



Executive Summary

The Truth-telling Project

**An Outcome Evaluation of a Royal Roads
University Graduate Student Research Project**

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Cover photo: Trust circle. Northern Uganda, Uganda. Photo: Cheryl Heykoop

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents an outcome evaluation of a research project undertaken by a Royal Roads University (RRU) Doctoral of Social Sciences (DSocSci) student. The “Truth-telling Project” (TTP) focused on how to meaningfully and ethically engage young people in post-conflict truth-telling and transitional justice (TJ) processes in Uganda. The project aimed to support young people’s empowerment; inspire organizational and policy change to support new models of engagement for post-conflict truth-telling commissions; and influence further research on the topic. This outcome evaluation assesses whether and how the TTP contributed to improving young people’s involvement in TJ processes in Uganda.

Methodology

The outcome evaluation uses a project theory of change (ToC) as the main analytical framework. A ToC is a model of how and why a project is expected to contribute to a change process. It documents what the research is expected to produce in terms of products and services (outputs) and provides a set of testable hypotheses about what actors (individuals and organizations) will be influenced by the research process and outputs, and how their resulting actions (outcomes) are expected to contribute to higher-level changes (outcomes, impacts). The evaluation team led a participatory workshop with the Principal Investigator (PI) in May 2018 to define the scope of the evaluation, retrospectively document an up-to-date ToC for the TTP (Figure 1) and identify possible sources of evidence to empirically test the ToC. The evaluation team conducted 17 interviews and reviewed relevant documents to assess project design and implementation (i.e., proposals, assessments, reports), and outcomes (i.e., participant surveys, policies, press releases, websites, briefs) to answer the following questions:

Outcome Evaluation

- *To what extent and how were outcomes realized?*
- *Were project assumptions sustained?*
- *Could the outcomes have been realized in the absence of the project?*
- *Were there any unexpected outcomes?*
- *Are the higher-level changes likely to be realized?*

Project design and implementation were characterized using Belcher et al.’s (2016) Transdisciplinary Research Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). The QAF was used to assess the degree to which the project incorporated recognized elements of transdisciplinary research¹, organized under the principles of *Relevance*, *Credibility*, *Legitimacy*, and *Effectiveness*, guided by the following questions:

Project Assessment

- *What elements of research design and implementation supported outcome realizations, and how?*
- *To what extent and how did the project engage with relevant stakeholders?*
- *To what extent were the research process and products sufficiently relevant to realize the stated aims?*
- *To what extent are target audiences aware of and using the project outputs? How are they using them?*
- *How does Royal Roads support student success in research?*

Results were analyzed and grounded in social change theory to explain the implications of outcome realization.

Project Overview

The purpose of the TTP was to contribute to more meaningful and ethical engagement of young people in issues that affect them. The project worked through five interconnected *pathways*. *Empowering young people* with the necessary capacities

¹ The QAF is not meant to be a measure of excellence, but rather characterizes the project design and implementation in terms of the degree of its transdisciplinarity.

and relationships to actively participate in both truth-telling commissions and decision-making processes in TJ was expected to support more meaningful engagement processes to acquire an accurate account of history and contribute to reconciliation and healing. Through strategic partnerships and support of the *organizational capacity and practice* of partner organizations, partners were expected to develop interest in and capacity to support the effective engagement of young people in their own work. With a greater orientation toward young people, partners were expected to develop greater interest in supporting young people’s involvement and engagement in future truth-telling commissions in Uganda and contribute to the development of a coalition to support more effective TJ policy processes. It was assumed that successful *government policy* change and implementation happens both from the top-down and the bottom-up. Hence, governments would be more willing to adopt new principles to engage young people if the interest, opportunity, and capacity to support young people’s participation in new ways are already developed locally, and if the principles have been tested and proven to be feasible and effective. *Professional development* through the research experience was expected to build the capacity of local Ugandan researchers and enhance the PI’s expertise and credibility on the topic. This would create new opportunities for the research team to share experiences at academic and policy dialogues to advance and inform policy, as well as through the networks of the organizations where the research assistants obtained work following the project. Contributions to academia through *research* was expected to influence both the supply and trajectory of research, as other scholars take up related questions, adapt approaches, and continue to build the knowledge base. It was expected that the accumulation of scholarship will influence the practice of organizations. Together, these pathways were expected to support truth-telling commissions in gaining a fuller account of conflicts and support meaningful reconciliation and healing for all people affected by conflict. The key steps in these pathways are illustrated in Figure 1.

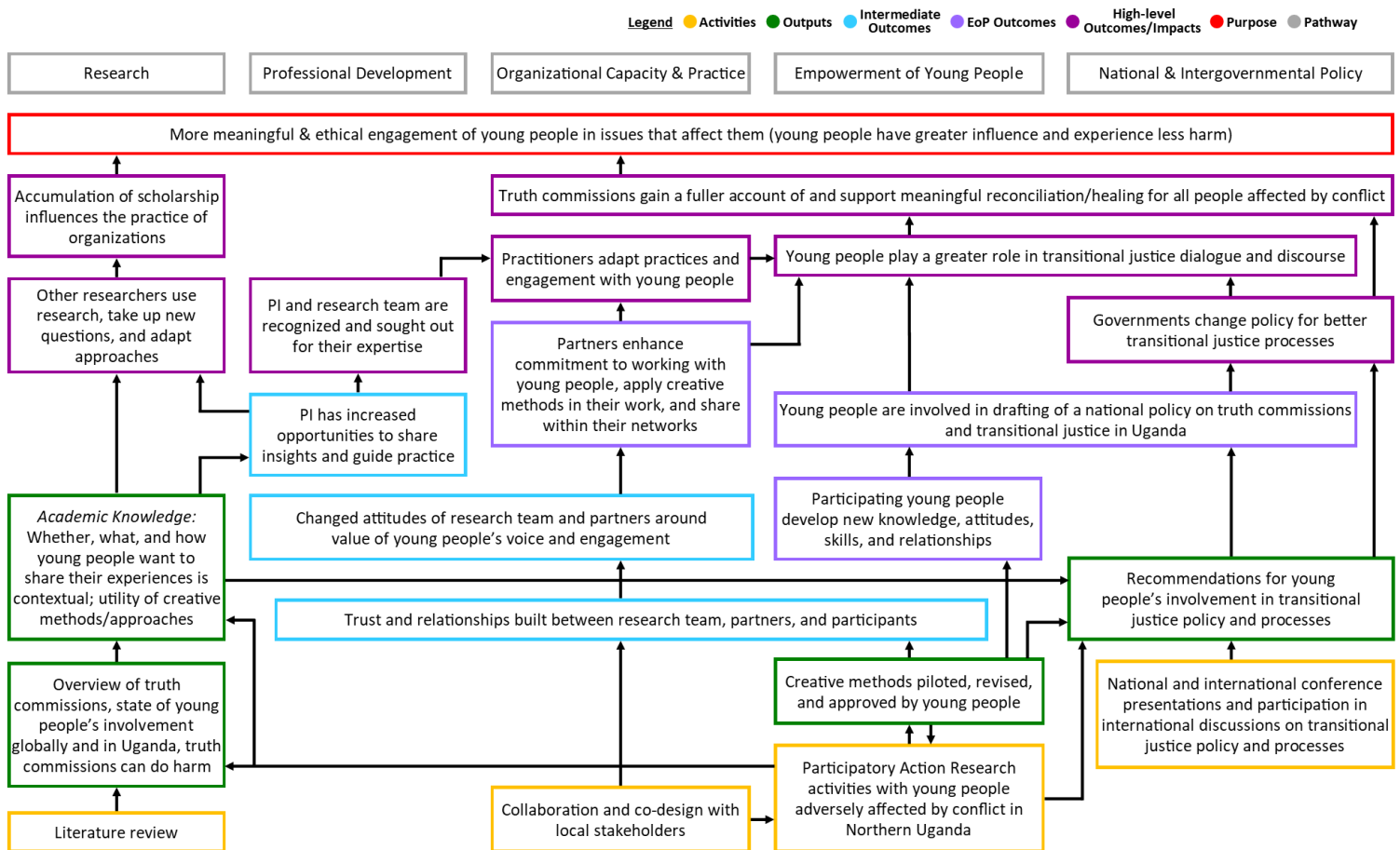


Figure 1. Simplified TTP Theory of Change²

² A table showing the relationship between the aggregated and disaggregated outcomes can be found in Appendix 8.

Results

Outcome Evaluation

To what extent and how were outcomes realized?

Table 1 summarizes the extent to which outcomes were realized. The project leveraged multiple impact pathways and mechanisms to realize outcomes and make progress toward higher-level outcomes. Outcomes pertaining to young people’s empowerment were realized by research participants through experiential learning within the TTP, as the project provided a first-hand example of how an engagement process of young people affected by conflict could be conducted. The TTP also supported opportunities to build the capacity of participating young people. Outcomes in the *organizational practice and capacity* pathway were realized through effective collaboration and strategic partnerships to support partners’ needs, and by co-producing knowledge about how to engage young people affected by war to realize mutual benefits relevant to their missions. Outcomes in the *policy* pathway were supported by outcomes in the *young people’s empowerment* pathway, and through organizational capacity and practice changes that connected partners, government actors, and young people in a session where young people were involved in the review of a draft national policy for TJ. Outcomes in the *research* pathway were realized through the research team’s participation in and contributions to the academic discussion on the topic. Outcomes in the professional development pathway were realized as the TTP provided an opportunity for the PI and the research assistants to develop their research capacity through the project experience; exposed the PI and research team to new networks; and supported their interest to continue working with young people and/or TJ.

Table 1. Summary of outcome realization and project contributions

<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Status and Extent of Project Contribution</i>
Trust and relationships built between research team, partners, and participants	Realized, with clear project contribution
Participating young people gain new knowledge, attitudes, skills, and relationships	Realized, with clear project contribution
Changed attitudes of research team and partners around value of young people’s voice and engagement	Realized, with clear project contribution
Partners enhance commitment to working with young people, apply creative methods in their work and share within their networks	Realized, with clear project contribution
Practitioners adopt practices and engagement with young people	Partially realized, with clear project contribution
Young people are involved in drafting of a national policy on truth commissions and TJ in Uganda	Realized, with clear project contribution
Governments change policy for better TJ processes	Insufficient evidence
Young people play a greater role in TJ dialogue and discourse	Partially realized, with clear project contribution
PI has increased opportunities to share insights and guide practice	Realized, with clear project contribution
PI and research team are recognized and sought out for their expertise	Realized, with clear project contribution
Other researchers use research, take up new questions, and adapt approaches	Realized, with clear project contribution
Accumulation of scholarship influences the practice of organizations	Insufficient evidence

Contextual factors also played a key role in realizing outcomes. For example, other activities, including educational, governmental, and non-governmental initiatives, as well as other research projects, supported the empowerment of young people affected by war. However, prevailing cultural norms about young people (e.g., to be seen and not heard) and the TJ policy implementation gap may have hindered progress towards intended end-of-project outcomes or outcomes that were expected to manifest in the long-term. There were also unexpected outcomes such as capacity building for research assistants and participants. The logic of the TTP ToC and its underlying assumptions appear to be sustained. The project had a purposeful design driven by a genuine desire to create positive changes in the context.

Project Assessment

What elements of the research design and implementation supported outcome realizations, and how?

The TTP demonstrates characteristics of a relevant, credible, legitimate, and effective project that facilitated meaningful engagement of young people who experienced the Ugandan conflict and provided them an opportunity to share how they wished to be involved in TJ processes. Evaluation informants described the TTP as highly ethical, participatory, and beneficial to the young people involved. The TTP focused on understanding and accommodating the unique intersection of TJ for young people in the Ugandan context. The project explicitly identified and planned for outcomes from the start. Inspired and driven by the need for meaningful and ethical engagement of young people on issues that affect them, the TTP included young people throughout the research process as partners in decisions around how the TTP progressed. The TTP practiced sound research ethics by adherence to a ‘do no harm’ principle, appropriate application of participatory action research (PAR) methods, and collaborative engagement with strategic partners to build participant and organizational capacity.

Results from the outcome evaluation and QAF assessment highlight that the PAR approach and strategic partnership with local organizations made the process relevant and enabled knowledge co-generation, which met the research objectives and supported outcome realization. Most actors within the project’s sphere of influence were aware of the project findings, benefited from the process, and are using lessons from the project. Extensive engagement, consistent communication, and appropriately targeted outputs enabled broad reach and enhanced the utility of the TTP findings for practitioners, policymakers, and academics beyond the sphere of influence.

There is evidence that RRU programming supported the realization of TTP outcomes in the *professional development* and *research* pathways. RRU appeals to scholar-practitioners who bring professional expertise to their research. RRU encourages research that makes a difference and designs programs intended to build student competencies to execute effective research projects. RRU also facilitates collegial relationships and builds networks through the research committee (which can be made up of external academics, RRU faculty, and practitioners) and cohort that enrich the research and students’ continued professional development experience. In this case, RRU exposed the PI to diverse epistemological and methodological orientations. For example, in addition to the DSocSci coursework, the PI had the opportunity to join an Outcome Mapping training offered by RRU, which helped to inform the TTP ToC. The program also facilitated an open space where the cohort could be a sounding board for ideas during the design phase of the research. This encouraged a collaborative approach to the research as multiple perspectives were integrated. RRU also provided a strong committee structure that enabled new relationships to form and existing relationships to flourish. The professional networking and diverse epistemological orientation strengthened the research and its contributions.

Lessons Learned

Project Lessons

- Purpose-driven research activities that plan for outcomes increase the potential for intended changes to be realized.
- Inclusive and ethical project engagements that share decision-making power with participants and other target audiences supports capacity-building and fosters agency. Research projects can demonstrate and support the iterative development of a positive process that can be emulated or replicated by practitioners in their work.
- Building relationships and support networks that put trust and mutual benefits at the core enables strategic partnership and collaboration to expand research influence.
- Effective collaboration in a research team supports equitable professional development by expanding professional networks, building on existing research competencies, and developing reputations that can be further leveraged to continue work on the topic and further contribute to higher-level outcomes.

Contextual Lessons

- The TTP was well-situated within the local context, driven by the objective to produce a contextually relevant truth-

telling model to engage young people whose lives had been affected by the Ugandan conflict. The TTP used specific strategies to address:

- Ugandan context: a literature review on Uganda’s history of the conflict, the PI’s familiarity with the country’s political and cultural dynamics, hiring a local research team, and conducting frequent field visits during the project;
 - Post-conflict context: a literature review on the Ugandan conflict and other countries’ post-conflict TJ processes, engaging different groups affected by the Ugandan conflict (formally abducted (FA), internally displaced (ID), born in captivity (BIC), disabled by war (DBW)), applying and testing an engagement approach that could be replicated or emulated by Uganda’s future TJ processes; and
 - Young people’s context: making activities accessible to them (in terms of local language and sign language interpretation, education level, delivery, etc.) and fun; and capturing and being informed by their ideas, needs, and voices.
- Change processes take time. While the timing of relevant policy processes is hard to predict, the TTP was conducted in the same period as national (e.g., draft Ugandan policy) and international policy-related processes (e.g., Kampala Recommendations) on TJ were underway. As a result of the TTP’s strategic partnership with relevant NGOs in the region, and leveraging of international networks and opportunities, the project was able to indirectly contribute to closing key policy gaps.

Evaluation Limitations

Limitations of the analytical framework: Retrospective documentation of the ToC makes the distinctions between intended and unintended outcomes unclear. Having the PI identify informants for testing the outcomes can also increase the risk of introducing bias into data collection, as informants may be selected for their likelihood to reflect positively on the project’s results and outcomes. To address this limitation, snowballing for additional perspectives and sources of information was undertaken.

Limitations of the data and results: Assessments rely on informant perspectives. Interviews were conducted several years after the project concluded, making recall of project details and processes challenging for informants. However, it was observed that those closest to and more involved in the project could recall more details of the project and its contributions. These individuals also perceived the project’s influence to be higher than those more distant from the project. Despite best efforts to reach government officials, key intergovernmental organizations, and young people involved in the project, these informants were inaccessible. As a result, many of the outcomes in the *policy* and *young people’s empowerment* pathways could have had richer data and analysis.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the case study findings, we recommend the following for future research projects:

1. Develop explicit, realistic, and theoretically sound assumptions and theories about how and why a research project is expected to contribute to change at project inception to inform planning and adaptive management;
2. Include research participants and target audiences as partners when appropriate and feasible;
3. Develop mutually beneficial partnerships with organizations holding complementary objectives; and
4. Foster effective collaboration through building trust and shared decision-making power to ensure co-ownership.