

MTN commemorates World Drug Day with Virtual Drug Convos Webinar

“The media plays a huge role in what people perceive as acceptable, cool or trendy”- Bada Akintunde-Johnson speaks on the influence of media in the prevalence of Drug Abuse and addiction among young people.

To commemorate the International Day against Drug abuse and Illicit trafficking, telecommunication giant MTN hosted a virtual conversation, in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, to proffer solutions to the prevalence of drug abuse and illicit trafficking in the country.

Held on June 25, 2021, and themed “Share Facts on Drugs. Save Lives”, the Webinar explored factors that have led to the menace of drug abuse and illicit trafficking, as well as tools that are pivotal to changing the narrative in Nigeria.

Bearing in mind that the media is the predominant tool through which vices are either promoted or curbed, Country Manager of global media giant ViacomCBS Networks Africa, Bada Akintunde-Johnson, shared on the role ViacomCBS has played, so far, in the fight against drug use, abuse and addiction.

“Globally, the media has played a huge role in what people perceive as acceptable, cool or trendy. The reason a lot of young people get hooked on hard drugs is because they’ve seen someone they look up to use it while becoming successful and appearing cool. A lot of these influential people don’t understand the sheer power of influence that they have over other people,” he said.

Reiterating Akintunde-Johnson’s position, Oliver Stolpe, Country Representative, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, said, “In Nigeria the prevalence of drug use is almost three times what the global average is. UNODC’s drug report predicts that if the growth continues at the current rate, we will have about 20 million drug users in Nigeria by 2030 - that is in less than ten years. The situation is really bleak. The reason for the hope we have is that we see greater attention being paid to the issue with forward thinking platforms such as this.”

Speaking on how ViacomCBS has been addressing these issues, Bada Akintunde-Johnson said, “If we can get them to recognize the roles they play in helping society to quench the tide of this destruction, the more we can get them on our side and get the results we want and reduce drug abuse drastically. This is why through our work at ViacomCBS we created MTV Shuga as a platform to drive awareness towards other social ills like HIV, sexual health issues, gender based

violence and we are obviously looking within the mental health and substance abuse space because a vast number of our audience are affected by these things.”

Panellists - MTN Y’ello star winner Dotti; singer-songwriter Joeboy and record producer, David Jones, further proffered workable solutions to the rising rates of celebrities suffering from drug abuse. Moderating the panel session, media personality Nnenna Ekwuekwue, known professionally as Nenny B, encouraged young Nigerians to stay away from hard drugs and take better responsibility for their lives.

The event, which lasted for about two hours, with over 2000 people in attendance, featured an impressive line-up of speakers- Mr Sunday Dare, Minister for Youth and Sport (represented by Mr Ogaba Ede, Director, Education and Youth Development), Pastor Tony Rapu, Senior Pastor, House of Freedom (represented by Dr. Osasuyi Dirisu, MD, PHD, LWW Research and Strategy); Prince Julius Adewale Adelusi-Adeluyi, Chairman of MTN foundation; Odunayo Sanya, Executive Secretary, MTN Foundation; Bada Akintunde-Johnson, Country Manager, ViacomCBS Networks Africa; Dr Maymunah Kadiri, Founder, Pinnacle Medical Services; Oliver Stolpe, Country Representative, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime amongst others.

Launched in December 2018, MTN’s Anti Substance Abuse Programme is a multi-stakeholder intervention aimed at increasing awareness of substance abuse and addiction among youths. The intervention also seeks to discourage first-time users from taking the first step to possible addiction. The event focuses on building a dynamic platform that will enable young Nigerians to participate actively and contribute to in-depth conversations about substance abuse and addiction.