

Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum. (2010). *A People's Guide to Transitional Justice: An Introduction*. Harare: African Community Publishing and Development Trust.

**Reviewed by
Nyanga Takupiwa**

The Zimbabwean authored book was produced mainly for the Zimbabwean market specifically targeting politicians, religious leaders, civic society, victims and perpetrators. The main aim of the book is to promote wide spread discussion and awareness of the concept of transitional justice and the importance of full and honest participation in the process of transitional justice. Transitional Justice, which refers to a range of approaches that societies undertake to reckon with legacies of widespread human rights abuse, was vividly analyzed with possible solutions to the challenges of transitional justice being given. The book has come at a time when Zimbabwe's two major political parties had been involved in a fierce conflict for the past decade resulting in the creation of major rifts among people and communities. The conflict consequently led to the formation of an Inclusive Government in 2008. The text is therefore very important in assisting readers to realize the benefits that accrue from transitional justice. The text will assist the Zimbabweans to move away from the period of violent conflict between Zimbabwe National People Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) from 2000 through 2008 which in some instances resulted in blood shed. The book has also come at a time when the three principals to the Government of National Unity have expressed their commitment to redress the wrongs of the past and consider ways in which gross violations of human rights can be prevented in future.

The book, *A People's Guide To Transitional Justice* comprises of ten chapters with ideas and concepts that are coherently and sequentially arranged. Throughout the text, there is a pervading theme of transitional justice encompassed by fascinating range of scholarship. The sequencing of chapters and ideas is appropriate given that the preceding chapter feeds into the new chapter.

The book provides a variety of approaches to use in influencing transitional Justice in society. It provides judicial and non-judicial approaches that can be employed to prevent future human right abuses. The book presents information on how transitional justice should be handled, starting from its definition, recovering the truth, institutional reforms, reparations and right to accountability. The book, *A People's Guide To Transitional Justice* presents readers with adequate and relevant information with regards to the administration of transitional justice. It is usually very difficult for the injured part(ies) to forgive their predecessors, however the information provided for in the book make the two groups accept the new realities.

The text provide methods and approaches that can be used in consolidating, peace, promoting human rights, democracy and healing the effects of past wrongs.

The book simplified issues by defining key terms and basic concepts to transitional justices. It makes readers have a better and clearer understanding of what transitional justice entails. Some of the terms that were defined include peace building, justice, healing and reconciliation (page 8). These terms are key in dealing with the concept of transitional justice, hence unbundling them makes it easy for readers to understand the whole process of transitional justice. The author of the book made an effort to provide readers with practical and relevant information on transitional justice.

The *Zimbabwe NGO Forum* used illustrative diagrams and pictures to drive home concepts. Pictorial materials are used at the beginning of every chapter as a way of driving home the theme of the chapter and text. Pictures on page 15 clearly show how people can move from conflict and chaos to cooperation. The illustrative analogy helps readers to quickly understand the principles of transitional justice such as the cover page and page 9. These interesting pictures are not difficult to interpret but provide useful information to readers. The author is also commended for explaining what the pictures represents and depicts. The text is very rich with various hands on activities and uses the conversational style which is intended to keep the reader active and interested. This is quite commendable since it helps to simplify complex issues. While the idea of interpreting diagrams for readers is welcome, it stifles creativity and discovery learning.

To further catch the interest of readers the text used poetry, for instance on page 60, there is a poem entitled *Forgive and Forget*, which is meant to drive home the theme of reparations, covering its possibilities and difficulties.

The fact that the book was produced after making a survey, throughout the country makes it more relevant to the market it is targeted for. The text is applauded for bringing on board almost all key people in society in collecting information that was used in compiling the book. For instance church leaders, chiefs, artists and other societal dignitaries (page 141) were consulted in compilation of the book. This made the text appealing to all stakeholders. Transitional justice is generally viewed from various perspectives starting from cultural right to the modern day methods hence it becomes imperative to make wide consultations so as to produce a text that addresses the real knowledge gaps that need to be filled. The approach also makes the text have a Zimbabwean flare. While the idea of making consultations with various stakeholders is appreciated, it has a danger of being bias as authors may choose to bring out experiences which are favorable to the goals and interests they wish to pursue and leave out those from the other groups who share different views with them. It is usually advisable to rely heavily on the existing body of knowledge rather than the findings from the groups concerned. The government is a major stakeholder to transitional justice; hence they should have been seriously engaged it so as to produce balanced views on how transitional justice should be handled in Zimbabwe.

The text did extremely well in presenting information in a logical and systematic way. Transitional justice is a process hence it is prudent to present information in a logical and systematic way for the readers to easily grasp the concepts. Adequate and relevant information on truth recovery, institutional reform, reparations accountability, memorials, transitional justice for

women and children were covered in the ten chapters of the text. The book, *A Peoples' Guide To Transitional Justice* is commended for bringing out how transitional justice for women and children should be managed and treated. Women and children are the most vulnerable groups to abuse during political upheavals in any society; hence it is prudent for society to be equipped with techniques and skills of managing transitional justice to this category of people.

The text is also applauded for creating sections summarizing and concluding the chapters except for chapter I. A summary and a conclusion gives the reader a rundown of critical issues under each topic and sub-topics hence it helps in consolidating concepts and ideas. Chapter one has no summary and a conclusion and chapter ten only has a conclusion without a summary. Although the author managed to present his material consistently, critics may state that he should have adopted the chapter ten formats where there is a conclusion without summary. The unavailability of sources also presents a challenge to readers since it doesn't provide the reader with the opportunity for further reading. More reading materials should have been provided in the form of a reference list so that readers may have more materials to make further consultation.

Although, multiple authors are good eye candy, they often fail to deliver. For this particular text, there is considerable inconsistency in style. While all the ten chapters except for chapter one have an introduction and a conclusion, these were presented in different styles. Some chapters have unusually long introductions of about half a page.

In summary, although the chapters are independent, there are a number of them that recur during the book. The book is very beneficial to politicians, civil society leaders, religious and traditional leaders and also the policy makers. The text's intended objective was realized. Although no single book can completely satisfy all its intended beneficiaries, in this case more answers than questions have been presented throughout the text.

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