African Prisons Project: Transforming prisons and building just societies

London, United Kingdom
Kenya, Uganda
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http://vimeo.com/114293124

Year Founded: 2007
Organization type: nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector
Project Stage: Established
Budget: $500,000 - $1 million
Website: http://www.africanprisons.org
Twitter: https://twitter.com/africanprisons
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/africanprisonsproject/

- Education
- Health care
- Human Rights

Project Summary

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

APP’s approach rests on a fundamental premise – the poor and marginalised overwhelmingly represent prison populations across the world. Prisons therefore represent the ideal environment to focus initiatives for change and to create opportunities to address one of the world’s most seemingly intractable problems – inequality.

WHAT IF - Inspiration: Write one sentence that describes a way that your project dares to ask, ”WHAT IF?”

Lawyers and leaders were drawn from all backgrounds, not just the privileged sections of society?

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

In Uganda and Kenya 90% of people cannot afford a lawyer and 60% are held on remand – a decade without trial is not uncommon. A definition of ‘crime’ often veers far from western interpretation. Vagrancy and debt are common themes. Young people can be imprisoned for having sex under the age of 18, despite the consent of both. If found guilty, for the boy, this carries a life sentence. Penalties are long and conditions are harsh.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

To use prisons as catalysts for change. To provide ground up initiatives, including opportunities to study Law with the University of London, that equip prisoners with the skills to challenge injustice. In addition, to improve health, welfare and sanitation, and provide leadership tools to ensure interventions are sustainable. We promote systemic change in areas where the poor have little defense against discrimination. “I hope to one day qualify as a lawyer and to represent those who are vulnerable and not able to pay for legal representation.” Rose, Lang’ata Prison, Kenya. To complement this bottom up approach with top down initiatives to motivate senior criminal justice personnel to drive forward service delivery models based on rehabilitation and respect for human rights.
Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

Case study - Wilson Harling Kinyua, Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, 2015

“I was born in 1976 in Kenya. A year after I left school I faced a charge of robbery. My parents could not afford a lawyer. I was given a death sentence, later commuted to life imprisonment. I was bitter. I hated myself and had no desire to live - until African Prisons Project came into my life. I now study law at the University of London and pride myself on using my legal skills to help those around me. My life is rekindled. I see an opportunity to influence change in the justice system.”

Impact: What is the impact of the work to date? Also describe the projected future impact for the coming years.

Last year, 30 (rising this year to 51) prisoners studied for a law degree/diploma with the UOL. In turn they supported 638 prisoners to access justice and helped overturn 14 death sentences. Human rights training has been delivered to 9,142 prisoners, 1,223 surities traced and 945 successful applications for bail.

14 libraries have been established and 120,000 books distributed. 459 prisoners and staff have access to safe sanitation facilities due to Biogas installation. 35,772 prisoners, prison staff and their families have accessed APP health services. 17 senior criminal justice personnel have joined APP in the UK to participate in action learning focusing on progress towards human rights. “Unity is strength, thanks to APP for their support in teaching us. Luzira women can now read and write.” Docas, Luzira Prison, 2015

Scaling up APP initiatives will enable us to reach more prisons, expand to other African countries and increase the accumulative impact of our work.

Spread Strategies: Moving forward, what are the main strategies for scaling impact?

APP’s strategy will continue to focus on the core aim of promoting human rights and access to justice, but with a greater range of activities and impact. We will extend our work in Ugandan and Kenyan prisons, but will also seek opportunities to share learning and experience more widely across the continent. South Sudan has been identified as an area of significant need and humanitarian support in prisons in this area of Africa is particularly urgent. APP envisions developing more programmes, specifically targeted at leaders and change-makers within prisons and prison services. There will be a greater emphasis on building capacity and training and empowering prisoners to deliver services.

Sustainability

Financial Sustainability Plan: What is this solution’s plan to ensure financial sustainability?

We have, to date, been able to attract support from a wide range of individuals, trusts, foundations and corporate bodies through our ability to demonstrate good outcomes and value for money. We rely on a small group of funders willing to share our vision that loss of freedom should not mean the loss of what it means to be human. This is an unrelenting task but one that we will endeavor to pursue.

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

There are no other charities that we know of delivering similar services in Ugandan and Kenyan prisons. Ad hoc support is occasionally evident. For example, we know The Legal Resources Foundation has delivered some para-legal training in Kamiti Prison in Kenya, but this appears to be on a limited basis. With so many people experiencing the effects of poverty in these areas, the welfare of prisoners is a low priority. APP does not dispute that those who have committed crimes deserve to be held to account, but believes that every person should have a voice and be treated with dignity and humanity.

Team

Founding Story

I travelled to Africa on my gap year to volunteer in a hospice. While I worked it became evident that the lives of prisoners brought from the local jail were considered worthless. Available resources – scarce for everyone – were all but denied entirely to sick prisoners. They were left to die. I visited the prison and was shocked, not just by appalling conditions, but by the number of people languishing without charge because they were poor. Following my return to the UK I trained as a barrister, continuing to champion this cause and engage the support of others while I qualified and established APP.

Team

We have 36 full-time staff, seven based in the UK. Rigorous assessment ensures all staff possess relevant qualifications. I am trained as a barrister and APP’s Country Director, based in Uganda, has a postgraduate Diploma in Law and over 11 years’ experience of project management. We have 10 board members bringing a wealth of experience from legal, financial and corporate sectors. The team will evolve exponentially in response to the needs of our beneficiaries.

—Background—

Please confirm how you heard about the Unilever Awards:

Through the Ashoka Hub Digest

Please confirm your role in the initiative (eg Founder/co-Founder) and your organisational title:

Founder and Director General

Which of the 8 UN Global Goals (Sustainable Development Goals) pre-selected for this competition does your solution relate most closely to? [select all that apply]
Leadership and the Unilever Awards

Please provide examples of any previous entrepreneurial initiatives you have pioneered.

I have dedicated my life to African Prisons Project from a young age. There may be those that consider this limits the depth of experience I can bring to the organisation. However, I am constantly exploring how I can broaden my professional and social networks with a view to enriching the quality of the work and bring new perspectives. In 2006 I was the youngest Magistrate to be appointed in the Midlands; I have extensive experience in criminal and civil matters, including participation in initiatives in Sierra Leone to recommend reform of the country’s prison service. I also have a deep understanding of the British legal system and the way it is implemented in the countries in which APP works.

Beyond your existing team, who else are you working with to achieve your objectives, eg partners, advisors, mentors?

APP is able to deliver cost-effective, high quality services by leveraging support from organisations, stakeholders and funders. Law firms, including Clifford Chance, Jones Day, Hogan Lovells, Allen and Overy and Coulson Harney have contributed valuable pro-bono support. The Association of Commonwealth Universities support groups of criminal justice personnel to participate in APP’s Secondment Programme. The University of London has reduced student fees for APP and recently suggested we explore the possibility of joint working to draft new law modules. Book Aid International supplies books to APP libraries, including the legal texts required by our students. APP’s Patrons act as advisors and mentors and include Lord Paul Boateng, Dame Linda Dobbs QC and Lord Ramsbotham. We work in volatile, sometimes hostile environments and good relationships with prison personnel at all levels is key to the project’s success. Prison staff may not always share our vision, which could potentially impact negatively on what we seek to achieve. We mitigate this by creating an inclusive environment wherever we work, encouraging staff to engage with us and demonstrating that the outcomes can impact positively on the whole prison. Prisoners dedicated to study are less prone to disruptive behaviour through frustration, anger and boredom. Projects to improve prison infrastructure, such as the establishment of a Biogas toilet system at Namulu prison and a bore hole to supply clean water at Loro Prison also improved the lives of prison staff and their families – many of whom live in conditions little better than the prisoners they guard. A significant number are actively supportive and engaged in promoting APP’s work, acting as ambassadors to take the work forward.

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