

**Rehabilitation as a third priority in a twenty first century prison: Results from three prisons in Ghana**

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## **Purpose of the presentation**

- This presentation focuses on discussing the state of rehabilitation in three selected prisons in Ghana. The first section of the presentation puts the paper into context by highlighting the historical background of prison and rehabilitation in Ghana. The second section presents qualitative data on the current state of rehabilitation in Ghana prisons. The presentation ends by suggesting policy implications based on the findings.

## Where are we from (Historical background)

- In Ghana, the arrival of the British in 1844 saw the introduction of a new criminal justice system.
- Tankebe (2013) noted that the colonial administrators' sole reason for introducing criminal justice system – specifically prison was to keep and punish indigenous people whose actions and conducts threatened colonial administration.





## Where are we from (Historical background)

### *Focus of the prison*

- The focus of imprisoning people during the colonial era was to
  - a) instill fear in the indigenous Ghanaians who tried to oppose colonial rule
  - b) Keep them in custody, and
  - c) Punish them
- This reflects in the dungeons that were built at the time to keep inmates
- The focus on punishment meant that the police was tasked with prison administration (Boateng & Darko, 2016).



## Where are we from (Historical background)

### *Postcolonial era prison*

- Tankebe (2013) Ghana's criminal justice system was colonially created and imposed.
- For example, some provisions in the 1972 Prisons Service Decree of Ghana [PSD] (the major prison legislation of Ghana) mirrors that of the 1876 Gold Coast Prisons Ordinance of colonial Ghana.
- The 1876 and 1880 Gold Coast Prisons Ordinance did not prioritize inmates' reformation and rehabilitation but instilled on safekeeping and harsher punishment.



## Where are we from (Historical background)

### *Postcolonial era prison*

- Consistent with the 1972 PSD is the primary focus of the Ghana prisons service on safe custody as stipulated in section one.
- Today, more than half of the 43 prison facilities in Ghana were inherited from the British colonial administration
- These prisons were originally built to meet the need of punishment and safekeeping during colonial rule and had not gone through any transformation to meet modern standard.



## **The current state of rehabilitation**

- A qualitative data collected from 17 inmates and 15 prison officers in three selected prisons (Nsawam Medium Security, Kumasi minimum security and Ankaful Maximum security prisons) in Ghana illuminates the current state of rehabilitation.

### ***Core mandate of the Ghana Prisons Service***

- Officer Wayo explained what the prisons are mandated to do according to the law:

*The primary responsibility, as indicated in the prison service decree is to ensure safe custody and welfare of inmates and if possible, undertake rehabilitation and reformation of inmates. By law, rehabilitation is not the primary priority, it is a third priority of the service, we are supposed to do it and do it well, but we do not have the needed resources, so we mainly focus on the primary mandate.*



## **The current state of rehabilitation**

From the passages above, in Ghana, the effectiveness of the Ghana Prisons Service and efficiency of the prison officers are measured based on safe custody. Officer Quay illustrated:

- *We have achieved successes in keeping them in safe custody because that is what we most often use to measure our effectiveness; the government see us to be effective when we are able to keep them without escape rather than reforming them and reintegrating them into the society.*





## **The current state of rehabilitation**

Due to the Ghana Prisons Service placing more emphasis on safe custody, other important aspect of the prison was overlooked. Rehabilitation resources including human and material were underdeveloped.

- *We are faced with insufficient resources to rehabilitate the inmates* (Officer Bakar).

At the schools there is a pervasive shortage of teaching material:

- *Sometimes we have no marker for teachers to teach, which is very worrying. We have a very nice library, where shelves are always empty with no books for the students to read*” (Officer Tee).



## **The current state of rehabilitation**

Even through there rehabilitation facilities in two of the selected prisons, they were not enough. Officer Atwo lamented:

- *We are rehabilitating less than half of the population we have here – the deficit in training program is affecting a lot of the inmates to go back to crime after leaving the prison*



## **The current state of rehabilitation**

In fact, rehabilitation facilities were inadequate in the selected prisons. Officer Kuma acknowledged:

- *In most of our prisons the facilities that our colonial masters left us are what we are still using. Population has grown and crime fighting techniques have also changed but there has not been any real change in our techniques . . . the facilities we were using in the 1960s and 1970s are not different from what we are using now . . . this entangles our efforts and makes us less effective in the reformation mandate.*





## **The current state of rehabilitation**

The protracted lack of expansion, maintenance and acquisition of sophisticated equipment had prevented effective reformation in the prisons.

Officer Bakar asked:

- *The equipment to train them are not there – how then do we reform them?*

The statement above suggests that the officers had no other option than to stick to the core mandate of the prison (safe custody) and ignore rehabilitation



## **The current state of rehabilitation**

Sadly, a majority of the inmates left the prisons untreated, unskilled, and unreformed. Osie, one of the inmates explained:

- *A lot of us wanted to learn a trade before leaving the prison, but the programs are not there, in this prison, the only thing we do is sport; we play soccer every morning, we spend the rest doing nothing, imagine serving 10 or 20 years in prison doing nothing, what will you spend your life on, probably you will have more discussions with fellow inmates and that will only make you become a better criminal than better person.*



## **Way forward**

Based on the findings, the paper has come out with three policy implications

- ❖ Revise the prison service decree to make rehabilitation a primary priority
  
- ❖ Create rehabilitation or correction department in the country's prisons, and
  
- ❖ Employ prison staff such as social workers, psychologists and other skilled professionals whose sole focus will be on rehabilitation, therapeutic, and counselling.

# Conclusions