Indonesian Deployment of Corrective Services NSW Officers

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Overview

Correctional Staff from Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) were invited to work with Indonesian Director General of Corrections (DGC) to assist Indonesia develop their correctional practices. Staff from Indonesia Corrections visited various Australian Jurisdictions in 2008 and were impressed by the Brush Farm Academy facilities of CSNSW and the professional operational aspects of the department when visiting Correctional Centres and Probation and Parole Offices. These visits resulted in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) facilitating the deployment of two senior operational staff – one correctional and one community correctional – to assist the DGC with the operational, systemic and bureaucratic changes they were undertaking.

The DGC, since the arrival of Pak Untung Sugiyono, the Director General of Corrections, have been reviewing their practices with the aim of addressing many of the difficulties facing their organisation. The main difficulties and challenges facing the organisation were:

- Overcrowding
- Lack of resources for both operations and training
- Outdated processes and systems

Before CSNSW became involved other agencies had been involved in developing plans and instigating change within the Department. This included developing Human Rights practices (Roald Wallenberg Institute) and bureaucratic change incorporated in the Blueprint for Change developed by the Asia Foundation. The Centre for Detention Studies has also had a key role working within DGC instigating and developing plans for structural and systemic change.

The Deployment

CSNSW was given the brief to assist DGC to develop its operational capacity with the aim to develop modern correctional practices. This aim was supported by key senior staff within DGC. This support, which manifested as active encouragement and openness to visit prisons and probation and parole office, was a key aspect to the success of the project to date.

Two correctional officers started in late April 2009 and with the assistance of two interpreters were placed inside the head office of the DGC to begin the project.

The other part of the briefing given to the officers was to develop the relationships between Indonesia and Australia. This aim along with capacity building remained the focus throughout the following three months. The project length depended on the reception of the officers, project outcomes within Indonesian Corrections, and the ability of the officers to meet the needs of DGC.
From the beginning the officers spent some time talking with officers at all levels in the organisation. This included interviewing the Director General and presenting to senior officers and policy makers within Indonesian Corrections. They also visited a number of Custodial and Community Institutions to ascertain and assess the needs of on-the-ground officers.

It is very exciting for officers from Australia to work so closely within an Indonesian Department. As Susilo Bamban Yudiyono, the Indonesian President stated, when visiting Australia in March 2010, both Australians and Indonesians have stereotyped images of each other’s country and its people based on historical perceptions. For example Indonesia is still seen as an ‘authoritarian, extremist and expansionist power’ by Australians and hence viewed with some suspicion. Likewise Australia’s history of racial intolerance highlighted by the policy of ‘white Australia’ causes some ill-feeling and suspicions towards Australia by Indonesians.

Although these prejudices exist, the overall reception from all levels of the DGC organisation (and from Indonesians in general) was overwhelmingly open and receptive to our input. The officers we worked with showed a genuine curiosity about our country and its practices as well as openness to new correctional practices. It is naive to believe that we did not face resistance and polite indifference at times. However, the overall reception and willingness to learn, engage in dialogue, and to learn about and adapt our practices was evident and the ongoing pattern of our interactions with staff at all levels were very positive.

It is important to note here that it was not a case of CSNSW going in, developing Standard Operating Procedures and having DGC adopt those immediately. Although there is a general willingness to adapt different modern correctional practices – including case planning, parole processes, intelligence collection, and appropriate assessment of offenders for classification and supervision, adapting those aims to meet Indonesian goals was the challenge and remains the challenge as this project develops.

To give one example of one of the major differences, and strong reasons why Indonesian Corrections cannot simply take on CSNSW practices:

CSNSW, with a budget of around one billion Australian dollars, works with around 10,000 prisoners and has another 18,000 offenders being supervised in the community. Under this budget CSNSW operates 33 Correctional Centres, 64 Probation and Parole Offices and a number of other units including Community Offender Support Centres and Custodial Diversionary Centres. In comparison, Indonesian Corrections has over 137,000 offenders in custody in 207 prisons and 191 Detention Houses (remand centres). They also supervise around 27,000 offenders (almost entirely on Parole) in the community and have 67 Probation and Parole Offices. Unlike CSNSW the DGC also oversees 61 confiscated goods houses. DGC operations have a budget equivalent to around 38% of CSNSW budget. The maths is staggering when you combine this with an overcrowding problem – with an average of 69% overcrowding in prisons throughout the country.

If you overlay this major difference in resource availability with the cultural,
political and geographical (Indonesia is an archipelago consisting of over 17,000 islands) differences between the two countries it becomes a major challenge for any operation to achieve major organisational change without a large amount of political will and focus. CSNSW involvement had to be guided by the needs of Indonesian Corrections however we also had to provide leadership and direction in the face of what we observed, (and professionally assessed as key requirements of the organisation) and were advised were the challenges and difficulties they were faced with.

A major challenge for the project was to maintain positive and open communication with the main drivers of change and suggest and implement practices to meet these challenges.

Training

A major challenge highlighted very early by the CSNSW officers was the lack of training of officers who work with offenders. These are the officers that work with offenders on a daily basis – custodial officers and probation and parole officers. To give an example most Parole Officers working in the community have received no direct training on how to manage offenders. In one place we visited an officer stated that in the 34 years he had worked in Probation and Parole he had received only one week of training.

It is important to remind the reader of the reasons for this – the lack of resources being the key one. There is training given to these officers however lack of resources means that only one officer a year from each unit will get four weeks training.

Senior officers in the DGC are sent to AKIP for three years – their training academy. This training is solely for young men and women mostly just out of school and these officers, after graduation, are placed throughout their country. The reader is reminded that Indonesia is a young democracy and the nature of working as a new democratic country (since 1997), providing resources to agencies in a transparent and open manner, and ensuring that the needs related to running of these agencies are met, in such a complex and diverse country, would be a major challenge for any leader. Many of those challenges are well documented in other areas and will not be addressed in this paper.

The lack of training for base officers in both custodial and community corrections was evident in all our visits and conversations and research. It was decided very early on that training in modern correctional practices to officers would be an initial aim. This would achieve a number of aims – it would allow us to work with, and discuss with officers at various levels throughout the department, about their needs and hopes for change. It also gave us opportunities to visit numerous prisons and probation and parole offices throughout the country in the places we were training. Lastly it gave us the opportunity to deliver training in what we saw as key offender management practices that we hoped would assist the officers to manage offenders more effectively.

Other Challenges

In addition to the shortfall in training of base officers there were a number of other challenges evident to us.

As already stated overcrowding is a major challenge facing DGC and there are a number of other difficulties that result from that. Many of the prisons we
visited had up to 30 inmates in one cell – this combined with sanitary issues and the lack of running water in some cases meant that offender management was less an issue as offender control. The ratio of offenders to officers and sheer numbers of offenders within prisons, combined with the absence of an integrated and automated offender information management system, means that many offenders overstay their orders. These issues are being addressed by the DGC in conjunction with the Blueprint for Change and NGO’s such as the Asia Foundation and Centre for Detention Studies.

As stated, the low level of funding Indonesian Corrections receives in comparison to CSNSW is a major reason for the many underlying difficulties of the organisation. The inability to meet all the training needs of officers, lack of infrastructure (e.g. integrated information management system throughout the Department that would avoid overstaying of prisoners), and overcrowding are examples of some of these difficulties.

A further aspect that was highlighted to us as a cause of some of their challenges was the low level of salaries of officers. We were informed this caused low motivation and morale and challenged ethical and probity issues within the organisation. Conversely we were pleasantly and often surprised at the level of enthusiasm and openness of the people we trained and talked to throughout.

The reasons for overcrowding are not just about the lack of enough prisons. It is a fact throughout most of the world that prison populations are increasing including NSW and the reasons for these are caused by many factors. In NSW a focus on truth in sentencing and sentencing guidelines has had an influence and result in increasing prison population.

We were advised by the DGC that the prison population has almost doubled in six years since 2003. The causes for this are, we were told, because of the triumvirate entities that hold the power within the justice system in Indonesia. That consists of the Judges, the prosecutors and the police. We were advised constantly in our conversations that these three set the agenda for sentencing with a heavy bias to custodial sentences. Evidence of the ability of defence lawyers or the probation and parole service to actively and decisively influence sentencing was negligible. We were also advised that sentencing almost is exclusively given as a prison sentence no matter the type of offence or the type of offender. Although they do have a probation Order this is rarely used and makes a small percentage of the offenders supervised by Probation and Parole.

One of CSNSW’s priorities is to decisively influence sentencing and releasing authorities. The key ways we do this is through thorough assessment and identification of factors that contribute to offending behaviour and through identifying offenders at high risk of reoffending. This in turn assists the Courts and releasing authorities to provide conditions and give appropriate directions to offenders designed to reduce the risks to the community and contribute to the reintegration and resettlement of offenders into a law-abiding life. It is with these aims that we introduced these concepts of appropriate assessment, classification and data collection to Indonesian Corrections.

This aim guided the training we gave to probation and parole as well as to the
recommendations for the ongoing project at the completion of the initial stage. Interviewing skills, understanding the concepts of assessment and risk, and collecting data and intel were all concepts we continually discussed and influenced those we spoke to within Indonesian Corrections. These concepts are the outcomes presently being worked towards within the project.

Cultural

Living and working within a culture as diverse and different to Australia as Indonesia was a challenging and very satisfying aspect of the project for the officers who have the opportunity for placements there. The supports offered and given by DFAT were a key aspect in ensuring the work was not impacted on by living concerns. Providing stable accommodation and appropriate supports are key aspects to ensuring the officers are comfortable and safe and ensured that the work side could be focussed on without worrying about accommodation or safety issues.

Indonesia is a dynamic and exciting place to work. Traffic, shopping, the large population, religious acceptance and diversity, and the diverse and fascinating cultural regions make for an exciting and captivating learning experience.

It is important for people working there to immerse themselves and accept these differences rather than isolate and withdraw. Indonesia is a community based culture and for Australian individuals this can be confronting and confusing. Indonesia is very sensitive to cultural influence and judgement because of centuries of Dutch rule. Officers working there must ensure they remain open to difference and suspend any judgements or views that we somehow do things better.

Although overcrowding was a constant in most prisons – there were some we visited which were less than capacity – we also viewed many inventive ways that operational units dealt with their problems. For example in one prison geese were used on the outer perimeter of its walls for two functions – one to clean up food scraps and the other to provide alarm should people walk past. We were assured by the Kalapas that the geese make a racket at night time should anyone come close that would alert officers. Remembering that there was little to no electronic infrastructure or if there was it was out of commission. “Waiting” to be repaired was a statement we heard often when we ask about non-functioning equipment.

Outstanding examples of offender management operations were found in prisons like Malang Men’s and Women’s First Class Prisons. Although both were overcrowded there was no sense of despair or chaos we viewed in some other prisons. This was due in a large part to the managers of these prisons. It should be noted that both prisons had ISO 2008 certification and appeared appropriately resourced.

Conclusion

I hope this article does not give the perception that we are critical of Indonesian Corrections practices. That is not our aim or intention. As stated the lack of resources which results in staffing, infrastructure and training shortfalls, means that they must cope with what they have. I found Indonesians to be inventive adaptable and flexible people who face hardship with good humour, grace and humility. The overcrowding caused by the justice system, which the Corrections System in Indonesia sits outside of, rather than being a key influential member of (as
CSNSW does in NSW), means that DGC has little influence on the processes that cause the overcrowding. As stated. The DGC is well aware of their difficulties, the source of their difficulties, and strong directions about how to address those difficulties.

The people working within Indonesian Corrections, especially the Director General and Secretary General, and key Directors demonstrated a keen insight and understanding of their challenges. Their openness to CSNSW staff, providing us with access to their prisons, probation and parole offices, and staff, meant that the project was given a major stimulus and momentum through their support. There willingness to discuss issues and consider change is a credit to them and their staff.

The challenge for Australian Officers working in a country with some major cultural and language differences did not manifest as difficulties that could not be overcome – and this was entirely because of the support of the DGC and DFAT. The willingness of DGC to face their challenges and find new ways of performing their duties, restructure their department, and reform their bureaucracy was exciting and enlightening to be part of. Learning about our close neighbours and their culture and beliefs was an enlightening and growing experience for me as an individual. I learnt a lot about humility and how our neighbours can influence and assist us to change as much as we might be able to influence and change them. I would recommend the experience of living and working in Indonesia to anyone open and enthusiastic to learn.

References

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