

## **Gaps exist in rehabilitation of children in conflict with law report shows**

**By Janerose Wanzira and Evelyn Makena**

There are inadequate rehabilitation programs for children in conflict with law in Kenya, a new report has shown.

The report launched last week by the Department of Children Services (DCS) under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection highlights several gaps in the juvenile justice system that do not respond to the needs of children.

There are inadequacies particularly in rehabilitating children that were involved in terrorist activities, drugs and substance abuse and sexual offences, notes the ***Assessment Report on Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration Programmes Services and Practices for Children in Conflict with the Law in Kenya.***

In a speech read by the Chief Administrative Secretary, State Department of Social Protection, Hon. Patrick Ole Ntutu on behalf of the Labour Cabinet Secretary, Simon Chelugui during the launch, he noted the need for well-designed and implemented programs of rehabilitation and reintegration for children under juvenile justice.

“The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in which Kenya is a signatory, recommends that the essential aim of treatment of every child in conflict with the law, if found guilty of infringing the penal law, shall be his or her reformation, reintegration into his or her family and social rehabilitation,” said Chelugui.

The report developed with the technical support of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and funded by the Government of Canada also identifies inadequacies in various stages of the child justice process.

Concerns raised in the report include inhumane conditions for children in cells during the pre-trial stage, mixing children in conflict with the law with those in need of care and disruption of their education.

Lack of legal aid is also another concern affecting the children hindering their ability to effectively participate in court proceedings.

“Legal aid provision to child offenders and access to quality justice still appears to be a challenge to children in conflict with the law,” said Chelugui.

The report identifies underfunding as a factor compromising the quality of services offered during reintegration of children in conflict with the law.

To seal the gaps identified in the assessment, DCS also launched the **Blueprint for Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration Programmes for Children in Conflict with the law in Kenya.**

The blueprint maps out the key programmes that ought to be implemented in institutions for children in conflict with the law and upon their release from the institutions.

It also highlights the principles that should inform processes within the entire continuum of the child justice system.

The blueprint sets out a framework to enhance coordination of agencies involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration processes of rehabilitation and reintegration.

“ All these instruments set out standards for treatment of child offenders in Kenya to ensure that every child in conflict with the law is treated with respect and dignity, “ said Chelugui.

During the launch of the two documents held at the Ministry’s offices at NSSF Building last week, Chelugui noted that the Office of Director of Public Prosecution is forming a task team on juvenile justice and plans to develop guidelines for prosecutors to improve the handling of children in the criminal justice system .