

GROUP 3

FOSTERING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS FOR ACCEPTANCE OF OFFENDERS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Recent research reveals that support by stakeholders is required to tackle crime prevention and facilitate rehabilitation. At the same time, creating awareness about the magnitude of the matter is not easy. Although statistics show that Japan has a low crime rate, the country faces different challenges in rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders.

The topic allocated to group three was “Forming multi-stakeholder partnerships and engaging the community in the social reintegration of offenders.” At the initial stage of the group discussion, all the members highlighted the situation of their own countries. The member countries in this group include: Japan, Laos, Myanmar, Kenya, Indonesia and Maldives. The specific discussions include the public/private stakeholders and their involvement in the pretrial, post-trial and trial phases. It was identified that the member countries who have a well-established relationship with stakeholders in this matter are Japan and Kenya. The main discussions of the group focused the challenges faced regarding stakeholder involvement, solutions and best practices that can be suggested. Accordingly, based on the lectures provided and field visits, recommendations are provided to the pressing issues in all member countries of the group.

Hence, it was agreed that the most prevalent issue in all the countries is the concern on eliminating public stigmatization and enhancing offender acceptance. In order to overcome the mentioned issues, it is important to foster public understanding and multi-stakeholder partnerships for acceptance of offenders.

Based on the group discussion, several stages regarding the stigma and discrimination of offenders were identified. Therefore, the group came up with three steps according to the level of acceptance by the community and proposed the best practices based on the discussion.

II. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

In the group discussion, the following three steps were identified to eliminate prejudice against offenders:

A. Public Awareness

The first step is to make the public aware of the need to support offenders and prevent recidivism.

In Japan, challenges must be overcome in order to demolish stigma and discrimination against offenders. Many intervention programmes have been conducted throughout the country. One of the main programmes is the Brighter Society Movement, which is a nationwide movement launched by the Ministry of Justice in 1949. The aim of the movement is to make society brighter and inclusive through the deeper understanding of offenders, their rehabilitation and their need for support from all the people in Japan. Every year the Ministry of Justice holds festivals that include the distribution of flyers and booklets. In addition, social media is used to create awareness among the public.

In addition to the movement, the public prosecutors' offices in Japan launched re-entry support in 2009. The support aims to provide social welfare services to suspects, in cooperation with social welfare agencies. The public prosecutors' offices take every opportunity to promote the importance of support because it is critical to prevent crime.

In Kenya, the involvement of community members in supervision through Community Probation Volunteers promotes the sense that the community is rehabilitating their own offender for community safety. Also, the Community Service Order (CSO) supervisor is from the community, and the work done is for the benefit of the community. Open days are held where successfully rehabilitated offenders tell their stories and encourage community members to help in social reintegration of offenders.

However, despite these challenges explained above, it is assumed that stigma and discrimination against offenders are still prevalent. It should be noted that these challenges have only involved people who are interested in offender rehabilitation. As a result, people who are not interested in the issue have not been sufficiently influenced.

B. Acceptance of Offenders into the Community

The second step is to eliminate prejudice against offenders without imprisonment. There is no doubt that offenders face discrimination in the community. It is understandable that people seek safer communities; therefore, offenders might be regarded as threats to the community. However, what should be emphasized from the viewpoint of building a safer community is as follows.

First, in many countries, most offenders who return to the community without imprisonment have committed minor crimes. It is doubtful that these offenders will become a threat to the community. Second, based on research, offenders often have a broad range of problems including lack of education, diseases, disadvantaged family backgrounds and so forth. Therefore, exclusion from the community will worsen the problems and cause reoffending.

C. Acceptance of Ex-inmates into the Community

The third step is to eliminate prejudice against ex-inmates: offenders who served time in a correctional facility. The ex-inmates released both before and after completion of the terms of their sentences face harsher stigma and discrimination than offenders without imprisonment. People fear ex-inmates because they are usually regarded as vicious criminals who are likely to commit crimes again. Thus, ex-inmates have difficulty finding housing, employment, healthcare services and getting married.

The general public understands that people who have been released from prison need to live without discrimination in society in order to reintegrate and prevent recidivism, but they refuse to accept offenders as their neighbours, which prevents the offenders from living normal lives.

In some countries, the ex-inmates released from prison receive various forms of support, such as admission to a halfway house, employment support and welfare support. In addition, some countries provide support through volunteer probation officers. However, not all of these interventions have been successful.

In response to this problem, for example, in Laos, where Buddhism is widespread, some ex-inmates released from correctional institutions are likely to become monks. However, it is not practical to adopt ex-inmates released from prisons or correctional institutions in countries with relatively low interest in religion. It is also possible to make a fresh start by living in a different area, where no one knows about the offender's criminal record. Even in this case, the Internet is so advanced that, even if offenders move, their criminal records may be revealed, and this does not lead to a fundamental solution. On the other hand, in some countries, ex-inmates are still facing the difficulties in finding housing, employment and health care services due to lack of links to the community.

III. BEST PRACTICES

In the discussions, it was proposed that the following best practices can be used in order to build more inclusive communities which discriminate less against offenders. It is critical to change the perception of people in the community. Based on the lessons and experiences obtained from both seminars and group work sessions, it should be noted that inclusive communities would effectively reduce recidivism. Especially, ex-inmates need tailored bridges linking them between the prison or correctional institutions and society in terms of rehabilitation and reintegration after they are released. At the same time, the state and society should organize programmes or projects with public participation in order to raise awareness for people in society on understanding and providing more chances for the ex-inmates in terms of reintegration into society and living together.

A. Awareness Raising

First, as discussed above, raising the community's awareness about offender rehabilitation is critical. For this purpose, public awareness campaigns by criminal justice agencies and other related agencies would be helpful. The more attractive and catchy tools will bring more effective results. For example, to publicize how offenders' community work or activities contribute to the community would be persuasive, as in

some countries, offenders are obliged to do something for a community as diversion or a condition of probation.

Singapore is a country that has a lower crime rate in comparison to other countries. A visiting expert from Singapore shared success stories related to the Yellow Ribbon Project in Singapore. The purpose of the Yellow Ribbon Project is to create awareness of the need to give second chances to offenders, secondly, to generate acceptance of offenders and their families by the community and, thirdly, to inspire community action to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-inmates. The success of the Yellow Ribbon Project can be attributed to the media campaign and outreach strategies and strong community ownership of the Yellow Ribbon brand.

In order to make such projects more attractive, a symbol can be used to create and visualize the efforts to support reintegration. In general, in order to attract young people who are not interested in such activities, the government works to raise awareness of the Yellow Ribbon Project through public relations activities that make full use of SNS, marathons and concerts that seem to be largely successful. The point of this plan is to create a symbol of the activity, involve young people and clarify the goals, and it can be adopted in each country. In addition, Japan's Movement for a Brighter Society has created a mascot character called "Hogo-Chan", which can be taken up as a best practice.

B. Providing Support Services for Offenders

Second, in the discussion, the group members highlighted information delivered by visiting lectures who provided information about best practices in their respective countries. One of the best practices was the success of the Probation Service in Croatia, which aims to effectively resocialize and reintegrate offenders into the community. The positive effect brought to the country within a short timeframe is a key factor to acknowledge. Due to the positive outcome of the service, it has been acknowledged at the national and the international levels. Substitution of prison sentences with community work orders has had a significant role on public acceptance of offenders into the community. Those participating countries, such as Maldives and Myanmar, that do not have established mechanisms can adopt the best practices of the Croatia Probation Service.

In Japan, various public and private partners engage in supporting offenders. Some of the examples are volunteer probation officers (VPOs), who are volunteers working under the close supervision of the probation office and who play crucial roles in offender rehabilitation in the community. Big Brothers and Sisters (BBS) works with youth and juvenile offenders. Hello Work works for the promotion of employment support projects for ex-offenders. The establishment of halfway houses in Japan has played an important role in the accommodation and support of offenders who are released back to the community.

In Kenya, some of the following practices help with the acceptance of offenders within the community. Offenders perform community service orders (CSOs), which is unpaid public work to pay back to the community for the offences committed, for example, by doing afforestation for environmental conservation, rehabilitating community access roads and the like. Offenders with technical skills, like carpentry, make classroom desks for pupils and repair broken ones including school doors and windows. Empowering offenders is done, for example, with school fees for education and

technical skills including capital to start a business to be productive members of the community. This gives hope to the community that offenders will change positively and promotes acceptance.

C. Appreciation and Persuasion of the Community

Third, rewarding the community in various ways is also effective. In Japan, employers are paid money by a public agency when they hire an ex-inmate. This approach can also be applied to an offender. For example, instead of building facilities such as prisons or correctional institutions, it may be effective to improve roads in the surrounding area. Giving incentives to companies that let offenders work may also be effective. In order to resolve the high costs, we believe that the costs of prison should be reduced by community work whenever possible. Although the reward does not help to change the community's perception itself, it could enhance the acceptance of offenders.

It is also important to demonstrate the effectiveness of support for offenders to reduce crimes. It should be noted that most people in a community do not know that excluding offenders from the community possibly causes reoffending. Therefore, the criminal justice agencies are obliged to demonstrate that support for offenders will prevent crimes and contribute to building a safer community. At the same time, how to deliver the information to people in the community should be considered. Merely publishing a white paper or distributing a booklet to related agencies is not the best way to reach to people who are not interested in rehabilitation of offenders. Finding ways to involve those people is a key which we identified through discussions.

IV. CONCLUSION

Acceptance of an offender back into society by the public is a topic of global interest. Most developed countries face several stages of offender stigmatization and discrimination which tend to result in reoffending. However, it was agreed that in the past few years, few interventions have been done in their respective countries towards eliminating offender stigmatization and discrimination within the community. Effective measures are needed to overcome these issues. Implementation of the best practices mentioned in this report would minimize stigmatization of offenders and increase public acceptance in accordance with integrated approaches of all multi-stakeholder partnerships, including both public and private partners.