, and partner organisations who contributed to the success of this webinar series. We hope that the knowledge, experiences, and resources shared throughout these sessions will continue to support and inspire efforts to address substance use and addiction in communities around the world.