

The world's population of people in incarceration has progressively increased over the past four decades to reach more than 10.74 million people. The report in the latest edition of the World Prison Population List, an estimated 11.5 million people are held in custodial facilities throughout the world. The Ikoyi and Kirikiri custodial centres located in Lagos, Nigeria were built between 1955 and 1963, to hold a maximum capacity of 3,787 inmates. By January 2023, the facilities accommodated 6,600 inmates with the female centre holding 306 inmates, a number which is more than 150% above its maximum capacity. Over 70% of the inmates in these centres were remanded for minor offenses such as street trading, loitering, prostitution, and environmental offenses. A summary of the total inmate population of custodial centres in Nigeria

comprising of Convict and Awaiting Trial Persons (ATPs) as at 10th February, 2025 is 80,088. The number of ATPs from the total inmate population is 53,411. This makes the percentage of ATPs 67%.

Meanwhile, the efficacy of incarceration is increasingly being questioned. This is more so because, although one of the fundamental purposes of incarceration is to prevent recidivism by serving as a deterrence to criminals, available evidence suggests that custodial sentences are less successful in preventing recidivism than non-custodial sentences. Community service has been increasingly recognized as a viable tool for restorative justice. Its emergence as a legal sanction in the mid-20th century was influenced by growing dissatisfaction with traditional punitive measures like imprisonment. Overcrowded prisons, high recidivism rates, and the social stigma

associated with incarceration motivated courts to consider alternatives that were both rehabilitative and cost-effective.

To effectively tackle over population in custodial centres and the increasing number of Awaiting Trial/Unconvicted persons, Lagos State needed to take a bold step to reduce the proportion of ATPs in these facilities by providing a robust alternative. Consequently, the Ministry of Justice introduced the concept of community service by establishing the Community Service Unit (CSU) as a way to address the above issues and further incorporated a provision in the revised Administration of Criminal Justice Law 2011 (Section 347), that allows Magistrates and Judges to impose community service sentences on those who commit minor offenses.

This guideline provides a comprehensive

framework for the effective operation of the CSU, with a view to ensuring compliance with legal standards and promoting rehabilitation and community with development in the administration of criminal justice.