

Completion of the 145th International Course

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1 Introduction

UNAFEI held the 145th International Training Course from 12 May to 18 June, 2010. We had a total of twenty participants, with twelve individuals from overseas and eight from Japan. Those who participated are all criminal justice professionals, such as police officers, prosecutors, members of the judiciary, and corrections and probation personnel. The overseas participants represented nine different countries: there were two participants from Brazil; one from Costa Rica; one from El Salvador; two from Iraq; one from Kenya; two from Nepal; one from Papua New Guinea; one from Hong Kong (observer); and one from the Republic of Korea (observer). The Japanese participants included one Assistant Judge, one Family Court Probation Officer, two Public Prosecutors, two Corrections Officers, and two Probation Officers.

2 Main Theme of the Course

The main theme was “Effective Resettlement of Offenders by Strengthening ‘Community Reintegration Factors’”. Treatment programmes for offenders that strengthen “community reintegration factors” include those that secure stable accommodation for offenders, enhance their basic skills, help them procure employment, and provide them with budgeting/debt counselling. These represent the most basic treatment programmes provided in correctional facilities and by probation offices. However, in recent years, it has become clear that these basic treatment programmes can have a significant impact on preventing recidivism and can also affect the success of other programmes broadly recognized as effective, including cognitive behavioural programmes. In light of these successes, the significance of basic treatment programmes is now being re-evaluated. Likewise, because the idea of “social inclusion” is now widespread, these treatment programmes have an opportunity to gain wider recognition.

However, the degree of effort being made to implement treatment programmes for offenders that strengthen “community reintegration factors” varies significantly by country. Would our course have the same significance for each of the overseas participants? As the Programming Officer, this was the point that most concerned me at the beginning of the course.

3 Course Summary

The course programme primarily consisted of individual presentations by participants about the current situation in each of their respective countries, lectures given by UNAFEI

professors and experts from Japan and other countries, observation visits to agencies and facilities related to the main theme of the course, and group workshops.

For this course, we invited a number of experts on offender treatment from Japan and other countries to participate as lecturers. We visited agencies and facilities that provide offender treatment, including prisons, probation offices, and halfway houses (Offender Rehabilitation Facilities). However, to cover the main theme of this course, it was necessary to consider collaboration with private and voluntary sector agencies too, rather than criminal justice agencies alone. To this end, we also invited as lecturers individuals involved in social welfare, those from NPO organizations that help offenders find work, and a “co-operative employer” who employs ex-offenders. From what I saw, the participants were equally attentive in listening to lecturers with wide-ranging areas of expertise. Meetings with Volunteer Probation Officers from various regions of Japan were also held as part of the VPO International Seminar,¹ which was closely related to the main theme of this course. Overseas participants were particularly interested in the activities of Volunteer Probation Officers in Japan - a system unlike any other in the world - and we enjoyed some incredibly lively Q&A sessions during these meetings. For example, a participant asked how VPOs’ family members feel about having offenders on probationary supervision regularly visit their homes. One of the VPOs answered that his wife serves them tea, chats with them, and welcomes offenders as warmly as she would any other guest. Many of the overseas participants could not hide their astonishment upon hearing this response. I also frequently fielded questions about the voluntary probation officer system between lectures and during breaks.

The information given by the various lecturers and VPOs provided a solid base for conducting group workshops, for which the participants were divided into two groups. Both groups had to work hard to reach a consensus because the criminal justice system and situations of offender treatment vary quite considerably from country to country. Participants often continued discussions until very late at night. In the end they were able to successfully put together a report that compiled their reform measures to address the problems presented in relation to the main theme of the course.

4 Conclusion

During the final general discussion, overseas participants made remarks such as: “In my country, most of the focus is placed on punishing offenders, but little attention is given to helping them resettle into the community. I want to help spread the concept of rehabilitation of offenders in my own country” and “I want to introduce systems such as the voluntary

¹ The VPO International Seminar is held for a two-day period during UNAFEI’s International Course in the spring and the Senior Seminar in winter. It offers Volunteer Probation Officers an opportunity to deepen their knowledge and gain information related to the treatment of offenders in other countries.

probation officer system to my country”. As the Programming Officer, I was inspired by many of these remarks. One overseas participant shared the following thought with me during a group workshop:

“In my country, prisoners end up joining a terrorist organization after being released from prison because there are really no other ways to earn a living. But as this course taught us, if proper vocational guidance is provided in prisons, we may be able to reduce, even if by only a little, the number of such prisoners. This course has been a great encouragement and given us hope”.

It was at this moment that I felt this course held true significance for these overseas participants.