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“Show me your impact”: Evaluating transitional justice in contested spaces

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses some of the most significant challenges and opportunities for evaluating the effects of programs in support of transitional justice – the field that addresses how post-conflict or post authoritarian societies deal with legacies of wide spread human rights violations. The discussion is empirically grounded in a case study that assesses the efforts of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and one of its Guatemalan partners to evaluate the effects of a museum exposition that is attempting to recast historic memory and challenge racist attitudes in post-conflict Guatemala. The paper argues that despite the increasing trend to fund transitional justice programs, many international aid donors are stuck in traditional and arguably orthodox paradigms of program evaluation. This is having a negative effect not only upon the administration of aid but also upon how transitional justice research is perceived and valued by local populations. The case study experience indicates that there is no perfect evaluation model or approach for evaluating transitional justice programming – only choices to be made by commissioners of evaluation, evaluators, and those being evaluated. These are profoundly influenced by the extreme politics and moral values that define transitional justice settings as contested spaces in which calls to remember the tragic past must be balanced with aspirations to re-build a hopeful future.

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1. Introduction

Transitional justice – the field that addresses how post-conflict or post authoritarian societies deal with legacies of wide spread human rights violations – has come to occupy a position of increasing importance in the administration of international aid²; so too has the menu of mechanisms or interventions called for by governments, international organizations, scholars and civil society advocates. Although there is no established model for transitional justice, it is generally understood to have moved beyond the realm of the juridical to the political, to embrace a suite of mechanisms that include criminal prosecutions of individual perpetrators (tribunals), truth seeking initiatives to address past abuse and clarify historical accounts of the past (truth commissions and investigative bodies), material and/or non-material reparations to victims, memorialisation initiatives that commemorate victims, reforms to key institutions (including the judiciary,

army and police and vetting, dismissals and barring from public office) (Bickford, 2004, p. 1045) and most recently, reforms to history education.³

Transitional justice is arguably one of the most controversial, complex and unpredictable processes undertaken by governments and citizens in the politically charged and socially contested environments that accompany the transition from conflict or repressive rule. The use of mechanisms for transitional justice has proliferated throughout the world over the last decade, and especially over the last five years.⁴ However, actors involved in the business of international aid are coming to realize that the record for evaluating the effects that these interventions are having on the lives of people has not matched enthusiasm for promoting, designing and financing them. As a field, it would seem that transitional justice is now coming of age. With this maturation, those who have a stake in the outcomes of transitional justice – governments, perpetrators, victims, ordinary citizens and the international aid community – are beginning to ask difficult

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¹ The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not represent those of IDRC.

² A recent report by the International Centre for Transitional Justice notes that funding for programs on transitional justice has increased in recent years. By a very conservative U.S. private foundations alone have invested close to \$93 million dollars in the transitional justice field from 2003 to 2007 (Bickford & Schultz, 2008, p. 24).

³ Cole (2007) makes a convincing case for including history education as one of the institutions that should appear in frameworks for transitional justice. In the latter part of this paper, I will examine a case study that focuses on history education in Guatemala.

⁴ A review of the website of the International Center for Transitional Justice indicates that transitional justice mechanisms are currently operating in no less than 37 countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. See <http://www.ictj.org/en/where/overview/index.html>.

questions about the success or failure of the transitional justice project.

This paper is motivated by three recent trends that are influencing academic, policy and practitioner debates about the merits and pitfalls of transitional justice. The first relates to the social science literature on transitional justice, which is calling into question some of the core assumptions or change theories that tie together transitional justice mechanisms and their potential to identify causal relationships with wider processes for social change, including (but not restricted to) conflict prevention, reconciliation or 'social healing', democratization and consolidation of the rule of law (Brahm, 2007; Mendeloff, 2004; Vinjamuri & Snyder, 2004). The fact of the matter is that scholars, policymakers and advocates have all been weak in consolidating a compelling body of theoretical and empiric evidence that assesses both the positive and negative effects of these mechanisms upon larger processes of peacebuilding and development.⁵

In parallel to this debate, there is a re-kindling of methodological discussions around the effectiveness of aid and impact evaluation (and what constitutes acceptable or credible evidence). This manifests itself in one of two ways: a continuing tendency by donors to cling to linear, ill-adapted methods and approaches to the evaluation of international development aid, despite a tacit (or explicit) recognition of their limitations⁶; or seizing upon the use of experimental and quasi-experimental methods as a "gold standard" for impact evaluation, with little consideration for the need for multi-method approaches that account for the many complex factors that actually lead to changes in governance and human relationships in transitional societies.⁷ As both a researcher and a donor, I have seen these dramas being played out in international and national organizations (both governmental and non-governmental) working in human rights and transitional justice in developed and developing world.

The third significant development that underpins this paper is the growing interest among social science researchers working on transitional justice to make use of the principles and methods emerging from program evaluation research and practice to sharpen applied empiric research on transitional justice.⁸ Researchers and advocates alike are increasingly looking to program evaluation for new learning and clues that might help lead them out of the impact quagmire. At the level of practice, civil society and non-governmental organizations – particularly those working with victims in the developing world – are demanding legitimate approaches to better understand if and how transitional justice processes are helping or harming their societies. At the same time, they are anxious to respond to donor demands for evidence of "impact" in ways that are balanced and accountable – not only to donors, but also to the local populations in whose name transitional justice is being undertaken. Clearly, the single biggest dilemma facing all those working in the area of transitional justice is the urgent need to build an evidence base to underpin policy and practice.

In this paper, I will discuss some of the most significant challenges and opportunities for evaluating the effects of programs

⁵ Scholars who are interested in problematizing transitional justice point out that what we have is largely anecdotal or inconclusive evidence. For a thorough review of some of the major studies to date on truth commissions, criminal trials and vetting see Thoms, Ron and Paris (2008).

⁶ See for example Bakewell and Garbutt (2005) and United Nations General Assembly (2008). The by-line of this report is as follows: "results-based management at the United Nations has been an administrative chore of little value to accountability and decision-making".

⁷ Renewed interest in such methods emerged in the advent of the Centre for Global Development's report. Since the release of the CGD report, debates for and against experimental methods, especially randomized controls trials have continued to rage. See for example, Ravallion (2009).

⁸ See Pham and Vinck (2007).

in support of transitional justice objectives. By means of a case study, I will empirically ground this discussion and share learning emerging from the efforts of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and one of its Guatemalan partners to track and evaluate the effects of a museum exposition that is attempting to recast historic memory and challenge racist attitudes and beliefs in post-conflict Guatemala. I will argue that despite the rapid growth of transitional justice and the increasing trend among bilateral and multilateral development assistance donors to fund transitional justice programs, many of these donors are stuck in traditional and arguably orthodox paradigms of program evaluation. This is having a profound effect not only upon the administration of international aid but also upon how transitional justice research is perceived and valued by local populations. The experience of IDRC indicates that there is no perfect evaluation model or approach for evaluating transitional justice programming – only choices to be made by evaluators and those being evaluated. These will continue to be profoundly influenced by the extreme politics and moral values that define transitional justice settings as contested spaces in which calls to remember the tragic past must be balanced with aspirations to re-build a hopeful future.

2. Historic Memory and Racism in Guatemala: Evaluating the Effects of the "Why are we the way we are?" Museum Exposition

2.1. How the story begins

Transitional justice processes most often take place in socially and politically fragile contexts that are characterized by high and increasing complexity. These settings are fluid, highly sensitive and often can be prone to relapses into violence. Guatemala is no exception to this characterization. The Guatemalan internal armed conflict ended in 1996, leaving about 2% of the national population dead or disappeared – 83% of who were indigenous (Commission for Historical Clarification, 1999). In 1999, Guatemala's Truth Commission concluded that the Guatemalan state had committed acts of ethnic genocide against the indigenous population. In the spirit of "nunca más" (never again), the Truth Commission report also highlighted the need for initiatives for historic memory and the reform of primary, secondary and university level education to include instruction on the causes, development and consequences of the war. The transformation of Guatemala's education system was also clearly recognized as a priority in the Peace Agreements⁹ signed between the Government of Guatemala and the URNG guerrilla. Although most Guatemalans recognize that racism is a problem, spaces are limited for debating how Guatemalans might construct a nation in which ethnic diversity is celebrated and everyone is a citizen in the fullest sense of the word. The open discussion of racism in either the public or private domain remains a contentious and complex issue.

It was in this context that the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Meso América (CIRMA), a research centre and library decided to dedicate major attention to developing research and educational strategies around the issue of racism, as a contribution to the social reconstruction of Guatemala in the post-conflict period (Adams, 2007a). The International Development Research Centre (IDRC), a publically funded Canadian institution that funds research in the developing world, was also interested in supporting innovative peacebuilding research in Guatemala. IDRC's relationship with CIRMA actually pre-dated the release of the Truth Commission report. Between 1998 and 2003, IDRC had supported CIRMA to produce an exhaustive multi-volume ethnographic study

⁹ See Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1995). Available from: <http://www.usip.org/resources/peace-agreements-guatemala> [cited 02.01.10].

of the history and current tendencies of interethnic relations in Guatemala. In 2003, CIRMA began discussing with IDRC and other donors the potential for using this research to reconstruct a new Guatemalan narrative around race relations and the history of the conflict. CIRMA's research formed the basis for an ambitious nation-wide effort to stimulate public reflection and dialogue, called the "National Campaign for Interethnic Dialogue: *Our Diversity is Our Strength!*" The campaign was developed on the basis of a national consultation, which detected strong interest in addressing the issue of racism in Guatemala, and just as strong a fear as to how to do this without exacerbating existing tensions (Adams, 2007a, p. 4).

This challenge – how to create a mechanism for dialogue which would foster, and not hinder, social reconciliation – was at the heart of the design of the Campaign that was launched in June of 2004 (Adams, 2007a, p. 3). Developed with help from international experts on social violence and reconciliation, and based on learning emerging from museums of conscience and race consciousness training experiences, the centre piece of the Campaign was a 5000 square-foot interactive museum exposition called *Por Qué Estamos Como Estamos? (Why are we the way we are?)*¹⁰ Using photographic images, videos and interactive games that invited people to reflect on their own lives in Guatemalan society, the expo presented an animated, colourful portrayal of the history and current state of interethnic relations in Guatemala.

2.2. Monitoring the effects of historic memory and education: original intentions

As CIRMA contemplated the content and structure of the campaign, IDRC's Evaluation Unit offered to support CIRMA in conceptualizing and putting into place a comprehensive system for monitoring and evaluating results, including the effects of the campaign on those who would view it. Monitoring peoples' reactions to the campaign was seen as a critical first step in assessing how the campaign might contribute to changing peoples' attitudes and behaviors towards racism. Through a series of peer support meetings and training in a planning, monitoring and evaluation methodology known as Outcome Mapping,¹¹ IDRC worked with CIRMA staff in order to help them identify those individuals and groups in present day Guatemala who the campaign most hoped to influence: high school teachers in public and private schools, regional university authorities, university professors in the regions and social and political leaders in NGOs (Evaluation Unit, 2008, p. 8).

IDRC supported CIRMA to put together a global monitoring and evaluation strategy that included a series of monitoring and data collection instruments drawn from Outcome Mapping and other methodologies (questionnaires for dialogue participants, records of attendance at the expo, weekly reports by expo museum guides and exit interviews with expo attendees). All of this data was collected and tracked through a specially designed database. Monitoring efforts were largely focused upon the "*Why are we the way we are?*" museum expo which was considered by CIRMA to

constitute the heart of the national campaign operation. IDRC and CIRMA each had interests – some of them shared – on issues of learning and accountability for results around the museum expo. Some within CIRMA wanted to use its research to catalyze a process of national reflection and deep social transformation. IDRC's Evaluation Unit wanted to know if its funding was achieving its desired outcomes and was also interested to see how Outcome Mapping might be successfully grafted onto a process for transitional justice and reconciliation. Both CIRMA and IDRC harbored the hope that data harvested from the monitoring and evaluation framework could be used to inform CIRMA's continued research on inter-ethnic relations and social reconciliation in Guatemala. As will be discussed further on, this lack of clarity around the use of monitoring data generated significant problems that affected attitudes around the value of monitoring and evaluation and the adoption and ownership of the M&E framework within CIRMA.

2.3. What actually happened?

Results from the first two years of the deployment of the museum expo in three regions of the country exceeded expectations, generating a wave of reactions both inside Guatemala and internationally. Between mid-2004 and mid-2006, the expo reached more than 117,000 visitors (nearly 1% of the national population). More people visited the exposition than visited Guatemala's other twenty-two museums combined over the same period of time. The campaign received support from seventeen national and international donors and from a broad cross-section of Guatemalan society, an extremely rare achievement in this post-conflict society (Adams, 2007b, p. 6).

The data gathered by the campaign indicated that in general, the effort was received with high levels of acceptance and legitimacy. About 90% of the visitors to the exposition responded "positively" while 5% on either side viewed it as either too "light" or too "radical" (Adams, 2007a, p. 5). Reactions tended to be positive although a minority of the visitors were defensive and negative. The range of reactions to the expo underscores the deep complexity inherent in recasting historic memory and cultural identity in contested spaces, as illustrated in the following descriptions:

Reflections on personal identity and existing ambiguity¹²:

"After visiting the expo, I thought more about it, and I am in fact, indigenous because my grandmother came from..."

Validation and feelings of comfort with the expo's message and content:

"At last, somebody is telling it like it is."

"I was a soldier in the 1980's and I had to leave Guatemala, and that made me think about our living situation."

Surprise, doubt and curiosity around the issue being presented in a new light:

"I was foolish to teach absurd things to my students; the true history is quite different, and here I finally recognized that."

Discomfort and a desire for more profound and convincing arguments:

¹² The following reflections are taken from Adams (2007a).

¹⁰ The campaign also included two other components: a guided process for group dialogue of community leaders on the topic of interethnic relations and a series of university teaching activities oriented toward designing an effective teaching package on the history racism and social inequality. This paper will be restricted to a discussion of the museum exposition.

¹¹ Outcome Mapping is a planning, monitoring and evaluation methodology that assumes that people control change and that, as external agents, development programs only facilitate the process by providing access to new resources, ideas or opportunities for a certain period of time. The originality of the method is its shift away from attribution to contribution; and from assessing the products of a program (e.g. poverty alleviation and reduced conflict) to focus on changes in behaviours, relationships, and actions of the people and activities with whom a development program works directly. See Earl, Carden and Smutylo (2001).

“We need to talk about structural discrimination in this country;”

“They don’t say anything about reverse discrimination.”

Fear in the face of the explicit presentation of the problem of racism:

“This expo is a double-edged sword, because by trying to create awareness it can also awaken a sleeping consciousness that could turn into a monster.”

Annoyance and denial:

“What are you trying to do with this?”

“I don’t think things are quite the way you show them.”

The Campaign also received broad support from diverse segments of the population that seldom agree on any issue. Media support – written press, television, and radio – went well beyond simple reporting. The media became key allies, almost always providing the campaign with ample and positive coverage (Adams, 2007a, p. 7). The exposition also awakened the interest of diverse international organizations working in the field of human rights and research and education in post-conflict societies. A number of international foundations and donors requested presentations on the campaign or visited the expo with a view to documenting it as a model for reconciliation and educational innovation in a host of countries including Ethiopia, Eritrea, Serbia, Romania, Macedonia, Burma, Cambodia, Bolivia and Argentina (International Development Research Centre, 2008, p. 9).

3. What was learned about historic memory and education in Guatemala?

In developing and implementing the monitoring and evaluation strategy for the museum expo, CIRMA and IDRC faced a number of methodological and contextual challenges. These were navigated with varying degrees of success. In some instances, CIRMA was able to collect useful data that yielded significant learning around the effectiveness of the campaign and the nature of inter-ethnic relations, as well as how to approach the issue for greater reach. Four important pieces of learning stand out:

- a. Mass exposure to the exposition: The Campaign reached 25% of the local population and 40% of the school population in two of the three Guatemalan departments where the expo was set-up, creating an important unanticipated effect. By saturating a specific population, the exposition apparently created a neutral external reference point enabling people to safely discuss what had been a virtually taboo subject. This is an effect that the expo is seeking to repeat by focusing on one social group in order to create a critical mass during the next five years (Adams, 2006, p. 6).
- b. Young people are a critical group and are especially open: The original idea of targeting the expo to young people from 13 to 25 years of age was validated, as this group generally showed a special ability to interrogate their ideas and reflect upon reality. However, the expo organizers also observed that children from ten years of age were just as responsive. Despite their openness, however, these young Guatemalans would seem to require more formal facilitation (Adams, 2007b, p. 6).

- c. Teachers are strategically placed – and especially resistant: At the other extreme were the teachers, who as a group were among the most ambivalent and resistant visitors to the expo, with a tendency to stifle the reflection that their students were generating on their own. This is perhaps not surprising; the structural discrimination that underpins Guatemalan society is sustained no less by the education system than by the police or judiciary, the more common target institutions of transitional justice programming.
- d. The exposition’s efficiency and efficacy could be improved: Finally, an analysis of the costs involved in the first phase of the deployment of the expo enabled CIRMA to develop a plan to maximize financial and programmatic efficacy and efficiency for the final phase. An analysis of reactions to different parts of the exposition also allowed CIRMA to identify certain changes to make to the presentation of content and form of the installations (Adams, 2007b, p. 7). For example, it was noted that a number of urban youth who viewed the expo were unable to relate to the history of Guatemala’s conflict, perceiving it as something that would be better to leave in the past. This suggested the need to adjust some of the content in a way that would be more accessible and immediately relevant to younger generations of Guatemalans (CIRMA, 2008, p. 6).

Despite the encouraging progress noted above, IDRC and CIRMA missed some major opportunities to track and understand the effects of the museum expo as a tool for social reconciliation. In mid-2006, CIRMA closed the expo in order to evaluate its results and plan for its re-design and re-launch.¹³ As part of that process of reflection, IDRC commissioned an external summative evaluation of the monitoring and evaluation framework experience. While many important lessons emerged from that evaluation, three learnings in particular merit discussion here.

3.1. The critical importance of defining use of findings

During the planning phase, IDRC invested much time in working with CIRMA personnel in order to define how the data and analysis that would emerge from the monitoring and evaluation framework would be used and who exactly would use it. Based on the premise of Utilization Focused Evaluation (Patton, 2008) the M&E framework endeavored not to dictate any particular evaluation model, method, theory or use of findings. Rather, the expectation was that in guiding CIRMA through an interactive process, they would be better positioned to collect the data that the organization would need for accountability purposes vis-à-vis its donors and for learning purposes around the effectiveness of the expo.

The implementation of the framework over a period of two years gave rise to a series of unexpected outcomes. The first was a lack of agreement within CIRMA whether the framework and data collected should be used to inform decision-making for improving the operations of the expo, thus informing program effectiveness and fulfilling accountability requirements with donors; or whether the data should be used to feed and inform CIRMA’s research activities (CIRMA, 2008, p. 23). Although the emerging data could arguably serve both purposes, the reality was that these were two fundamentally different groups of uses and users. A division also developed between those who wanted to use the expo as a sort of research laboratory or generator of interesting empirical data that could then inform a future research agenda within the organiza-

¹³ In mid 2006, the National Campaign including the expo, was closed. A large multi-donor summative evaluation of the project was conducted at the end of 2006. One of the recommendations of the evaluation was that the expo be devolved from CIRMA.

tion and those who viewed and wanted to use the expo as a dynamic instrument for igniting a transformative process of social change among individuals and groups who viewed the expo. These differences contributed to ongoing organizational tensions which paved the way to the eventual devolvement of the expo and its operation to a separate organization.¹⁴

A second (and related) difficulty was the absence of sufficient spaces within CIRMA for reflection and analysis of emerging data. The daily operation of the National Campaign was an all consuming activity for CIRMA and its staff. The massive amount of rich qualitative data collected on the immediate effects that the expo was having on visitors' attitudes tended to be inconclusive, due to weak baseline data. Despite this problem, informal daily exchanges between staff allowed CIRMA to incorporate some process changes during execution and did significantly contribute to the re-design of content and process for the re-launch of the expo in 2009.

3.2. Balancing power relationships

The challenges around use were exacerbated by power differentials at two different levels: externally, between CIRMA and the seventeen national and international donors who were financing the Campaign; and internally between the CIRMA staff who were directly involved with the expo and those who continued to be occupied by CIRMA's traditional research and education activities.

Throughout the Campaign, CIRMA was forced to spend an inordinate amount of time ensuring that its donor relationships stayed on an even keel. Multiple donors with different reporting requirements called upon CIRMA to report on diverse outcomes (and anticipated impacts) with differing data. This resulted in an ongoing tug of war between those who valued quantitative vs. qualitative data; and those who insisted upon more linear approaches to planning and evaluation (logical framework analysis and results-based management) vs. those who espoused systems approaches. IDRC unwittingly played a part in this drama: the summative evaluation of the monitoring and evaluation project commissioned by IDRC in 2008 discovered that CIRMA staff involved in the M&E work felt obligated to maintain an exclusive focus on Outcome Mapping tools and their qualitative focus because IDRC (the principal creator of Outcome Mapping) was funding the M&E project (Ortiz, 2008). This happened at a time when the organization was under pressure for more quantitative data.

Part way through the project, the coordinator of the monitoring and evaluation work departed, taking with him his knowledge of Outcome Mapping. While the new coordinator made laudable efforts to get up to speed on the methodology, his research background was decidedly quantitative in nature. Although he managed to collect an impressive volume of quantitative (and largely demographic) data, opportunities to drill down to uncover qualitative considerations were lost. Nevertheless, much of the quantitative data collected did allow CIRMA to speak with authority to the outside world about the breadth and reach of the campaign, if not its effectiveness in influencing attitudes among the viewing public.

As mentioned, within CIRMA, both the National Campaign itself and the monitoring and evaluation project generated unexpected tensions. The high profile of the Campaign and related donor enchantment with the museum exposition resulted in the creation of two groups: those who were in the Campaign and those who

were not. The Campaign was like a donor magnet, reproducing within CIRMA all of the worst deformations of international aid. The management of the daily of operations of the monitoring and evaluation project was highly centralized in the coordinators who oversaw this work. Despite their best efforts, the coordinators were unsuccessful in generating excitement and building ownership for monitoring activities. The museum guides who were working in the expo collecting and entering monitoring data saw this work as a burden and an imposition at the end of a long day. This was exacerbated by the fact that the data collection system was too large and ambitious. Data was being collected merely for the purpose of data collection, in the hopes that in the future, it would serve the purposes of research and program improvement.

3.3. Theories of change can be illusive when new ground is being broken

Transitional justice mechanisms are not unlike other international development interventions that aspire to facilitate or promote complex social change processes requiring multifaceted interventions and multiple national and international actors. In other words, change will always be the result of a multi-causal package and both the funders and the funded will be faced with the perpetual problem of attribution of results to a single project or program. The current state of the transitional justice field suffers from a very particular problem, however: as a relatively new and emergent field, we are in the early days of theory building and many of the theories of change that underpin transitional justice initiatives are either untested or inconclusive. Typical change processes or implicit (and often untested) assumptions about the goals of transitional justice include social healing (through truth-telling initiatives); reducing recidivism (through criminal trials for human rights abusers); or facilitating the formation of new identities (through educational reform, as in the case of the Guatemalan museum exposition).

The museum expo is not unlike other transitional justice initiatives; social change will be a long term process that will arguably take generations to become fully rooted. In other words, those working in support of transitional justice share the same impact dilemma that faces many international development actors working for governance and social change in transitional, socially and politically contested settings. In the Guatemalan case, we admittedly fell into the 'project trap'; both IDRC and CIRMA were perhaps caught up in the short timeline of the project and its interventions, looking for larger impact pay-offs. We also assumed a more linear process of knowledge transfer which would result in attitudinal change. Ironically, the Outcome Mapping framework which was built on the basis of systems theory was inadvertently extracted out of the wider system.

Although both CIRMA and IDRC had a general idea of the expo project's theory of change, not enough time was spent explicitly articulating assumptions and intentionality, or mapping out the potential complexities and variables – psychological, social/class, gender, political – that would influence the reactions of the individual visitors who would view the museum expo. Both organizations assumed a causal relationship between exposure to the content of museum and the subsequent formation or evolution of attitudes and values. In hindsight, it is now easy to see that the implied theory of change was far too simplistic. Using the expo to induce behavior change among individuals was viewed as an important proxy for assessing social change and was one of the motivating factors behind the selection of Outcome Mapping as a central methodology. Much of the power of Outcome Mapping is rooted in the participatory values that underpin the methodology. In this case, the assumed theory of change was never externally validated with other interested stakeholders. External validation

¹⁴ Following up on the recommendations of the multi-donor evaluation, in June of 2007, the administration of the National Campaign was moved to the newly created Instituto Internacional de Aprendizaje para la Reconciliación Social-IIARS (International Institute for Learning on Social Reconciliation).

may well have uncovered the cracks in the theory of change and allowed us to view and understand the expo as a tool for cognitive reframing (confronting individuals with information discrepant or contradictory to their expressed attitudes or self-image to induce cognitive dissonance and create opportunities for re-framing these attitudes) (Shapiro, 2005). As it was, we missed the mark, and in this case, behavior change was never an appropriate indicator of social change – mainly because the viewing of the expo was in itself a passive activity which would have needed to be accompanied by longer term strategies for social action among targeted groups, if actual changes in behavior among the viewers were to be the final outcome.

Poor mapping of the theory of change is a common trap into which we ought not to have fallen. IDRC's accompaniment and mentoring of CIRMA could also have been tighter. However, given the cutting edge nature of the National Campaign and the fact that both CIRMA and IDRC were breaking new ground, it was only through the evaluation process that both organizations were able to fully grasp the complexity of the theory of change underlying the expo and its use. This error has now been rectified. With its re-design and re-launch in February of 2009, the expo is now being used as a teacher training tool for educating primary and secondary teachers and public servants on issues of race relations. The focus of the re-design has been on the development of a pedagogic strategy both to help teachers to digest the issue and to become constructive participants in post-exposition dialogues and investigation in the classroom. In using the expo in a more targeted manner, the expectation is that with the necessary incentives, teaching professionals in Guatemala might begin to move away from more traditional forms of emphasizing historic facts, not enquiry, and that students will begin to understand and problematize why accounts of the same event – Guatemala's tragic conflict – might differ. IDRC has been working with the International Institute for Learning on Social Reconciliation (IIARS) in the design of a new monitoring and evaluation framework for the expo.

4. Lessons learned from Guatemala: key principles and approaches to evaluating transitional justice

It is hoped that learning from the “*Why are we the way we are?*” project can be used to improve planning, monitoring and evaluation of transitional programming in other countries emerging from violent pasts. Programming in these contested, complex contexts will almost always be accompanied by high levels of unpredictability. Co-existing and being comfortable with ambiguity is an important aspect of working in contested spaces – this does not come easily for most of the large donors and grantmakers who underwrite transitional justice programming and want visible, short term returns on their investments. Transitional justice, as we are often reminded, is far from “tried and true”. Programming in this area is not for the risk averse. Embracing risk in international aid administration is a tall order when there are multiple accountabilities at play. Since there still appear to be many questions around whether transitional justice ‘works’ (e.g. whether it promotes social reconciliation and contributes to peacebuilding), it seems that one of the most intelligent ways to manage the risks effectively would be increase learning. This implies going beyond the “yes” or “no” question of if transitional works to ask the question of how transitional justice works. Good program evaluation can help answer this question.

Those involved in transitional justice programming – civil society organizations, governments and donors of different persuasions – will need to abandon orthodox approaches to linear planning, monitoring and evaluation and embrace new approaches for dealing with complexity through adaptive management. In light of this reality, the following principles and approaches to the

evaluation of transitional programming for social reconciliation should be considered.

4.1. Combine research and evaluation

Theory-based evaluation,¹⁵ because of its focus on exploring both successes and failures, could be of particular importance for evaluating transitional justice. Theory-based evaluation as its name implies, has more often than once uncovered the difficulties or deficiencies underlying the original theory underpinning a program or project's logic. Because theory-building around the long term impacts of transitional justice is still in its infancy, it is also critical that transitional justice program evaluation be accompanied by deeper empirical research that sheds light on the social change processes and theories that underpin transitional justice as a concept.

4.2. Prioritize local stakeholder accountability not just donor accountability

As seen in the Guatemalan case, improving trust in strained inter-group relationships needs to be seen as a priority. Externally imposed approaches to program evaluation can often unwittingly play a role of undermining the long-term goals (or hoped for impacts) of transitional justice. Those being evaluated often view the parachuting of external evaluators into highly charged contexts as an imposition and a liability to be managed, since they assume that any negative findings will be taken up and exploited by adversaries to transitional justice. In such cases, the potential for doing more harm than good is very real. The success or failure of a program in support of transitional justice must pay heed to the equally important imperatives of vertical accountability to the donor and horizontal accountability to a wider base of civil society stakeholders.

4.3. Empower disadvantaged groups, including victims

Evaluation of programs designed to serve disadvantaged groups such as victims of human rights violations may actually be threatening to stakeholders in those groups. Program beneficiaries have often suffered bad experiences with the management of international aid, including evaluation. For many of these people, evaluation has been a highly disempowering experience. Whatever form of M&E that is chosen, it should be conflict-sensitive and not exacerbate tensions, making a socially and emotionally fraught situation worse. These contexts could greatly benefit from development evaluation approaches that build rather than erode the social capital of the organizations and beneficiaries involved in transitional justice programs.

While we often dwell upon the importance of evaluation for evidence, in contexts dealing with a violent past, it is important to remember the linkages that exist between findings as evidence, the process use benefits of evaluation¹⁶ and the potential to recuperate lost social capital. Findings alone are of limited use and rarely (if ever), is an evaluation report sufficient to support social change. Because such a large part (although not all) of transitional justice programming is about re-building broken relationships, donors and evaluators need to double their efforts to straddle the intersect between the use of evaluation findings for articulating evidence based decision-making and good participatory process that

¹⁵ See Weiss (1997).

¹⁶ Process use refers to “individual changes in thinking, attitudes, and behaviour, and in program organizational changes in procedures and culture that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process”. Patton (2008, p. 115).

implants a deeper respect for the utility of evaluation in the user as a vehicle for organizational learning on the ground.

4.4. Use participatory approaches to offset power imbalances

Transitional justice contexts are often characterized by intense feelings of distrust at many levels. The ideological divisions of civil society are deep and are particularly difficult for an outsider to understand, let alone navigate. Recipients of transitional justice programs (governments, NGOs, and victims groups) may distrust bilateral or multilateral donors, who have in the past, played a direct or indirect role in the conflict. In such contexts, external evaluation is (not surprisingly) viewed as an extension of repressive tactics. Many of the long term goals of transitional justice suggest that participatory evaluation approaches such as self-assessment and peer review could play a constructive role in the achievement of the longer term, ambitious aspirations that underlie the transitional justice project. Participatory approaches that support evaluative thinking also build learning capacities into the organizations of transitional justice stakeholders.

5. Concluding remarks

At the end of the day, it is local actors who need to be convinced that transitional justice 'works'. Uptake and ownership of the well-intentioned goals of transitional justice will depend upon whether local actors perceive the achievement of results that are important to them and their constituencies – not the international donors who fund these processes and their evaluators. This reality has perhaps been most aptly summed up by the former President of the African Evaluation Association: "It is not about your project; it is about my country".¹⁷

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¹⁷ Oumoul Ba Tall, President of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation. Speaking at the European Evaluation Society Conference, October 2008.