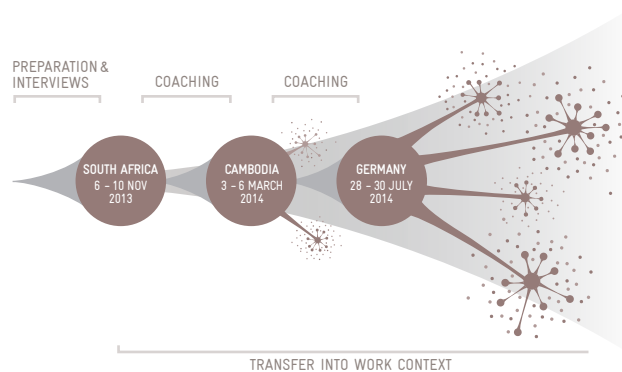




# The Mandela Dialogues on Memory Work

## Reckoning with the past and building trust towards the future

Every society emerging from oppressive rule or conflict to democracy is faced with the difficult task of re-shaping and re-liberating societal memory, and promoting cooperative views on the common history. Countries have tended to reckon with the pain and damage of the past through formal instruments, like 'truth commissions' and 'criminal tribunals'. At the heart of experience with these instruments have been the overlapping processes of recording and remembering. Establishing a dialogue on the past within and between societal groups has, for some countries, meant seeking a balance between information transparency and reconciliation. But experiences around the world have shown that the processes of reconciliation and rehabilitation are complex and require far more than a reliance on formal records. A crucial element in any transition to democracy has to be respect for, and the provision of space for, the interrelated dynamics of remembering – storytelling, silence, and discussions. People, especially the victims of oppression, feel the need to tell their stories, and the need for someone who listens.



Taken as a whole, the 12 days of active dialogue and the individual and collective exchanges that took place in the periods between Lab meetings, offered a space 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 reinvigorated debates about memory work and how we do it, and offered new approaches, new questions and challenges to existing paradigms. The objectives were to develop leadership and methodological capacities of the participants, to deepen their understanding of the functionality of recording in shaping and liberating societal memory, and to enable participants to enrich and develop change projects in their own institution or country.

During the first five-day Lab meeting in South Africa, participants got to know each other personally and professionally, through sharing of their biographies and discussing the issues that inform and trouble their work. In this meeting, the participants and hosting team (comprising the convening organisations and the facilitation team) struggled to find a balance between different methods, and modes of engagement, especially the need for analytical and intellectual discussion and debate, on the one hand, and on the other, the need for more experiential, artistic forms of learning, and observation. In relation to memory work itself, many areas of both tension and consensus emerged during many sessions of this first meeting. Key questions focused

26  
  
PARTICIPANTS

10  
  
COUNTRIES

## The Process

The Dialogues brought together 26 leaders (policy makers, a federal judge, founders and CEOs from foundations and museums, researchers and publicists) from Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Canada, Croatia, Germany, Kenya, Serbia, South Africa, and Uruguay.

The participants (52% men, 48% women) were activists, analysts, and functionaries in the field of memory work. Many of them were also survivors or descendants of survivors of human rights violations and brought this experience to the dialogue process.



Implemented by:



on healing and preventing repetition of history, the ethics and inclusivity of memory work, and caring for self.

During the second Lab meeting in Cambodia, the responsibility of participants to co-create the process was emphasized. Participants looked to 'dig deeper' into the issues they faced in their work; share knowledge and find where the differences and similarities between their contexts lay. The importance of context and intent behind memory work emerged as additional themes. This broadened the discussion and focused participants' attention on why and how memory work is done to achieve the often quite diverse goals of a range of stakeholders.

Next to shared projects and intentions, a significant result from the final Lab meeting in Germany was a deeper understanding of the differences between national and regional contexts that inform and define approaches to memory work. This sharing of differences, disagreements, and discomfort seemed significant as the identification of shared issues and concerns had been in the first and second dialogues. The agreement to seek to understand and elucidate those differences was an important breakthrough in the process, that took participants and the hosting team beyond the questions outlined at the start of the journey. Identifying where our differences lay, and the diverse meanings our contexts have lent to the lexicon of transitional justice – reconciliation, democracy, social justice, enemy, healing, reparations, and punishment – led the participants of the dialogues towards a conversation that strongly highlighted the shortcoming of 'ready-made' systems, structures, and processes for dealing with past conflict and injustice.

In locating the Lab meetings in three countries with very different pasts and very different approaches to dealing with the past, the convening organisations sought to offer opportunities for the participants to actively engage with a diversity of experiences, and explore the complexity of reckoning and representing the past by immersing into three different national narratives during the course of the Lab. The participants were thereby offered a chance to reflect both on the similarities and differences between these contexts and their own regional, national, and local experiences. Amongst the immersion sites the Lab team experienced, the Alexandra Township in Johannesburg, and the Cradle of Humankind in South Africa, the Tuol Sleng execution center in Cambodia, and the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.

Further information:

[www.we-do-change.org/what-we-do/mandela-dialogues-on-memory-work-1](http://www.we-do-change.org/what-we-do/mandela-dialogues-on-memory-work-1)

In 2016, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Global Leadership Academy convened "The Mandela Dialogues on Memory Work 2 – Creating Safe Spaces across generations".

[www.we-do-change.org/what-we-do/mandela-dialogues-on-memory-work-2](http://www.we-do-change.org/what-we-do/mandela-dialogues-on-memory-work-2)



## Impact

"My eyes have been opened and I must go forward with the knowledge that I have gained."

*Participant of the Mandela Dialogues on Memory Work*

## Stories of change

### A network across frontiers:

This is the story of Anna Kaminsky. She is the managing director of the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED-Dictatorship in Eastern Germany.

[www.we-do-change.org/our-impact/anna-kaminsky](http://www.we-do-change.org/our-impact/anna-kaminsky)

### Diversifying Cambodian Memory Work:

Minea Tim is the executive director of Kdei Karuna (KdK) – a Cambodian NGO working in the field of dealing with the past by conducting dialogues to transform historically rooted conflicts.

[www.we-do-change.org/our-impact/minea-tim](http://www.we-do-change.org/our-impact/minea-tim)

### Memories can change History:

Wachira Waheire is a farmer and human rights activist from Kenya. During the regime of Daniel arap Moi from 1978 to 2001, he was imprisoned and tortured.

[www.we-do-change.org/our-impact/wachira-waheire](http://www.we-do-change.org/our-impact/wachira-waheire)



80 %

improvement of innovation and leadership skills



85 %

received significant impulses for tackling current challenges in their home systems



55 %

were able to initiate innovation and change in their institutions and organisations

March 2017

Further information about our impact:

[www.we-do-change.org/our-impact](http://www.we-do-change.org/our-impact)

## The convening organisations

### The Nelson Mandela Foundation

The Foundation was established in 1999 by Nelson Mandela. Its vision is a society which remembers its pasts, listens to all its voices, and pursues social justice. Its mission is to contribute to the making of a just society by keeping alive the legacy of Nelson Mandela, providing an integrated public information resource on his life and times, and by convening dialogue around critical social issues. Dialogue as an instrument for finding sustainable solutions to intractable problems is fundamental to understanding Nelson Mandela's legacy. In mandating the Nelson Mandela Foundation, he insisted on one of its core objectives being the creation of a space which would bring together those who think they have little in common and who might have no desire to listen to one another. Such a space has to be a safe space. This is the space in which sustainable solutions can be worked out.

[www.nelsonmandela.org](http://www.nelsonmandela.org)

### The Global Leadership Academy

The Global Leadership Academy offers interdisciplinary and practice-oriented programmes aimed at improving the innovation capacity and leadership skills of decision-makers from the fields of policy-making, business, higher education and research, and civil society. In the Lab they come together to look at global issues from a completely different angle. Gaining fresh perspectives allows them to implement the necessary change processes in their spheres of influence.

The Global Leadership Academy, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is a central component in GIZ's range of services for international human capacity development.

[www.we-do-change.org](http://www.we-do-change.org)



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