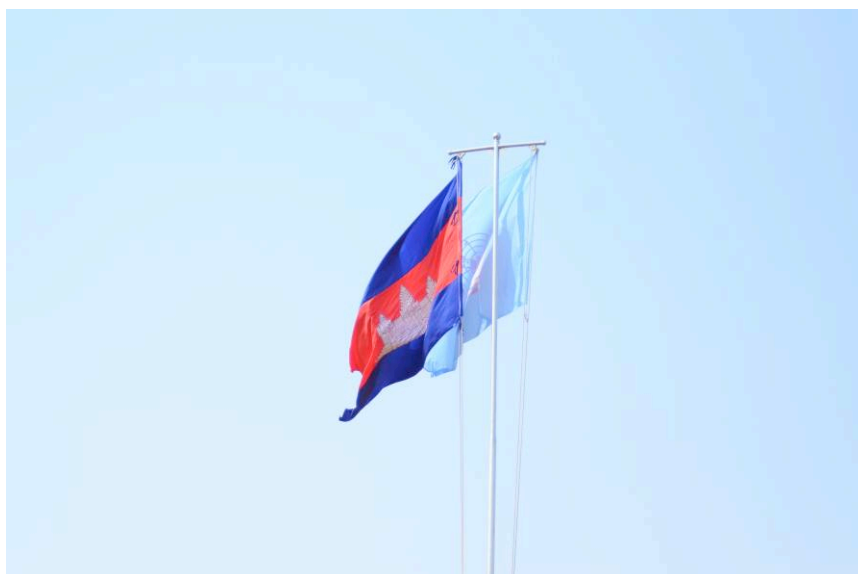


The Mandela Dialogues: Dialoguing Memory Work

A co-operation between GIZ Global Leadership Academy, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF)



REPORT ON THE SECOND DIALOGUE - 3 – 6 MARCH 2014

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA

The dialogue: an overview

Between 3 and 6 March 2014 the Nelson Mandela Foundation and GIZ Global Leadership Academy brought together 24 participants from ten countries¹ to engage in the second of a three-part dialogue series on memory work. The final dialogue will take place in Berlin in July 2014.

¹ The participants came from Argentina, Bosnia, Cambodia, Canada, Croatia, Germany, Kenya, Serbia, South Africa and Uruguay.

This dialogue process provides an international forum to discuss the complex personal, collective and professional challenges facing those engaged in reckoning with the past. Through different layers and modes of engagement the process aims to reinvigorate debates about memory work and how we do it; and offer new approaches, new questions and challenges to existing paradigms.

Through the three Mandela Dialogues on memory work the host organisations intend to achieve the following outcomes:

- To critically contribute to, and strengthen, the transitional justice discourse internationally and deepen understandings of memory work
- To foster a global network of peers
- To create an opportunity for personal development and solidarity for leaders in their fields
- To invigorate and enable leadership and guide participants through an exploration of individual lines of inquiry
- To foster innovation

The participants are activists, analysts and functionaries, with many straddling (over time or at the moment) these somewhat artificial categories. Despite their different national contexts, experiences and professions, at the outset of the dialogue process the participants shared with the two convening organisations a sense of having reached an impasse in their personal and professional capacities – with there being more questions than answers about memory work. They shared a common desire to grapple with the difficult questions they face in their daily practice and to learn from each other.



The dialogue process

Unlike traditional workshops, seminars or conferences, the dialogue takes place without formal presentations. Rather, the content is created by the participants and enabled by a skilled team of facilitators. The second dialogue took place over four days and included sessions designed to enable a progression of conversations between participants. Several innovations in the design of the process were aimed at moving process from topics determined by the hosting team and informed by the first dialogue, to a programme of discussion determined by participants themselves. This was done through the introduction of the 'open space' methodology. In 'open space' participants set topics for discussion and invite others who may be interested in those topics to join them. Subjects discussed during these sessions are a good indication of the issues of most pressing interest and concern to participants. They included:



- How to stimulate, and create safe spaces for inclusive inter-generational dialogue that involves victims, perpetrators and young people
- How to translate memory work inspired by personal and even traumatic experiences for a new generation and how to navigate the tension informing and engaging a new generation without overwhelming them emotionally
- How do you create a memory centre?
- The meaning of emotional openness [empathy] as a quality of memory work leadership?
- What is the role of the state and non-state actors in the process of memory building? And what is the relation between institutions and 'consumers' of memory work?
- Memory work for social action and social change.
- Shaking and overcoming concepts and meanings in systemic changes - how can we go beyond meta-language used in memory work and in civil society work? And what chance is there of preventing a repetition of the past?
- Innovation, memory and practice – what is your contribution to memory in your community, country and society – show me your ideas!
- The goal of memory work – nation building? Peace building? Keeping up with trends?
- The enemy is not something you have, but something you walk with. Space for the enemy in our work?
- What are we responsible for? How do we organise ourselves to carry on our responsibilities?

While stimulating debate, discussion and sharing practice is central to the dialogue, engagement with the history and current landscape for memory work in the host country is an essential part of the process. In South Africa this took the form of visits to Alexandra

township, the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory, the Sterkfontein caves, Freedom Park and the Voortrekker Monument. These excursions were followed by an engagement with thirteen South Africans (including the directors of Freedom Park and the Voortrekker Monument). In Cambodia seven Cambodian guests joined participants at noon on the second day of the dialogue and spent time discussing their work and experiences with the group. Participants could choose one of three site visits – a city tour led by history students; a tour of Tuol Sleng detention and torture facility, or a visit to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). Some of the Cambodian guests joined them on these visits.

Following the site visits the participants engaged in a round of exchange with the Cambodian memory workers to share insights from the visits and deepen the participants' understanding of memory work in Cambodia. The Cambodian guests were:

- Ms Vannath Chea – A survivor of the Killing Fields and freelance researcher with many years of experience in reconciliation and memory
- Mr Youk Chhang - Executive Director of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia
- Mr Savourn Doung – Head of the Cambodian's Defender's Project on gender-based violence
- Dr Helen Jarvis – Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia and former head of the ECCC Victim Support Section
- Mr Long Khet - Executive Director of Youth for Peace Cambodia
- Mr Va Nou – Director of the film “We want you to know” and formerly a member of Youth for Peace Cambodia
- Mr Chea Sopheap – Archives project co-ordinator, Bophana Centre
- Mr Sarath Yourn – Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation

Extracts from the engagement with the Cambodian guests are included in the following section.

From Johannesburg to Phnom Penh: key insights and matters of substance

Participants in the process identified their expectations for the second dialogue as being to deepen discussion about the context, practice and challenges of doing memory work; and to learn from the differences and similarities of their work on different continents and with vastly different national experiences. The purpose of this sharing is to inform, strengthen and improve their own approaches to the practice of memory work.

During the first dialogue in South Africa areas of tension, of disagreement and of consensus emerged, but were not explored in depth. The emerging themes included:

- Healing and preventing a repetition of history

- Inclusivity and exclusivity in the practice of memory work
- Timing of memory work and the need for the work to be trans-generational
- Archives

Cutting across these four themes were two additional themes relating to how memory workers can sustain their passion and take care of their well-being; and how to negotiate the complex ethical issues that arise while doing memory work.

The four primary and two cross-cutting themes re-emerged in Cambodia through conversations about the purpose, nature and practice of memory work. During this second dialogue, the importance of context and intent behind memory work emerged as additional themes. This broadened the discussion and focused participants on why and how memory



work is done to achieve the often quite diverse goals of a range of stakeholders. In addition, participants spoke of the need for a recognition of the power relations between state and non-state actors in the field of memory work and to make visible the motives behind memory work, since power relations and motives influence, and even define, practice.

The following is a summary of key issues to emerge from the dialogue.

The purpose of transitional justice and memory work

“The work of memory is full of shadows.”

(Youk Chhang, Director of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia)

During the three days of dialogue participants shared a number of underlying beliefs about the purpose of memory work, and questions about what it could or should be. In different contexts and at different times the purpose of memory work might be:

- To recognise the suffering of victims by providing justice.
- To facilitate inter-generational relations (e.g. one Cambodian participant said that “the younger generation don’t believe their parents’ stories – this is...why the ECCC is important.”)
- To ‘build a bridge for the new generation to move forward.’
- To break cycles of violence, intolerance, injustice, war and hatred.

- To bring understanding about atrocities.
- To heal through narratives (e.g. “Through telling their stories the survivor feels a relief and that narrows the gap between them and their children; and “You can’t live without memory – traumatic memories live with you, and form your identity.”)
- To ensure that justice is done through arresting, prosecuting and punishing offenders.
- To forget and move on (“The more I think, the more I think memorials are about forgetting. We need to go on with daily life without the burden of remembering every day and so we create memorials to contain memory so that you can go on and then come back for reminding.”)
- To reveal untold histories (“There was no history about my people and culture in my history books”).

But just as these might be the stated or unstated purposes of memory work, participants raised a number of questions about the expectations associated with memory work, including:

- Does memory work prevent history from repeating itself?
- How does memory work prevent conflict? Is it strong enough to prevent new conflicts?
- Is it worth investing in inter-generational memory work?
- ‘How can we avoid being memory terrorists and forcing things down people’s throats? If the work of memory is to counter singular narratives - in doing that work we create other narratives that vie for dominance.’

Throughout the dialogue participants returned to the difficulty of, and the need for, doing memory work that includes, rather than excludes all sectors of society affected by injustices or atrocities of the past. Yet, taking an inclusive approach to memory work is not necessarily the primary concern of those who fund, or have the power to define the forms of national transitional justice processes.

Through a sharing of biographies, contexts and practices participants began to reflect on and reveal the power relations at play within the field of memory work. Memory work came to be understood as being inherently value-laden; and those values can either serve to entrench power in the hands of a few; enhance hatred and difference; or, work to secure an inclusive future.

It became clear through discussion that “memory destabilises systems” and, when memory work is inclusive, it does not necessarily support the interests of those in power. “That is why even democratic states will resist memory work. Political interests and memory work are diametrically opposed.” This recognition went some way towards answering the question that arose about why ‘pro-poor’ memory work is seldom, if ever, funded. Participants began to ask “who is dominating memory work?” They noticed that in many contexts when governments own and create dominant narratives about the past that are supported by



capital and international donors, the result does not always favour a resolution of injustice, support inclusivity or result in a reduction of hatred between former enemies. The question became: “Who helps to resist that?”

As important as resisting ‘unhealthy’ memory work might be, participants also recognised the necessary role that states and donors have to play both in the formal processes of transitional justice and in the work that follows such process.

The role of blaming in reinforcing societal divisions (within and between nation states) was a recurrent theme. The idea emerged that for as long as memory work reinforces blaming and the creation of a group of righteous victims it will not be able to prevent a recurrence of past injustice and hatred. In the words of one participant: “if the purpose of transitional justice is only to blame, then it leads to intolerance and a repetition of violation - it

contradicts the acceptance of responsibility...a blaming narrative is like a preparation for another war, because that is how it starts for us. We start blaming our neighbours. When we accept responsibility for what happened we are allowing for it to get better.”

Highlighting one of the dilemmas facing memory work, a participant from Cambodia said that: “We have to strike a balance between the past, present and future. We want to move into the future but we don’t want to forget the past. But, if we focus too much on the past we will not focus on the future so we need to determine what we want to remember and what we want to forget.”

Another tension to emerge was how to balance the need for punishment for past injustice and offences with the need to enable people to take responsibility for what has been done in their name.

The practice of memory work



*"What we do is a gamble for the future, we can't control the outcome."
(participant in the Mandela dialogues)*

Participants shared their working experiences with one another through a series of small group discussions and in dialogue with Cambodian memory workers.

Using art as a way of doing memory work emerged as a strong theme in relation to the practice of memory work in Cambodia. This is in part a response to the high rate of illiteracy and the need to find ways to encourage communication between generations and between communities. One Cambodian guest explained, "it is a way for people to visualise their future and plan their lives."

Discussions about the practice of memory work also led to the identification of several of the themes discussed above, as well as to the identification of the specific challenges of memory work experienced by participants. These included:

- That with the increasingly privatised and capitalised nature of memory work, it grows in complexity, and becomes a frightening terrain.

- There is a fine line between presenting a realistic picture of the past and causing disengagement if the content is traumatising (referring to Tuol Sleng and other memory sites in Cambodia it was said “Once local people visited the museums they were discouraged from going again because it was too painful and there was not enough explanation. This creates a passive victim and doesn’t encourage further engagement.”)
- That memory work can be complex, challenging and exhausting (“To do this work you have to have a lot of multi-disciplinary knowledge: psychology, history, economics and so on. There is no curriculum for ‘memory work’.”)
- That activists who join the state after transition to take part in, or even drive, transitional justice processes and build archives, face particular challenges as they balance their activism with their roles as functionaries.



We can never do enough – the work is never done

A number of participants expressed concern about institutionalised silences. They felt that despite transitional justice processes and other memory work having been undertaken,

silences remain. This was in part a recognition that memory work often excludes and conceals, because certain silences are necessary to reinforce power. Yet, it was also a reflection of how many participants felt about their work – that whatever they did was never enough.

A clear example of this emerged during the dialogue with the Cambodian guests. Participants had spoken about the silence about the past in Cambodia. Yet, in her introductory presentation Dr Jarvis identified this as one of the two important misconceptions about Cambodia. One of the misconceptions, she said, “is that that we need to ‘break the silence’. People believe that until the establishment of the ECCC there was silence. But that is not true. From the moment of the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge there were strong documentation and memorialisation projects/processes as well as justice processes. Tuol Sleng was established very soon after the end of Khmer Rouge rule. 1979 was the first genocide trial in the world, and that was in Cambodia. There are documents from that trial and a book produced in English by the University of Pennsylvania. But because the government was not recognised internationally, and the Cambodian representative to the UN was Khmer Rouge until 1993, what was going on here in Cambodia was covered up. There were a lot of activities in the 1980s, but they seem to be forgotten.”

There was a strong sense throughout the dialogue that there is no end to memory work. Since it is hard to separate past, present and future, and since there is no end to social injustice that has its roots in the past, the work can never be done.

The personal burden of memory work

In the first dialogue in South Africa participants began to link their personal biographies with the work they do. They identified how their own experiences have shaped their practice, informs their commitment, and motivates them to continue. This emerged even more strongly in the second dialogue.

Engagement with both perpetrators and victims, and their narratives, impacts memory workers and often leads to vicarious trauma. Since memory workers have often experienced trauma themselves, the effect is perhaps even more pronounced than in other types of work. Memory workers assume the burden of responsibility for the healing of victims, for realising justice and for giving voice to those who have no voice, such as is expressed in these two statements from participants:

I spoke about the people who have been killed and have no voice; and,

I work with silence. The people I work with cannot speak because others can't hear them. My job is to help them speak about it. All the time I hear secrets I cannot tell. I am the little 'public' for them to speak to.

The highly emotional nature of the work led to discussions about how to balance empathy and emotional well-being. Empathy was identified as being essential to remaining compassionate and to doing the work of memory effectively, yet memory workers require support and recognition of their own trauma. Introducing this kind of support into the working environment became an objective for at least one of the participants.

The loneliness of memory work was a common theme to emerge from the second dialogue with statements like these being shared by participants:

I have been sinking in an ocean of memory and now I am learning to swim. Often I feel alone and need someone to hear me.

Loneliness. One of the most important things to bring from Johannesburg is not to be so lonely in our daily work. It is a good sensation to have a community of peers fighting for memory, justice and democracy.

Towards the end of the dialogue participants began to articulate the need to maintain perspective and tend to their own well-being. This is not only because it will enable them to continue doing the work – but also because it is impossible to achieve healing and overcome hatred in society while traumatised. Some distancing from responsibility for the harms of the past is essential. As one participant said: “We are all responsible for telling what happened in our country, but we are not all responsible for what happened.”

Another said, “the challenge is for us to find the moments of lightness and joy in what we are doing.”

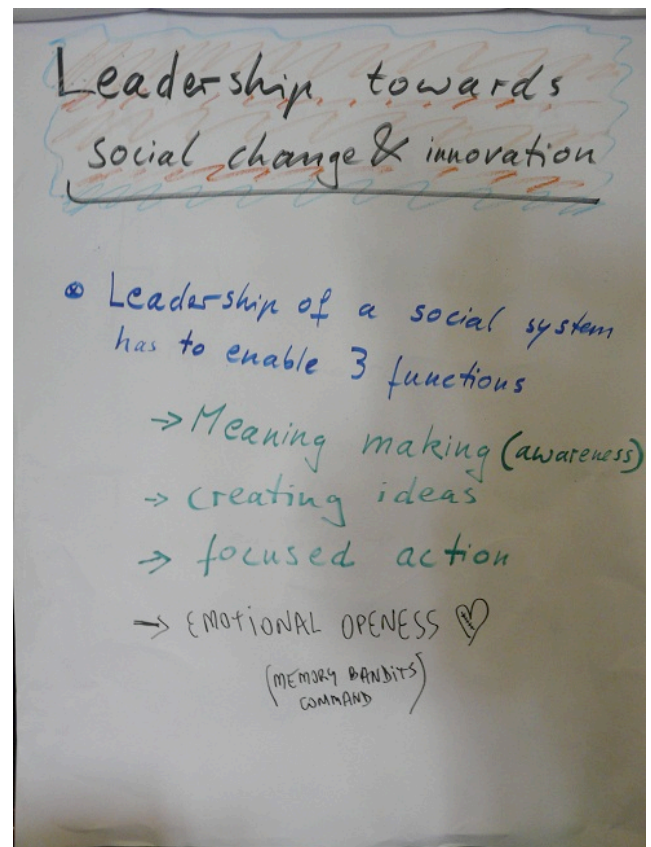
Personal and professional growth and outcomes of the dialogue process

“We are creating a community of memory.”

Participant in the Mandela Dialogues

On the third morning of the dialogue, David Graf and Jan Wessler shared with participants the insights about leadership that inform the approach of the GIZ Global Leadership Academy. These included that leadership requires an awareness of meaning-making, which means being conscious of what is happening and why. It also requires vision and to allow space for new possibilities. Finally, leadership is about focused action. Leadership is about enabling your social system to realise social change.

A systemic view of social impact, or taking responsibility for social good, requires that leaders are aware of their own attitudes and institutional roles; while enabling collective learning to inform change and fostering and facilitating dialogue beyond one’s own institutions and across conflicting interests.



Through the dialogue participants shared examples of how they had been inspired by the process and insights they had gained about their own roles.

One participant found inspiration from his experience in South Africa: “I heard about Nelson Mandela long ago but when I went to South Africa and read his book and then looked at his achievements, and what can be achieved I saw **what can be achieved by teamwork and what can be achieved by an individual.**”

Others were inspired by being surrounded by peers who share their interests, passion, commitment and experience of memory work. They were also inspired by learning from the experiences of different national contexts:

When I got to South Africa I was happy to be surrounded by peers. It was an important experience. I am a little disappointed because in my field people are struggling with little things, and with ego – we blame each other and can’t navigate our difference. As a functionary I am thinking about how we can handle our differences and how much we blame.

From Johannesburg I felt like I learned from everyone. It was a great opportunity – these dialogues. I have been inspired by how to deal with your enemies, to create space for enemies.

The experience of another country lets me think about my own reality and how to deal with the pain of the past. It lets me reflect on the question of personal commitment. I have been working on memory for 28 years. I feel renewed commitment since South Africa.

There is constant learning through our different stimulations and this makes us do a better job.

During the second dialogue participants spoke of their personal growth, or shared revelations that they have had as a consequence of participation in the dialogues. Several participants also spoke of the value of the individual coaching that takes place between facilitators and participants between the dialogues.

Personal revelations included:

“I was struggling before Johannesburg. I was at a personal crossroads. I liked how we dug and talked. I kept digging and it has helped me to take decisions. I am harmonising my inner beliefs and outcomes.”

“There has been a crystallisation that my work is about the future. It is about trying to make sure that our gains are not rolled back.”

“I can now articulate what I am doing. I have inspiration for a paper.”

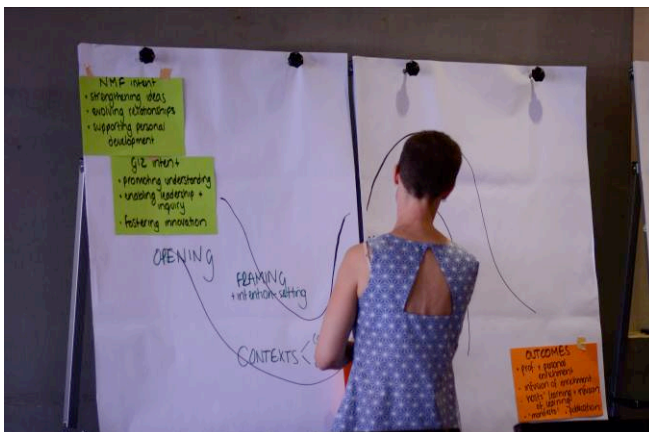
“How can I transfer my experience of memory work to a future generation? These are questions for my future, and that changes the focus of my future work. Now I need to consider new models and methods. Because if I cannot transfer [my knowledge] it is lost in time and space.”

“When you dig together you learn a lot. Now I will be bold, I have understood what is happening on six continents and so I can speak with confidence in forums about memory work – this is powerful collaborative learning.”

Berlin and beyond

While the impact of the dialogue process on participants’ daily working lives, and on the development of shared initiatives will become apparent over time, there were some immediate outcomes identified from the process so far. Some of these were personal revelations (as described above), others were collaborative initiatives, that include but are not limited to:

- A web platform established by one of the participants for all participants to share information, engage in debate and discussion, and display their work.
- Putting in place emotional support for employees of a court dealing with past injustice in Argentina.
- Three participants are exploring a collaborative initiative to establish a virtual and mobile Inuit memory centre and to initiate youth dialogues in Canada.
- A South African participant will be drawing on the experience of Uruguay in working with archives and making them accessible. This knowledge will be shared between participants and infused into the work of the Archival Platform in South Africa.



- Stellenbosch university museum and the Nelson Mandela Foundation will create an exhibition to stimulate a difficult visual dialogue. This will be the basis for the participant to establish himself as a transformational leader of the Stellenbosch museum.

- The Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Stazi Archive Commission in Germany are talking about creating an exhibition that explores the intersecting histories of South Africa and the GDR.
- One participant will be writing about her learning from Cambodia in youth blogs.
- The Nelson Mandela Foundation will collaborate with GIZ and the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship to explore the possibility of an edited volume with contributions from participants in the dialogue.

From the start of the second dialogue, until the end, participants expressed an intention to ensure that the process of dialogue and sharing between members of the group continues

beyond Berlin and to instil the process with a purpose for the future. The meeting in Berlin will allow for a deeper exploration of the issues raised in Cambodia; further development of collaborative initiatives and may result in a shared statement - 'the Berlin Declaration' – about memory work.