



Promoting fair and effective criminal justice

ExTRA Project Mid-term Evaluation Overview

Evaluation of PRI's alternative to imprisonment project in East Africa

One of PRI's key priorities is to promote fair and proportionate sentencing and greater use of noncustodial measures. The UKAid sponsored [ExTRA Project](#) – Excellence in Training on Rehabilitation in Africa – is a pilot project looking to realise this aim in East Africa. A [Mid-term Evaluation](#) of the project has been completed, which focuses on community service as an alternative to short-term prison sentences for petty offences.

Prisons throughout the region are hugely overcrowded with both those who are convicted and those who are still pre-trial experiencing congested and unsanitary conditions. When community service works well, there are benefits both at the societal and individual level. Money is saved by the government when it does not have to provide housing and food to large numbers of prisoners, relieving strain on an overburdened system, and the community also receive free labour towards valuable projects in the local area. The individual offender is punished by having to work for free, but gains the opportunity to acquire skills that can help to prevent recidivism. Offenders completing community service orders (CSOs) are also able to spend some time working for money, allowing them to provide for their families and avoid the harmful conditions in prisons, where communicable diseases are rife.

This project works with the relevant government departments in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda to increase and improve the usage of CSOs, the rates of their completion and perception towards its use, to ultimately reduce the unnecessary overuse of imprisonment in the pilot areas. See here for the [theory of change](#).

A theory based evaluation design was used, which involved analysis of project related documents and activities and drew on interviews with a range of key stakeholders throughout specific evaluation visits from a PRI team and project visits by the Project Coordinator. Data collected during this period is compared to that collated in the baseline period. The project largely consists of training based activities with key stakeholders and this initial evaluation suggests positive effects.

Key findings

Usage of CSOs

The data collected during the mid-term visits shows large increases in the use of CSOs by the courts in both Tanzania (76% increase) and Uganda (80% increase) in the pilot areas.

While in Kenya there appears not to have been an increase, possible reasons for this are discussed, such as the transfer of magistrates and the Presidential decree relating to harsher sentences for alcohol related offences. There was, however, a marked rise in the length of the CSOs issued and a fall in custodial prison sentences – both of which were aims of the training, suggesting a positive effect. Further counterfactual analysis also showed that where there were two magistrates serving a court and only one attended training, the magistrate who did benefit from training saw a dramatic increase in the use of CSOs, whereas the other did not see a positive change.

Completion of CSOs

The data suggests that the rate of successful completions rose (to 97%) in Kenya, remained broadly the same in Tanzania (96%), and fell in Uganda by 11% to 79%. The fall in Uganda is explored and may be explained by a combination of a lack of accurate recording of absconds before the project training and a sharp increase in the number of CSOs needing to be monitored. It is worth noting that after the introduction of the Community Service Department Volunteers and the initial drop in completions, the completion rate has been improving month on month. There is further discussion in the report of the ‘supervisor’ role (those who work at the ‘host’ organisation where the CSO is carried out) in Kenya and Tanzania, where training with this group appears to have had a positive effect.

Perception

While the mid-term evaluation did not look specifically at questions relating to public confidence in community service (as a perceptions survey will be completed during the end-term stage to compare with the baseline data), stakeholders in all three countries made reference to its importance.

The police were often highlighted as a group with negative views towards community service and PRI heard from police officials that officers can sometimes feel that their hard work is not appreciated by the magistrates if a CSO is given. However, there was evidence that training had produced some positive results. Magistrates themselves explained the importance of the community’s perception of the alternative to prison and in some cases they explained how this effected their decision making.

The effectiveness of different project activities are discussed in the report. Feedback from sessions suggested that participants both gained knowledge and improved their opinions of community service and indeed, the report includes a case study where a local chief changed his stance from being firmly against community service to becoming a positive advocate for its use. Further case studies also highlight the positive effects of the project.

Lessons

There are clear limits to what Probation/Community Service departments are able to do to increase the effectiveness of CSOs, even with the additional capacity. Even in Kenya, the best resourced of the three departments, there were indications that probation cannot keep up with the pace of demand for suitability assessments. Further innovative solutions have been developed, for example, Uganda has introduced Community Service Department Volunteers, recent graduates in relevant fields who provide extra capacity to the department. They sensitise people at court, in police stations and in prisons as well as the community about CSOs and also help provide accurate data to magistrates so that they can make informed decisions about whether to issue a CSO. These volunteers also manage another

new group, the Peer Support Persons (PSPs) – former offenders who have successfully completed CSOs and have been identified as people who can be a positive influence on the offenders currently carrying out CSOs. They provide counselling and support to the offenders and help ensure that they do not abscond.

Through this pilot project, PRI has learnt a lot about identifying the right indicators to measure the performance of a community service system. At the mid-term stage it has become clear that outcome indicators used in this project – number of CSOs and percentage of CSOs completed – are not the best indicators for tracking the outcomes and impact. New indicators are suggested such as the CSO to imprisonment ratio and the monitoring of the level of absconding.

Despite some good examples of community service placements (poultry projects in Kenya, waste disposal in Uganda, work in health centres in Tanzania), too many still involve cleaning and slashing. While the ExTRA project stakeholder events appear to have stimulated an increase in the range of agencies and institutions willing to offer placements, too many are unimaginative and produce too little satisfaction for the public and too little opportunity for rehabilitation, reparation or learning of new skills.

As a result of PRI's ongoing work on the [UN Bangkok Rules](#) and partnership with the Kenya Probation and Aftercare Service, a project is underway in Kenya to learn further lessons about adopting a [gender-sensitive approach](#) to community service, which will be applicable to the region.

Recommendations

The report concludes with detailed recommendations for the probation and community service providers in each of the countries. These include the introduction of more innovative community service placements and the development of greater feedback mechanisms to both the community and the magistrates who issue the orders. PRI will help to further develop data collection tools and also suggests the introduction of exit interviews with offenders in order to gain further qualitative information. Countries are encouraged to consider good practices from the others: for example, Kenya's involvement of a seconded magistrate in the coordination of community service, Uganda's use of PSPs, and Tanzania's close ties between CSO and local government officials. There are also recommendations for the researchers who will conduct their end of project of assessment in April and May 2016.

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