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AFRICA EVALUATION INDABA

Finding a Way Together



What practical steps can we take to transform evaluation practice in Africa?

GET A SEAT ON THE TABLE

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How do you like your tea? Do you have your 'Ketepa', Kenyan tea, jar in the kitchen and have you grown up drinking it brewed in a pot, with a lot of sugar and milk? Again, I ask, how do you like your tea? Well never mind, I am buying the tea for you and I know what you need. So, I will tell you how to drink your tea!

My respected African colleagues, I agree we need that cup of tea (we are aid dependent nations). But are we so grateful for that 'free' cup of tea, that it means we will take it as it comes, drink it however we are told and then even worse not be part of the feedback process reporting on how that tea tasted? We have over the years just become passive consumers.

This write up is not about the West versus Africa; but more about an inclusive, equal seat at the table. We must always remain grateful to foreign donor agencies for their funds and guidance; because many of us who have participated in the African Indaba have our own salaries paid by these funds. The aid industry, will naturally, always be skewed towards the West and this is not something we should try to fix. However, I propose transforming evaluation practice through making national ownership more than a tick box exercise, and this agenda must be driven by the African people not donors. We must ask or fight for an equal seat at the table. We have the right to ask for this, because it is our countries, our lives and our tea. So, what is our added value? WE ARE THE MOST SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION to any intervention.

Firstly, it is integral that African evaluators find their voice. This means that we must have something tangible to say; before we question why we are not being heard. No one can ignore a better way of doing things, something that makes aid money more effective or mobilises it.

For example, using the Made in Africa (MAE) approach:

1. **A significant mass of people** need to talk about MAE at **every opportunity**, explaining its importance.
2. We must blend it with existing approaches e.g. feminist evaluation until donors are ready to accept MAE as a standalone approach.
3. Get endorsements from high profile evaluators. It does not matter how we get noticed just that we **need** to get noticed.

Secondly, during COVID-19 we have a unique opportunity in the field to take the lead on technologies for evaluation in Africa. Because, there is no one other than the people who live with slow internet, poor signal etc who are better placed to advise which technologies can work and are culturally suitable and usable in the field.

Thirdly, we must be **one**, be empowered by our people. Build each other up both in conversation and most importantly in our minds. Since childhood, I have watched American TV, all the superheroes are white. Knowing that African superheroes exist starts with a gradual process of seeing them with my familiar superheroes, as equals. For example, if there is a panel discussion, it should include an African national; as we have fought for the rights of women, we need to advocate for African evaluators.

Finally, young evaluators must be groomed to have a mindset of innovating, creating and leading the profession. We must advocate for Africans to lead evaluations, rewarding experienced national experts over expats. Youth should prove their worth so much, that one day, national experts can demand equal pay, as their international colleagues.

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