

IMPROVING THE REINTEGRATION OF OFFENDERS INTO THE COMMUNITY: THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THAI CORRECTIONS

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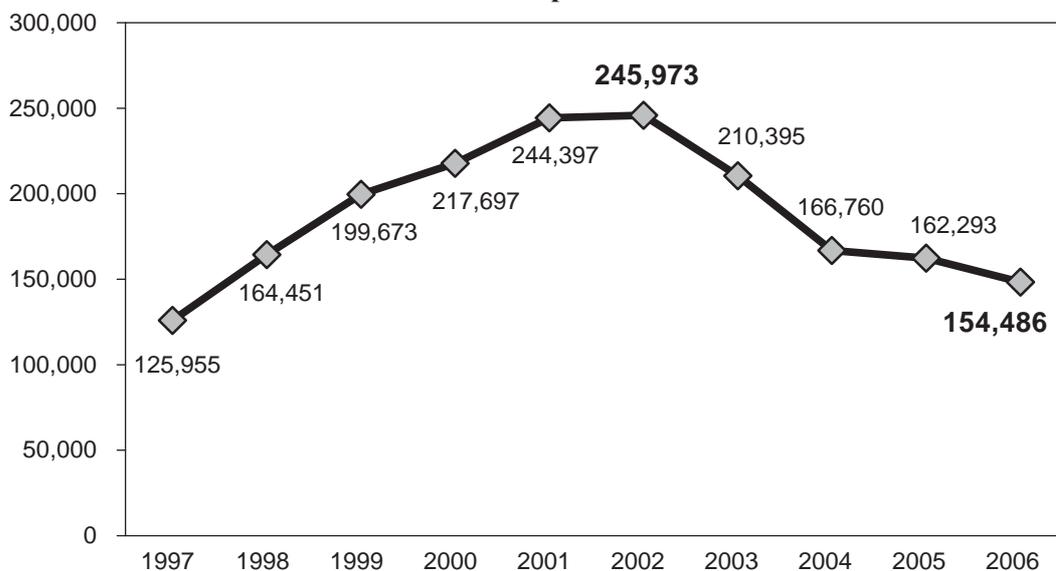
I. INTRODUCTION

Placing offenders in custody alone is not sufficient to solve the problem of crime. Imprisonment only temporarily removes criminals from the community. Most prisoners are freed and many of them relapse into the cycle of crime afterwards. The ultimate goal of corrections is offenders' successful reintegration into the community. Unsuccessful reintegration and recidivism have been alarming problems confronting the Department of Corrections. Previously, there were hardly any pre-release programmes, preparation or support provided for prisoners. After the key purpose of the system was shifted from punishment to that of rehabilitation, the Department of Corrections has been committed to the principle of through care and has implemented various rehabilitation initiatives to generate safe and successful re-entry into the community.

II. PRISON POPULATION & NUMBER OF RECIDIVISTS

A. Prison Population

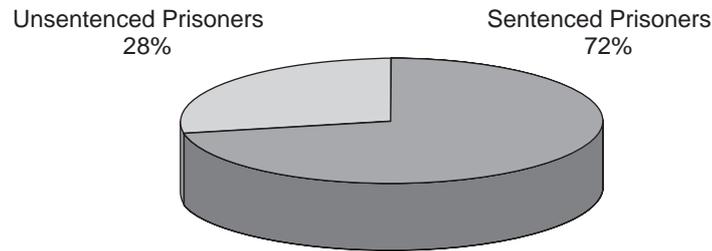
Chart 1: Prison Population 1997 - 2006



Regarding the overall statistics of the last decade, from 1997 – 2002 Thailand experienced a dramatic growth in the total number of prison inmates, rising from 125,955 in 1997 to 245,973 (the highest figure on record) in 2002. Since then, after the moment of crisis, the rate has seen an annual gradual decline. As of January 2007 about 154,486 inmates are incarcerated in 139 correctional institutions throughout the country.

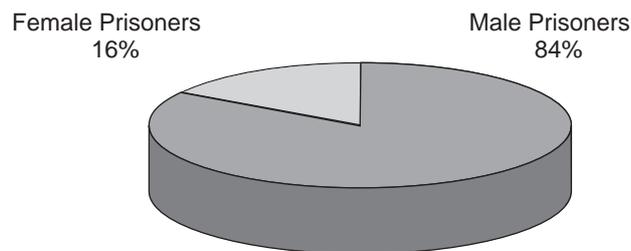
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**Chart 2: Number of sentenced and remand prisoners in Thailand
(as of 12 January 2007)**



In Thailand, an unsented inmate or remandee means a person who is awaiting investigation or awaiting trial or pending appeal. As of 12 January 2007, of all 154,486 prisoners in Thailand, the average number of remand and sentenced inmates was 41,960 (28%) and 111,114 (72%) respectively. Compared to the figures for July 2005, this reflects a growing number of remand inmates, which at that time stood at 25% (41,194) of all 162,293 inmates.

**Chart 3: Number of male and female prisoners in Thailand
(as of 12 January 2007)**



At present, the number of female prisoners in Thailand is approximately 23,816 (approximately 15.5% of the total number) while the number of male prisoners stands at 130,670. In contrast to the statistics of the last 12 months, the numbers show a slight decline of about 1%. Next year it is expected that it should stay constant, in the range of 15 – 16%.

The Department encountered an overcrowding crisis in 2002 when the total number of prisoners reached 245,973. This number has been gradually decreasing, and it could be said that by comparison, the current total number of prisoners (154,486) is not considered to constitute an overcrowding situation. Furthermore, the overall extended capacity of all correctional facilities allows a possible 205,436 inmates to be accommodated. As a result of the reduction in the number of prisoners, the Department can shift the organizational policies to focus mainly on the sustained improvement of prisoner standards of living, based on respect for humanity.

However, the growing difficulty that the Department of Corrections is encountering is the unequal dispersion of prisoners which in turn creates mass imprisonment in only some areas. A good example of this is the number of prisoners in Bangkok which is more overcrowded than other regions due to a large number of remand prisoners who cannot be moved to other facilities outside Bangkok until they are convicted in court. Apart from this situation in Bangkok, correctional institutions having an overcrowding problem must move prisoners to other facilities which have the standard of space designated as sufficient by the Thai Department of Corrections.

B. Number of Recidivists**Table: 1 Number of Convicted Prisoners Classified by Instances of Imprisonment
(as of October 2006)**

Instances of Imprisonment	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
First-time Offender	79,966	15,368	95,334	86.02
Second-time Offender	9,628	1,428	11,056	9.98
Third-time Offender	2,359	230	2,589	2.34
Fourth-time Offender	987	94	1,081	0.98
Fifth-time Offender or more	740	27	767	0.69
Total Number of Multiple Instance Offenders	13,714	1,779	15,493	13.98
Total	93,680	17,147	110,827	100

As of October 2006, the number of convicted prisoners in Thai correctional institutions who were imprisoned for the first time was 95,334 (86.02%) of all 110,827 convicted inmates. The number of offenders with multiple instances of imprisonment was 15,493 or about 13.98% of all convicted inmates.

**Table 2: Number of Re-Offending Convicted Prisoners
October 2005 – September 2006**

Type of Offence	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Offence against Property	547	18	565	35.60
Offence against Life	23	-	23	1.45
Offence against Bodily Harm	69	1	70	4.41
Offence against Sex	32	-	32	2.02
Offence against Social Security	8	-	8	0.50

Note: 1. The number of released prisoners from October 2003 – September 2004 was 78,360

2. The number of released prisoners from October 2004 – September 2005 was 24,961

From October 2003 – September 2005, the total number of released prisoners was 103,321. The number of reoffending convicted prisoners from October 2005 – September 2006 was 1,587 or about 1.53% of all released prisoners during two fiscal years. In addition, drug offenders still represent the majority of all released prisoners in Thailand who reoffended and were reimprisoned. The number stood at 791 (49.84%).

III. POLICY FRAMEWORK

It is widely recognized that mechanisms to enhance the chances of an offender's reintegration into society are an essential part of any strategy to reduce recidivism. The word reintegration appears to assume that the offender was well integrated in society prior to his or her imprisonment. The idea of reintegration is well recognized by the Department of Corrections as it widely appears in many of its formal documents. An example of this is the Department's vision statement "to become an outstanding agency in ASEAN countries on the treatment of offenders and to return productive citizens into society". In addition, several strategies specified in the Department's five-year strategic plans (2004 - 2008), such as the promotion of public and private sector involvement and the improvement of treatment of offenders as well as the collective strength to overcome substance abuse, are all put into action to prepare both the community and prisoners to achieve the common goal: smooth reintegration of offenders.

Since 2002, emphasis has been placed on the development of effective rehabilitation programmes to address the special needs of different types of prisoners, such as sex offenders and violent offenders. In so doing, the Prisoner Rehabilitation Programme Development Centre has been established with responsibility for developing model rehabilitation programmes and providing resources and training for prison staff in charge of instructing rehabilitation programmes. Many schemes, including the Annual Rehabilitation Programme Contest have been launched to encourage more innovations in the area. More importantly, a key performance indicator has been set so that every facility must select at least one model rehabilitation programme to be applied to its setting.

IV. KEY FOCUS AREAS

Before designing any strategies on prisoner reintegration, it is a good idea to first identify factors that are linked to relapse and desistance. The Department of Corrections has focused on four elements in developing appropriate programmes and service for prisoners. First, released prisoners have similar essential needs, for example, accommodation, employment and good family relationships, as do other people. Second, apart from essential needs, a number of prisoners also have criminogenic needs that require specific treatment programmes. Third, even if prisoners are adequately prepared for release, reintegration can never be successful unless there is community acceptance of offenders returning to the community. Fourth, the continuity of service delivery has to be taken into account to ensure that released inmates do not fall through the gaps of service provision. Based on these elements, rehabilitation programmes and services are therefore implemented with the key focus placed on the areas of inmates' essential needs, criminogenic needs, community acceptance and continuity of support.

V. FOSTERING REINTEGRATION

A. The Period in Prison

Offenders are sent to prison not only temporarily as a punishment for their wrongdoing, but also to receive the rehabilitation necessary to address their needs and problem behaviour before being released in the community. In the Thai Corrections System, prison is something more than just bricks and bars, rather the facility has been converted into prisoners' homes where various meaningful activities to target offenders' criminogenic needs take place.

1. Home of Intellect

Being marginalized and disadvantaged in terms of education is a factor connected to offending. During incarceration, inmates can attend educational programmes, provided in three categories, appropriate for their interest and skills.

- **Formal Education**
Starting from illiterate level to primary level, which is compulsory education in Thailand, prisoners can choose to continue their secondary level schooling through the adult curriculum in prisons. They can even study in undergraduate programmes provided by Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University.
- **Vocational Education**
With close co-operation from the Department of Vocational Education and the Department of Non-Formal Education, various types of vocational education programmes are provided for prisoners in every prison facility. Most programmes emphasize enhancing work skills for life after release and short-term training. The prisoners who pass the exams receive a Vocational Certificate or an Advanced Vocational Certificate for their study and practice.
- **Non-formal Education**
Apart from formal and vocational education, prisoners are also allowed to study according to their own interest. Many prisons hold special study programmes such as short-term computer courses, computer or engine repair courses, boy scouts and girl guides training, and the "Art for All" programme.

Moreover, their time can be spent productively by learning and researching in *Prom Panya Library*, which was initiated by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhon, who graciously considered that prisoners

should have the learning opportunity afforded by a standard library that contains numerous and various books, with a librarian to give advice and essential assistance. The *Prom Panya Library* project was first established in 2003 at Thanyaburi District Prison and then in other prisons across the country. The project has been supported by Matichon Newspaper, which is the main organization drawing public interest to contribute new books to *Prom Panya Library*. By 2008, there will be 103 libraries all over the country. At present, the Crown Princess has presided over the opening ceremony of the *Prom Panya Library* at four correctional facilities. In addition, they are allowed to self-study using a range of learning materials, such as computers and CD-ROMs supplied in the Knowledge Centre, which is being established in every prison.

2. Home of Rehabilitation

There are three kinds of rehabilitation programmes in practice. Firstly, the Fundamental Programme, an education programme similar to that provided by the Home of Intellect Strategy, is operated with the intention to provide inmates with sufficient education and skills. Secondly, Rehabilitation Programmes for specific types of offender are also conducted to adjust prisoners' attitudes and behaviours by employing various therapeutic modalities, such as musical, art and family therapy. Lastly, Welfare Programmes, including treatment programmes for the elderly and initiatives for prisoners with physical and mental health issues are implemented to maintain offenders' safe and sound custody.

3. Home of Sport and Recreations

Several kinds of sport and recreations are offered in prisons for at least two reasons. As imprisonment can cause considerable stress and tension, playing sports can keep inmates mentally and physically fit. Additionally, inmates can learn favourable interpersonal skills and sportsmanship through sport and recreational activities.

4. Home of Dharma

Recognizing that religion is an important factor in improving inmates' mental status, every correctional facility provides opportunity to all inmates to practice their religious activities without discrimination. Since most of inmates in Thailand are Buddhists, there are several Buddhist activities arranged in the facilities; the "Prison as Home of Dharma for Inmates" programme is one among them. For five days and four nights, inmates have time to perform religious activities, to pray, and meditate supervised by professional preachers. The programme aims to keep the inmates calm and to help them regain consciousness.

Several factors are necessary for the success of the aforementioned programmes. First of all, inmates are provided with careful and thorough preparation for their re-entry, thanks to a wide variety of education programmes, ranging from computer to business administration, which are offered from elementary to undergraduate level. For that reason, inmates should find something they are interested in to keep themselves occupied and equipped with knowledge and skills necessary for their future work. Another key to success is the support, love and understanding that inmates receive from their families, who are occasionally invited to participate in family activities held inside prison. Furthermore, despite facing a financial constraint and overcrowding, the initiatives are deemed to be successful because of the tremendous support received from outside agencies.

B. Staged Release to the Community

Aimed to bridge the period of transition of offenders between prison to the community, three schemes have been put into operation.

1. Vivat Polamuang Rajatan School Project

The project is a four-month intensive treatment programme specially provided to classified prisoners who can receive special parole after finishing the school programme. The curriculum has been applied from the military's Vivat Polamuamg School which provides intensive treatment programmes for drug addicts. Short-term vocational training, behavioural change and disciplinary training have been added to the programme in order to help them to resettle during their conditional release. At the end of the programme, prisoners passing the evaluation would receive special parole and return to the community as decent citizens. Since 2003, there have been about 2,700 inmates graduating from the school.

2. Pre-release Program

Every prison facility runs Pre-release Programs twice a year for inmates whose remaining term is less than six months. It aims at fostering successful reintegration and reducing the chance of reoffending. The emphasis has been on inmates' basic and cognitive skills shortfalls to build up their immunity to crime. Thus, offenders are provided with education and job training as well as behavioural skills, such as living and parenting skills.

3. Pre-release Centre

Currently, there are 10 Pre-release Centres being operated in correctional institutions countrywide. Convicted prisoners whose remaining sentence term is not more than five years and who have agricultural backgrounds will be voluntarily classified and transferred to Pre-release Centres located in the prison region. At this service hub, an array of support and services, formerly fragmented, are integrated in one place, facilitating ease of prisoners' access to services that match their personal needs.

In relation to early release, two parole systems have been implemented in the Thai Correctional System; Regular and Special Parole. The former is to be granted to inmates who have served at least one third of their whole sentence and those who have served not less than ten years of a life sentence. The latter is a special scheme introduced for a certain type of prisoner, such as inmates with disabilities, the elderly and those who complete intensive treatment programmes from Vivat Polamuang Rajathan School. Both systems allow well-behaved inmates who have high chance of reintegration to restart their new lives in the community, under some forms of supervision or monitoring, more quickly. Not only can a condition imposed with parole ensure public safety, it also helps ex-prisoners in maintaining acceptable behaviour until they successfully settle in the mainstream community. However, only a little research has been conducted on the success of the parole system.

C. Removing Hurdles

Several efforts have been made to minimize the effect of the stigma confronting most prisoners and to enhance the acceptance of ex-prisoners by employers. At the moment, these attempts have been put forward only unofficially by means of promoting employers' positive attitudes towards released prisoners and encouraging them to give these wrongdoers another chance. Some MOUs have been signed between the Department and other agencies regarding the provision of post-release service for ex-offenders; for example, there is such an agreement between Pattaya Remand Prison and Nong-pla-lai Sub-District Local Administration.

This memorandum will enhance co-operation between prison and local government agencies to support prisoner reintegration into the community. In addition, prison labour contracts will be signed between the local government offices and the prison to employ prisoners for public works such as drain cleaning, repairing local roads and small construction projects in the areas where prisons are located. Prisoners will receive some remuneration for this work when they are released. Moreover, members of the community will be assigned as volunteer social workers to provide aftercare service such as home visits, counselling and employment to released inmates, ex-inmates and their families.

Furthermore, the Department of Corrections always urges prisons to seek job placements for their inmates by establishing networks with local labour markets and other relevant agencies. However, the most important key for ex-prisoners to secure a job is perhaps their own knowledge and skills. Hence, it is important that prison vocational courses must be tailored to meet market needs and that inmates' skills and talent gained in prison are acknowledged by outside people.

D. Preparing the Community

For the success of reintegration, preparing the community is as important as preparing inmates. All of the hard work and rehabilitation in prison will be in vain if ex-prisoners are rejected by their respective communities on re-entry. In Thai jurisdiction, several initiatives have been incorporated to promote community acceptance.

1. Inmate Teacher Project

On special occasions, such as the Annual Prison Product Exhibition, skillful inmates are brought outside

to teach in career training classes provided free of charge for interested people. More than just a showcase for inmates to demonstrate their skills, the project renders their confidence in earning a living after release and also improves public attitudes towards prisoners.

2. Community Service Scheme

Appropriate prisoners are sent outward on a daily basis to work for the local community. Participating in this scheme, inmates learn how to work as a team and that they should do something for other people to make up for their wrongdoing. The scheme directly contributes to public forgiveness for inmates and growing community acceptance.

This year the Department of Corrections implemented a new project titled “Enhancement of Traffic Service and Accident Prevention during New Year Break”. Between 27 December 2006 and 5 January 2007 with the collaboration of three agencies, namely the Department of Corrections, the Highway Police Constabulary and the Vocational Education Council of the Ministry of Education. The project aims to reduce loss of life and property from traffic accidents and to prevent other crimes. This is also a chance for prisoners to serve the community and for the community to accept the offenders. Around 400 well-behaved convicted prisoners from 18 correctional facilities were sent to eight Highway Police Service Stops spread across the northeastern and central region of Thailand and the Bangkok area. These prisoners assisted with traffic services, engine repair, first-aid units and foot massage parlours.

3. Restorative Justice Approach

A pilot initiative has been launched to apply the Restorative Justice Approach to a prison setting. It aims at encouraging offenders to feel remorse, to accept responsibility for their actions and to seek ways to restore the harm done to victims and the community. The ultimate goal of this programme is satisfaction and understanding of all stakeholders, with which it is hoped to finally achieve an improved community acceptance of ex-prisoners.

E. Continuity and Inter-Agency Collaboration

The collaboration of relevant agencies is essential in ensuring the continuity of service, which is key to boosting offenders’ chance of resettlement. Also, co-operation of every sector of the community is vital since offender reintegration demands a great deal of resources and is a complex task that is unlikely to be accomplished by a single agency. Considering the importance of collaboration, the Department of Corrections always seeks opportunities to establish partnerships with both government and non-government agencies.

1. Skill Support and Safe Reintegration Project- SSSR

This project is a good example of how successful inter-agency collaboration can produce effective prisoner intervention. The project is carried out in five locations to target inmates who attend Vivat Polamuang Rajathan School. The project provides skill-based services, such as job training, and also addresses other survival needs by granting inmates loans that can be used to start their own small businesses.

In launching this project, partnerships were formally built by 11 Memorandums of Understanding signed between Department of Corrections and other public and private agencies that provide post-release service, such as employment and personal financial management organizations. These service providers work closely together to set up a service plan for inmates. As a result, it can be ensured that inmates can start making use of services in prison and, once released, are referred to an appropriate post-release service according to the plan.

The active involvement of every sector of the community is highlighted and makes the project so outstanding that it received The President’s Award from the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA). The award ceremony took place during the 7th ICPA Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, in November 2005.

VI. CONCLUSION

The diversity of offenders' needs and risks makes the transition from custody to community a complex task. In response to this complexity, the Department of Corrections is aware that innovations have to be continually injected into its through care service delivery. Its latest innovation is an initiative based on HM King Bhumibol's Philosophy of Sufficient Economy, which provides for his people guidance on appropriate conduct aimed at sufficiency, self-containment and a self-supporting lifestyle. The project focuses on providing inmates with advice on how to adapt the theory to several aspects of life, so that they will be able to protect themselves from harm and to handle challenges arising from today's changes in the outer community.

Another recently developed project is a rehabilitation programme for inmates whose alcohol use is linked to their offending behaviour. Underpinning the project is the idea that if the alcohol issues of this group of inmates are not suitably addressed, alcohol, despite not being an illicit drug, will continue to pose serious harm to the community. At the beginning of this fiscal year, the pilot project will be starting in two prisons and will be adopted in other facilities subsequently.

A variety of prisoner interventions discussed throughout this paper should accurately reflect a genuine commitment of Department of Corrections to provide meaningful rehabilitation programmes, aiming to facilitate smooth and successful reintegration. In this regard, the Department believes that when both inmates and their community are sufficiently prepared, the outcome will be worthwhile as ex-prisoners' chances of reoffending will be minimized and public safety will be enhanced. As a service provider, the Department of Corrections will be especially proud that its clients eventually manage to establish themselves as decent citizens in the community.