

COMMUNITY SERVICE SENTENCING IN FACILITATING THE REINTEGRATION OF OFFENDERS INTO THE COMMUNITY IN TEMEKE MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

Community Service Sentencing (CSS) is a non-custodial sentencing option adopted in Tanzania to promote offender rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, alleviate prison overcrowding, and enhance community participation in the justice process. Despite its legal establishment under the Community Service Act No. 6 of 2002 and its nationwide implementation, questions persist regarding its effectiveness in urban municipalities characterized by high population density and socio-economic vulnerability, such as Temeke Municipality in Dar es Salaam. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of Community Service Sentencing in facilitating the reintegration of offenders into the community in Temeke Municipality. The study adopted a qualitative exploratory research design grounded in Reintegrative Shaming Theory. Data were collected through purposive sampling using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions involving ex-offenders, probation officers, magistrates, community leaders, and family members. The data were analysed thematically to generate an in-depth understanding of stakeholders' experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation and outcomes of Community Service Sentencing. The findings revealed that Community Service Sentencing provides meaningful opportunities for offender rehabilitation and community engagement by allowing offenders to maintain social ties and contribute positively to community development. The study concludes that while Community Service Sentencing is important in the reintegration of offenders into the community in Temeke Municipality its effectiveness in Temeke Municipality remains constrained by institutional and community-level challenges. The study recommends strengthened inter-agency coordination, increased resource allocation, enhanced supervision and monitoring systems, and sustained community sensitization programmes to improve the effectiveness of Community Service Sentencing as a viable alternative to imprisonment.

Keywords: Community Service Sentence, Community Reintegration, Offenders Criminal Justice Reform

1. INTRODUCTION

Criminal justice systems have increasingly recognized the limitations of incarceration in addressing crime sustainably (UNODC, 2015). Scholars argue that prisons often perpetuate cycles of violence, stigmatization, and exclusion, especially for petty offenders (Garland, 2018). Community Service Sentences (CSS) have emerged as a restorative alternative emphasizing rehabilitation,

accountability, and reintegration rather than retribution (Karimullah, 2023). They are increasingly recognized as a restorative alternative to traditional punitive measures, emphasizing rehabilitation, accountability, and reintegration rather than retribution. Unlike conventional punishment, which often prioritizes deterrence or retribution, CSS focus on repairing harm, fostering offender responsibility, and promoting community well-being (Karimullah, 2023; Pavlacic, 2021).

By engaging offenders in structured community work, CSS provides opportunities to acquire practical skills, build social connections, and develop a sense of purpose, all of which are crucial for reducing recidivism and supporting long-term reintegration (Lacey, 2015; Fulham et al., 2023). Restorative practices embedded in CSS encourage offenders to confront the consequences of their actions, often through reparative activities or direct dialogue with victims, thereby enhancing accountability and offering victims emotional closure (Shem-Tov et al., 2024; Wood, 2024). Moreover, CSS address limitations of traditional punitive approaches, which can exacerbate social alienation and fail to tackle underlying social, economic, or psychological drivers of criminal behavior (Karimullah, 2023; Taylor, 2025).

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that restorative interventions, including CSS, are effective in lowering recidivism and facilitating successful reintegration (Fulham et al., 2023). Legal precedents further underscore the judiciary's recognition of restorative alternatives as constructive mechanisms for justice, highlighting the social and moral benefits of reintegration over purely punitive responses (Pavlacic, 2021). Collectively, these findings position CSS as a transformative approach in criminal justice, balancing the needs of offenders, victims, and communities while fostering rehabilitation, accountability, and social reintegration (Shem-Tov et al., 2024; Wood, 2024).

In Africa, CSS and other non-custodial sentences are grounded in communal traditions of reconciliation and collective responsibility (Oware, 2020). Countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana have integrated community service into their penal systems to reduce prison congestion and promote restorative justice (Kariuki, 2019; Sarpong, 2016). In Tanzania, CSS were institutionalized under the Community Service Act No. 6 of 2002. The law empowers magistrates to impose community work on eligible offenders in lieu of imprisonment. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (2023), CSS aims to alleviate prison overcrowding, reduce state expenditure, and facilitate offender rehabilitation. By 2013, more than 5,000 offenders had served community service sentences, mostly in public institutions such as schools, health centers, and municipal cleaning projects. However, despite policy successes, questions remain regarding the actual impact of CSS on recidivism, rehabilitation, and community perceptions – particularly in urban municipalities characterized by social fragmentation and unemployment (Tanzania Correctional Service, 2021). This study situates CSS within Tanzania's broader penal reform agenda and explores its effectiveness in Temeke, one of Dar es Salaam's most populous and diverse municipalities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although Community Service Sentencing has been legally established and implemented across Tanzania for over two decades, evidence regarding its actual effectiveness in reintegrating offenders to the community remains limited, especially at the municipal level. In Temeke Municipality, official reports indicate persistently high and, in some cases, rising rates of recidivism, particularly among young male offenders (Tanzania Correctional Service, 2021; MOHA, 2020). This trend persists despite the availability of non-custodial sentencing options designed to rehabilitate offenders and reduce repeat offending.

Existing studies on Community Service Sentencing in Tanzania and comparable developing contexts have largely focused on policy frameworks, institutional arrangements, or general perceptions of non-custodial sentences (Gilliéron, 2010; Queenturnble, 2007). Many adopt quantitative or mixed-method approaches and emphasise outcomes such as prison decongestion, while paying limited attention to offenders lived experiences, community attitudes, and the practical realities of CSS implementation at the local level. Moreover, there is a noticeable lack of qualitative research examining how CSS operates in highly urbanised municipalities characterised by social and economic vulnerabilities.

In Temeke Municipality, administrative records and anecdotal evidence suggest that some offenders who complete community service sentences subsequently reoffend, raising concerns about the adequacy of supervision, community support, and reintegration mechanisms (URT, 2022). However, there is insufficient empirical evidence explaining why this occurs, how CSS is implemented in practice, and whether it effectively addresses the underlying factors contributing to reoffending.

The absence of in-depth, localized qualitative evidence on the role of Community Service Sentencing in facilitating the reintegration of offenders into the community in Temeke Municipality represents a significant knowledge gap. Without such evidence, policymakers, judicial officers, and correctional administrators lack the contextual insights necessary to strengthen CSS implementation and enhance its rehabilitative outcomes. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining the role of Community Service Sentencing in facilitating the reintegration of offenders into the community in Temeke Municipality.

1.3 Study Objective

The objective of this study was to investigate the role of Community Service Sentencing in facilitating the reintegration of offenders into the community in Temeke Municipality, Dar Es Salaam Region, Tanzania

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, theoretical and empirical literature reviews are presented.

2.1 Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on Braithwaite's (1989) reintegrative shaming theory, which differentiates between stigmatizing and reintegrative forms of shaming. Stigmatizing shaming labels offenders as deviant, isolating them from society and often exacerbating criminal behaviour, whereas reintegrative shaming condemns the offense while treating the offender as a valued member of the community capable of reform (Braithwaite, 1989). Community Service Sentences (CSS) operationalize this theory by providing a structured mechanism through which offenders can make amends for their wrongdoing through unpaid labour, while simultaneously maintaining and rebuilding social ties within the community. By emphasizing responsibility, skill development, and meaningful contribution, CSS embodies the rehabilitative and reintegrative principles highlighted in the preceding discussion, offering a concrete pathway for offenders to restore their social identity and reduce recidivism (Fulham et al., 2023; Karimullah, 2023; Shem-Tov et al., 2024).

In African contexts, reintegrative shaming resonates with indigenous justice traditions that emphasize reconciliation, apology, and compensation, reflecting a communal understanding of justice as restorative rather than purely punitive (Mutangi, 2021). CSS thus represent a convergence of Western restorative justice practices and African communal ethics, particularly the Ubuntu

philosophy, where justice is conceptualized as a process of repairing harm and restoring social harmony rather than enacting retribution (Karimullah, 2023; Taylor, 2025). By linking offenders' accountability to meaningful community engagement, CSS operationalizes reintegrative shaming in a manner that is both culturally resonant and empirically effective, reinforcing its role as a restorative alternative that balances the interests of offenders, victims, and communities (Pavlicic, 2021; Wood, 2024).

2.2 Empirical Review

Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Offenders into the Community Rehabilitation and reintegration remain central goals of Community Service Sentencing (CSS), grounded in the idea that offenders are more likely to reform when they remain embedded within their social environment rather than being isolated through imprisonment. However, recent empirical literature increasingly shows that reintegration is not guaranteed by the sentence itself, but is shaped by supervision quality, institutional capacity, stigma, and socio-economic realities.

Recent global studies continue to emphasise the rehabilitative potential of community-based sanctions, while also revealing important limitations. A 2023 meta-analysis on restorative justice interventions examined multiple international programs and found that such approaches, including community-based sanctions, produce small but statistically significant reductions in general recidivism, while also improving offender accountability and social reintegration outcomes. However, the study highlighted that results vary depending on programme design, offender characteristics, and implementation context. Methodologically, the study relied on aggregated quantitative data, which provides strong generalisable evidence but offers limited insight into how offenders experience reintegration in everyday life. This creates a gap in understanding the social processes of reintegration, which this study addresses by focusing on lived experiences in Temeke.

More recently, Zhang, Shi, and Ward (2026), in *The Dynamic and Endogenous Behavior of Re-Offense Risk*, used an agent-based simulation model based on U.S. probation data to examine how diversion and community-based programs influence reintegration trajectories. The study found that rehabilitation outcomes are not static but evolve through interactions between individuals and their social environment, including supervision intensity and community feedback. While this study is methodologically innovative, it is based on simulation and data from developed systems, limiting its applicability to real-world African contexts. The present study addresses this by providing empirical, grounded evidence from an urban African municipality.

Recent African studies increasingly highlight that reintegration is deeply influenced by structural and social realities. A 2024 study by Alila titled *Assessment of Rehabilitation Programs in Kenyan Prisons* used a mixed-methods design combining surveys and interviews at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison. The findings showed that rehabilitation programs improve reintegration when they are tailored to offenders' needs and include skills development, but their effectiveness is constrained by resource limitations, overcrowding, and weak post-release support systems. The limitation of this study is that it focuses on prison-based rehabilitation rather than community service, leaving unanswered whether non-custodial sanctions provide better reintegration outcomes. This study addresses that gap by examining reintegration within a community-based sentencing framework.

In Kenya, the 2025 National Crime Research Centre study, *The Delivery of Community-Based Sentences*, analysed probation and community service orders using institutional data and stakeholder perspectives. The study found that community-based sentences support rehabilitation by keeping offenders within society and reducing the disruptive effects of imprisonment. However,

it also revealed that public perceptions, weak compliance monitoring, and limited institutional capacity undermine reintegration outcomes. While this study provides strong policy-level insights, it does not deeply explore offenders lived reintegration experiences. The current study fills this gap by incorporating perspectives from ex-offenders, families, and community members.

Another important regional contribution is the Kenyan Probation and Aftercare Service report (2016–2023), which documents reforms in supervision and reintegration systems. The report shows that structured supervision, social inquiry, and follow-up mechanisms are critical in supporting offender reintegration, but also highlights challenges such as high caseloads and uneven service delivery. However, institutional reports tend to present aggregated outcomes rather than detailed qualitative insights. This study complements such evidence by exploring how reintegration is experienced at the community level.

Recent Tanzanian studies provide more direct insight into the challenges of rehabilitation under community service systems. Leonard, Buhori, and Naftal (2025), in *Examining the Challenges Hindering the Implementation of Community Service Sentencing for Offender Rehabilitation: Insights from Butimba Central Prison*, used a qualitative case study design involving interviews and document analysis. The study found that rehabilitation and reintegration are constrained by inadequate resources, weak legal enforcement, poor coordination among stakeholders, and strong social stigma against offenders. These factors limit the effectiveness of CSS despite its intended rehabilitative role. The strength of this study lies in its recent, context-specific evidence. However, it is centred around institutional perspectives and does not fully capture the broader community dynamics influencing reintegration.

Similarly, Ndibalema (2025), in *Community Service Orders and Prison Congestion in Tanzania*, used a phenomenological qualitative approach with interviews and document review in Dar es Salaam. The study found that community service orders are underutilised and often depend on judicial discretion rather than systematic implementation. This limits their potential to support reintegration and reduce reliance on imprisonment. While this study highlights structural barriers, it focuses more on sentencing practices than on the actual reintegration experiences of offenders after completing community service.

Across global, regional, and Tanzanian literature, a consistent pattern emerges: Community Service Sentencing has clear potential to support rehabilitation and reintegration by preserving offenders' social ties and shielding them from the negative effects of imprisonment. However, its effectiveness is not automatic; rather, it is shaped by several interconnected factors, including the quality of supervision and monitoring, the availability of rehabilitation support such as skills training, counselling, and aftercare services, prevailing community attitudes and stigma toward offenders, as well as the overall institutional capacity and level of coordination among key actors. Despite the growing body of recent studies, a critical gap remains in the literature. Many existing studies tend to focus primarily on quantitative outcomes, often overlooking the lived experiences of offenders, while others emphasise institutional or policy perspectives at the expense of community-level realities. Additionally, a significant proportion of research concentrates on prison-based rehabilitation, leaving community-based sentencing, particularly Community Service Sentencing, insufficiently explored in terms of its actual reintegrative impact in everyday social contexts.

There is limited in-depth, qualitative, and context-specific research examining how Community Service Sentencing supports or fails to support reintegration in urban, socio-economically vulnerable settings such as Temeke Municipality. This study addresses these gaps by adopting a qualitative exploratory approach to examine rehabilitation and reintegration under Community Service Sentencing in Temeke Municipality. It brings together perspectives from ex-offenders,

probation officers, magistrates, community leaders, and family members to provide a holistic and humanised understanding of reintegration.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory design to investigate the effectiveness of CSS in Temeke Municipality, capturing the nuanced experiences of offenders, practitioners, and community members. The qualitative approach was particularly suitable for this study, as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of social processes, interpersonal interactions, and community-based restorative justice practices, aligning with the study's focus on reintegration, accountability (reduce recidivism), and rehabilitation as emphasized in Braithwaite's (1989) reintegrative shaming theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2015).

A total of eighteen participants were purposively selected based on their direct experience with CSS, complemented by snowball sampling to identify additional participants embedded in relevant social networks. The sample included eight ex-offenders who had completed CSS, three probation officers, two magistrates, two community leaders, and three family members, ensuring a diversity of perspectives across institutional, familial, and community levels. This sampling strategy allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the social and relational dimensions of reintegrative justice in practice.

Data collection employed multiple qualitative methods to capture rich information. In-depth semi-structured interviews elicited personal narratives and professional reflections, focus group discussions facilitated interactive insights into community perceptions, and participant observation documented behaviours and practices during ongoing CSS activities. Interviews were conducted in Swahili, audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for accurate and reliable analysis. Triangulation across these data sources enhanced the credibility and richness of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, providing a systematic and rigorous approach to identifying patterns and insights across the qualitative dataset. The analysis began with familiarization, during which the researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts, focus group notes, and observation records to gain a holistic understanding of participants' experiences with CSS. This step was particularly important for capturing the social and relational nuances emphasized in Braithwaite's (1989) reintegrative shaming theory, including offenders' accountability (reduce recidivism), social reintegration, and community responses to restorative interventions.

Trustworthiness was ensured through methodological triangulation across interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, as well as peer debriefing and member checking to validate interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity was maintained throughout, with the researcher critically reflecting on positionality, biases, and the influence of their dual role as academic and community observer, thereby enhancing the credibility and contextual relevance of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2015).

3.1 Study Findings

Reintegration is a multidimensional process that involves not only the offender but also the family, community members, and broader social support structures. The analysis revealed three interconnected sub-themes: (i) community acceptance and stigma, (ii) family and community support systems, and (iii) interventions needed for better reintegration.

Family Support and Reintegration

Community leaders highlighted that communities have become more accepting of offenders after CSS, although stigmas persist. One leader noted:

“As community members, we try to avoid stigmatising, despising, or judging them as unworthy. Instead, we learn from their mistakes and the consequences of wrongdoing... we dedeliberately involve them in community activities such as environmental cleaning, tree planting, maintaining gardens, and keeping public spaces tidy.” (Interview/Community Leader/2025).

Family members reported mixed experiences:

“Among close family members, the reception was warm and filled with love... However, some neighbours were still doubtful at first. But when they consistently showed good behaviour after completing the sentence, those same neighbours began to trust and accept them again.” (Interview/Family Member/2025).

Offenders themselves acknowledged stigma

“Within my family, some felt I had not changed and would continue stealing because I was not sent to prison, while others gave me a second chance to rebuild trust.” (FGD/Offender/2025).

The findings indicate that while CSS promotes community acceptance and offers offenders a second chance, lingering stigma both within families and the wider community can hinder full reintegration. This suggests that for CSS to be more effective, efforts should extend beyond the sentence itself to include community sensitization and support programs that foster trust and reduce negative perceptions. Strengthening these social acceptance mechanisms can enhance the rehabilitative and re-integrative potential of CSS, ensuring offenders are fully reintegrated and less likely to reoffend. These results align with Maruna (2001), who argued that desistance depends heavily on community acceptance and recognition of an offender's changed identity. However, they contrast with LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, and Bushway (2008), who observed that stigma often persists regardless of demonstrated reform, making reintegration highly challenging. The RST emphasizes reintegration rather than permanent stigmatisation (Braithwaite, 1989). In Temeke, CSS provides opportunities for integrative shaming, but stigma by some community members reflects disintegrative shaming, which undermines reintegration.

Community Acceptance and Social Interaction

Community leaders highlighted the importance of local support structures:

“We have local groups and family networks that guide these individuals. Some elders and leaders help them find jobs or small business opportunities, which makes reintegration smoother.” (FGD/Community Leader/2025)

Family members confirmed providing support:

“As a family, we supported them by providing capital to start small businesses, while others were assisted to go back to school or vocational training colleges.” (Interview/Family Member/2025)

Offenders also valued support from officers

“From my probation officer, I received guidance and advice, and was even referred to a drug rehabilitation unit. Now I no longer use drugs.” (FGD/Offender/2025)

The findings indicate that coordinated support from family, community networks, and probation officers plays a critical role in facilitating successful reintegration of offenders. Access to vocational training, small business opportunities, and counseling not only equips offenders with practical skills but also reduces the likelihood of recidivism.

Support systems whether from families, community leaders, or probation officers were crucial in preventing relapse into crime and fostering stable reintegration. This corresponds with Visser and Travis (2003), who argued that family support is one of the strongest predictors of successful reintegration. However, it contrasts with Petersilia (2003), who argued that systemic barriers such as limited employment opportunities often outweigh family or community support in determining reintegration outcomes. According to RST, reintegrative support restores social bonds and fosters pro-social behaviour. The family and community support described in Temeke reflects integrative practices that reduce shame and encourage offenders to reform.

Experiences of Stigma and Labelling

Participants suggested further interventions as shared below

“They need continuous counselling and guidance... In addition, vocational training should be provided, especially for those who are unemployed. Skills such as masonry, tailoring, or small business training would be helpful.” (Interview/Community Leader/2025).
“Providing counseling, guidance, and life skills training is crucial for offenders sentenced to community service.” (Interview/Magistrate/2025).

Offenders requested more economic opportunities

“Provide more entrepreneurship training and linkages to credit facilities; develop offenders’ talents and skills.” (FGD/Offender/2025)

The findings highlight that counseling, vocational training, and access to employment are key for sustainable reintegration. Without these interventions, stigma and economic hardship may drive some back into crime. These insights are consistent with Uggen (2000), who demonstrated that employment opportunities are vital for sustaining desistance. However, they diverge from Cullen and Gilbert (2012), who argue that effective correction lies more in supervision and deterrence than in socio-economic support. CSS embodies reintegrative shaming by providing offenders with second chances. However, RST also highlights that reintegration requires both symbolic acceptance (community forgiveness) and practical opportunities.

4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that offender reintegration following Community Service Sentencing is highly dependent on social relationships and community attitudes. Family support emerged as a critical facilitator of reintegration, while experiences of stigma and labelling undermined reintegration efforts. In densely populated urban settings such as Temeke Municipality, weak community cohesion and limited public awareness of Community Service Sentencing intensified these challenges. The findings suggest that reintegration outcomes are shaped not only by sentencing decisions but also by broader social dynamics within the community.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, this study recommends several measures to strengthen Community Service Sentencing for the reintegration of offenders into the community in Temeke Municipality. They include but not limited to the following: -

(i) increased government funding for probation services; (ii) capacity-building for magistrates and officers; (iii) nationwide sensitization campaigns to destigmatize CSS; (iv) integration of vocational training; and (v) continuous evaluation of CSS outcomes. More broadly, the adoption of CSS contributes to decolonizing Tanzania's criminal justice system by emphasizing restoration over retribution.

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