
REPORTS OF THE SEMINAR

GROUP 1

MEASURES FOR A SMOOTH AND SUSTAINABLE REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION PROCESS THROUGH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

Group 1 was assigned to discuss “Effective Measures for a Smooth and Sustainable Rehabilitation and Reintegration Process through Community Involvement”. The discussions lasted from 27 January 2011 to 8 February 2011. It was agreed that discussions would be guided in accordance with the following agenda: (i) Community Involvement: Obstacles to the Reintegration of Offenders; (ii) Community Involvement: Institutional Treatment of Offenders; (iii) Community Involvement: Community-Based Treatment of Offenders; (iv) Measures/Recommendations to enhance Community Involvement in the Treatment of Offenders.

The Group elected by consensus Mr. Márcio Schiefler Fontes, from Brazil, as Chairman, Mr. Yasuhiko Maezawa, from Japan, as Co-Chairman, Mr. Ahmad Ishaque Jehangir, from Pakistan, as Rapporteur, and Mr. Mohammad Zahidul Hasan, from Bangladesh, as Co-Rapporteur. In his opening remarks, the Chairman encouraged members to speak freely and openly, clarifying that views expressed by participants will not be deemed as the official position of each country.

II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

A. Community Involvement: Obstacles to the Reintegration of Offenders

It should be noted that views expressed by participants were specific to the situation in each country. According to Japanese participants, community involvement is an integral component in the treatment of offenders. Voluntary Probation Officers (VPOs) and privately run halfway houses were a few of the examples cited. However, the number of VPOs being registered is declining.

Several participants said treatment of offenders was not a priority in many developing countries, as there are many basic problems to be addressed first. The participant from Jamaica identified lack of supportive legislation/policies and distrust of offenders as two main factors which impinge on community involvement. Traditionally, prisons operate as closed communities which fuels public mistrust, and discourages openness and transparency. The situation is worsened by a media which only highlights negative occurrences.

Participants agreed that communities often fail to see any beneficial link between themselves and offenders, and so were not motivated to become involved in their treatment. In addition, society views treatment of offenders as an exclusive function of government, and considers that what is needed most is punishment for offenders. It was posited that the stigma attached to crime and deteriorating economic conditions weaken family support.

All participants were in agreement that public perception of prisons and prisoners was the single greatest barrier that militates against community involvement in the treatment of offenders. Participants hailed successful strategies, such as Singapore’s *Yellow Ribbon* project, as long as they respect each country’s peculiarities.

During the discussion, the following intervention strategies were proposed to reduce obstacles: (i) Public campaigns utilizing politicians, public figures, celebrities and ex-offenders to increase awareness of the treatment of offenders; (ii) Media to promote rehabilitation efforts to help change public perception; (iii) Private organizations and NGOs to lobby government for legislative/policy changes to improve openness and transparency in prisons and promote public confidence.

B. Community Involvement: Institutional Treatment of Offenders

The discussion was focused on preparing offenders for economic independence on their release. It was generally agreed that private organizations' and NGOs' support is invaluable, as governments struggle to adequately provide many critical requirements for the successful reintegration of offenders. Japanese participants agreed that the economic downturn and its impact on resources was making it difficult, even in Japan, to support the economic independence of ex-offenders.

The participant from Jamaica stated that prisoners were largely from low socio-economic backgrounds, uneducated and unskilled, and needed educational and vocational training to prepare them for successful reintegration, a view which was widely accepted. The Rapporteur added that prisons in developing countries should introduce special assessment and aptitude tests, similar to those being carried out in Japan.

Participants from Japan explained how the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) concept was contributing to the solution, but added that improved family support was necessary to achieve better results. The Japan Employment Support Provision Organization was established in January 2009 by Nippon Kardonner, Japan Chamber of Commerce, Toyota, Nippon Steel and other central economic associations and companies to raise funds for potential employers, an effort which has contributed to an increase of cooperative employers. From a broader perspective, pre-release orientation is an essential component in rehabilitative regimes, as it prepares offenders for a smoother transition into society, wherein they can lead a productive life. It is therefore necessary for private sector organizations to extend their contribution to this programme. Prof. Watanabe underlined that the work of VPOs with offenders in the community has been broadened and extended to prisons.

Individuals, private organizations and NGOs can be a useful resource to help motivate offenders during rehabilitation. The *Courtney Walsh Foundation* in Jamaica was noted as a good example of private sector support. Views were varied and reflected cultural differences according to each country, although members were in agreement that poor socio-economic conditions, low self-esteem and poor attitude were factors impinging on prisoners' level of motivation. Participants from Japan added that education was also critical to improve motivation levels and reduce recidivism. The Chairman remarked that both self-esteem and stable jobs are critical to levels of motivation, besides adding that motivation differs between juveniles and adults, as well as between males and females; therefore, consideration should be given thereto. Also, it was suggested that motivation should be addressed in three spheres: *inner motivation*, *motivation from social circles* and *institutional motivation*. The suggestion was considered and widely accepted during discussions.

The Group believed that inmates' motivation levels can improve if family relationships are strengthened, and the gap between community and inmates is narrowed. Workshops focusing on building self-esteem and modifying behaviour were necessary to motivate inmates towards rehabilitation. This should be enhanced by public figures and celebrities who could be invited to visit prisons to deliver motivational talks. Prof. Watanabe added that ex-prisoners and victims can also be utilized to help in this effort. Support groups are also important and can motivate future ex-prisoners into becoming responsible citizens. *Big Brother*, *Big Sister* (BBS) associations which provides peer mentoring to juvenile offenders, and *Circles of Support* (ex-offenders' associations) were cited as successful examples.

Organizations can be encouraged to strengthen their support to prepare inmates for successful reintegration in many ways. The participant from Jamaica said it was very challenging for ex-offenders to gain employment in formal organizations; therefore skills training in penal facilities should be geared towards self-employment. The Rapporteur suggested the identification of cottage industries near prisons which will result in benefits to both the local businessperson and inmates, while the Chairman highlighted the *Begin Again* programme which provides a bridge between inmates and prospective employers. Participants agreed that present-day business analyses, such as SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and PESTLE (Political, Economic,

Social, Technical, Legal, Environmental), should be considered by judicial and correctional officers.

Prof. Watanabe emphasized that to increase effectiveness and efficiency, assessment of inmates is very critical, as well as providing a match between skills training of inmates with needs of employers. It was pointed out that a shift in public perception was needed and criminal justice administrators should discover innovative ways to entice media partnership. Visiting Expert Ms. Chemonges (who participated in the discussions on the second day) urged the need for better health facilities in jails to control contagious and other diseases.

C. Community Involvement: Community-Based Treatment of Offenders

Participants supported the view that the economic independence of ex-offenders contributes to a decisive reduction in recidivism rates and a safer society in which to live and work. Participants from Japan highlighted several areas in which the community was involved in providing economic independence for ex-offenders in their country. Conversely, several participants indicated that very little, if any, economic support was being provided for ex-offenders in their countries. The participant from Nepal observed that other countries will have to look at strategies of Japan in order to move forward.

The participant from Jamaica noted that the first six months of release are the most critical for ex-offenders, who are often estranged from family and without economic support, and as such accommodation and job placement are most important. The Group agreed, and proposed that private organizations establish programmes during this crucial phase to help ex-offenders take control of their lives and contribute productively to society. The Co-Rapporteur, however, preferred the view that organizations which target poverty eradication in developing countries can be encouraged to assist ex-offenders in starting small businesses.

The Group agreed to the following proposals regarding this issue: (i) Establish and manage halfway houses to provide accommodation to ex-offenders during the first six months of release; (ii) Establish Employment Bureaus to teach résumé writing skills, conduct mock interviews and link ex-offenders with employment opportunities; (iii) Expand the job market; (iv) Encourage private organizations not to refuse micro-credit to assist ex-offenders in starting or managing their own businesses.

The discussion on how individuals and organizations can support ex-offenders covered a range of issues, including: family support; the influence of community leaders and their ability to motivate; the impact of religion; the level of trust between client/stakeholders and support systems; and the impact of economic conditions on motivation levels in different countries.

Several members expressed the views that family and faith-based organizations were also elements which can help ex-offenders maintain requisite motivation levels to achieve economic independence. Additionally, private organizations can play a very important role by establishing and managing supportive programmes to maintain motivation standards. Suggestions included the *Free as a Bird* project and *FOR a Change* as useful examples. The Chairman cautioned that wholesale importation of foreign-based programmes will have to be tailored to fit cultural differences in respective countries.

At this point, the Group agreed that the following measures are important: (i) Establish groups to strengthen bonds between inmates and family/community; (ii) Provide specialized treatment for drug offenders; and to provide residential care for mentally and intellectually challenged inmates is desirable; (iii) Utilize websites and social networks to share information and find solutions among peers.

Participants expressed the view that it is the responsibility of different tiers of government and criminal justice practitioners to engage the community in the treatment of offenders, rather than waiting on the community to make the initial contact. To encourage support, the community must be convinced of the benefits to be achieved, and which should be evidenced by tangible results. Among the issues mentioned were the risks involved when ex-offenders are employed by private organizations and the need for policies to encourage private entities for continued engagement. Group members agreed that there is a need to develop public relations strategies that promote openness, transparency, and trust as interrelated and critical components.

The following methods of encouragement were proposed: (i) Develop public relations strategies which

emphasize crime reduction as a potential benefit to the community; (ii) Publicly recognize and acknowledge national awards to individuals and entities involved in the rehabilitation of offenders; (iii) Share information among agencies involved in treatment of offenders; (iv) Utilize social-networking websites; (v) Nurture partnerships with electronic and print media; (vi) Target and encourage prospective organizations and individuals for continued assistance; (vii) Government to give tax incentives and subsidies to businesses to encourage employment support; (viii) Conduct volunteer training sessions to improve service delivery; (ix) Establish and increase community work programmes for inmates.

It was felt that information sharing is critical to improving effectiveness and efficiency. As part of the strategy, participants proposed use of public figures, celebrities, and the media to communicate their support to the rehabilitation of ex-offenders. Public relations activities should focus on the benefits to society and convincingly convey this message to the community. Participants also expressed the view that careful assessment of the needs of the correctional system and the resources available in the community to find a suitable match is one of the ways to increase effectiveness and efficiency.

Providing information to organizations involved in the treatment of offenders, supported by open and honest communication, is also an approach to be considered. However, information sharing requires legislative changes and amendments in government policies, and this has to be done as a way forward. Training for volunteers is also very important as it conveys and clarifies the expectations for all parties involved.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main obstacles to community involvement in the treatment of offenders are: (i) Stigmatization of offenders; (ii) Lack of public awareness of the relationship between rehabilitation and crime reduction; (iii) Inadequate approaches to the community by criminal justice practitioners; (iv) Limitations in legal frameworks; (v) Social exclusion of offenders.

To address these issues, it is necessary to bridge the gap between offenders' rehabilitation needs and the extent of community involvement. Institutional and community-based programmes need to be widened to reduce reoffending and provide a better social environment for all.

The Group proposed the following recommendations:

1. The State organ responsible for justice and law and order in each country should take up the role of leader in offender treatment. The first step is to ensure that judicial, police and correctional officers understand the necessity of giving treatment to inmates consistent with their inevitable return to society;
2. All correctional institutions should develop a public relations strategy, based on partnership with electronic and print media;
3. Public campaigns, including commercial spots on TV and radio, should also emphasize programmes related to victims, especially compensation;
4. Educational awareness should be developed and extended to schools and universities, showing the correlation between reintegration of ex-offenders and low recidivism. Also, highlight the reduction in social and financial costs;
5. Successful strategies, such as Singapore's Yellow Ribbon Project should be implemented, although respecting each country's peculiarities. Support structures for victims should also be emphasized;
6. Present-day business analyses, such as SWOT and PESTLE, should be considered by judicial and correctional officers;
7. Administrative frameworks of correctional facilities should allow correctional managers to search for and implement local solutions to specific problems;
8. Correctional managers should be encouraged to be proactive in garnering individual and community organizations' support;
9. Legal frameworks should be tailored to enhance community involvement in offender treatment as well as emphasizing diversion and restorative justice mechanisms;

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10. Programmes such as the Japanese VPO system, which have been successfully adopted by the Thai, Korean and Philippine criminal justice systems, should be considered, especially by countries with minimal community involvement in the treatment of offenders;
11. Correctional facilities should provide training focusing on employability skills, specifically related to cottage industries, in order to facilitate self-employment;
12. Governments should provide tax incentives and subsidies for those private companies that accept ex-offenders as their employees.