Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of Development Studies

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE SENTENCING OPTION AS A REHABILITATION TOOL: A CASE OF BULAWAYO.

BY

ELFIAS SHUMBA
L011 0600E SUPERVISOR: MR. D. DUBE

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ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe introduced penal reforms in its criminal justice system in 1994. These reforms were prompted by pressure over continuous use of prisonisation as the preferred means of punishing wrongdoers. That is how Community Service Orders, a non-custodial measure, as an alternative to imprisonment came into being. Community service is embedded in the reformative theory of punishment and was seen as a sustainable approach to develop reintegration of offenders into their communities, reassure reconciliation, as well as reduce recidivism, the challenges of overcrowding and the high costs to taxpayers and government in maintaining prisoners. This study was based on the overall objective, which was to investigate the perceived effectiveness of the community service programme as a rehabilitation tool in Bulawayo. Offenders, victims and their families as well as members of the judiciary were interviewed, in addition, possible recommendations for the effective implementation of community service are given that can contribute to its success and sustainability if put into operation by the relevant stakeholders. The study was qualitative in nature and relevant information was gathered through, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires and literature review was conducted to come up with the theoretical framework and background to the study. Data was analyzed using content analysis method. The study findings were that the community service programme has been accepted by the community for encouraging reconciliation and the reintegration process of the offenders into their societies. This is despite the perception by some members of the community that the sentence is a soft option. The study findings also revealed challenges which are: an existing discord between stakeholders which require urgent attention to address cases of recidivism, inadequate funding and a management structure headed by a principal community service and a dysfunctional district committee.