

Center for International Legal Cooperation (CILC) and Directorate of Community Service (DCS) Partnership Strengthens Rehabilitation of Refugee Offenders through Community Service in Refugee Settlements in Uganda

Rehabilitation of Offenders has in the past been punitive and to be served in jail for detriment as well as to correct offenders not repeat their offences. This is more so for refugees who are expected to be at their best behaviour given their status in any country. More so as factors for migration range from economic, social, political and environmental.

However restorative justice perceives rehabilitation of offender's as a measure to facilitate offenders pick a lesson from their offences and be able to turn their lives around to become useful trusted members of their community. The rehabilitation process entails provision of resources and psycho-social support like education and counselling to facilitate behavioural change, attitude transformation and skills development.

In Uganda, significant efforts have been undertaken to rehabilitate non-incarcerated offenders by the Directorate of Community Service. Overtime the Directorate of Community Service has built a reputation for recording least rates of recidivism, thankful to rehabilitative programmes that are applied, namely nursery tree planting, carpentry, feeder road maintenance, beautification and brick making among others. In collaboration with international and local institutions and agencies, the Directorate of Community Service has adopted special programs transforming offenders to responsible civilian. However, such programmes are not equality distributed in all districts in Uganda due to a limited resource envelope and staffing.

Giving Chances, Making Changes is the slogan of the Directorate of Community Service (DCS) which was established in 2012 (as Department of Community Service) and has been a spearheading on rehabilitation of offenders since then.

The DCS has been propagating for rehabilitation of offenders that is applied in a dignified manner and gives responsibility to offenders to denounce unlawful behaviour. While the slogan seems logic, it is difficult to achieve especially where offenders such as refugees/vulnerable persons with no permanent base for placement or are considered outcasts in the community they live. One of the criterion for a Court to issue a Community Service Order is a having a fixed place of abode to which most refuges and vulnerable persons lack. Secondly community opinion on offenders is crucial in determining whether the offender should be granted for community service after all he/she will be serving the community which he/she will be assigned. In some cases reconciliation of offenders and victims will be recommended in order to repair relations and to facilitate return of offenders to the community they live. The Center for International Legal Cooperation (CILC) in partnership with the Directorate of Community Service are reinforcing the concept of rehabilitation of offenders through community service. This has been done through building staff capacity in core areas like Human rights, SBGV and refugee management taking a step further into deliberately planning for offender's life skills development through serving community service within communities they live given most offences they commit are petty and generally motivated by peer pressure in cases of youth, poverty, intoxication and negative cultural practices.

The directorate of Community Service has now developed an approach where the refugee settlement agencies, stakeholders and refugees are key partners in the rehabilitation process. The unique approach of rehabilitation has been applied to refugee offenders in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in Uganda which has a population of 93,000 refugees. Through a series of trainings

conducted by CILC on SGBV prevention and on Refugee management, CILC enhanced awareness and skills of DCS to adequately respond on these type of offences. The sessions further created opportunity for the DCS engagement on SGBV prevention and response along with general crime prevention and support to victims of crime as well as offenders. This is coupled with the fact that many offenders do not get support to heal and re-build social and life skills that could enable them to reintegrate within communities successfully. This leaves them susceptible to violence, crime and in conflict with the law again as seen during a field visit to Kyangwali Magistrate Court by CILC and DCS teams in April where some offenders were found to be repeat offenders with prison personnel frustrated on how to manage such cases.

CILCs engagement with DCS, the judicial sector and refugee agencies has facilitated the unique practical approach to advance rehabilitation of offenders through community service orders for simple offences. To advance the unique refugee rehabilitative approach, CILC further conducted trainings on entrepreneurship to equip the DCS staff for skills development for refugee offenders that will go hand in hand with support to victims of crimes thereby creating an opportunity for healing, skills development, and peaceful co-existence among refugees and host communities.

The unique approach for refugees settlements in Uganda developed has turned Kyangwali Refugee Settlement Magistrate Court to take the lead on practically issuing community service to refugee and host community offenders. CILC has created a great opportunity for community service being well strengthened as a form of rehabilitation in refugee settlements in Uganda. Given the many services required in refugee settlements that are provided by implementing and operational partners to UNHCR and government, the need for partnerships to fully provide services remains. Thus any partnership between Community Service Directorate and other group refugee settlement agencies thus will offer prospects in form of rehabilitation, sensitization, and logistical inputs and will go a long way to contribute to the limited resources to match demands in refugee settlements. In addition it will supplement partner's efforts to rehabilitate offenders while improving refugee's lives in refugee settlements. The efforts not only in the refugee settlement areas but surrounding communities will further see prisons decongested, offenders serving community service within their communities in a dignified manner while plugging a gap for some services, yet also able to care for their families while gaining life skills, healing to build trust within communities to become useful, responsible members of their community.

The approach above can also only facilitate healing for both victims and perpetrators of crime thereby creating peaceful co-existence with refugees and host communities.



Community Service Staff pause for a photo with the Facilitators and the Chairperson/National Community Service Committee after closure of the Refresher Training in Hoima. Seated L-R Ms. Adeline Tibakweitra/Project Manager, Mr Herbert Arinaitwe/Ag. Commissioner, Compliance Monitoring, Hon. Lady Justice Flavia Anglin Ssenoga/Chairperson-NCSC, Ms. Ans Voordow- Head Facilitator



Community Service Staff and the training Facilitators in a group photo after a stakeholder meeting at Kyangwali Court during the field visit to Kyangwali Refugee Settlement.



Ms. Ans Voordow conducting a training session at Miika Echo Resort, Hoima



Community Service staff during group discussions



Refugees in Kyangwali settlement raise arms in support of Community Service during sensitisation