

OPINION

Tackling Kenya's alcoholism challenge

The first tirade of Jesus entailed turning water into wine in the wedding that took place in Cana of Galilee. That is what a drunkard friend of mine told me when I attempted to advice him against taking alcohol.

And that presents an acute moral dilemma of alcoholism: that probably a total prohibition may be difficult, however desirable it might be to some.

America took the total alcohol prohibition route between 1919 and 1933. State legislatures curtailed the alcohol industry leading to a total ban based on a constitutional amendment of 1919. Prohibition supporters saw a society beset by alcoholism, family violence and corruption induced by alcoholism. But alcohol went underground. Criminal gangs seized control of the trade. But it is also true. Cirrhosis, a liver disease mainly associated with alcohol, declined steeply during prohibition. On the one hand, state revenue declined and criminal gangs emerged. But on the other hand there was a healthier nation.

That's the conundrum which this debate presents. Definitely research has affirmed the very negative impact of alcoholism generally. Alcoholism is a major cause of many diseases. It breaks families. But it seems humanity has never found a common approach to the alcoholism problem.

Even countries which through religious edicts shun alcohol, people always try to find an alternative to get high or illegal ways to get their drink. Iran and Afghanistan, for example, have one of the highest rates of production of opium.

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime's *World Drugs Report 2023* shows drugs and alcohol are more of a problem in advanced countries than in the Third World. The United States leads in countries with this problem. Asia is least impacted continent.

But definitely Kenya needs to do something to avoid increasing the rate of illicit alcohol consumption. The number of zombies addicted to alcoholism seems to be on an increase.

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Irungu Kang'ata National Quest

The problem, being a complex one, requires a multi-faceted approach. It is impossible to assume the problem will be eradicated 100 per cent. But definitely these measures might reduce the problem even if by 30 per cent.

First, the economic drivers of alcoholism need to be remedied. One sees a correlation between negative alcoholism with unemployment. It appears some use alcohol to numb their negative feelings of economic frustration. Once the society grants them hope by way of creation of employment opportunities, probably alcoholism might be reduced. Of course this tends to be long term: economic upward swings require tact and time. But as they say, an idle mind is the devil's workshop. For instance, industries that create employment would remove youths from the streets towards productivity and from the probable allure of alcohol.

Second, advertisement of alcohol needs to be curtailed. A case can be made of advertisements making alcohol appear cool. But such a suggestion would receive tonnes of resistance from key stakeholders. But clearer consumption went down when adverts were curtailed. Probably such a pivot would require international consensus. Maybe a United Nations resolution urging countries to move towards this direction would

create necessary conditions that would incentivise countries towards this direction internally. Curbing advertisement is not the same as prohibition. It makes alcohol consumption organic and driven by true demand. This is as opposed to "manufactured consent".

Third, there is a space for moral norms. Particularly educational and religious institutions that shape norms. Villages that are dominated by religions that abhor alcohol tend to have lower rates of alcoholism and vice versa. Probably a curriculum that highlights dangers of excessive alcohol consumption and alcoholism is important. An internal theological discussion amongst my Catholic brethren might help towards redirecting faithful away from alcohol.

Fourth, who should regulate the alcohol sector? It has been suggested the regulator should be the national government on the ground since it does not have a vested interest unlike countries that need the revenue. Well, any regulator — whether national or county — has some merits and demerits. Enforcers tend to use this power to extract money from the hardworking innocent trader. Maybe self-regulation might cure Good and reputable industry players get the power to self-regulate the sector — they have a profit motive to do so.

And the state extracts taxes in the process and remains overreaching oversight duties. Like the way the Law Society of Kenya does in the legal profession.

Fifth, rehabilitation of addicts is important. Many people are unaware the standard National Hospital Insurance Fund package covers rehabilitation costs. Probably this needs to be championed more because it tends to be an underutilised cover benefit even when the county shifts to SHIF.

Finally, there is space for enforcement of alcohol consumption hours. In the Western world, rarely do people party until morning. Hours for alcohol consumption are strictly enforced.

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Embrace non-traditional modes of ICT training



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Throughout the evolution of the internet, we can consider that the third wave has peaked. The first wave happened between 1983-1999 and was all about laying the foundation of the online world. The second wave happened at the turn of the millennium and brought much replication stretching between 2000-2015 and was all about the app economy and the mobile revolution — search, social, e-commerce and startups growing on top of the internet. The third wave started around 2016 and revolved around the internet of Things (IoT) — ubiquitous connectivity that allows entrepreneurs to transform real major world sectors including transportation, manufacturing and health.

It is no longer the case that the internet or the digital world is the playground for youth, thus the buzz around town for more youth to embrace new forms of ICT training to tap into digital jobs especially those in tertiary colleges and universities by accessing curated programmes geared towards exposing them to the latest industry technologies and trends.

To unlock the potential of youth, governments across the world have doubled down their investments in ICT infrastructure to ensure connectivity of citizens into the deeper reaches of the countryside. Several countries are enacting education digitalisation policies to develop sustainable and effective adaptation of education and training models.

The European Union launched the Digital Education Action Plan in 2020 while China, South Korea, and Singapore have gone full throttle with a similar raft of policies on ICT and Education for future-ready and digital learners.

By no means has Kenya been left behind. The Ministry of Education data show that the country has over 560,000 students in the tertiary education space alone on the back of an active push for more competency-based curricula.

During the recently concluded Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, global technology giant, Huawei

Many countries are scrambling to draft policies on ICT and Education for a pool of future-ready and digital learners.



Michael Kamau The Next Wave

announced the "Three Trees" model for talent development that included teachers and students, lifelong learners, and industry practitioners hinged on a commitment to deal with opportunities and challenges of the ICT industry developments through its academy programme which is working with over 2,200 Universities and colleges across the world to bridge the ICT talent capability gap with industry requirements.

The programme first launched globally in 2015 has seen over 150,000 students benefit through direct access to books and publications and virtual or simulated laboratory environments.

In Kenya, Huawei ICT Academy is working with over 50 universities, colleges, and TVETs that can directly access globally recognised ICT Certification. The certification is structured at an associate level, professional level, and expert level. It is important that such programmes focus on equipping learners with the latest technology skills through a comprehensive lecturer capability improvement training.

Students should also master various ICT industry technical domains such as datascience, cybersecurity, 5G, WLAN, Cloud, and Artificial Intelligence. The courses

focus on the practical capability of the learner and feature simulated lab environments, quizzes and mock examinations among others. After training, students can sit for a certification exam to prove their mastery of the specific technical field.

Other large local and global technology companies are making similar commitments including on monetisation of content by creators. Korza Techropolis, the Vision 2030 project envisioned as a Smart City and digital technology hub, has also rolled out the Jitome Programme in partnership with the Ministry of ICT where it equips classrooms in TVET Centres with computers and delivers online learning models across the country away from its cluster campuses. Often, these programs are free and only require that students apply and join and the certificates are valid for formal employment in any sector.

Through the Huawei ICT Competition, students in Kenya have an opportunity to learn and compete on the latest ICT skills at a national, regional, and global level. It is important to expose and train students on fundamental ICT topics critical for a career in ICT such as IT infrastructure, application and software engineering, data science and optical networks engineering. ICT project manager, Artificial Intelligence and Big Data engineer among others.

For academic institutions to keep pace with the evolving industry requirements, non-traditional forms of training and certification, combined with formal university curricula must now become fit for the purpose now that the "traditional" model followed on academic qualifications has proved insufficient.

These digital training opportunities are disrupting the traditional form of certification and as such, require government and industry to standardise certifications to enable those seeking formal employment the recognition that come with the inevitable frequent upskilling, refresher courses and on the job training.

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