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THE NIGERIAN PRISONS AND THE PERSPECTIVES OF RE-INTEGRATING EX-CONVICTS INTO THE LARGER SOCIETY: UNDERSTANDING THE MACRO AND MICRO INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This research is the outcome of a one year TETFund funded study on 'Ex-convicts and reintegration experiences: an exploratory study of life after prison in Nigeria. The project involved a one-on-one interview, focus group discussion, personal observation, and narratives from the sample population, etc. to specifically analyze and compare experiences of ex-convicts [and others] and the general societal challenges that are likely to affect their capacity for re-integration. Several issues, which seem to challenge possible efforts at turning ex-convicts into useable manpower to fill and complement existing skill gap in Nigeria's manpower landscape, were identified. These issues are encapsulated in regimes of cultural worldviews, which hardly support any possible plan for incorporating ex-convicts into Nigeria's mainstream labour market. Institutional challenges also featured as major impediments to preparing ex-convicts for eventual re-integration. The study used focus group discussions which comprised of 37 inmates out of 930 inmates and collective efficacy theory was adopted for this study. The paper recommends, among other things, that there should be reforms in the prison in line with the world best practices. The alternatives to imprisonment like open prison and community service should be incorporated into the prisons in Nigeria. The paper recommends for further study on the issue of prisonization.

Keywords: *Ex-convicts, Reintegration, Prisons*

Introduction

The penal institution, according to Foucault (1977), has historically evolved in four categories as 'torture', 'punishment', 'discipline' and 'prison'. Public torture proceeds through the ritual of investigation and ceremony of execution which is a method of extending the omnipotence of sovereign's body power. However, the political cost of the intention to induce fear and submission through torture could be higher if the victim turns out to be celebrated. In order to minimize that, the 'punishment method' came as a replacement. Such replacement was necessary to check the 'uncontrolled' and 'undue' concentration of disciplinary power on the sovereign in favour of more and evenly distributed [public] power. Under this circumstance, a more controlled form of punishment served to force prisoners to do work that reflected their crime, and repaying society for their infractions - *'this would have allowed the public to see the convicts' bodies enacting their punishment, and thus to reflect on the crime?*

The disciplinary aspect of the prison emerged out of the conviction that 'bodies' must be subjected to all forms of necessary training, observation and control for the new economics, politics and welfare of the modern society. The idea is to subject the body to some forms of docility for it to be able to function in factories, ordered military requirements and classrooms, etc. Giving new forms of individuality to bodies requires modern institutions and technologies of disciplines. But the peak of prison as a centralized institution of criminal punishment, according to Foucault, means that it is part of a larger network of a

system of sovereign institution (schools, military institutions, hospitals and factories) in modern society (with diverse disciplinary careers, and under the scientific authority of medicine, psychology and criminology).

Prisons serve three fundamental functions, namely: one, restraining the commission of crime by putting offenders behind bars. Two, deterrence the prospect of being incarcerated makes potential offenders to delay moderate behaviours and three, reformation, which aims at teaching better habits and improved behaviours.

Three prominent types of punishment dominate modern criminal justice system including simple fine, community service and incarceration. These depend on the gravity of the offence: lesser offences including traffic and disrespect to constituted authorities, etc, may be settled with a fine or community service, while severer offences (armed robbery, murder, arson, rape, kidnapping, drug offences, etc.) are most likely to attract incarceration. Incarceration regimes could be 'closed' (convicts are not granted freedom outside the prison premises); 'semi-open' (individual has the right of working outside the prison during the day, being incarcerated only at nights); and 'open' (convicts may not only work outside prison, but could also spend nights at home). The length of imprisonment affects human capital development. The longer the period of incarceration, the more likely the diminishing or depreciative impacts on human capital (Nagin and Waldfogel 1998, Joseph 2002, Sachida and Mondonca 2007).

Criminals who have been arrested and incarcerated potentially face several challenges notably stigmatization, labour market punishment and diminished productivity. The impact of stigmatization cross-cuts social and economic lives of ex-convicts. Some studies suggest that ex-convicts are more likely to face lower income streams in their businesses or employment and hardship in finding employment relative to non-convicts (Iloizer, 2007, Sachida and Mondonca, 2007, Joseph, 2002, Imai and Krishna: 2001, Nagin and Waldfogel, 1998, Glaeser and Sacerdoted 1999). Using the National Longitudinal Surveys of the United States (NLSY), Holzer (2007) argued that all else equal and spells of incarceration do tend to reduce subsequent employment and earnings for those with criminal records.

Theoretically, this finding seems to draw support from the following arguments (Holzer 2007:5):

'Once released, the tendency of ex-prisoners to work might be reduced for a variety of supply-based reasons, such as the fact that their skills...depreciate over time, their information about the job market weakens and their work networks atrophy. As these, individuals withdraw from the labor market (and perhaps recidivate), their behaviour can also reduce the opportunities for and interest in employment among young men in poor neighborhoods who otherwise might not engage in crime...perhaps by thinning out their informal employment networks as well or by generating more negative peer effects.'

Given the potential impact of incarceration on ex-convicts in the society, we take a broader look at the challenges and opportunities most likely to shape how ex-convicts negotiate their survival and livelihoods in the context of developing countries using Nigeria as a case. This is expected to contribute data from the developing-country setting and complements international literature on the socio-economic and human cost of incarceration on ex-convicts. The paper is organized in segments. Immediately following the introductory segment is a discussion on Nigeria's prisons and the criminal justice system. The third segment discusses the research processes, focusing on the methods of data collection, analysis and ethical issues. The fourth segment presents the various findings from the Held with specific emphasis on the socio-demographics of inmates, re-integration plans for ex-convicts and the associated challenges. This is followed by the discussion of findings and concluding remarks.

Nigeria's Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system involves the totality of practices and governmental institutions responsible for directing social control, deterring and mitigating crime, or sanctioning those who violate laws with criminal penalties and rehabilitation efforts. The criminal justice system consists of the Police which is the entry point to the Criminal Justice System; the courts (for adjudication-settling disputes and administering justice); and the prisons, jails and keep the inmates in some countries they are called the correcting probationary agencies. The prison remains last in the line of the criminal justice system with the mandate for punishment, correction and rehabilitation. The tasks of investigating and enforcing criminal law resides in the police authorities, which serve as the first entry point into the criminal justice chain. Nigeria's criminal justice system has, for several decades, been managed within the framework of the British colonial administration - the Criminal Procedure Act (CPA) 1 and the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) 2. The aim of the colonial justice system was to protect the Europeans from the exploited natives. For several decades, it has dictated the pulse of the Nigerian criminal justice system until the enactment of the Administration of Justice Act (ACJA) in 2015. The ACJA replaced the obsolete colonial criminal legal heritage with the goal of improving the efficiency in the administration of criminal justice, heavily challenged by excessive use of technicalities, long period of adjournment of cases, prisons and court congestion, corruption, excessive delays in adjudicatory process, poor capacity of staff, poor infrastructures and poor plans for rehabilitating and re-integrating ex-convicts into the society. The ACJA is supposed to represent a significant shift from punishment to restorative justice with interest in restoring victims, safeguarding their rights and advancing the emergence of an orderly society.

In the criminal justice chain, the prison represents an important element involved in reforming, restoring, re-integrating and re-socializing ex-convicts into the larger society. But the treatment of prisoners in developing countries is an important issue for consideration in criminal justice systems reforms or behaviour change improvement programmes. Much attention tends to shift to the situation in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, etc. African prisons have been largely overlooked by the international community. Although some international organizations including the Human Rights Watch (2004) and Amnesty International (2003) have shaded light on African prisons, research attention remain surprisingly low. The need to learn more about African prisons is reinforced by the Ouagadougou Declaration on Accelerating Prison and Penal Reform in Africa, and the Kampala Declaration on Prison Conditions (Penal Reform et. al. 2003), which all attempted to promote strategies and standards that do not currently exist. How does the Nigerian prison system function to meet the challenges associated with its goal of reformation, restoration and re-integration of ex-convicts into the larger society?

Nigeria's prison system is one of the British colonial legacies in principles, institutional architecture and management practices. Literature has it that the Broad street prisons (Lagos) was the earliest prison in 1872, which was later followed in 1909 with the establishment of other prisons in Calabar, Onitsha, Degama, Benin city and Sapele. The colonial prison arrangement was decentralized to reflect the diversities of the geopolitical and ethnic structures of Nigerian society. Consequently, the management of the system was delegated to different forms of administration including the District Commissioner and the native authorities. This arrangement later gave way to a uniform prison system following the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1994.

Reformation and correctional interests still remain the main principles behind the Nigerian prisons service. In this context, the Nigerian prisons have served to cater for all categories of offenders including criminal and civil inmates, debtors, detainees, recidivists, etc. The prisons equally cater for adult males and females, young persons, children, pregnant women, nursing mothers, long and short term prisoners, condemned

prisoners and inmates awaiting trial or being held for safe custody. It is speculated that over 60% (some locations could record as high as 80% or more) of the total prison inmates is awaiting trial for diverse offences. Some could wait between 1 and 8 years for their trials and the wait can take even a longer period.

Compared to the larger Africa, Nigeria has the lowest prison population rate of any country, at 34 prisoners per 100,000 populations (Penal Reform International, 2003). While numbers are relatively low, the reality is that conditions are deplorable and complicated by over-congestion/overcrowding, decrepit infrastructures (of the colonial era), poor or nonexistent plumbing, insufficient medical care, poor waste management, gross underfunding and ill-motivated workforce, with potential for physical abuse, disease, and deaths in custody. As one of the penal institutions of the state, the prison is meant to be responsible for securely housing people who have been convicted or on "awaiting trial". Prisons maintain custody through measures aimed at preventing escape including erecting high walls or chain link, fence, placing guards, constant checks on cell perimeter walls and regular surveillance. Therefore, imprisonment has emerged as a form of humanitarian system of punishment for different categories of offenders in many societies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of collective efficacy which was propounded by Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls (1997), in their observation, they maintained that neighbourhood varies in their ability to activate informal social control. This involves citizens behaving proactively, not passively whenever "they see wayward behavior such as by calling police authorities, coming to the rescue of someone in trouble, and telling unruly teenagers to quiet down and behave." They posit further, that such collective behavior of residents is contingent on whether there is mutual trust and solidarity among neighbours (Sampson et al, 1997:919). The theory of collective efficacy, cohesiveness prevails, the citizens can depend on one another to enforce rules of civility and good behaviour. Such neighbourhood city, locality, country with collective efficacy, have no noticeable social cohesion among neighbours combined with untiring willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good (Sampson, et. al., 1997:918).

This theory can easily be applied to this study in that collective efforts of all citizens are needed in order to curb the problem of reintegration of ex-convicts in Nigeria. The efficacy of individual, governmental agencies and non governmental organizations are needed in order to effectively decongest the prisons in Nigeria and effectively reintegrate them into the society. However, Lilly, Cullen and Ball (2007:46) states that "the concept of "efficacy" implies not merely a state of being ready for social action" but ability to take necessary action.

The Research Process/Methodology

This research is the outcome of a one year TETFund funded study on 'Ex-convicts and reintegration experiences: an exploratory study of 'life after prison' in Nigeria'. The project involved a one-on-one interview, focus group discussion, personal observation, and narratives from the sample population drawn from Uyo prison to specifically analyze and compare experiences of ex-convicts [and others] and the general societal challenges that are likely to affect their capacity for re-integration. We were able to interview 37 respondents who were purposively selected over the course of the project. Our interviewees included 20 convicts (13 males and 7 females); 6 ex-convicts (5 males and 1 female); 6 prison staff (4 males and 2 females); from Uyo prison and 2 staff partners from a non-governmental organization; and three others (two police officers and one public analyst). We used in-depth and semi-structured interviews to be able to generate as much and detailed information as possible. We equally depended on informants, narratives and secondary sources of data (mostly on inmates' socio-demographics) from official statistics kept by the Uyo Prison authorities. We were given supervised access to the prison environment, which

enabled keen observations on how the system functions in terms of infrastructures/services and the general condition of inmates.

Interviews were conducted and concluded with a triangulation meeting with staff and the selected permitted inmates (though highly supervised) to build consensus around emerging themes. Interviews were conducted in Ibibio and English (for non-Ibibio language speakers). The field assistants were responsible for typing field notes and transcripts, and manual coding for purposes of identifying and highlighting themes, all these were cross-checked by the research team.

We reviewed one another's field notes from individual interviews and discuss our interpretations jointly (Strauss and Corbin 1998). On the basis of the interviews, content analysis of national policies and policy framework were carried out to understand general issues and challenges associated with the Nigerian prisons. Fieldwork was complemented by informal meetings, discussions, email and phone conversations, follow-up interviews, and the review of local publications

All necessary ethical procedures and practices were followed including informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and ability to withdraw from participation at any time. This study however focused on the Nigerian prison system - the last in the criminal justice chain. Others in the chain including the legislative, the court and the enforcement agencies were not covered. It is also important to state that all the inmates were interviewed in the presence of the prison staff. This implies that freedom to freely and frankly express one's self was highly supervised, perhaps, to minimize the possibility of further exposing the system in the light of massive corruption often reported of the Nigerian Prison Service (The Paradigm 2015). Informant sources were very helpful as sources of useful information. Despite these limitations, we strongly believe that this study is a useful start for further research.

Findings

The Uyo Prisons and the socio-demographics of inmates

A notable feature of the Nigerian prison is its tendency to parade an unusually large inmates' population mostly dominated by those in the 'awaiting trial'. The Uyo prison, for instance (4th August 2017 statistics), parades a total inmate population of 938 dominated by 755 (80.5%) in the 'awaiting trial' (Male = 697; Female = 58); 150 (15%) convicts (Male = 139; Female = 11); 13 (1.4%) lifers (all males); 19 (2%) condemned criminals (all males); and one male detainee. By gender, the inmate population is dominated by 92.6% male and 7.4% female populations. Some 'awaiting trial' inmates were still in detention for over 4 years, with no prospect and plans for compensation on proof of innocence.

A disproportionately high male inmate population reflects how the challenge of existential struggles in a patriarchal society disproportionately affect men, regularly pushing them into illicit and illegal means to sustain daily personal and family responsibilities. A female respondent (in her 60s) argued: *'you can see only few females... in fact, they do not have much problem except minor offences... the problem is located in men...and they populate this Prison most.'*

The Nigerian prisons play host to people with offences that ordinarily should not warrant imprisonment (e.g., sanitation offences, prostitution, driving offences, land struggles, etc.): *'All cases of offences are sent to the prisons'*, argued one respondent (a staff). He went on: *'It is so bad that at one point we had to reject some categories of individuals ...but we were still forced to accept them by the authorities... the prison is not meant for people who have violated sanitation laws or several other civil cases...'* Lesser offences could better be handled through several other options such as fines, community service, electronic tagging and monitoring while worst offenders could go to prisons.

Viewing prisons as a place for all manners of offences is costly on many fronts. It implies much money has to be budgeted for building and maintaining more cells, hiring staff, and feeding more inmates (even of lesser offence), and keeping them idle/disconnecting them from the labour scene. More costly is the prospect of making inmates of lesser offences more dangerous by locking them up along with hardened ones. It is possible the cost of incarceration could be reduced, and money channeled to funding improved policing and educational/schooling programmes.

Re-integration Plans for ex-convicts

One of the core responsibilities of the Nigerian prison service is re-integration and re-socialization. Research into ex-convicts' reintegration strategies in developed countries might not be applicable in different socio-cultural contexts. Imprisonment poses a range of social, economic and personal challenges, which later affect the prisoner capacity for re-integration into the larger society. Some of the challenges have been highlighted to be associated with the ex-prisoner past experiences of social, economic and psychological isolation or marginalization.

Literatures have variously asserted that imprisonment might have produced some collateral effect on many ex-prisoners, including a loss of livelihood, social network and other personal belongings as well as some mental-psychological defects.

In essence, the period of transition from prison to society can be very challenging for ex-prisoners, especially when additional social perceptual problems of stigmatization and discrimination are envisaged. Reintegrating ex-convicts into the larger society is particularly difficult in Nigeria. In the first instance, the Nigerian prison system is very ill-equipped to perform its critical task of reforming citizens convicted of crime. The poor state of the Nigerian prison system and facilities can hardly prepare convicts for life-after-imprisonment' through some forms of mental, intellectual, physical and psychological supports as well as equipping them with new skills and competences for future opportunities (UN, 2006).

Our findings from the Uyo prison show that the Nigeria prison is very ill-equipped and insufficiently funded to execute this important aspect of their core mandates. There are very few low-skilled manpower training workshop centres including tailoring, carpentry, welding, barbing, information and communication technology (ICT) and fibre making, devoted to preparing long term (convicted) inmates of two years' and above for a life after prison terms. We also learnt the National Open University has approved one Centre for the Uyo Prison. The prison equally caters for the intellectual needs of inmates through schools and library programmes.

For the technical skills, inmates' enrollment is voluntary, while their products are consumed within the Prison, and this is where opportunities for expansion are limited. One of the respondents lamented thus: '*...these inmates take their time and produce good quality materials...I bought one shelf years back from here, and till today it is still strong...'* As a close organization, the skills, products and manpower potentials of the inmates can hardly be showcased to the general public and this does not give room for adequate preparation for re-integration and rebuilding of their lives after prison terms. The economy is also deprived of the opportunity of gaining from the services and productivities offered by the inmates.

Against the above context, prisoners in Nigeria negotiate plans for re-integration into the larger society from a position of weakness. Poor infrastructures and limited but ill-equipped skill acquisition centres hardly provide the necessary incentives for engaging in self-development training and activities. Most of the inmates' socio-economic and family backgrounds hold little or no prospect of supporting their future development on release from incarceration. Even if some prospects were possible, the society-wide attitude of stigmatization barriers ex-convicts from availing themselves of available opportunities for rebuilding their lives.

However, individual specific coping strategies may be helpful. All the respondents had no clear plans and hopes of being re-absorbed or re-building their lives after jail terms. They rather depend on *"God's plans for their lives after prison"*, 'one prisoner (in his early 40s) who was serving six-months conviction replied to our questions as follow: *'...well, although I have my plans and my wife has hers for me, I depend on God's direction as I will be concluding my stay tomorrow...'* Another who has spent over 4 years awaiting trial observed: *'...I have learnt my lessons, but life is difficult...I have three kids and the burden is on my wife...it is now I know those who are my real friends and relatives...if I finally get out of here, I will relocate to start a new life in Akwa Ibom... I do not have anything, everything is gone... I only depend on God...'*

Similarly, another male inmate (in his early 30s) currently serving a ten-year term for robbery stated that *'...I am a fisher man. but occasionally engaged in robbery, which led to my arrest, conviction and jail... I have learnt my lessons... I don't think anything will take me back to such business again...here in the prison I am doing farming and I hope to continue in farming after my jail term... I would not need money, all I will need will be farm tools and I can work and survive with my family...'* Extremely few inmates enroll in few training but grossly under-equipped centres. When asked why he does not take advantage of some training and skill acquisition opportunities for the inmates, a male convict (late 20s) said he cannot do anything because facilities are not available.

We equally interviewed an inmate in his late 20s (serving 5 years term) who was coming from the ICT class, and he had this to say, *'...take advantage of this ICT to improve myself and today we were learning Microsoft...when am through with my jail term, I hope to set up a business and may want to further my education...'* Although the Uyo prison runs some training workshops including tailoring, carpentry, barbing salon, welding, fiber-making and ICT, these workshops are highly underequipped. Facilities are virtually non-functional. The tailoring workshop had only one functional tailoring machine, which cannot support an average of 10 trainees projected per day. The ICT section had less than 20 plastic seats and 6 computers (5 of which is claimed to have been donated by the State Government while one was donated by the NGO running the place). Farming activities are not strongly supported as would be expected. Very small portions of scattered cultivated lands were used for vegetables and that cannot be said to adequately cater for the interest of even a single inmate.

Generally, the prison facilities do not have clear plans for rehabilitation or preparation of inmates on 'awaiting trial' for re-integration into the larger society (should they be found innocent), notwithstanding the number of years served. One senior staff interviewee told our team that: *'the prisons are meant for convicts...they are the real landlords entitled to every facilities and services... inmates on 'awaiting trial' take advantage of existing facilities if they desire...you cannot force them...'* The inability of the Nigerian prison to adequately provide the needed infrastructures for skill acquisition and training for the inmates is the main factor that works against successful rehabilitation and re-integration of inmates. Inmates' interests for acquiring some training skills and building capacity for future use are highly circumscribed by grossly inadequate infrastructures of skills acquisition and rehabilitation. One cannot learn where there is no opportunity. As one inmate interviewee noted: *I would be interested in learning some skills but there are no facilities, virtually nothing to engage me...I would appeal to government to help equip some of the training centres...*

The Nigerian prison claims to run after-care service charged with the responsibility of resettlement, follow-up, re-integration and re-socialization of ex-convicts. Our field experience shows that the 'aftercare' departments revolves around extremely few and highly under-equipped manpower and other relevant resources. The department, which merely exists in name, runs no independent budget plans. By our interaction with some staff, extremely very few inmates receive follow-up services, and this probably has to do with some external facilitations.

Inmates who have concluded their terms depend on families and voluntary support from the prison's staff on small matters as transport fees back to their destination. One staff respondent observed: *'...nothing is available even for transport on discharge... they depend on their families...and where support is not forthcoming, voluntary donations from staff may be possible depending on availability' or how kind and good the inmate was...yes, most inmates get stranded...there is nothing we can do if it is not possible...*

One of our team members had an occasion to mobilize transport support to one inmate who finished his jail term and was about to head to the Middle Belt of Nigeria. *'...the man had nothing to pay back home...I had to arrange some transport money...I would have asked him to sleep in my place, but you know it is difficult to trust some people especially an ex-convict...if something happens, people would mock you for daring to put your hands in fire...'* Our effort to locate an ex-convict who was successfully re-integrated could not yield fruit as one staff interviewee argued: *"...would you use your personal money to fuel your car and finance such visit...not possible...the budget is not there...and there is nothing we can do about that..."*

Poor follow-up service implies that possible success stories and challenges of ex-convicts cannot be tracked to improve on the system. Running after-care services requires heavy logistics and motivated professionals, which are not possible under current circumstances of gross underfunding. By this, it is clear that the Nigerian Prison can hardly prepare convicts for 'life-after-imprisonment' through some forms of mental, intellectual, physical and psychological supports as well as equipping them with new skills and competences for future opportunities.

The Challenges of reintegrating ex-convicts in Nigeria

Recidivism: The rate at which prisoners get recycled in Nigerian prisons remains very high. A male respondent in his early 50s had this to say: *I know of one boy who served here, and when he was freed without appropriate resettlement, he went and stole a fowl from the neighborhood and was brought back...when asked why he did that, his response was he was better-off staying in the prison than outside...'* Macro-societal, socio-economic and cultural factors contribute to recidivist tendencies of ex-convicts.

The prison system mirrors the dynamics and conditions of the larger society. If the larger society commands weak value culture, social norms and poor attitude to entrepreneurship, every other associated institutions in the society is more likely to be affected. The rise of petroleum oil as the basis of the Nigerian economy in the 70s equally led to the rise in poor attitude to work and the mentality of 'get rich quick' among the people. This challenge got complicated by the problem of elite corruption that leaves all institutions of discipline, education and morals weak and incapable of citizenship building. Young people get increasingly lazy and would not want to work. Others would not want to go to school, especially given the ease they can secure livelihoods through dishonest means of accessing 'quick money'. Similarly, this same attitude is reproduced in the prisons. Inmates prefer food to training and self-development, *'it is very serious'*, argued one male correspondent in his late thirties: *'...if you have to attract their attention, cook food, provide biscuit and other eatables or wearables...without that you are wasting your time...they would not come... I think most of them are lazy...and it is affecting their future'*, he noted.

Poor attitude to self-development among the inmates is one of the greatest impediments to rehabilitation and re-integration of ex-convicts. The attitude to work may be there among some, but the prison system does not have structured plans for rehabilitation and re-integration of ex-convicts upon release. The extremely few training workshops are highly underequipped and cannot provide incentives for self-development activities for the inmates. Having wasted several years or months in confinement without anything to show, it is difficult to get such inmates, on release, on a path to rehabilitation and improved living, hence the tendency for recidivism.

In this context, imprisonment seems not to be correcting behaviours in the desirable direction; it rather reinforces criminal tendencies of inmates. A case of an inmate we interviewed, one day to his release, was an interesting case in recidivism. By all indication, the inmate had shown remorse and promised to be of good conduct on release. One of our team members got his contact details and proceeded to help him rebuild his life. In less than one month, the ex-convict was already involved in multiple cases of swindling, forgery and extortion, and other criminal behaviours. 'At the time of going to this write-up, the young man was already in the Police custody. This, and related ones, are interesting areas for more research.

Stigmatization:

The challenges of re-integration common to ex-convicts are due largely to the internalized view held by communities along with the larger society, making it difficult for ex-prisoners to gain employment upon release from prison. Ex-convicts, in most cases, often have to deal with the stereotypes and stigma of being perceived as violent, uneducated and lazy, among several others. This problem is compounded by the inability of the relevant state and social institutions to support their full re-integration through some enabling processes and platforms. For instance, it passes as a standard practice that many employers of labour in Nigeria discriminate against applicants who had suffered some criminal convictions. A frustration arising from job discrimination is more likely to encourage recidivism. Stigmatization goes beyond the general perception of the personality of the ex-convicts since it affects their businesses and business interests- *'...yes you are talking about a situation where even the skill you acquired does not have meaning...the society does not patronize you...'*

Stigmatization transcends every facet of our societal institutions including the family, church and academic institution. One staff who runs some support programmes for the inmates painted the scenario when he said: *'...it is very serious that the church that is supposed to help does not help... we have experiences of launching an appeal for support in the church for prison inmates...the response has always been negative...people do not see why they must support prisoners...it is serious that in one occasion some members of a certain church organization were querying the need for renovating and building a befitting place for prisoners...'* For most people and organizations, prisoners are paying for their sins and should not be supported.

A prison official corroborated this position with an experience he had in an academic institution, where a professor had to speak against supporting prisoners and ex-convicts on religious grounds, citing the biblical portion which emphasizes that *'the soul that sinneth shall die'* (Ezekiel 18: 20). To most in the Nigerian society, the Prison is a 'trash can' that should be dumped all forms of 'rubbish'. Irrespective of the category of offence, once you had been in prison, you are not likely to be accepted at every layer of the society and its institutions, as one female inmate in her late 40s noted: *'...sir! It would be difficult, but with God, I will try to cope....'* Asked about their prior attitudes towards ex-convicts, all the inmates (males and females) were unanimous in their attitudes of seeing prisoners as the worst offenders on earth who should not be associated with.

One female inmate in her early 40s said, *'...now my attitude has changed...people have different problems that bring them to the prison and so we should not generalize...I have learnt my lessons...being in the prison is much more than going to school ...you learn a lot practically ...nothing would bring me here again...'* The negative image held of prisoners from the outside gets reinforced at every layer of the society (including the family, church, public institutions and the general society) and poses the greatest challenge toward achieving successful reintegration for ex-convicts.

Discussion of findings and concluding remarks

The Nigerian prison functions as an organization that is influenced by a range of political, social, economic and administrative arrangements. By this, its finances, services, operational efficiency and management practices are directly influenced by the macro institutional interests and practices across the executive, legislative and judiciary spheres. In the first instance, the Nigerian prison system is a security formation directly under the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The functioning of its daily bureaucratic and administrative practices is directly and centrally supervised through structured and networked systems of regional and State commands. The governing principles, laws and regulatory framework for its daily operations and practices are supplied by the legislative arm of government, while the judiciary is responsible for matters of justice.

In this context, the performance of the Nigerian Prison System is a function of the effectiveness and performance of the three arms of government - the legislature, executive and the judiciary. From the perspective of the laws and regulations, the Nigerian prison had been built around colonial legislative framework of custodianship and punishment for several decades until 2015. But the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) of 2015 made some provisions in the direction of restorative justice with interest in improving efficiency, checking prison congestion, etc. In the light of global experiences and practices in prison reforms and management, the ACJA cannot be said to be comprehensive as it fails to embrace best practices in open prisons and diverse sentencing options, as well as the use of modern technology in the 'management of inmates. Inadequate reforms in the legislative sector equally affected the activities and practices in the criminal justice chains, especially the Court and the Police.

The Uyo prison, for instance, hosts inmates of all categories of offences, including sanitation offences (which could easily be handled through fines or community services). Although our scope of research did not directly focus on profiling available staff capacity, our regular interactions and interviews indicate that the Uyo prison lacks adequate supply of manpower at many levels. Critical manpower areas including psychology, psychiatry and medical science are not manned by specialists. In short, there is no psychologists, psychiatrist and medical doctors in the Uyo prison's-employ. Most of the staff are hardly in tune with modern practices associated with the prison system. They see the prison from the prism of custodianship. Important and specialized service units including counseling, aftercare, etc. are either none existent or grossly undermanned and underequipped. Poor human capacity hardly opens up the Nigerian prison to ideas and innovative practices, and this affects the performance and efficiency of the system,

A highly centralized and slow bureaucratic arrangement equally poses a great challenge against securing some best practices for improved prison and inmate's management through critical partnership. Corruption happens to be the greatest problem in the Nigerian prison system (<http://www.theparadigmng.com/2015/07/26/massive-corruption-exposed-in-the-nigerian-prison-service/>).

Our focus here never extended beyond the experiences in the Uyo prison. Our team had the opportunity to interact with some ex-convicts who gave their diverse narratives of hijacking food and material donations for inmates, poor utilization of funds meant for inmates' care and outright exploitation of inmates.

Corruption in the prisons implies that the prospect of partnership for improvement in infrastructures and services within the system may not succeed on grounds of poor accountability. One of the main reasons why the prison remains less open to research and public scrutiny is the fear of exposing some shady practices within the formation. One ex-convict in his early 50s noted: '*...if you see what happens in the prison, you shed tears...the system is rotten...inmates will never see or have a taste of any food item donated*

from the public...whether cow or goat...'. Another respondent (in his late 30s) explained: '*...the prison authority can never allow you interview the inmates freely...they must have coached them before they were invited for interview...no staff wants those inmates to expose the system and say out their real experiences...they can never...*

Our research team was surprised to witness that only one sewing machine is functioning (though at sub-optimal level) for 938 inmates. Similar situations prevail in other skill acquisition centres, but the authority would not, at any level, hesitate to boast of well-equipped and functional skill training and acquisition centres.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The government should make laws that would help in the decongestion of the prisons. Similarly, all the awaiting trial cases should be given accelerated hearing in the court in order to determine their innocence or guilt. There should be an enabling law that would guarantee the reintegration of ex-convicts, these would go a long way in curbing recidivism and prisonization in Nigerian Prisons. Individuals, non-governmental organizations, government officials, should contribute in making the prison equipped for inmates, for nobody knows who will be the next to be there. Culturally, village chiefs should be given timely training, through awareness creation on how to properly reintegrate the ex-convicts in their respective villages. There should be alternative to imprisonment, like community service and open prison.

In conclusion, the Nigerian criminal justice system needs tremendous legislative, legal, administrative and policy reforms in the direction of decongestion, improving the efficiency in the management of the criminal justice process, taking advantage of innovative and best practices, encouraging partnership with the private and non governmental bodies, minimizing administrative corruption and re-directing the energies of the prison inmates to productive engagement for the overall benefit of the economy. The criminal justice chain is a problem which affects all elements and practices at the prosecution, pre-trial and sentencing levels. Some levels of education and awareness are also necessary to create sensitivities around specific issues. For instance, the judges could be sensitive to the congestion challenge by embracing alternative custodial sentencing options (e.g., community service, more liberal bail terms, etc) for minor offences. It is also important for policy makers to realize the potential of the prison industry in economic transformation and evolve some institutional arrangements to take advantage of this prospect.

The study equally found out that prisonization (a process whereby newly institutionalized offenders come to accept prison lifestyles and criminal values) has been another source of concern in Nigeria. As virtually all infrastructures of rehabilitation and reintegration are not functioning, the temptation to be internalized into the mores, customs and values of inmates' subcultures remain of potential threat to the goals of rehabilitating inmates and preparing them for life-after-prison terms.

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