An army of international heavyweights is creating powerful new arms to combat the drug trade in East and Southern Africa, writes Kgaelemo Motlanthe.

**Retracing the campaign against drugs**

Governments in diverse regions worldwide are experimenting with new approaches to drug policy and regulation, with the aim of moving away from a ‘war on drugs’ approach that has failed globally and in Africa.

**NEW APPROACHES**

In recent years, policymakers have increasingly turned to new approaches to drug policy, such as harm minimization and decriminalization. This approach aims to reduce the harm caused by drug use, rather than focusing solely on criminalizing drug production and distribution.

**HARM REDUCTION**

Harm reduction strategies include the provision of safe injection equipment, access to medical treatment for drug use disorders, and drug detoxification services. These approaches are designed to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious diseases, such as HIV and hepatitis C, among drug users.

**LEGALIZATION**

Legalization proponents argue that legalizing drugs would lead to a reduction in drug-related crime and violence, as well as increased access to evidence-based treatment and prevention services. Legalization advocates also point to the economic benefits of legalizing drugs, such as tax revenue from the drug industry.

**RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY**

Policymakers are increasingly relying on evidence-based research to inform their drug policies. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of different approaches, as well as understanding the social and economic impacts of drug use.

**OUTLOOK**

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges posed by drug use, policymakers are increasingly recognizing the need for a more nuanced and evidence-based approach to drug policy.

**CHALLENGES**

Implementing new drug policies can face significant challenges, including opposition from drug war advocates, concerns about public safety, and the need to balance the rights of drug users with the needs of the wider community.

**CONCLUSION**

As governments around the world continue to experiment with new drug policies, it is clear that a more nuanced and evidence-based approach is needed to address the complex issues posed by drug use.

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*Image: A man stands in a crowd holding a sign that reads 'Legalize drugs'.*