



Kenya: Investing in the Reintegration of Women and Children with Terry Nyaoro of Clean Start Kenya

Joining Paul Dosh is Terry Nyaoro (aka Terry Bii), Program Officer at Clean Start Kenya, a Nairobi-based organization that aids justice-impacted women and children with reintegration support. Nyaoro details the history of Clean Start, emphasizing the impact the founder's experience with incarceration has had on the organization's mission and programming. Drawing on the post-release challenges many women face, Nyaoro describes the psychosocial and economic programming offered to promote self-sufficiency among women. Transitioning to a focus on children, Nyaoro discusses the circumstances of those living in Kenyan prisons and the work Clean Start has done in this area, such as responsive caregiving, a childcare framework within the prisons, and policy advocacy. Underscoring the importance of ongoing conversations on the impacts of incarceration, Nyaoro outlines the organization's future goals and how listeners can get involved with Clean Start.

[00:00] Terry Nyaoro: ... The fact that Clean Start exists, first of all, I would like us to know that it was born out of pain and outrage.

[00:17] Paul Dosh: I'm Paul Dosh, associate professor of Political Science at Macalester College and an advisory board member of Children of Incarcerated Caregivers. Today, we're learning about Clean Start Kenya, an organization based in Nairobi that works with women and children impacted by the criminal justice system, supporting programs for successful reintegration at every level. My guest is Terry Nyaoro, program officer at Clean Start Kenya, with over 10 years of experience working with justice-impacted women and children as a coach, mentor, counselor, and caseworker.

[00:56] Paul Dosh: Terry, thanks for joining me.

[00:58] Terry Nyaoro: Well, thank you so much.

[01:00] Paul Dosh: To begin, can you tell us about Clean Start Kenya's mission and how you came into this work?

[01:06] Terry Nyaoro: Clean Start's mission—we work with women and children who are impacted by the criminal justice system to restore dignity and hope for successful reintegration. How I came into this work—I happened to be going to prison to encourage women, and by that time, Teresa was still in prison serving her time.¹ We had a program—we were five volunteer women who just visited the prisons to encourage the women. So she got into one of our classes, and that is where I met Teresa.

So after that, she got to come out the same year, and she wanted to start an organization, which she was already thinking about. She asked us to guide her through what happens within the corridors of prison and [among] the stakeholders. So we took her hands and we began supporting her. By then, she was calling it support me with my *[inaudible]*. So I saw it right from the onset when she just came up [and] said, 'Terry, come and help me so that we can continue helping women to reintegrate successfully.'

Now in my area of work, I first of all started as a coach when Clean Start was starting, and we coached women and officers, basically to check on their attitudes, to set goals, and to be able to bring confidence back to the women. But then, later on, as the years continued to move, we noticed that there were gaps in the reintegration space. So now we are focusing more on women and children. So that's just a background of how I came to start at Clean Start, and I have been there since, continuing to serve the women, the children, and the girls in the juvenile justice system.

[03:11] Paul Dosh: And so that was over 10 years ago. Tell me a bit more about the work you've done as a program officer, how that's evolved, and the programs that you support.

[03:19] Terry Nyaoro: When we began, we just used to go and talk to the women, but we realized that there was so much more to do. Every time we went, we were able to see gaps, and we needed to address those gaps. So first, we started by coaching, but we realized that the women were getting—yes, they were getting confident; their mindsets were changing. But now, coming outside, there was a big gap. They did not have people who could receive them coming outside. So then we began to think about the programs that could support them.

So at Clean Start, we have Circles of Healing, which is a program that fosters successful reintegration by reconciling an imprisoned or formerly imprisoned woman with herself, her

¹ Teresa Njoroge, founder of Clean Start Kenya.



family, and the community. Usually, when a woman is arrested, she has so many issues and challenges. And so when they come out, they meet with other imprisoned women in peer led spaces where they gain social support, trauma [support], and healing. So that they can find themselves back on their feet. So these spaces provide [the] groundwork for reconciliation, mental wellness, and a place where they can set their goals. So that is one of the programs, and we call it Ufunuo.² It is a six weeks program that runs inside the prisons and outside the prisons just to ensure that this lady reconciles with herself, her family, and the community.

We have a program called Tables of Support, and for this program, we seek to build economic resilience in the livelihood and security of imprisoned and formerly imprisoned women. So they are strategically positioned after they have undergone trauma and healing counseling. We now take them through programs that would help them receive seed capital to start businesses [and] build their skills just for them to be able to survive on the outside.

And then, last but not least, we also have the Halfway Program. And [with] this one, we realized that when women come outside, some of them have no families to go back to. So we already bought land, and we are still getting resources to build a space where these women can come. Those who do not have a space where they can go can come there and have skills training there. They can also continue with their healing from trauma. We are intending to have business hubs in a community center for these women.

[06:27] Paul Dosh: Can you tell me a little bit about how any of these programs or other work supports the children of these imprisoned mothers? What's the impact on children?

[06:37] Terry Nyaoro: Yeah, one other program that I hadn't talked about is about children. In the children's department, what we do is work with children accompanying their mothers to prison to ensure positive outcomes in their child's later years by intervening in their early years. And this we do by advocating for responsive caregiving, the provision of a child care framework within the prisons, and policy change in terms of aftercare for children exiting prison.

We do resource mobilization of items such as foodstuffs, clothing, toiletries, toys, and learning materials for the children. Apart from that, we run a program called Responsive Caregiving Training for officers, the wardens, and the nannies—the women who take care of the children—so we have a curriculum there for responsive caregiving for the nannies and the wardens. We do home tracing and reunification. We also have a component of family strengthening and linking the family and the child to psychosocial support. Once the child has been reintegrated into society, we ensure a continuum of schooling by paying for their school fees outside.

² Ufunuo is Swahili for revelation.



[08:06] Paul Dosh: And I understand that Clean Start has also constructed a children's kitchen in one prison and made some other physical changes. Can you describe that?

[08:15] Terry Nyaoro: Yes, that is one project we are really excited about. However, that's just one prison. It came about when we realized that the children eat their meals—the same meals the women may eat, and the time that the food is cooked is quite early. When the food is being served, most of the time the food is cold and might be a bit hard—the texture. So we saw the need, we got partners who were able to support us, and then we built a kitchen.

So in that kitchen, the desired effect was to have a space where food can be made for children and served warm, and we can also have a store where the grains are [stored] so that they can access food coming [at] the right temperature. We have always wanted to do that to all the other prisons, but funds were not enough. That's still our desire—for every prison to have a facility that can cater to those needs. The children can have their meals cooked there, they can have storage for food for the children, because again, that is something that the government is not doing.

[09:44] Paul Dosh: Have you noticed any trends regarding the ages, races, ethnicities, religions, or socioeconomic statuses of the families that Clean Start Kenya works with?

[09:55] Terry Nyaoro: Yes, when we talk about ages, young people ages 15 to 35 are the majority in prison, and I think this is due to the harsh economic times that we are facing. There are no jobs around. So this is something that cuts across [the] board. When you talk about religion or races, because we are all affected as Kenyans, when you get into the prison mix, you will find basically a balance of all these tribes, the reason being the harsh economic times that you're facing. People are jobless and so the crime rates are going higher and higher, day by day, so everybody is looking for an opportunity to survive. Yeah, that's what I can say.

[10:49] Paul Dosh: Earlier, you mentioned the founder of Clean Start Kenya, Teresa Njoroge, who was imprisoned at the Langata Women's Maximum Security Prison with her daughter—one year old daughter. How has her story and the lived experiences of other incarcerated women motivated Clean Start Kenya's mission and vision?

[11:10] Terry Nyaoro: Well, that's such a good question. The fact that Clean Start exists, first of all, I would like us to know that it was born out of pain and outrage. She went through it herself, and for the pain that she went through, God had to be very outraged—you know, to be so mad about the issues that women are going through. By the goodness of it all, if you see her [TED Talk](#), she says that 'I come as one but I represent a million.' Now we have noticed that the women who are inside have very, very unique stories. And that is something that we're really



continuing with because her story just opened the door to many unique stories of women who are there, some even for petty offenses, but are serving time.

[12:10] Paul Dosh: This podcast series has focused on prison nurseries and, more broadly, circumstances where children reside with an incarcerated caregiver. In Kenya, how do prisons function specifically with regard to mothers and children? What facilities are available?

[12:24] Terry Nyaoro: In Kenya, our prisons, with the little resources that they have, do their best, but the conditions inside [are] not very pleasant. You'll find that in some prisons, the women share the same quarters with their children—those who are on remand and even those who are already sentenced. Where there is no space, they all share the same room. So in such a situation, you find that diseases, you know, become part of the day to day life. The children are exposed to so much vulgar language and a lot of trauma. So we only have a few prisons that are a bit, you know, the ones that are in towns; we call them the elite ones. But those that are outside there, you find they don't have kitchens, play areas, or learning spaces. So when they do not have these areas, sometimes they have to look for schools outside. So that's the kind of situation that we have around [us].

[13:34] Paul Dosh: What are the eligibility requirements for mothers who want to have their children with them in prison?

[12:40] Terry Nyaoro: In Kenya, if a lady is pregnant and she is still serving time, she will give birth and can stay with the child there [for] up to four years. Or when she's arrested and she has a small child, if she does not have somebody that she trusts [and] if the child is below four years, she can choose to go with the child and serve her sentence with her child. The child has to be between zero and four [years old]. After four years, they are not allowed to be within the prison spaces. They are either taken to the CCIs—children's institutions—if their family members are not able to come and take them in. That is what the government has passed, that for a mother to stay with her child, the child has to be between zero and four years.

[14:43] Paul Dosh: So you've talked a little bit about the conditions that mothers and children are experiencing. What's life like for children once their mother has finished her sentence and she's no longer incarcerated? What kind of obstacles do these children face?

[14:59] Terry Nyaoro: Their first obstacle is the reintegration gap—the transition coming out of prison to society. The majority of these women, when they come out, you realize that some of them find their homes, like if they had their husbands, some have left or remarried. If they had houses, maybe they were locked by landlords because they were not able to pay rent. And some even end up sleeping in the streets. For those who find it quite difficult, they go back to prison.



They just commit another crime to go back to a space they're familiar with as their comfort zone, which is very unfortunate.

[15:47] Paul Dosh: So turning to a slightly different topic of the law, have any national or continental laws, such as those from the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, had any practical effects on the treatment of children in prison? What about international laws such as the Bangkok Rules?

[16:06] Terry Nyaoro: Here, I must say that I applaud my country. They have been at the forefront [of] all these laws: African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of [the Child and the] Bangkok Rules. We have even had a policy that our President has passed into law for children of incarcerated parents, and they all draw from these international rules. Apart from just being [*inaudible*], we have used those international rules to bring out policies, and this one specifically is for children of incarcerated mothers—it was just launched last month. So we are happy about that [and] that, as a country, we have taken a step forward. We are also currently working on guidelines that will help [with the] reintegration process of that child who is with the mother in prison.

[17:12] Paul Dosh: Can you say a little bit more about the guidelines for reintegration?

[17:16] Terry Nyaoro: So this year, Clean Start and a few other stakeholders got together, and we spearheaded and kept advocating for, you know, the children to be treated right. But it came to a point where we spearheaded the policy matter, and we found favor with the authorities. We started working on the policy document with other stakeholders. This is not just about Clean Start; it's about having a multi-sectoral approach. And when we got together, the work began on the policy, and it ended. So we realized the policy cannot work single handedly. We needed guidelines that work together with it so that the process of the infrastructure can facilitate working with children and mothers in prison in a way that will have an impact.

[18:23] Paul Dosh: Do you have a goal for when that will be achieved?

[18:26] Terry Nyaoro: The policy is already out, and the timeline we expect for the guidelines [is] that anytime this year, we should have the guidelines. So that is where we are as Kenya; we are happy that we made that first step, and once we have these guidelines, we are hoping that implementing matters concerning children and women of incarcerated mothers will become easier.

[18:59] Paul Dosh: That sounds like a really important innovation. Oftentimes, these kinds of policy and law changes are driven by organizations. What are the main organizations working within prison nurseries and advocating for incarcerated mothers and their children in Kenya?



[19:14] Terry Nyaoro: Yes, as I said, we thought that this was not just about us because it came from a place of pain and outrage, but many stakeholders saw the need and the gaps that were there. So we managed to work with a number of stakeholders. We have worked with the Kenya Prison Service; they have been our major partners. We have worked with the Ministry of Education. We have worked with the Ministry of Health to see that the health component is also taken into consideration. We have had our probation and aftercare work also.

We have had Kenya's Pediatricians Association as our partners, and currently they are also going to do research for children, just to talk about health issues that could affect children while in that environment in prison. We have an organization called Kidogo. Kidogo is an organization that trains on responsive caregiving. So they are the ones that we have developed a curriculum that we use to train the officers and the women who have children within the prison—the ones who take care of the children. There's an organization called Faraja [and] Nafisika [Trust]. We have worked with the Ford Foundation; they have been our big, big partners. Also the Commission of Jurists, just to mention a few.

[20:55] Paul Dosh: CIC, as an organization, is committed to supporting the best interests of children. Do you think that the way that prison nurseries in Kenya are currently conducted succeeds at keeping the best interests of the child in mind?

[21:07] Terry Nyaoro: I would say that there is need for improvement. As I've said, we have pushed for the policy, the policy is out, and we are working on the guidelines. Yes, implementation might be a bit slow because we need these documents. And on the ground, all the different stakeholders are doing their bit; those who are able to train officers are able to train, and those who are able to provide resources for children are doing so. So we still have a lot to do. And considering the conditions of the prisons, some of them are still—we are still advocating for play areas for children. We also want kitchens around so that these children do not have to feel like they are in an unsafe environment. So there's quite a lot to do, I agree.

[22:09] Paul Dosh: So play areas, kitchens, and safety sound like key objectives. What about alternatives to children and their mothers staying together in prison? Are there any other alternatives in Kenya?

[22:23] Terry Nyaoro: Yes, we do have alternatives to imprisonment. We have diversion. They can also be bailed out. We have community service orders [and] alternative dispute resolution. However, the challenge here is that very few clients or women know about these alternatives. Therefore, they end up serving time in prison. Another hindrance would be poverty—not being able to even afford a lawyer. So in that respect, these alternatives are there, but very, very few



people know about them. So there is a need for them to be informed and educated [about] the alternatives available.

[23:12] Paul Dosh: You mentioned several improvements you're hoping to see. Are there other changes Clean Start Kenya would like to see in Kenyan prisons, policies, or issues surrounding the incarceration of mothers with their children?

[23:25] Terry Nyaoro: First and foremost, we are looking at using the alternatives. We are telling ourselves that we don't want people who have committed petty offenses to be behind bars. So these alternatives would really work in those cases. We would want it to be the last resort for a woman to go in with her child. So our biggest objective is to empower our women to know the alternatives that are available so that they can use them. They do not have to go and serve their sentence, and for those who are there, we educate them. We work with other organizations to educate them on their rights and just empower them while they're inside so that when they come outside, they're able to start from somewhere.

We also want to have more safe houses because of the stigma—when they come out, people are not ready to receive them. Therefore, we find that the recidivism rate is higher because when they feel that they have not been accepted in the community, they choose to go back. And that is why Clean Start has the Circles of Healing, where these women can come and be in a safe space [where] they can come and talk about their issues and feel that there is a community of people who are like them, and inside there, they can be empowered to be able to do their businesses, create other goals for their lives, and move on. So that's our bigger goal.

[25:23] Paul Dosh: What advice do you have for CIC as we navigate the topic of prison nurseries in the United States?

[25:29] Terry Nyaoro: First and foremost, I would say thank you for having these conversations. These are very rare conversations, especially on our continent. I would ask that you share best practices that are done globally so that other nations can learn from those best practices. You can also share information [and] data available concerning the children of imprisoned mothers or imprisoned parents. So that it's a space where we can learn and exchange ideas.

[26:09] Paul Dosh: Is there anything else you'd like to share with us today? And please tell us how listeners can find out more about Clean Start Kenya in order to support your important work.

[26:18] Terry Nyaoro: I would like CIC to continue with these very crucial conversations because every change begins with a conversation, so that it doesn't become a foreign thing to talk about issues of imprisonment. And for people who would want to find out more about Clean



Start, we have our website, which is www.cleanstartkenya.org. We have our Facebook page, Twitter handle, and LinkedIn [profile]. They can also visit us; when you come to Kenya, we are in Westlands, School Lane, 31st.³ So you're all welcome to come and visit us and see us, and should there be those who would want to support us in any way, they are most welcome.

We do donations to the prisons. We take clothes, soap, and diapers just to keep the children away from the cold so that they can withstand those harsh situations. Sometimes we take grains and clothes to different prisons. So we will appreciate that help. If we have people who would want to provide mentorship or apprenticeship to the women, they are most welcome. Our team is still young. We are still building our capacity. When I came to Clean Start, I didn't know so much, but working through the years has continued to build my capacity. And therefore, it's a need for those of us who are working because we have quite a number of women who have come out of prison and are working on the same team. So those are some of the areas you can come and plug in. You can donate laptops; we do training [virtually] in all the prisons, [but] so far we are only able to reach a small number of prisons. You can donate food stamps or dignity packs for children and women.

[28:43] Paul Dosh: Terry Nyaoro, thank you for joining me and sharing with us your work and advocacy.

[28:49] Terry Nyaoro: Thank you.

[28:52] Paul Dosh: Thank you for listening to the Children of Incarcerated Caregivers International Prison Nursery Podcast. We're your hosts, Paul Dosh and Barbara Frey, advisory board members of Children of Incarcerated Caregivers. To learn more about our organization and view additional materials, documents, and research from this episode, you can visit our website at cicmn.org.

This podcast was created with research from our student collaborators McKenna Haas, Olivia Hudson, Kamini Ramakrishna, Socorro Topete, and Jonah Brumbach. Episodes contain original music by David Smith and production by Brian Carnell. Don't forget to tune into the next episode! We hope to see you there.

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³ Clean Start Kenya is now located at 658A Tabere Cres, Nairobi, Kenya.

