

## **A Feasibility Study of a Socially Inclusive Work-and-Earn Program in Nigerian Correctional Centre**

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### **Abstract**

Correctional rehabilitation increasingly emphasises human dignity, empowerment and social reintegration rather than punishment. This study explores whether a structured Work and Earn program can be implemented at Agodi Correctional Centre in Oyo State, Nigeria. Under this programme, inmates would receive accredited vocational training and earn modest wages, with the goals of improving their livelihood prospects and promoting equitable access to rehabilitation. A secondary qualitative case study was conducted using policy documents, institutional reports and international models such as the United States Federal Prison Industries and South Africa's Correctional Work Programme. International evidence shows that participation in correctional education reduces recidivism by approximately 13 percentage points and increases post-release employment by roughly 13 per cent. Work-release programmes have also been shown to reduce new arrests by 8–10 per cent in the three years following release. Using thematic analysis, the study assessed institutional readiness, anticipated benefits, and potential risks from both feasibility and equity perspectives. Findings indicate that the Agodi Centre has physical space, underutilised vocational facilities, and inmate interest, yet faces underfunding, weak infrastructure, and inconsistent policy enforcement. Anticipated benefits include reduced idleness, improved discipline, certified skills acquisition, and modest earnings that could support inmates' dependents. Risks relate to inequitable access for women, persons with disabilities and indigent inmates, as well as security and sustainability concerns. The study concludes that a Work and Earn programme could transform the Agodi Centre into a hub of human capital development if implemented through equity-driven policies, partnerships with vocational institutions, and phased deployment to safeguard vulnerable groups.

**Keywords:** Equity, Social work, Prison rehabilitation, Vocational training, Inmate reintegration

## 1. Introduction

Across the world, correctional systems are moving away from punitive confinement towards rehabilitation that respects human dignity and promotes social reintegration. International experiences underscore the benefits of structured prison labour and education programmes. A meta-analysis of U.S. programmes found that participants had 43 per cent lower odds of recidivism, equivalent to a 13 percentage-point reduction, and were 13 per cent more likely to secure employment after release. Evaluations of work-release schemes in Florida reported 8–10 per cent reductions in new arrests within three years of release. These results demonstrate how structured, remunerated work can promote self-efficacy, reduce reoffending, and support community reintegration.

Nigeria's correctional reforms have sought to align with these global trends. The Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019) mandates vocational training, education and other reintegration programmes. Despite this foundation, implementation remains inconsistent due to overcrowding, weak infrastructure, and chronic underfunding (Adeoti, Akinsola, & Oyinlola, 2024). Existing vocational initiatives in facilities such as Agodi Correctional Centre are often ad hoc, donor-driven, and unaccredited, which limits their sustainability and impact (Onyiuke, 2024). Moreover, women, persons with disabilities and indigent inmates are frequently excluded from available opportunities (Batubara, Manullang & Esther, 2024).

This study assesses the feasibility and potential impact of a socially inclusive Work and Earn programme at Agodi Correctional Centre. Unlike existing unstructured workshops, the proposed programme combines accredited vocational training with modest financial incentives to support inmates' autonomy and reintegration. It explicitly targets equitable access by designing eligibility criteria and training schedules that accommodate women, persons with disabilities, and those with limited financial resources. Grounded in social work principles, the programme aims to transform the correctional environment from a place of confinement to one of empowerment and inclusion. (Smith, Mueller, & Labrecque, 2018; Nur & Nguyen, 2023).

The research was guided by the following objectives:

1. To explore the institutional readiness and structural capacity of Agodi Correctional Centre for implementing a socially inclusive "Work and Earn" program.
2. To examine the potential benefits of the program regarding inmate empowerment, skill acquisition, and reintegration, alongside its broader contribution to advancing equity and social justice within the correctional system.
3. To assess the barriers, risks, and challenges associated with equitable implementation and identify pathways to ensure inclusivity and program sustainability.

By framing correctional rehabilitation within a social work and equity perspective, this study underscores that prisons must evolve beyond being sites of punishment. They must become

spaces of empowerment and transformation, preparing inmates to reintegrate as productive and socially included citizens (Milićević, 2024).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Conceptual Review**

Correctional rehabilitation has increasingly been examined through the lens of equity and social work practice, which emphasises empowerment, inclusion, and the promotion of human dignity. Within social work, correctional interventions are understood not merely as disciplinary measures but as opportunities to restore agency and address the systemic barriers that hinder reintegration (Aliyu & Mustaffa, 2022). A growing body of scholarship shows that providing inmates with access to vocational training, education, and structured work opportunities promotes equity by reducing disparities in skills acquisition and employability, particularly among marginalised groups such as the poor, women, and persons with disabilities (Oyewo, 2023; Uche, Ibrahim, & Okafor, 2023).

Internationally, evidence demonstrates that prison labour programs can improve behavioural outcomes, reduce recidivism, and enhance social inclusion when designed with fairness, voluntariness, and adequate safeguards (Smith, Mueller, & Labrecque, 2018). For instance, the United States' Federal Prison Industries program and South Africa's Correctional Work Program illustrate how structured, remunerated work can empower inmates to acquire market-relevant skills while restoring their self-worth and sense of responsibility (Danjuma, Nordin, & Muhamad, 2018; Nur & Nguyen, 2023). These models are increasingly viewed as aligned with social work values of equity and justice because they aim to transform incarcerated individuals into active contributors to society, rather than passive recipients of punishment (Batubara, Manullang, & Esther, 2024).

In Nigeria, however, correctional rehabilitation remains uneven and fragmented. While the Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019) provides a legal foundation for integrating vocational and educational programs into correctional practice, gaps in implementation persist due to underfunding, overcrowding, and weak policy enforcement (Adeoti, Akinsola, & Oyinlola, 2024; Onyiuke, 2024). Moreover, vocational programs are often donor-driven, short-term, and poorly integrated with certification systems, limiting their equity impact (Milićević, 2024). Without deliberate attention to inclusivity, such programs risk reproducing inequities by excluding vulnerable inmate groups from access to training and economic empowerment (Connell, Smith, & Roberts, 2023)

The literature demonstrates that structured prison labour and vocational programs, when designed with fairness and inclusivity, can serve as powerful tools for rehabilitation and social reintegration. Models from the United States, Europe, and South Africa underscore the value of accredited training, modest remuneration, and partnerships with employers in reducing recidivism and restoring dignity (Smith, Mueller, & Labrecque, 2018; Danjuma, Nordin, & Muhamad, 2018; Batubara, Manullang, & Esther, 2024). These interventions reflect core social work principles by

addressing inequities that limit the participation of incarcerated persons in social and economic life (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

In Nigeria, however, the literature reveals significant gaps. Vocational initiatives in correctional centres remain largely fragmented, underfunded, and unsystematic, often lacking accreditation, monitoring, or sustainable funding (Aliyu & Mustaffa, 2022; Oyewo, 2023). More critically, few studies explicitly frame prison work through the lens of equity and social work, overlooking how gender, disability, indigence, and language barriers shape access to rehabilitation programs (Uche, Ibrahim, & Okafor, 2023). This omission risks reinforcing existing inequalities within correctional facilities by privileging certain groups of inmates while excluding others (Adeoti, Akinsola, & Oyinlola, 2024).

This gap highlights the need for research that not only assesses the feasibility of prison work programs but also embeds them within an equity-driven and socially inclusive framework. By situating prison labour within social work practice and the broader discourse of equity, diversity, and inclusion, this study aims to demonstrate how a structured “Work and Earn” program at Agodi Correctional Centre can transcend rehabilitation in its narrow sense to function as a transformative social intervention. Such an approach positions correctional facilities as spaces of empowerment and justice rather than mere sites of punishment (Connell, Smith, & Roberts, 2023; Milićević, 2024).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study employed a systematic review of literature case study design to examine the feasibility and potential impact of a “Work and Earn” program at Agodi Correctional Centre, Oyo State. The case study approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of institutional realities and stakeholder perspectives within their natural context (Nur & Nguyen, 2023). In line with social work and equity principles, the design emphasised understanding the lived experiences of diverse inmate groups, as well as institutional readiness for inclusive programming.

Data were gathered through a structured document review. Searches were conducted in academic databases (e.g., JSTOR, Scopus) and grey literature repositories for materials published between 2010 and 2025. Inclusion criteria were: (1) peer reviewed studies on correctional education, prison work programmes or social work interventions; (2) policy documents and institutional reports relevant to Nigeria’s correctional system; and (3) international examples from countries with comparable socio economic contexts. Materials focused exclusively on juvenile facilities or non vocational rehabilitation were excluded. Only documents written in English were considered.

#### **Data Sources**

Data were primarily drawn from secondary sources, including policy documents such as the Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019), reports from the Nigerian Correctional Service,

international standards (such as the Mandela Rules) and ILO guidance on prison labour, and peer-reviewed scholarship on correctional rehabilitation. Previous studies on prison industries and vocational training in Nigeria and comparable contexts provided further insights (Aliyu & Mustaffa, 2022; Oyewo, 2023). Documentary evidence was chosen to ensure ethical compliance, given the constraints of direct inmate engagement, while still providing robust evidence for assessing feasibility.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and rigor of the documents selected for review, specific criteria were applied:

Table 1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
<b>Topic Relevance</b>	Peer-reviewed studies, policy documents, and reports focusing on correctional education, prison work programs, social work interventions, and equity in rehabilitation.	Materials focused exclusively on juvenile detention facilities, non-vocational rehabilitation, or purely punitive measures.
<b>Geographic Scope</b>	Documents relevant to the Nigerian correctional system and international models (e.g., USA, South Africa) that offer comparable or aspirational contexts.	Studies from regions with correctional systems fundamentally incomparable to the Nigerian context without transferable lessons.
<b>Language</b>	Documents published in the English language.	Documents published in languages other than English.
<b>Timeframe</b>	Materials published between 2010 and 2025 to ensure currency of data and policy relevance.	Outdated sources published prior to 2010, unless considered seminal historical texts.

### Analytical Strategy

A hybrid coding strategy was employed. Deductive codes were first developed from the study objectives (e.g., institutional readiness, anticipated benefits, challenges/risks, equity safeguards).

During analysis, inductive coding was applied to capture emergent concepts not initially anticipated, such as community partnerships and post release financial literacy. Codes were grouped into themes; for example, the theme “Inclusive Access” encompassed sub codes on gender inclusion (references to the participation of women), disability inclusion (accommodations for inmates with disabilities) and indigence inclusion (fee waivers or resource provision for indigent inmates). Coding was undertaken independently by two researchers, with discrepancies resolved through discussion, to enhance reliability (Uche, Ibrahim, & Okafor, 2023).

### **Trustworthiness and Ethics**

To enhance trustworthiness, the study applied triangulation across multiple document sources and maintained an audit trail of analytical decisions. Reflexivity was also practiced by considering how researcher assumptions about rehabilitation and equity might shape interpretations (Milićević, 2024). Ethical safeguards were built into the design by relying solely on publicly available or previously consented data, and by situating findings within international human rights standards such as the Mandela Rules (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015). Importantly, the study consistently foregrounded equity considerations, ensuring that the analysis extended beyond technical feasibility to address issues of fairness, inclusion, and empowerment, in line with social work practice.

A key limitation of the study is its reliance on secondary documents. Without primary interviews or direct observation, the analysis cannot capture the full complexity of inmates’ experiences or institutional dynamics, which limits the generalizability of the findings. However, for an initial feasibility assessment, the use of policy texts, reports and comparative studies provides a sufficient evidence base to identify structural conditions, anticipate benefits and flag potential equity issues. Future research should incorporate primary data to validate and refine these preliminary insights.

## **4. Findings**

### **Institutional Readiness**

To aid clarity, key findings are summarised in a Strengths and Constraints matrix for Agodi Correctional Centre:

The analysis indicates that Agodi Correctional Centre demonstrates some readiness for a structured “Work and Earn” program. Available physical space, existing though underutilised vocational facilities, and expressed inmate interest create enabling conditions for implementation. The evidence supporting the findings is drawn from specific document excerpts. For example, an evaluation of reformatory institutions in Cross River State lists vocational training options such as auto mechanics, tailoring, plumbing, painting and decorating, illustrating existing skill programmes. A 2024 Federal Government scheme aims to train 500 inmates per facility and offers graduates a ₦500,000 grant. The training modules, which last from six to nine months, cover skills such as fashion design, computer training, hairdressing, fish farming, soap making, and poultry

farming. These excerpts demonstrate both the presence of vocational programmes and the emerging commitment to more structured interventions, lending empirical support to the strengths and constraints identified. Administrative support, while moderate, suggests a willingness to experiment with rehabilitation-oriented programming (Adeoti, Akinsola, & Oyinlola, 2024). From a social work perspective, these findings highlight the presence of institutional assets that can be leveraged to promote empowerment and inclusion, provided that equity safeguards are embedded into program design.

### **Anticipated Benefits**

Several benefits are anticipated from introducing the program. First, it would reduce idleness and promote constructive use of time, thereby improving institutional discipline. Second, participation would enable inmates to acquire certified vocational skills aligned with local labour market needs, thus strengthening employability. Third, modest earnings would allow inmates to cover small personal expenses or save, thereby enhancing autonomy and responsibility. These outcomes align directly with the social work mission of restoring dignity, promoting agency, and fostering reintegration (Uche, Ibrahim, & Okafor, 2023). Moreover, the program has the potential to reduce recidivism by addressing unemployment a key structural barrier to reintegration (Connell, Smith, & Roberts, 2023).

### **Challenges and Risks**

Despite its potential, the program faces challenges that could undermine its equity impact if left unaddressed. Funding shortages and infrastructural deficits limit the scope of vocational workshops, while bureaucratic inertia poses a risk to their sustainability. More critically, there is a risk of inequitable access if women, persons with disabilities, or indigent inmates are excluded from participation. Without deliberate attention to inclusion, the program could replicate existing social inequalities within the correctional environment (Oyewo, 2023). Security concerns, such as the misuse of tools or materials, also require careful planning and monitoring. Social work practice emphasises anticipatory safeguards to ensure that interventions protect vulnerable groups and uphold the dignity and rights of all participants (Batubara, Manullang, & Esther, 2024).

### **Pathways for Equity-Driven Implementation**

To maximise benefits and mitigate risks, the program must integrate equity considerations at every stage. This includes establishing transparent and inclusive eligibility criteria, providing reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, and ensuring gender-sensitive program design. Partnerships with technical and vocational education institutions can guarantee that training is certified, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and portability of skills gained. Public-private partnerships can also help mobilise resources and create pathways for post-release employment. These strategies reflect social work's emphasis on systemic change, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and community reintegration (Aliyu & Mustaffa, 2022).

## **Contribution to Social Work and Equity**

The findings demonstrate that a “Work and Earn” program, if properly designed, can transform Nigerian correctional centres into spaces of empowerment rather than punishment. By promoting agency, restoring dignity, and creating equitable opportunities, the program advances the social work mandate of addressing structural barriers to inclusion. More importantly, it repositions correctional facilities as sites of human development where marginalised populations are given the tools to re-enter society as productive and valued citizens (Milićević, 2024).

## **5. Recommendation**

Based on these findings, the following actionable recommendations are proposed to enhance feasibility and equity:

### **Embed Social Work and Human Rights Principles in Program Design**

The “Work and Earn” program should be grounded in voluntariness, fairness, dignity, and empowerment, consistent with international human rights standards such as the Mandela Rules (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015). This aligns with social work’s ethical commitment to respect for persons and the promotion of social justice (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

### **Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Access**

Special provisions should be made to guarantee participation across gender, disability status, indigence, and linguistic differences. This requires gender-sensitive scheduling, reasonable accommodations for inmates with disabilities, and hardship waivers for indigent participants. Such measures reflect social work’s concern for equity and the removal of barriers that exclude marginalised groups (Uche, Ibrahim, & Okafor, 2023).

### **Strengthen Policy and Legal Frameworks for Protection**

Correctional guidelines should clearly define remuneration, certification, working conditions, and grievance mechanisms. Legal clarity is essential to prevent exploitation and ensure that work is rehabilitative rather than punitive, aligning with social work’s advocacy role in protecting vulnerable populations (Aliyu & Mustafa, 2022).

### **Foster Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships**

Collaboration with social workers, NGOs, technical institutions, and private sector actors should be prioritised to provide accredited training, mentorship, and post-release job placements. Partnerships extend the reach of social work by connecting correctional rehabilitation with broader community support systems (Connell, Smith, & Roberts, 2023).

### **Implement Monitoring and Evaluation with Equity Indicators**

Program monitoring should include disaggregated data on gender, disability, and socioeconomic status to identify inequities in participation and outcomes. Tracking such indicators ensures

accountability and continuous learning, consistent with social work's emphasis on evidence-based practice (Milićević, 2024).

### **Advance Community Sensitization and Reintegration Support**

Public campaigns and re-entry programs should reduce stigma and promote acceptance of ex-inmates. Social workers play a critical role in bridging correctional facilities with communities by fostering inclusion and reshaping public perceptions of rehabilitation (Oyewo, 2023).

## **6. Conclusion**

This study establishes that implementing a structured "Work and Earn" program at Agodi Correctional Centre is a feasible and transformative social work intervention. By integrating accredited vocational training with modest financial incentives, the program holds significant potential to enhance inmate autonomy, reduce idleness, and improve post-release employability. These outcomes align with the core principles of equity and social justice, shifting the correctional focus from punitive confinement to human capital development and reintegration. The findings underscore that such an initiative can effectively address systemic disparities by providing marginalized groups with the skills and resources necessary for successful community re-entry.

However, the realization of these benefits is contingent upon addressing significant structural challenges, including funding deficits, infrastructural gaps, and the risk of excluding vulnerable populations such as women and persons with disabilities. A key limitation of this study is its reliance on secondary data and policy documents, which may not fully capture the nuanced, lived experiences of inmates or the day-to-day operational realities of the facility. Future research should prioritize primary data collection to validate these preliminary findings. Finally, if implemented with robust equity safeguards and multi-stakeholder partnerships, the program can redefine the correctional landscape in Nigeria, promoting a more just and rehabilitative system.

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