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Resilient nations.*

United Nations Development Programme in South Sudan

# Juba Central Prison Vocational Training

## Impact Stories



*Access to Justice and Rule of Law Project  
South Sudan*





A trainee works on metal fabrication skills at the Juba Central Prison VTC.

# Juba Central Prison Vocational Training Impact Stories

UNDP is working to enhance physical and legal protection of people and communities in South Sudan by ensuring legal representation, access to justice, and empowerment of communities and civil society. With the goal to help transform prisons in South Sudan into institutions for reform and reintegration, the Access to Justice and Rule of Law project helped establish a Vocational Training Centre in Juba Central Prison in collaboration with the National Prisons Service of South Sudan. Since 2016, over 100 inmate trainees have graduated from the training programme and been released. These are their stories.



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## I. Introduction

# Why Establish a Vocational Training Programme in Juba Central Prison?



*Building robust, effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels promotes peaceful societies and contributes to sustainable development. This is the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 16.*

*Established in 2016, the Juba Central Prison Vocational Training Centre (VTC), funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is a collaboration of the National Prisons Service of South Sudan (NPSSS) under the Ministry of Interior, as well as the Ministry of General Education; the Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development; and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).*

*The vocational training programme aims to prevent recidivism by imparting technical skills to inmates that will enable them to pursue productive activities, earn their livelihoods and facilitate reintegration into their communities when released.*

*The VTC was established following recommendations set forth by the first-ever Rapid Prison Assessment conducted by NPSSS in 2012. According to the Inmates Statistics Reports (2014 and 2015), there are approximately 6,500 inmates serving sentences across 22 prison facilities in South Sudan. Central Equatoria has the highest number of inmates with more than 29 percent serving in prison in the region. Women and juveniles comprise approximately 6 percent and 4 percent of the total inmate population, respectively.*



The main training curricula of the Juba Central Prison VTC is designed for six months of instruction with a focus on practical application, exercise and examination. The training initiative seeks to ensure sustainability and promote indigenous expertise. The technical committee coordinates the selection process of qualified South Sudanese instructors and supervisors to conduct all trainings at the centre. The curriculum for the training programme is aligned with other vocational training institutions approved by the Government of South Sudan so that trainees complete the same level of rigorous instruction as those from similar institutions available to the broader public.

Above: Students in metal fabrication and welding pose during a recent visit to the fourth cohort of trainees at Juba Central Prison VTC.

The latest graduating class brings the total VTC trainees to 591 inmates and 139 prison personnel, across the trades on offer: carpentry and joinery, building and construction, electrical installation, metal fabrication and welding, auto mechanics, agriculture, hair dressing and beauty therapy, tailoring and fashion design, bakery, food processing, plumbing and information technology. Of those inmates trained, multiple are now working in formal positions with public, non-profit, and private organizations, while others have opened their own businesses or joined projects/ventures as apprentices to grow their skills.



## Tracking Progress of Released Trainees



Ben, 39, started as a trainee in the VTC, where he earned his certification in electrical installation, and has since returned to teach practical and theory lessons. He is now engaged with the project as a link between the released inmates and has individually visited 196 released trainees one-by-one – to provide monitoring and follow-up on their reintegration process.

Originally from Torit, Ben served seven years of a 20-year sentence in Juba Central Prison for a financial crime he contends he did not commit. He met legal aid lawyers while attending classes at the VTC who were able to help with his case.

“I was released on 29 January 2018 at exactly 9:42am. I remember it vividly,” says Ben, adding that he never intended to return to his previous career in finance. He now prefers the teaching and support fields, especially interacting with those fellow inmates who gained release from serious crimes.

“Although it’s difficult for many to get formal employment on release, I’m hopeful that what they learn will spread and become something good,” he says, adding that he feels fortunate to have a role and get to see the programme continue.

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Top row: Inmate trainees working on practical tailoring, welding, and carpentry skills in the Juba Central Prison VTC.

Bottom: Ben, 39, a former trainee and current instructor at the Juba Central Prison VTC.

## Youth Reclaiming Their Futures



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Along an energetic intersection of Ministries Road in Juba, mixed with the sounds of bodabodas and traffic police whistles, a young barber named Peter is giving his client a fresh fade.

Originally from Yirol, Peter was incarcerated at 16 years old for a fight which resulted in a death. As a juvenile, he avoided the death penalty, but he could not raise the funds to pay for bail and related fines. Peter was released on 23 July 2017, after spending five years in Juba Central Prison.

“I did not want to give up the opportunity to do something on my release,” says Peter, now 23, when he explains his motivation to participate in the hair dressing and auto mechanics courses offered at the VTC.

“Prison taught me patience and how quickly you can lose your way and lose your motivation.”

Peter now operates a barber stand with two chairs. While he learned how to do the technical aspects of his work through the VTC, he’s found his natural ability to interact and build relationships with customers helps grow his business the most.

“I don’t want to stop here. I want to continue to get experience, and with more tools and word-

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of-mouth growing, I will move from a stand to a proper shop," he shares.

In 2016, while Peter was in prison, both of his parents passed. He now helps support his three brothers, ages 7, 11, and 13, with school fees.

"No one was there to help me when I needed it, but I know by supporting them, they will be able to help me in the future. I don't want them to lose their lives like I almost did," he says, adding that while his brothers are interested in how he started his own business he's not forcing them to follow in his footsteps.

"I do have a friend who I've shown several barbering techniques, who can help me now. Eventually would like to employ others but for now I need to be patient and grow. For me, choosing the VTC was easy, and it turned out life changing," says Peter.

Above: Peter works on his client, Marco.

Left page: Peter, 23, from Yirrol.

Below: Peter cites his ability to build relationships with his customers as key to building his business.





Alex, 33,  
at the site of  
the hotel he  
is helping  
construct.

## Building an Independent Life



Not far from Peter's stand is a construction site where Alex, 33, is busy at work.

A graduate of the welding and metal fabrication cohort of the Juba Central Prison VTC, Alex is helping at the site for the past three months on a voluntary basis. He was released 20 July 2018 after completing a 10-year sentence. As a soldier, Alex was part of a fight which resulted in a gun misfiring and killing a fellow member of the military. He was 23 years old at the time of the incident.

When he entered prison, Alex lacked experience in any industry or vocation beyond basic military training and some farming he did in his home area of Kajo-Keji.

"I was not doing good before prison, and honestly, I lost

a lot of time between the years," says Alex. "I found that as a soldier-turned-criminal, no one wanted to help me. There was no loyalty in that situation – I felt abandoned."

Alex says the VTC classes in Juba Central Prison taught him technical vocational skills valuable on the local market and provided the space to gain practical expertise – both which he is applying to his life upon release.

"From my perspective, I'm now starting a new life. I feel confident in my abilities now and I don't mind anything independent – I can work alone and I can look for my own opportunities. From the position I am now, I can help my parents and siblings, and help make my country better," says Alex, adding that obtaining more construction

tools would help him pursue his work on his own without needing employer-supplied materials.

Access to tools and start-up resources is one of the many challenges facing the trainees on release. Although the project is providing basic start-up kits for successful graduates, the needs are large for those aspiring to launch their own businesses as entrepreneurs.

To help address this gap, UNDP added an additional five day Entrepreneurship Workshop to the VTC curriculum to prepare inmates scheduled for imminent release to creatively pursue independent self-employment.

## Profits Providing for Families



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Richard, 45, completed both the VTC course in welding and metal fabrication and the Entrepreneurship Workshop. Upon release, he joined up with his younger brother, Moses, to establish a workshop. Together the brothers build metal and mixed material furniture in the Gudele neighborhood of Juba.

“Starting a business has been a slow process. We want to diversify what we are producing,” says Richard, showing his products and explaining the prices of the different pieces, ranging between 1500-3000 SSP each. A major issue for the growth of his business is the fact most South Sudanese families are facing financial challenges, which keeps purchasing power low.

“Prison nearly destroyed all that I had built in my life. I was in a tight place, constantly thinking and worrying about my family on the outside. I was very stressed,” says Richard, who is originally from Yei, and married with six children.

His profits are now providing for his family and paying for school fees for his children, the eldest of which is now 18 and in Senior 2. “My kids are clever,” says Richard. “I want them to take something from here and from my efforts, I want them educated and growing.”

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Top left: Richard, 45, and his younger brother Moses, pose near their workshop in Gudele; Top right: the beds the brothers make on display roadside; Below: Richard poses with the furniture he has produced; Left page: Richard works on cutting a new piece of furniture.

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Beyond what Richard is doing individually to turn his life around, he emphasizes the need for peace to move forward. Since his release from prison, Richard has joined his neighborhood Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC), also supported by UNDP's Access to Justice and Rule of Law project.

"My home area [Yei] is not secure, and even here in Juba, the people can not have real progress until we have peace. We can't move freely. Without peace and rule of law, we'll never have a chance to make good profits, or develop new products," says Richard.





Friends  
Richard (left)  
and Mandela,  
both 28, at the  
upholstery shop  
where Mandela  
is now working  
on his craft.

## Serving as Positive Community Role Models



Several of the released prison VTC trainees are now active in their neighborhood's Police Community Relations Committees or other community leadership groups. Despite the challenges in their background, released trainees report they do not carry animosity for law enforcement. Part of this attitude transformation they found through the VTC's "Happy Hour" sessions, which are psychosocial support sessions consisting of discussion groups, poetry, music, storytelling, and prayer, held weekly on Fridays.

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Richard and Mandela, both 28, are two trainees who forged a friendship through the Juba Central Prison VTC, which endures now on the outside. They trained in electrical installation, auto mechanics, and carpentry.

Mandela says he was able to use his time in Juba Central Prison to focus on being productive and overcoming the trauma he faced through incarceration.

"Between the VTC and the Happy Hour sessions, the programme enables people to be different when they are released," says Mandela, who greets us at an upholstery shop where he is repairing and building chairs and tables, as he learned in the VTC. He says he is slowly building up his experience and would like to open his own workshop as an owner.

His friend Richard, from Eastern Equatoria, served two sentences in Juba Central Prison over the years. The latest was a four year stay which ended in 2017, on Christmas Eve.

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“My second experience, with the VTC, was nothing like the first time I went to prison,” says Richard. “I was experiencing real distress in my life and then in prison. Through the VTC experience, I was able to change, and I feel a real benefit from it. I don’t want to go back ever again.”

“Among everything, you’re faced with the burden of how to provide for loved ones while on the inside and it’s not easy to stay positive,” explains Mandela, who supports his parents, three brothers, and three children (ages 2, 4, and 7). His current goals are to send his kids to school, help his brothers and to plan a more solid future for his family, as they are currently not all residing together.

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Richard, meanwhile, has been gradually building his professional experience in his neighborhood. His electrical skillset requires tools he borrows for now.

“Release has not been entirely easy, there are real difficulties for finding work and getting something significant to support yourself,” Richard says, noting that his reputation has grown in his area as someone who can repair solar generators. “I need business cards and more tools, having my own tools would help me move more freely and take up opportunities quicker.”

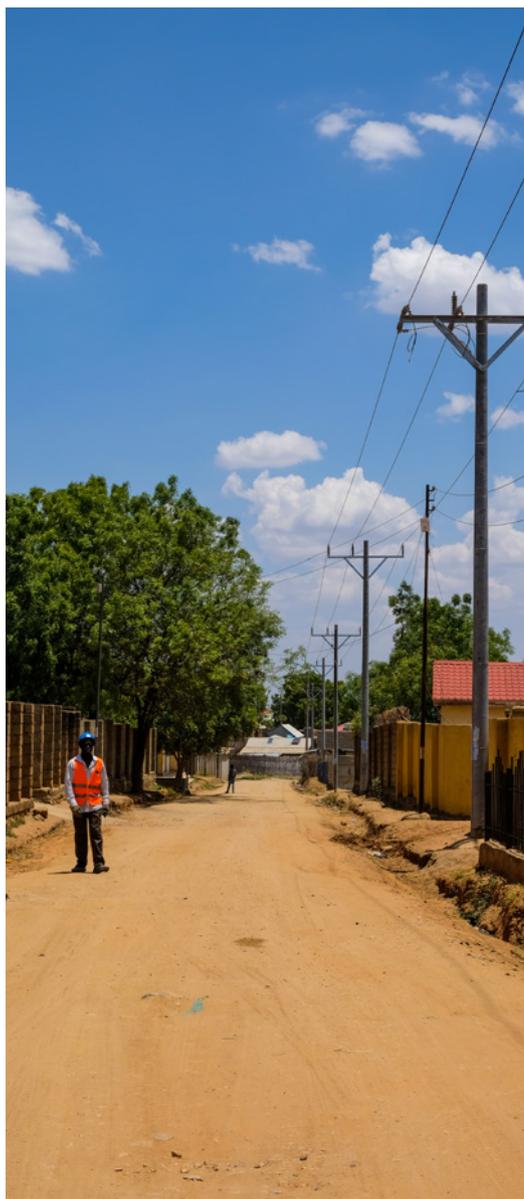
Beyond work, Richard was elected by his community to serve on the Police Community Relations Committee of Ward 4 as a youth representative. He now advises his community



Mandela’s goal is to send his children to school with his earnings and eventually open his own workshop in the future.

how to avoid troublesome behaviors, encouraging productive pathways and community security.

“I want to let other youth in my area understand how they can get their own job, how they can do their part, and how together we will make progress,” says Richard, adding that, ultimately, “Peace is important because we need to be able to plan to work and to make profits.”



## Advancing Development with Technical Skills



One electrical installation trainee of the Juba Central Prison VTC is now working as an apprentice on one of three crews setting up new power lines in Juba, a high-profile project signaling a new era of development in South Sudan.

Micheal, 29, spent a year in prison for a crime related to an argument and physical altercation. He was released on 24 August 2017. Originally from Kajo-Keji, Michael is married with two kids (ages 3 and 7) who he supports, as well as his parents and his two brothers.

“My wife suffered while I was in prison because I could not help,” says Michael. “My goal right now is to provide for my children and earn enough to afford a car which we can transport the babies to school in.”

Michael did not know a trade before going to prison. Now, with his technical knowledge of electricity installation and design, he is actively contributing to a large-scale project.

“The work is going good, it’s very practical and hands-on. The experience I gain will help me in the future for more projects,” he says, adding that, “I have a lot of pride because I am working on a project which will advance Juba and South Sudan as a country. It has lots of benefits for our people.”

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Top: Michael begins the climb up a power line pole to install new power lines in Juba; Bottom: trainees in the Juba Central Prison electrical installation course, the same training programme Michael completed during his time.



As a trainee with the crew, Michael receives a small daily stipend and transportation allowance. By proving his abilities, he looks forward to signing a full contract with the company in time.

“I am proud to have Michael on our crew,” says Mr. Andrew, his team leader and supervisor. “He comes on time, he is hard working and he contributes actively. We are very impressed with his work ethic and ability. From our experience with him, we would be happy to welcome more trainees coming from the VTC on our crew in the future.”

The project engineer, Pascal, agrees: “Through Michael’s hard work we are showing, as South Sudanese, we have the ability and capacity to do these projects with our own labor. We appreciate him, and other trainees like him, who are willing to learn and willing to work together. With time and network, these trainees will do great things, for themselves, and for us as a nation.”

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Top center: Michael's teammates demonstrate the safety process for installing power lines in Juba.

Bottom: Michael (center front) and his crew, including supervisor Mr. Andrew (third from left), pose during a team break.



# A Vision to Succeed



In the Konyo-Konyo area of Juba, at a health office space, we're greeted by Christine, 29, her trainer and five fellow female coworkers, who are gathered to listen to Christine share her story.

Christine spent two years and three months in Juba Central Prison on financial-related charges. She was released in March 2017, after completing the VTC course in hair dressing and beauty therapy.

"Through the training I was able to gain knowledge and then importantly, how to put what I learned into action through the Entrepreneurship Workshop that followed," says Christine, who has three children (ages 7, 9 and 12).

"Christine is doing great here," says the trainer, emphatically. The company they work for uses a distribution model which enables women to access revenue streams while balancing demands of motherhood.

"In South Sudan, you will not necessarily find an employer, so you must learn the strategies for providing for yourself," says Christine, adding that the path has not been easy and some of her fellow trainees are struggling.

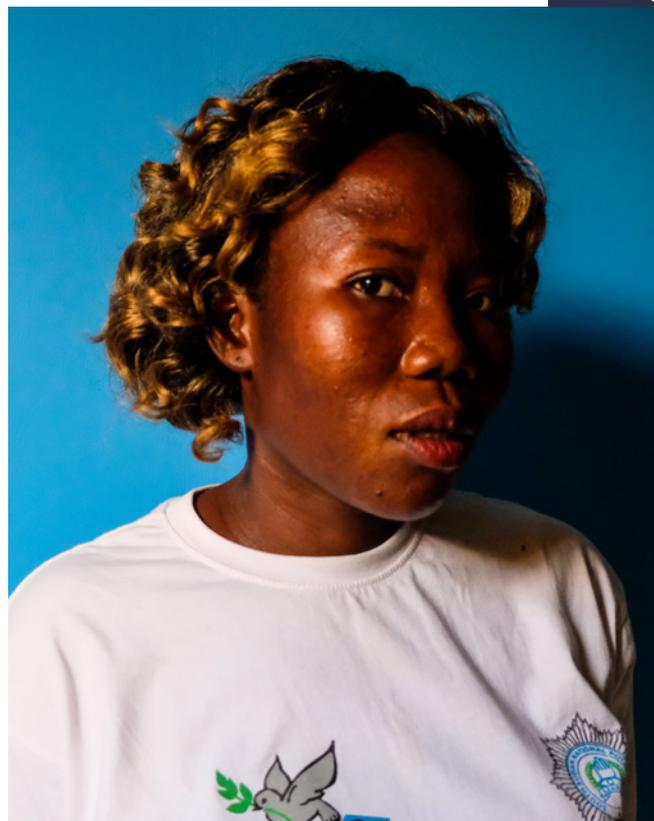
One of Christine's new coworkers explains the health supplements on offer at their office.

“The certificate of achievement itself is not enough on its own, unless it is followed by action. I know that with the plan I formulated, I can network and work productively,” Christine says. Since her release, she has gained diverse experience including working in a friend’s salon, conducting garage sales, and is actively working on more than one business idea.

“If you just come out and sit, you will encounter problems. I want to keep pushing and will not give up. I don’t want to lose momentum. I know how to persist through the struggle and I know I can accomplish something,” she explains, continuing into her idea for graduates in the future to be able to re-join the VTC as teachers or mentors to push others who are scheduled for release towards success.

“Some of the [fellow trainees] I know who have come out are still lost. In South Sudan we have a lot of pain,” she says thoughtfully. “I don’t want to see anyone fail. We can work together. Things have happened but what are you going to do about it? How will you start and when?”

Christine feels her story is proof of the power of the Vocational Training Centre programme to transform the lives of inmates who still have a lot to offer, by imparting technical knowledge but also confidence and a pathway for success:



Christine, 29, completed the Juba Central Prison VTC course on hair dressing and beauty therapy.

“It is an amazing feeling to work with my own hands, with my own sweat, and make a place for myself and my family, with my own belongings and accomplishments. I can envision my future and I know the steps to take to get closer to my goals,” says Christine proudly, in front of her new coworkers.



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