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Factors inhibiting the maturity and praxis of Made in Africa Evaluation

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Background: Monitoring and evaluation in Africa as a practice and discipline has been dominated by Global North perspectives. There have been efforts within the monitoring and evaluation space to build a practice and profession that is informed by epistemes and axiologies which are Afro-centric. The main stream approaches currently being used in African evaluations marginalize the African knowledge systems as well as African evaluators. Reconstructing and repositioning the value of Made in Africa Evaluation is a must, rather than a necessity.

Objectives: This article documents critical factors inhibiting the deepening of the 'Made in Africa Evaluation' (MAE), both conceptually and practically.

Method: Based on reviewed literature, hands-on experiences and conference attendances, researchers explored critical factors that inhibit MAE from gaining enough traction in Africa.

Results: It is noted that MAE faces challenges in the region. African countries are struggling with common issues of how MAE can gain enough traction. Key factors observed are (1) the over-reliance on Western world views or paradigms, (2) the dominance of Global North donors as commissioners of African evaluations, (3) the supply chain practices of African evaluators and (4) the perceived infancy of the evaluation profession in Africa.

Conclusion: Commissioners of evaluations should consider revising procurement regulations developed to facilitate equivalent shared responsibilities between African and Western evaluation experts. More work needs to be conducted in order to develop a body of knowledge with Afrocentric paradigms, ways of knowing and methodologies that are African. Developing an African methods database is essential. This will contribute towards the ability for Africans to drink from their own wells, thereby elevating the indigenisation of evaluation practice. This article advocates for the expedience of the MAE approach and fills an important empirical gap on the approach, which feeds into contemporary literature on the institutionalisation of African approaches in evaluation practice.

Keywords: Made in Africa; evaluations; context; Afrocentric; methodologies.

Introduction

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) landscape has been dominated by Western perspectives, both in academia and actual practice. Illustratively, M&E courses in African universities are Western-oriented, with little or no Afrocentric context-relevant materials. The Western dominance of the M&E is witnessed through the state of the evaluation approaches, theories, frameworks and practices, most of which were essentially coined in the United States of America (USA), Canada and the United Kingdom (UK) (Mouton et al. 2014). Sadly, the African education systems responsible for embedding knowledge are still subjugated by the Western episteme, and evaluations are no exception.

The question of whether there is hope for African countries to have evaluations with a contextually relevant African face remains unanswered. Of importance to note is that achieving 'Made in Africa Evaluation' (MAE) implies deconstructing the many centuries of African dominance by Western and European epistemological paradigms. This includes adopting Africa's own endogenous and indigenous paradigms designed for the benefit of Africa.

The ushering in of the new dawn of independence in most African states upheld the knowledge production systems which continuously preserved colonial representations. Africa has been on

the receiving end of the Global North–defined development and democracy, and she continues to struggle to re-assert her self-determination (Bantu 2013). Bantu (2013) argues that part of the problem is that most African states, upon attaining independence, failed to inaugurate sustainable counter-structures with independent governing systems. Contemporary Africa is a continent yet to tell her own story, given the long history of colonialism; instead, that which is Africa is told by Western thought (Mapitsa & Ngwato 2020; Mbava & Chapman 2020).

Emphasising the importance of knowing one's history, Bantu (2013) described the collective case of most Africans as being characterised by amnesia where the memory of history, culture remembering a sense of self, is a vast challenge. As such, M&E as a discipline is also caught in this lack of remembrance trend, negatively contributing to the appreciation of local contexts, even by Africans themselves. Thus, apart from M&E largely being presented as pro-Western in terms of methodologies, attitudes in Africa play a significant role also in making the discipline pro-Western. In South Africa, Uganda and Benin, for instance, M&E has received political will as compared to other countries, thereby explaining how M&E is growing as MAE and a discipline. Political will and support rendered to M&E means that countries such as the ones cited recognise that Africa's developmental trajectory should be pinned on paradigms, frameworks and models that are contextually relevant to Africa.

Against the above, therefore, MAE has become a plausible alternative to the Global North epistemologies and ontologies which in the past represented development in Africa. However, achieving such developments remains a utopia, given how development has been structured and systematised, especially in relation to Africa, rendering the discussions on MAE rhetoric. This article, however, provides insights into key challenges inhibiting the deepening of the MAE both conceptually and practically. These key challenges are (1) over-reliance on Western world views or paradigms, (2) dominance of donors as commissioners of African evaluations, (3) supply chain practices crowding out African evaluators and (4) perceived infancy of the evaluation profession in Africa.

This article is divided into six sections. Firstly, it outlines the significance of the article; secondly, it delves into the development of M&E globally and how this has shaped the evaluation practice in Africa. Thirdly, the article traces the birth of M&E in Africa and the genesis of the MAE and how important it can be. Fourthly, the key challenges hindering the proliferation of the MAE are discussed, as well as its implications on evaluation practice in the present and future. Fifthly, the article takes the key challenges and draws on actions that can be done to address the challenges. Finally, conclusions are drawn indicating further research and implications for evaluation practice.

Significance of the article

The MAE literature is quite substantial in relation to Africa. There are several studies relating to the birth of MAE but a relative dearth of studies that address factors inhibiting the proliferation of the MAE approach. In this case, the African Evaluation Association (AfREA) (2019), Basheka and Bymugisha (2015), Chilisa et al. (2016) and Cloete (2016) are some of the existing studies that have focused mainly on grounding the burgeoning of MAE approach and how it can be useful in shaping African evaluations. This article contributes knowledge to the evaluation community by (1) providing insight into key constraints hindering MAE approach, (2) stimulating conversations that will ensure local evaluators make use of Afrocentric paradigms that speak about the principles of *ubuntu,* (3) highlighting the need for improving evaluation training to increase the number of local evaluators who are able to adapt and use methods that are relevant and context specific and (4) more importantly, seeking to fill an important empirical lacuna in the MAE literature and feeding into more current literature on MAE approach.

Development of monitoring and evaluation globally

According to Madaus, Stufflebeam and Kellaghan (2000), the historical development of evaluation is difficult, if not impossible, to describe because of its informal utilisation by humans for thousands of years. The earliest traces of programme evaluation as a distinct scientific discipline used in social research methods to assess interventions, with the aim of making a value judgement and improving social interventions, date back to the 18th century (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman 2004). Rossi et al. (2004) and Mouton et al. (2014) indicated that the history of evaluations is linked to the Second World War when the U.S. federal government's vast expenditure on the social sphere required a more systematic and rigorous review of spending.

Studies – for instance, Mouton et al. (2014) – have discussed the various stages of development of M&E in accordance with the U.S. tradition. Mouton et al. (2014) further explained that by the time evaluation programmes reached Africa, scholars in the USA had already begun debating how to legitimise evaluation as a discipline. This effort involved having M&E as part of the curriculum in institutions of higher learning. Thus, different training options were conceptualised, thereby introducing a multitude of theories and evaluation paradigms. Although traces of theories are also seen in the UK, the level of the growth of MAE as a field in the UK is not at the same level as in the USA.

Basheka and Byamugisha (2015) noted that the international status of M&E research remains theoretically and methodologically influenced by the American tradition, and it is regarded as the 'motherland' of the field in terms of its:

> [*T*]rends, number of authors and their academic and professional influence, degree of professionalization, focus of academic

> programmes, legislation and institutionalisation of evaluation, development of models and approaches for evaluation, evaluation capacity building initiatives, evaluation standards and guiding principles, number and attendees of evaluation conferences and workshops, publications and their impact factor, guides and evaluation handbooks. (p.76)

Cloete (2016) reflects that most American influential evaluation scholars produced the first, and later, standardised textbooks for the curriculum and practice on this emerging transdiscipline (e.g. Greene 2005; Rossi et al. 2004; Scriven 1996), and they went on to train professional evaluators and practitioners across the world, including those from African countries. These efforts helped develop M&E based on the Western world view. From the 1990s, scholarship such as Chilisa (2015), Ofir (2018) and others pushed for the promotion and adoption of MAE research, training of African Monitoring and Evaluation practitioners and review of the curriculum in universities to reflect indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in order for M&E in Africa subscribe to Afrocentricism.

Monitoring and evaluation in Africa and the genesis of the 'Made in Africa Evaluation'

Whilst Mouton et al. (2014) outlines that there is limited research on the topic of the history of M&E in Africa, Basheka and Byamugisha (2015) and Cloete (2016) agree that the development of M&E theories and methods in Africa was influenced by the Global North discourses. Since the early 1990s, M&E has tremendously developed as a field of practice with focus on evaluation policies, voluntary organisations for professional evaluation (VOPEs), and M&E research. Commendably, there are now more than 30 national evaluation networks across the continent to date.

At its inception on the continent in the 1990s, MAE began by questioning the global universal approaches to evaluation, which traditionally had been based on the Western models. Monitoring and evaluation in Africa became geared up to fit in the different cultural and developmental contexts (Chilisa, et al. 2016; Cloete 2016). For instance, the AfrEA was formed and has embarked on a path to develop and constantly update its outlook to include contextually relevant evaluation standards. EvalIndigenous (2021) developed the Ethical Guidelines for African Evaluation to address the importance and relevance of cultural competence in conducting evaluations in Africa.

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing resistance to the dominance of Global North approaches, given their paternalistic tendencies in the evaluations commissioned in the developing countries, particularly in Africa (Cloete & Auriacombe 2019). In other words, discourses focusing on theories and methodologies applied in implementing evaluations commissioned in Africa have been premised on Western approaches and paradigms (Held 2019). Western-produced approaches and paradigms carry a misplaced view that Western experts should be responsible for adjudicating technical expertise, while administrative duties are relegated to local evaluation experts (Phillips 2018; Tirivanhu et al. 2018), because they have contextual know-how. This has been reinforced by the reality that the majority of the evaluation agencies commissioning evaluations in the region are predominantly from the Global North (Gaotlhobogwe et al. 2018).

At the 4th AfrEA Conference in 2007, at Niamey in Niger, a special discussion was organised by Sulley Gariba (a former AfrEA President and Zenda Ofir), entitled 'Making Evaluations Our Own'. A special stream statement was proposed by a few African volunteers, and Ofir (2018) reported that the statement formulated the notion of African-rooted and Africa-led M&E, which was based on:

> [*T*]he recognition of the importance of African values and worldviews and their central role in guiding and shaping evaluation in Africa, and fostering of intellectual leadership and capacity in evaluation in Africa for a greater role in guiding and developing evaluation theory and practice. (p.13)

It is this special stream to which the birth of the notion of MAE is attributed.

The MAE gained momentum at the 2012 Bellagio Conference, which was championed by the AfrEA (Chilisa 2015; Cloete 2016). This conference was a watershed for the MAE paradigm, dominated by various local M&E experts and scholars from different countries of Africa. A report entitled 'African Thought Leaders Forum on Evaluation and Development: Expanding Leadership in Africa' was produced at the completion of the conference (Omosa 2019).

The underlying principles of MAE as per the pronouncement of the Bellagio Conference are twofold. Firstly, it proposes that Africans should take ownership of the evaluation as a practice (Omosa 2019). Further, the practice and theory applied in evaluating, say, projects commissioned in the region, should be relevant and contextually address the needs of targeted communities. Secondly, the aim should be to ensure that Africa's knowledge systems and practices are recognised and embedded in evaluations (Omosa 2019). This also entails developing appropriate capacity-building interventions, spearheaded by universities, aimed at building a cohort of African scholars and practitioners with skills and knowledge to commission and utilise evidence emerging from evaluations (Omosa 2019). This will in the long run enhance the paradigm shift from the traditional settings whereby the evaluation agenda in Africa was primarily driven by Westerners (Tirivanhu et al. 2018).

The 8th and 9th AfrEA Conferences in Kampala and Abidjan in 2017 and 2019, respectively, further demonstrated the growing demand by African governments, Afrocentric scholars and practitioners to value add MAE on the continent. The birth of CLEAR-AA's flagship programme entitled 'Development Evaluation Training Programme in Africa' (DETPA) (hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand,

South Africa) is a game-changer towards embracing the MAE within higher education institutions. For instance, key training topics of the modules of the DETPA offered at the University of the Witwatersrand, among others, are:

- The African Evaluation Challenge: Made in Africa Evaluation
- Identification and Planning for Conditions and Capacities that Support an Effective M&E System
- Introduction to Theory of Change (University of the Witwatersrand 2022).

These can be read as Afrocentric in that the training is done against the backdrop of MAE, and hence the curriculum points towards remodelling the evaluation profession and training to address context-based challenges. Hence, DETPA, an annual 10-week M&E training programme, is designed to promote evidence-informed decision-making for sustainable socio-economic development by equipping M&E professionals with skills, knowledge and tools required for addressing local and global development challenges (Wits 2022). The DETPA curriculum is evidence to this and the training, apart from equipping evaluators with requisite skills, knowledge and worldviews, is based on ensuring that participants are equipped in evaluation Afrocentric paradigms and resources.

Lastly, the recently developed the African Evaluation Database (AfrED) is a useful initiative, although some areas need attention. The African Evaluation Database is funded by the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR-AA) (University of the Witwatersrand) and the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) (Stellenbosch University). It is a fully searchable online database that captures basic bibliographic and other related metadata on selected country papers, Terms of References (ToRs), presentations, journal articles, conference proceedings or papers or presentations and reports with respect to evaluations for the period 2005–2020 in Africa (Mapitsa 2019). It is intended to be a knowledge base useful to policymakers on specific content areas as well as those who are involved in evaluation and M&E capacity strengthening (Mapitsa 2019). It is these activities and initiatives that contribute towards increasing a pool of local evaluators with appropriate evaluation skills.

Key constraints facing 'Made in Africa Evaluations': A discussion

Worldviews or paradigms

The colonisation of African people had the dire consequence of desecrating their traditional knowledge systems, cultural practices, values and beliefs (Kaya & Seleti 2014). Western evaluation approaches are likely to influence subjugation of the African culture through neo-imperialism and the 'colonization of the mind' (Omosa 2019). Scholars such as Kaya and Seleti (2014) argue that Western worldviews of 'knowledge' are yet to appreciate alternative non-Western ways of knowing and producing knowledge. Consequently, the lack of this appreciation means that the historical account of African or IKS is less documented as evidenced in the broader academic discourses (Kaya & Seleti 2014).

African scholars such as Chilisa (2012), Chilisa and Tsheko (2014), Kaya and Seleti (2013) **and** Ofir (2018) have embarked on numerous initiatives aimed at championing indigenous or localised African knowledge systems in the evaluation sector. These scholars suggest processes (in some cases frameworks) of decolonisation and indigenisation as a plan of action for researchers and evaluators. They call on responsiveness to the culture of beneficiaries of developmental programmes in the evaluation process. Such initiatives ensure that Afrocentric approaches, *inter alia*, methodologies, ways of knowing and philosophies are embedded into the evaluation praxis.

Some of the studies elevating the Afrocentric paradigms include IKS (Geber & Keane 2013; Keane 2008; Keane, Khupe & Seehawe 2017; Khupe & Keane 2017) and decolonisation and indigenisation of evaluation (Chilisa et al. 2016). It is acknowledged (Chilisa et al. 2016; Geber & Keane 2013; Keane 2008; Keane et al. 2017; Khupe & Keane 2017) that African voices and their ways of knowing should be integrated into the discourse of development.

The dominance of donors as commissioners of African evaluations

Accountability for financial investments injected in Africa by Euro-Western donor communities elevated the demand for evaluation and has played a significant role in the institutionalisation of evaluation practices (Tirivanhu et al. 2018). This is corroborated by the AfrED database report commissioned by CLEAR-AA in collaboration with the CREST for the period 2005–2015, which illustrates that 69% of the evaluations were made by Western donor funders, followed by a 31% split between nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and governments (Mapitsa, Tirivanhu & Pophiwa 2019).

Another factor regards responsibilities and management of projects that eventually are subjected to M&E. Mouton and Wildschut (2017) reported that Western evaluators usually assume leadership roles responsible for technical and strategic activities during the evaluation process, while African experts are tasked with supporting roles, for example, administrative and logistical roles, denigrating African evaluation in the process (Tirivanhu et al. 2018).

However, the notion that Africans are less skilled is refutable, as there is a substantive number of skilled African evaluators. African evaluators have not been presented with opportunities to exhibit their evaluation skills, and as a result, they are more theory-oriented as compared to practice. It is incumbent upon these African evaluators to use relevant postcolonial indigenous theories such as *ubuntuism*, pan-Africanism, decoloniality, among others, and depart from as well as resist the dominant Euro-Western approaches. As Chilisa (2012) concluded:

> [*T*]he resistance is a challenge to Western-educated indigenous researchers, demanding that they begin to interrogate their multiple identities as colonizers participating in the othering of their people through the use of western research methodologies as peripheral. Others marginalized by the global network of first-world research elites and by global markets that continue to define and determine knowledge discourses on the basis of global market price. (p. 49)

However, and while the financial power of Euro-Western commissioners cannot be avoided at the moment because they commission evaluations for interventions they fund, it is suggested that key stakeholders in evaluation in Africa, such as African governments, should also contribute both politically and financially to the task of the development of standards to ensure that they reflect the contexts in which evaluation is taking place (Ngwabi & Wildschut 2019). Cloete (2016) noted that:

> Evaluations in Africa are still largely commissioned by non-African stakeholders who are mostly international donors or development agencies that run or fund development programmes on the continent. (p. 55)

The above comment shows that the culture of procuring evaluators from abroad is strongly embedded in Africa, and logically it entails that funders have to and should use their approaches to evaluate projects. It explains why there is a bias that external evaluators from outside Africa have a more established evaluation practice compared to their African counterparts. As such, governments in Africa should take heed and are the main stakeholders to promote MAE.

Although it is understandable that it is not avoidable that international agencies work in Africa, seeing as well that evaluations are donor-rooted in the region, a compliance requirement for external evaluations has also led to the assumption that evaluations should be conducted through an external consultant (Blaser-Mapitsa & Chirau 2019:39), which may and should not be the case. Questions to answer would therefore regard whether international evaluators understand the context within which the programme was implemented more than the local evaluators. Understanding and having knowledge of context is a prerequisite for assessing something (Fitzpatrick 2012). Yet, in practice, there are contextual factors that influence and shape evaluation but they are infrequently reflected on. A study by Phillips (2018) on four major donors who commission evaluations in South Africa found that the majority of international donor evaluation contracts in South Africa are obtained by international companies who often subcontract local expertise to enable them to understand the local context.

The question here is whether the local subcontracted institution operates fully guided with MAE or not. The extent to which the evaluation criteria, methods and approaches are contextually relevant remains questionable with most of the so-called 'local' evaluation institutions, which appear to be local in physical location and not in the MAE sense, as most are often designed by the Global North for the same purpose.

This situation raises concerns around the epistemological competencies to conduct evaluations in African contexts, particularly if they are led by donor or development organisations that do not recognise the importance of this aspect in evaluation practice (SenGupta, Hopson & Thompson-Robinson 2004). The effect of this is the perpetuation of the Western research paradigms. Furthermore, it presents the Western ways of knowing as superior to indigenous ways of knowing and evaluators (Chilisa 2012). Once epistemological issues are enshrined in practice, MAE will be a possibility rather than rhetoric.

Monitoring and evaluation is a growing profession across Africa, and this is indicative of the value of M&E in bringing about accountability, transparency and good governance. Generally, there has been mushrooming of VOPEs across the African continent over the past two decades. The continent now boasts the Zambia M&E Association, Uganda Evaluation Association, South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA), Rwanda Monitoring and Evaluation Association, Zimbabwe Evaluation Association, Evaluation Association of Kenya and Ghana Monitoring and Evaluation Forum among many other VOPEs at least in Anglophone Africa. There is, however, slow progress in professionalising the discipline globally, as only a few countries have formally professionalised evaluation (Podems 2014).

Professionalising evaluation is a priority in Africa so that it can promote MAE. The idea of professionalisation appeals to those looking to improve quality control for the practice of evaluation (Lavelle 2014; Montrosse-Moorhead & Griffith 2017; Podems, Goldman & Jacob 2014). Without the standardisation of evaluator competencies on the continent, it is difficult to fit the 'Made in Africa' concept into the several other issues of standardisation in the region.

The debates around the professionalisation in African countries are also informed by Global North ideas that might not be applicable to the African context. This has a bearing on the slow progress of the 'Made in Africa' concept, given the need of a paradigmatic shift to have Afrocentric evaluation. However, M&E capacity-building programmes such as the CLEAR-AA Initiative, the International Programme on Development Evaluation Training (IPDET), pieces of training offered by VOPEs such as the AfrEA and SAMEA, as well as universities have been developed to contribute to the growth of M&E in Africa (Abrahams 2015; Basheka & Byamugisha 2015; Wao et al. 2017). Further interrogation is required to check the depth of the curriculum in addressing MAE issues so that the training does not generally mimic Western-produced paradigms in the profession.

To buttress the aforesaid views, current efforts in capacity-building in Africa often rely on theories and approaches of global icons such as Robert Stake, Michael Scriven,

David Fetterman, Michel Quinn Patton and Mark Lipsey, which remain reference points for most African scholars wanting to learn M&E. This needs to be revised and reviewed, as reliance on Western thought has the obvious effect of reproducing Western-induced systems which MAE is trying to deal with. Hence, African evaluators need to reflect on and question the ontology and epistemology of these mainstream approaches and theories and their transferability to the African context. Without decolonising the mind, this will lead to deficit-based views and a stereotyped understanding of how the evaluation landscape should progress (Omoso 2019), further perpetuating Western paradigms.

Way forward

It is important that opportunities should be created for the collaboration between emerging and experienced African scholars to proactively pursue evaluations that are aligned with the MAE approach. However, this issue requires deeper conversations within the evaluation community around ways in which this shift in approach can be attained. Efforts should be directed towards evaluation training through the teaching of evaluation and evaluators' competencies in order to ensure that evaluators gain necessary Afrocentric technical skill sets (Thomas & Madison 2010).

Omoso (2019) argued that while it is necessary to have pieces of training, it is not sufficient; focus should go beyond acquiring technical competencies, and African evaluators need to be taught African philosophies and critically question hegemonic Western assumptions and worldviews. Wehipeihana et al. (2010) also argued that the:

> [*P*]ractice of evaluation is not restricted to the application of methods and techniques to a problem or issue. Rather, it is as much about who we are, and where we position ourselves in relation to others, as it is about what we do. (p. 187)

Central to this fact is the importance of African evaluators developing a body of knowledge with Afrocentric paradigms, ways of knowing and methodologies that are African and aligned with key elements of who Africans are as suggested by Wehipeihana et al. (2010).

Commissioners of evaluations, particularly donors, could consider revising procurement regulations geared at facilitating the use of African-centred methodologies and approaches drawn from the body of IKS, which is the hub of knowledge production and the very pivot of African existence. In teaching M&E in universities, African theories and paradigms are a prerequisite to decolonise the curriculum that bears ontological, axiological and epistemological assumptions of African needs. This is central in making MAE a possibility rather than rhetoric and may influence the evaluation practice in Africa.

Conclusions

This article zooms in the four constraints hindering the maturity of the MAE. It argued that there is a need for greater cohesion. Furthermore, it was noted that there is a need for more intensive MAE-oriented interventions aimed at championing the MAE discourse led by African and non-African practitioners and scholars alike. These include the intensification of research between experienced and emerging African scholars to establish a body of knowledge for MAE and adjustments to procurement practices, which could, for example, include a compulsory split between African and Western evaluation experts with equally shared responsibilities in evaluation studies; there is a need to commission and conduct interdisciplinary evaluations and an expedited momentum towards the professionalisation of the evaluation practice in Africa. Decolonisation of M&E is necessary and can take a form of multiplicity of interventions. This article argued that there is no prescription on how the decolonisation project should take shape but it is up to Africans, and even non-Africans, to come up with ways of empowering indigenous people and their ways of knowing. Educational systems are or should be at the forefront of the decolonial struggle, ensuring that the M&E curriculum is based on IKS and is relevant to foster MAE. This, of course, will not go without challenges, not only in the way the curriculum and teaching approaches are designed but also the way in which knowledge is generated and adapted to conform to African worldviews and realities.

Decolonising the M&E curriculum not only relates to curriculum changes but also goes beyond that. The majority of programmes in Africa are funded by international donors. Reflecting on that, questions that need to be answered are as follows: what implications does the Africanisation and decolonisation project have on funding models for M&E in Africa? Will the MAE be sustained without international funding, as most African countries are under austerity measures? These are some of the questions that remain unanswered and contribute to the approach to be neither rhetoric nor a possibility. Hence, this article does not at all provide answers but further stimulates conversations around how best can we buttress MAE in the face of constraints raised by this article.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

T.J.C. and M.R. used empirical findings of scholars as well as their experience in working within the National Evaluation Capacity Development (NECD) initiative, and they have contributed equally to the writing of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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