



Shaping the future: The power of youth as agents for living memory and justice

The needs and perspectives of young people are often neglected in dealing with the past processes – be it because of the time that has elapsed between the violent events and the present day, or because these processes do not always seem to be relevant to the socio-economic issues that preoccupy younger generations, or because the voice of youth is seldomly considered.

At the same time, justice initiatives and memorialisation efforts need to be relevant for the present day to fulfil their transformative and preventive potentials. Youth taking up an active role is therefore key. Moreover, young people affected by different experiences of violence can play an important role in the struggle for justice, addressing abuses they directly endured or the inter-generational dimension of trauma. They can link calls for the acknowledgement of past suffering with present day activism for accountability and broader notions of social justice.

Organised by Asia Justice and Rights, Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur, Impunity Watch

Experiences:

- Juliane Thieme, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig e.V., Germany
- Kania Mamonto, Asia Justice and Rights, Indonesia
- Josué Mugisha, Troupe Les Enfoirés de Sanoladante, Burundi

Facilitated by Anjli Parrin (University of Chicago, Global Human Rights Clinic, USA), Katharina Hochmuth and Christine Schoenmakers (Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur, Germany)

The workshop featured experiences from Burundi, Indonesia and Germany. It focused on different approaches to youth engagement as well as their opportunities and challenges in addressing legacies of violence and injustice.

Insights

Young people are both a source of hope and active catalysts for change. However, they sometimes confront the lonely task of reconciling with the legacies of past conflicts and hostilities and are left with the “unfinished business of the past”. Recurrently, processes tend to exclude youth or to adopt patronising approaches towards them. Especially in divided societies, competing perspectives, narratives and expectations place a significant emotional and psychological burden on young individuals, consequently hindering the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of transitional justice and reconciliation attempts.

All dealing with the past approaches must recognise the challenges confronting young people and design processes through their perspectives. This requires adopting an intersectional and trans-generational approach, which considers youth’s independent analyses and needs, recognises and empowers their agency and makes them part of each step of the process. In this way, their particular prowess in digital spaces and their radical creativity can be brought to bear.

Adopting a robust intersectional approach means acknowledging youth as a multi-dimensional entity and transcending conventional age-based categorisations that define them. The establishment of cross-generational learning environments, facilitated through diverse mediums and methods including artistic and non-verbal methods, becomes a must.

Developing youth agency means refraining from speaking on behalf of them, encouraging them with a leadership role within transitional justice processes instead. It involves getting more actively engaged within their “spaces” instead of “providing spaces” for them. It also includes empowering young people with leading roles as intrinsic stakeholders, where they can start initiatives like shaping educational curricula, with a special emphasis on history education and social media literacy.