

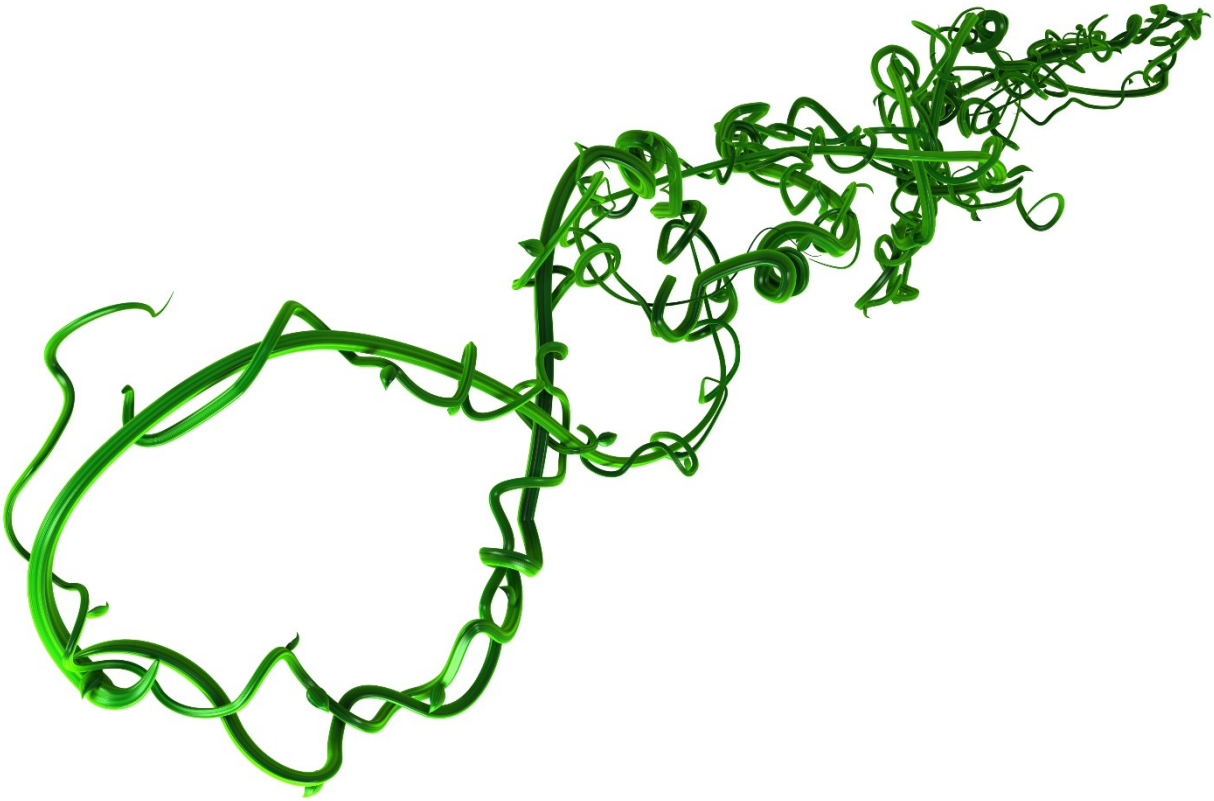
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“THEY ARE INTERTWINEDNTERTWINED” HARM AND THE M&E CYCLE

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HARM AND THE M&E CYCLE

Vidhya Shanker, PhD & Antony Maikuri, MDS

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Executive Summary

This research on Harm and the M&E Cycle grows from its sponsors' ongoing work to safeguard participants, intended beneficiaries, local communities, and environments from abuse and other types of harm at the hands of development aid agencies through improved training and evaluation/ M&E practice. It was produced through the review of six bodies of literature and individual interviews with eleven informants.

Methodology

We reviewed literature from M&E and Humanitarian Aid; Mutual Aid, Abolitionism & Digital Privacy; the Harm Reduction Movement; Trauma-Informed & Healing Centered Practice; Critical Development Studies & Feminist Evaluation; and Restorative & Regenerative Practices. We soon realized that we as researchers, coming from similar but different contexts, were interpreting "the cycle" differently. Born, raised, and partly trained in Kenya, Antony was envisioning the cycle of harm. Born, raised, and trained in the USA, Vidhya was envisioning conventional cycles of monitoring and evaluation, continuous improvement, and program development.

In an effort to practice and model intentional collaboration between colonial and subjugated knowledge, we transparently shared both interpretations with informants during our interviews. Informants' areas of expertise spanned development, evaluation/ M&E, technology, environmental justice, and conflict. Largely representing colonized and enslaved peoples around the world, almost all identified strongly with the cycle of harm and less so with the other cycles shared. They overwhelmingly addressed systems of power surrounding individual acts of harm.

Findings

Informants described harm as inseparable from and intertwined with evaluation/ M&E. Furthermore, the harm in evaluation/ M&E that they described was far too pervasive and fundamental to fit within prefabricated containers of who, what, when, where, or even how and why. As such, this report focuses more on their understanding of harm in practice than on prevention or repair. More specifically, informants said that harm is created through routine and taken-for-granted processes associated with dominant paradigms of knowledge production. These practices reduce context, amplifying simplistic narratives and drowning out local narratives. We learned that while harm is inseparable from evaluation/ M&E, it is not inevitable: Undoing harm is also embedded in processes of knowledge production.

Discussion

We realized that because our research process to produce knowledge about Harm and the M&E Cycle paralleled the M&E process itself, we could do or undo harm depending on whether or not we approached the process through the reductive practices associated with dominant paradigms. This led to our awareness that—if developed within a single aid agency or even within a larger field of practice—yet another safeguarding tool, policy, or training cannot undo harm. These responses to allegations of harm reinforce top-down relations of dominance between donor and NGO, headquarters and country office, management and staff, and staff and beneficiary. In that sense, they are carceral—conforming to a racialized logic of surveillance and punishment that further entrenches the concentration of power and centralization of control. Instead, informants suggested flattening hierarchies and flipping structures of accountability.

Conclusion

Undoing harm requires collaborating with participants, intended beneficiaries, and local communities to produce knowledge that:

1) tells the truth about the harm inflicted in both the recent past and the distant past, starting with organizations' origin stories in their surrounding communities, and
2) resurrects, conceptualizes, and attends to the (re)birth of indigenous* ways of knowing and indigenous processes of accountability.

Such relationally produced knowledge requires an emergent evaluation/ M&E design—an organic structure that can encompass the time and space involved in practicing reflexivity and reciprocal processes necessary for democratic decision making. Informants distinguished democratic from participatory processes. The latter remain framed by those who control resources whereas the former allows for truth-telling through deliberation and dialogue.

Acknowledgments

We as the researchers would like to thank Steering Committee members Stephen Porter, Dugan Fraser, Linda Raftree, Veronica Olazabal, and Rodney Hopson for the opportunity to conduct the research as well as for their assistance with recruitment efforts and generosity with critical feedback; their patience and understanding regarding the constraints for us as researchers and for informants related to COVID-19 and national uprisings; as well as their accommodation of our emergent design and possibly unexpected results. Additionally, we are grateful to Silvia De Sousa for her steadfast courtesy and persistence to work across time zones and financial institutions. We sincerely appreciate the encouragement, interest, and recruitment efforts of Rituu Nanda, Sharon Attipoe-Dorcoo, Ann Hendrix-Jenkins, Chloe Ione Stull-Lane, Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, Alyson Lipsky, Kristie Drucza, and Sisay Mammo. We are grateful to our informants, some of whom circled back when we provided the opportunity to offer clarification and feedback on our draft. We appreciate the close and careful reading of the reviewers, who gave detailed feedback and stretched our thinking, and some of whom joined an additional sense-making session to extend the work.

Thanks also to all the organizers and participants at the AEA 2020 conference session who shared their thoughts and experiences. We would like to call out Drs. Leah Peoples and Nicole Bowman for continuing to publicly complicate and disrupt prevailing notions of democracy. We would like to acknowledge Katie Regelson for her interest in and attention to multiple revisions of the poll. Lastly, we would like to acknowledge Zachary Tilton and the Integration of Technology into Evaluation TIG members for creating space for a discussion of harm in their week's worth of AEA365 Blog entries. Preparation of the content for these different formats and audiences refined our analysis and interpretation.

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* We treat specific categories of political, cultural, and national identity, alliance, and solidarity as proper nouns, capitalizing them accordingly. To avoid reifying artificial racial categories and racialized/ racially coded categories, however, we do not capitalize such words when they are used as more general modifiers—for example, "indigenous" as opposed to "exogenous" knowledge.



Introduction

Like all research—and evaluation—this work is shaped by the historical, geographical, and political context surrounding those involved in its development, in addition to the professional, disciplinary, cultural, political, and personal backgrounds of its sponsors, researchers, and informants. This section describes the report's origin story, honors its ancestry, and shares its purpose. We intentionally use the first person here and throughout the report to transparently acknowledge this research as produced by human beings situated within larger contexts.

The sponsors

The Steering Committee sponsoring this research consists of five senior monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practitioners representing the World Bank, CLEAR-Anglophone Africa, the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation & Assessment, MERL-Tech, and The Rockefeller Foundation. Steering Committee members contributed to the original framing their knowledge and experiences at organizations where widescale abuses have occurred as well as their expertise and commitments related to complex ecological frameworks;[1] the limitations of "unintended consequences;"[2] healing harm to non-human systems;[3] initiatives like AfrEA's Made in Africa approach;[4] and ensuring data rights, privacy, and protection.[5] Having reflected on harm and M&E internally, with philanthropic foundations, and at multilateral agency and professional association conferences for two years, the Steering Committee sought to map the harms that arise within M&E practice in a publication oriented for practitioners, beyond what is available in professional associations' current ethical guidelines.[6] The publication's content as originally conceptualized would expand on the Steering Committee's people-centered perspective of the ways that M&E can contribute to harm, including to but extending beyond vulnerable populations. These ways include how:

- Privileging certain voices and interests exacerbates exclusion
- Donor demands for data increase risks in data privacy
- Current M&E practices create cultures of compliance
- Skewed and inaccurate findings contribute to poor decisions
- Evaluation does not detect harm[7]
- Cultural familiarity and insensitivity can each potentially obfuscate the discernment of harm
- Current training ill-equips M&E staff to handle allegations of wrongdoing

Reviewers of the Steering Committee's initial concept paper pointed to five broad areas to consider refining for the intended publication:

- Both the value and the limitations of technical rigor
- Existing guidelines on doing no harm from humanitarian aid
- The multiple scales of harm's causes and effects
- The role of power and control
- Defining both "harm" and "cycle"



Figure 1. This research grows from the Steering Committee's ongoing work

We as the researchers picked up these five threads in the summer and fall of 2020. Specifically, this report focuses on understandings of harm in practice. Relevant actors and the undoing of harm are also addressed to a lesser extent.

The researchers

Two evaluation scholars conducted this research during the COVID-19 pandemic. Coming from highly relational cultures—in South Asia and in East Africa—we resonate with the initial reviewers' comments regarding scale as well as the Steering Committee members' commitment to complex ecological frameworks and unintended consequences. As products of British colonization, voluntary migration, and U.S. education—specifically in public policy and

evaluation—we also resonate with reviewers' comments regarding power and control and Steering Committee members' commitment to Africa's decolonization.

We found ourselves reacting negatively to the modernist, and racialized, implications regarding stagnation and progress of well-intended phrases like "leave no one behind." Additionally, we are cautious about the potential for people-centered models—while likely intended to humanize otherwise technocratic fields—to individualize the experience of both harm and healing at the expense of the collective experience of social groups and non-human beings. Visually depicting the ways that M&E can contribute to harm around, and with arrows directed at, an archetypical image of mother and child—again, likely in an attempt to focus attention on those at the intersection of multiple dimensions of harm—similarly has the potential to otherize those who disproportionately experience harm. It risks objectifying them as passive rather than active participants or agents of resistance within harmful dynamics.

As racially otherized development and evaluation practitioners based in Minneapolis, Minnesota—birthplace of the American Indian Movement[8] and current epicenter of negotiations between municipalities and community groups to institutionalize notions of violence prevention, safety, and healing in ways that challenge reliance on law enforcement[9]—we proceeded from the Steering Committees' conceptualization of this research and initial reviewers' comments to it as follows:

- We started our desk research with the M&E and humanitarian literature and analyzed it in relation to five bodies of literature that critique the carceral state[10] (see **Figures 1** and **3** and **How is harm understood?**)
- We framed our desk research and interviews with informants within Ecological Systems Theory (see **Figure 2**). These levels roughly correspond with those offered by Charancle and Lucchi[11]
- We worked toward definitions of "harm" and the M&E "cycle" through both desk research and interviews with informants (see **How is harm understood?** and **How does harm relate to M&E?**, respectively**)**

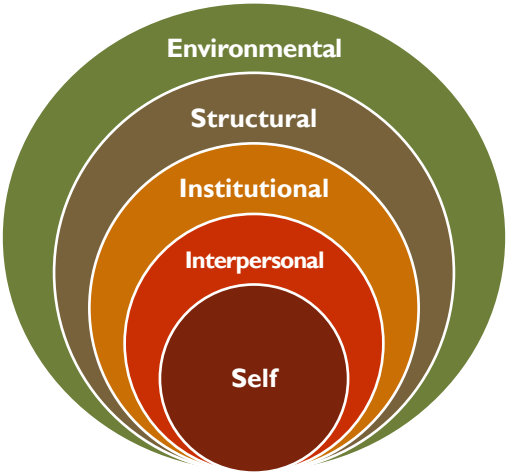


Figure 2. An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological Model illustrates the multiple, nested levels of harm's cause and effect, subject and object

The informants

We conducted loosely structured individual interviews with 11 informants. Interviews took place in English, by videoconference, and with no stipend, delimiting potential informants to those who were proficient in English, had access to the internet, and could spare an unpaid hour of time. Informants hold multiple areas of expertise individually and collectively: Four are evaluation/ M&E practitioners within multi-lateral agencies; four are independent evaluation/ M&E practitioners; two are development practitioners or strategists within large INGOs or multi-lateral agencies; two are faculty in higher education (in evaluation and community organizing/ policy-making); and one is the executive director of a nonprofit organization. Additionally, six informants hold expertise related to economic development. Other areas of expertise include international affairs, conflict, and fragile states; environmental sustainability; technology; ethics; evaluation; and gender and feminism. Many lead international evaluation bodies affiliated with multilateral agencies (see **Appendix A: Summary of Informants**).

We intentionally prioritized informants representing the experiences and perspectives of colonized and enslaved peoples. We recognize the North American practice of *evaluation* and its stated emphasis on program effectiveness as distinct from the humanitarian and development aid industries' mandated accountability to INGO headquarters and external donors through *M&E*, including its historical emphasis on project inputs and outputs. However, we intentionally included members of colonized and enslaved groups within the settler states of North America to avoid reinscribing racially coded, decontextualized notions of the "Global North" and "Global South" and to avoid reinforcing American exceptionalism[12] with respect to the USA. The sample also included two white settlers in the Global South.

In preparing the protocol and consent process, especially, we tried to be mindful of the potential harm that the interview process itself could cause informants (see **Appendix B: Interview Consent Form**). During the interviews, we shared our preliminary analysis of the literature's treatment of harm (see **Appendix C: Interview Protocol**). Additionally, we solicited feedback on a draft of this report with all informants and incorporated revisions that we received.



How is harm understood?

Oxford Languages and *Merriam Webster* define "harm" as a noun meaning intentional or unintentional injury, damage, or hurt; pain, grief, insult, sorrow, scathe; and a transitive verb meaning to cause any of these nouns. Used for the first time in Middle English, "harm" is akin to Old High German for "injury" and Old Church Slavonic for "shame." In utilitarian ethics, doing harm is known as malfeasance, in contrast to beneficence—or doing good. In this section, we start with the M&E literature but focus on the Humanitarian Aid literature's treatment of harm, as suggested by reviewers of the Steering Committee's original concept paper. We then discuss practitioners' understanding of harm gained through interviews.

Harm in the literature: Definitions, associations, conceptions

To the extent that harm is discussed in the general M&E literature, it is largely with respect to safeguarding populations considered vulnerable, with vulnerability treated as a static category rooted in identity, rather than a more fluid category that is produced relationally and dependent on structurally and situationally mediated power dynamics. Inasmuch as we aimed for the perspective of those whose identities are intersectionally marginalized to illuminate our analysis, we treat both the potential to inflict harm as well as the vulnerability to experience harm as structurally and situationally determined rather than in terms of discrete populations and fixed categories of identity.

As stated earlier, working from Minneapolis, we see parallels between evaluation/ M&E practice and law enforcement. Both occupations are widely presented as and believed to be forces for good. Groups disproportionately experiencing exploitation, marginalization, and violence, however, often see both as a force literally and figuratively on their neck. The parallels include not just unintentional harm but also harm directly inflicted by members of both occupations, including hyper-surveillance, brutality, forced experimentation, and reproductive injustice as well as the ongoing sexual violation particularly of women, children, and people with disabilities. In both cases, these are not isolated acts of poorly trained individuals. They result from asymmetrically structured mechanisms of control. Both fields originated as part of such mechanisms[13] and today, both can involve upholding unjust policies and engaging in dehumanizing practices. Of course, many entering the fields of both policing and evaluation/ M&E do so in the interest of ensuring accountability—including to local communities—and have worked to change the fields accordingly.[14]

Our selection of bodies of literature (see **Figure 3**) to expand and deepen understanding of harm is rooted in this comparison between law enforcement and evaluation/ M&E, which runs throughout this report along with other metaphors to describe the dynamics involved in evaluation/ M&E that we derived from the literature and interviews. Beyond those focused on safety and accountability, these include those focused on reduction, healing, and restoration.



Figure 3. Bodies of literature included in the desk research

Humanitarian Aid: *Do no harm*

- The notion of "do no harm"—non-malfeasance—originates in Hippocrates' admonition to "have two special objects in view with regard to disease, namely, to do good or to do no harm."[15]
- The phrase was advanced in the context of humanitarian aid in the early 1990s by the Do No Harm Project (formerly the Local Capacities for Peace Project), based at the Collaborative for Development Action, which consisted of donor agencies, UN organizations, bilateral organizations, and international and local NGOs.
- Having studied the interaction between aid and conflict, the U.S.-based group concluded that aid can both exacerbate and mitigate conflict.[16]
- Acknowledging that interventions become part of the local context and that harm can arise from rushing to act as well as failing to act—the perceived tension between advocating for rights and maintaining peace—the group's resulting caution is not to avoid harm entirely but rather to balance doing harm with doing good: The cure must not be worse than the disease, and the intervention must not destroy (or harm) that which it is meant to help.[17]
- The framework was explicitly intended "to help aid providers think through the issues so they could take more control of their impacts."[18]

Sectoral specificities

Surprisingly considering the level of attention paid to the phrase's medical provenance, "harm" itself is rarely defined in the humanitarian literature until relatively recently. Juxtaposed or used interchangeably with "harm" are "negative effects" or "negative impacts."[19] Also in relation to harm, the Do No Harm literature mentions "risk," which is often contrasted with opportunities[20]—reminiscent of business management literature—and to some extent discussed in legal terms regarding agencies' duty of care to individual participants, particularly representing groups considered vulnerable.[21] Charancle and Lucchi created a taxonomy of harm that draws from rights-based discourse, including negative impacts on the environment, economy, community, and individual rights.[22]

CDA has also discussed Do No Harm in terms of evaluation, acknowledging that evaluation itself is an intervention.[23] Limitations of Do No Harm are that it has grown from a framework into a principle that is ritualistically applied.[24] Additionally, it is typically applied at the project as opposed to the operational level.[25] Finally, because most theories of change and logic models articulate the positive effects that interventions are aimed at rather than their anticipated and unanticipated negative results, only positive effects tend to be measured. Negative effects appear "unintended."[26]

Do No Harm has been applied internationally as well as domestically in the USA, beyond humanitarian aid—especially in development, as both fields increasingly contextualize disasters within larger ecologies.[27] Its diagram of its seven-step process[28] is included as **Appendix D: The Do No Harm process**. Do No Harm has essentially become a brand, often abbreviated as DNH, with an entire suite of trainings and products.

Professional, disciplinary, and cultural specificities

Humanitarian aid's Do No Harm concept adds a medical metaphor to this report's existing policing metaphor to describe the dynamics involved in evaluation/ M&E. Like the notion of "harm" itself, defined early in this section, both the phrase and the brand "Do No Harm" come from specific linguistic, cultural, ontological, epistemological, and axiological locations and orientations. While 4th century BCE Greek medical ethics, the phrase's lineage, are much more nuanced than present-day usage, common, contemporary usage reflects prevailing power dynamics between physician and patient that underlie professionalized, diagnostic models of medicine that have displaced indigenous medicinal knowledge[29] and healing traditions historically held by women.[30] Like evaluation, even though professionalized medicine is currently numerically dominated by women, it remains gendered as masculine—an association made more evident when we juxtapose it with professionalized nursing.

Within this narrow usage, illness resides in the patient and healing comes from outside. This is distinct from an understanding of illness as being structurally produced—not unlike the natural disasters, violence, and poverty that are addressed in humanitarian and development work—and of healing as taking place relationally. Recent scholarship suggests that gender, class, and racial disparities in health can largely be attributed to the asymmetrical structural dynamics underlying unequal access to the social determinants and dimensions of health—in which health care

systems and individual providers like physicians are implicated—as opposed to hereditary and behavioral factors that lie within individuals.[31] Even epigenetics, which theorizes the transmission of trauma intergenerationally through DNA, reflects an interaction between individual and structural forces.[32]

Moreover, ritualistic application of Do No Harm risks treating harm as a discrete incident or event that evaluation, humanitarian, and development practitioners can avoid "doing" as opposed to a persistent condition or recurring pattern that unfolds and often compounds over time—much like chronic stress and associated diseases. It risks the prevention and repair of harm being concomitantly treated as transactional as opposed to potentially long-term, transformational practices that require ongoing labor. Do No Harm's cultural specificity thus lies in its metaphorical use of reductive as opposed to holistic or relational approaches to health and medicine as well as in its extolment of individual agency on the part of the physician, aid worker, development practitioner, or evaluator.[33]

Other models of medicine—and, indeed, other professions beyond medicine—offer different ideas about the distinctions between self and other, process and product, and cause and effect—rooted in interdependence, intersubjectivity, and mutual causality—that Do No Harm does not necessarily reflect or accommodate. Unlike increasingly popular prescriptions to forge relationships with "the other," many ethical traditions—particularly within indigenous and feminist knowledge and values systems—start from the premise that we begin life in-relation,[34] specifically in a woman's body that serves as our first natural environment.[35] These ethical traditions, to varying degrees, arose in the interviews discussed below.

Harm in practice: Definitions, associations, conceptions

Harm is...hurting, taking away—the opposite of love, respect, truth

Informed by our desk research, the above observations about the metaphors of policing and medicine were shared transparently with informants as we asked them to describe their own understanding of harm as well as its prevention and repair in relation to evaluation/ M&E. Depending on their background and current role, informants varied in the extent to which the invitation to share their understanding of harm led them to discuss the framework of Do No Harm/ DNH, the phrase "do no harm," or the concept of harm more generally. Informants almost unilaterally described harm as inseparable from evaluation/ M&E. Eight of the eleven informants explicitly named the interconnectedness or interaction between harm and evaluation/ M&E. Importantly, informants felt that while harm may be inevitable, it is not natural. Their responses were overwhelmingly tied to larger power dynamics—legacies of historical colonization and enslavement as well as products of ongoing structures of domination.

Harm is contextual

Not unlike the literature, informants were generally reluctant to define harm, although they did provide examples. Many felt that harm is not only culturally defined, but also too contextual—one said "overly complex"—to be defined universally. For example, the potential harmfulness of state-centric solutions varies depending on states' structure, development, and relationship with their people. One informant named nepotism as a foreign concept in many communities: It is considered morally just to work with people you trust and are materially tied to, providing them opportunities for growth and livelihood. Another described how the standards of harm in development aid, where we prioritize those most impoverished, would not apply in humanitarian aid, where we do not consider indicators of need. A third shared how as an outsider, they saw the long-term distribution of food in a particular community as harmful—displacing the local knowledge, economy, and spirit of innovation. But many community members themselves, and particularly community leaders, would not necessarily see it as harmful because they benefit from it personally or politically. One informant deviated from the rest, however, in being clear about the definition of harm, which they described not in terms of particular practices but rather in terms of virtues. On stating, "harm is already a least-common-denominator kind of word to me, so any example will be too narrow," they listed the following synonyms and antonyms: "hurting, taking away—the opposite of love, respect, truth."

Informants noted that harm includes acts of commission as well as omission. Broader categories of harm that rose to the surface from the interviews are detailed below. To the extent possible, informants' understandings of harm are organized by ecological level, starting from the self, although more than one informant noted that the Ecological

Model masks the complex interactions among levels. Informants are quoted at length in this section to preserve their voice and illustrate their thought process.

Harm is embodied

One informant—one of two who identified as white and of European descent—acknowledged that their "color is just power" and can inflict harm, regardless of how they engage. "I bring a lot of history with me…. I can be sitting and being very horizontal, very nice. I can be developing a very nice dialogue with people, but there are things happening there in the silence that derive from history, from existing colonial relations, from inequalities in my country."

Others, identifying with indigenous groups and groups of color, talked in a similar but necessarily different way about the distinction between how their bodies are classified and the knowledge and decision-making power that they bring to situations. They specifically discussed the exploitation of their phenotypes and identities, or their witnessing the exploitation of others who they considered just like them, were it not for their hybrid identities. They discussed the difficulty of occupying that contested space that is simultaneously "us" and "them."

- *"Recently, I experienced this with an African American consultant leading a team of non-Native consultants working with a tribe. I figured she would not do this because she was Black and also an "HR inclusion" consultant. Even though I was the only Native consultant working with Native people, I was not listened to or able to influence the process, plan, and work to be more culturally relevant and responsive. There was no room…for change and my leadership was seen as challenging authority instead of appropriately influencing the process. I saw how this 'using' and objectifying is not just a racist behavior of white consultants. It's a way of thinking about money and expertise when putting together and leading and working with a team. The power dynamic has to be talked about and thought through, and the weight of the voices: Who's going to determine what? How are decisions going to be made? If there is no shared power, there is no inclusion or authenticity.*
- *"Working in development humanitarian aid is…personal to me. I remember finding out my grandmother's side of the family were absolutely a recipient [of aid]. So, this is a very personal journey. It's not something that I do because it's altruistic and I want to save the world…. When people are talking about language like 'beneficiary.' So how many brown women are we going to have in these workshops?' and capacity building. These are people like my grandmother. There—but for the courage of my mother, being a single mom and pushing my sister and I through school, and uni, and etc., etc., etc. The privilege that I now find myself having in my 40s. There—but for all of that—go I.*

As such, the experience of harm even among practitioners is palpable and visceral, not just abstract or cognitive, and resists technocratic solutions.

there are things happening there in the silence that derive from history, from existing colonial relations, from inequalities in my country

Harm is the internalization of colonial narratives

Many informants referred to the mis-alignment between prevailing ethical frameworks within development and evaluation/ M&E and their ancestral frameworks, tying the imposed reduction of alternatives to a decreased ability to draw on other ways of knowing and being able to discern how to respond or proceed. These discussions, like those about the embodiment of harm, illustrate the interaction among multiple levels of harm—specifically the structural and self levels—which are typically mediated through interpersonal relations and institutional mechanisms. In the process, they called attention also to the difficulty of locating cause and effect on the nested levels that the Ecological Model offers.

- *"In some contexts, yes, structural and environmental are major but internalized harm as well can be the largest level in some of the communities that we've seen, where it's more psychological. It's not something that you can see immediately when you're there and yet, it could be one of the biggest issues that communities face.*
- *"I've observed many professionals saying and acting like: 'I first have to protect myself and worry about being sued, or making more money from more projects with a client. For many, that becomes the motivator for what is done, instead of... following our own deeper ethic, a voice inside ourselves that's connected to larger, greater principles and life mission that we're trying to follow…. So, professional ethics suffer. It seems like professionals that are trying to be more purist in that way are often more financially poor. We're more afraid to harm or take advantage and we want to*

do what is best for the community. So, we step back, and we would rather be generous with our time, and not do any harm. But then we may overdo our work and not charge enough, doing harm to ourselves.

- *"Stephen Biko said that the greatest weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. When we have been harmed, our self-determined process of evaluation is foreclosed and we begin to act according to the will or the purpose of the person or the group that has conquered our processes of self-determination. We've given over the power of our lives to an external entity. We're no longer living by our own dreaming process.…. That's an aspect of self-harm. My imagination has been limited. It's been constrained by what I've been able to see because of structural violence, because of structural oppression.*
- *"We have sector versions of ourselves. We know these Global North practices. That's how I learned about development, that's how you learned about it, that was what we're taught at university. Then, even when you're local, and you're in that space, you're then just reinventing those practices and behaviors. It's this vicious cycle. We colonize our minds, and even as people from the South ourselves, we continue to do that. So, when we're thinking about justice and care, even when we're talking about diversity and inclusion, we don't talk about equity…. I don't even use 'diversity.' I think it's such a buzzword. We don't talk about classism, which is such a prevalent issue in Africa and in Asia and Latin America, etc. And how different groups will harm each other, because we just are looking at things from a very binary perspective, and we still come in as, you know, you're the poor person over there, you're going to be so grateful that I've turned up to save you.*

Informants clearly feel the harm of being cut off from parts of themselves and their communities as they try to do their work. Adhering to professionally accepted principles has often meant violating their personal and political commitments and solidarities and vice versa.

when we have been harmed, our self-determined process of evaluation is foreclosed

Harm is technocratic, mechanistic approaches to aid and evaluation/ M&E

While many informants are familiar with the brand Do No Harm, only one referred immediately to the humanitarian literature, including ALNAP and the Sphere Project. Stating, "the mirror image for me of 'Do No Harm' is 'What are we accountable for?'" they explained how they have reframed the phrase (below).

- *"Everything is going to change the power relations. The moment we put a lot of money in front of people, that's going to change the dynamics. That is what it is. Now…there's no easy way of saying that, 'Oh, this is better. And that is not good.' To me, do no harm is having the humility to recognize it's a complex, …multidimensional problem you are treating. And you can't package it with a simple randomized trial, or simple answer that this is working, this is not working, and this is portable there and this is not portable here. And that kind of answer is the answer that evaluations are geared to provide.… That is harmful….*

Another referred to the superficial application of processes designed to address ethics, the failure of accountability mechanisms, and the need to name and develop ethical knowledge and skills in evaluation/ M&E competencies.

- *"We increasingly sign very long documents that we adhere to the ethical codes of the organizations, of the UN, of blah blah blah. But there is absolutely no accountability or no mechanisms defined, to present some concerns or some unethical practice.… [W]e have become more sophisticated on technical issues and technologies and artificial intelligence, but the very basics are just reflected in very formal stances. We need to be very transparent and open about these dilemmas and the decisions we make—an idea of ethics more related to accountability and transparency because otherwise, you tend to present fake realities. For example, we always report, 'Yes, we have applied an informed consent.' Sometimes we do it very mechanically. I was thinking that indicators of good application of informed consent should be that some people really say, 'No, I don't want to participate,' because in a way, 100% participation can be covering some pressure or power issues.*

Informants thus find the exercise of producing documentation and findings without substance disturbing, in ways reminiscent of many physicians' complaints about insurance paperwork and litigiousness more generally compromising their ability to care for patients with compassion and trust in their training and experience. Of course, reliance on checklists, forms, and documentation at the expense of a culture that supports and guides critical reflection, dialogue, and shared decision-making is not unique to evaluation/ M&E, development/ humanitarian aid, or medicine.

Harm is upholding illegitimate systems without awareness that we are complicit

Many informants discussed the complexities of working within small spaces: "We are trapped in this. We have no way out…." In such spaces, they try to maximize justice: "There are layers of harm and no harm and things that—you can have biases, you can have alliances with certain power structures, caste structures—all those things that follow that they can prevent." But they do so without necessarily dismantling the system itself: "Evaluation in that sense is designed to do harm in its current form, where framework cannot be questioned." The greater harm for them seems to lie in being unaware of the limitations: "The more important part is [that] the field recognizes its own complicity in aiding and abetting the power structures and the technocrats and so on and so forth."

the framework itself would be apartheid

One informant spoke about the difficulty that they experience as an independent practitioner, deciding whether or not to make money taking a project, in ways they compared to a physician making money for taking a patient: What if they are doing harm by doing this work that they make their living from? They felt that just like a physician could use a natural remedy instead of cutting an organ out, evaluators could in many instances avoid doing more harm by helping program staff and participants draw on what is already available to them—particularly when working with indigenous groups whose ancestral knowledge and practices are at risk of going extinct. Evaluation/ M&E that engages indigenous knowledge is typically neither taught in higher education programs nor written into or adequately supported by RFPs and ToRs.

Another offered advice from the perspective of working at a large agency:

- *"The World Bank is expecting, 'OK, how do you do a nice evaluation?' and 'How do you avoid mistakes?' and all those things. That's fine. You have to do that—you can't escape that. Otherwise, they will not give you the next contract. So, while you do that, you may also want to touch upon the framework issues and our own complicity. That complicity that is structured within our DNA. To do harm.*

This informant further deconstructed the legitimating role that evaluators have evolved to take on, just "like the police force" is expected to attend to concerns that could better be addressed by other professionals. "Merely by accident—like Nixon would say, 'You evaluate this and tell me whether the welfare people are using their money properly. If they're not using the welfare money properly, I'm not going to give them the welfare money again.' So those are the things that are prompting people to do evaluations."

Understanding their role, they articulated their limitations as no less than a world order of apartheid:

- *"There is an international order, which is completely screwing everyone in the South. You have this trade policy regime, you can give subsidies to your farmers, and those subsidies will kill thousands of sub-Saharan African farmers because they can't compete with these subsidies, right? …That is normal. Whenever I evaluate poverty reduction strategy, I don't evaluate whether I am changing this framework or not. I can't evaluate what is this international regime doing, right? Because that is out of bounds. I can't do that. Nobody will fund me. They will chase me out. So, the framework is never questioned, cannot be questioned. Is it within that framework we are going to do further harm? The framework itself would be apartheid….*

The sentiment that evaluation/ M&E does not address pervasive and fundamental harms recurred among informants, and use of the word "apartheid" was not unique to the informant quoted above. Comparisons to the police were direct, as were phrases like "aiding and abetting."

Harm is the extraction of information without corresponding changes in behavior

About half the informants questioned the Steering Committee or one or more of the sponsoring institutions' interests, naming historical patterns. Many of them—regardless of their own region of origin, training, or residence—named the effects of international policies on Africa in the same breath.

- *"So, I just want to ask the question, why? Why was the Steering Committee starting this? Because very often the issue of power is not something we talk about? It's a localization language and in anti-racism language now. But why*

someone wants to ask these questions, who they are asking the questions of, and how it is asked, are symptoms of how power either gets controlled, or maintained, or genuinely distributed. So, I'm curious about the genuine reasons about why they're asking this—which is why I ask the question—and what they plan to do with it after? Or are they doing this as a way to genuinely change and nudge their practices as donors and philanthropist into different directions? Or, you know, really useful research that they just want to come out and…because knowledge becomes a form of power and how you make it accessible….

- *"That kind of also reflects, echoes, thinking in terms of this inclusive and sustainable partnership is that we—I mean, agencies such as the World Bank or the Global Evaluation—'we want to engage with you, you know, we're helping you. And we will listen.' But I don't know if they actually know how to listen. Because it's that culture. I think it's that cultural competency. I'm drawing from the Pacific, and how do they engage in a culturally competent way? And recognize there is two different systems? And you need to recognize the strength of each system.*
- *"It's hard for me to think about the World Bank without thinking about it as a harm-causing institution at its very core. So, when the World Bank wants to talk about how do we do monitoring and evaluation to interrupt or disrupt and eradicate patterns of harm, I have many questions about how far back are you willing to go and how much responsibility are you willing to take for your own contribution to this pattern of harm? … So, are we having a real conversation? Are the people who are inviting you to do this research, are they willing to really listen? And if they listen, are they then willing to take responsibility for what they hear?*

Informants evidently seek truth-telling that will change the future. They are wary of efforts to publish guidelines or develop trainings without concrete shifts in power dynamics and the flow of resources. This is not unlike abolitionists' frustrations with police reform and movements to reallocate public funding to invest in safety and the prevention and healing of harm.

the frames that we use—even the do-no-harm principle—are defined by a Northern, logical, homogenous structure of what people think other people ought to behave like

Harm is starving indigenous knowledge and ethical systems

Many informants pointed to the harmful effects of a colonial education and colonial ways of being on indigenous and colonized groups—particularly on members working within international aid and the third sector.

- *"I think the aspects of sexual exploitation is quite clear. Where you use the power imbalances between the people that you're serving and you, the service provider, to take advantage of vulnerable people that are needing protection. I think that's quite clear…. What I think beyond those issues…where, for example, you go into a community and you erode their whole, perhaps, creativity to thrive…. Remember, rural Africans have traditionally been very creative in finding solutions. They know the climate is changing. And this crop is not viable in this season.*
- *"We don't prioritize…indigenous practices and cultural practices that have existed long before we decided we need to save the world…. In humanitarian aid, we say, 'do no harm.' We also say, 'leave no one behind,' right? People don't get left behind accidentally. People get left behind as a structured measure of injustice in the first place. It's because we didn't think about it, that's why they got left behind. It's because we prioritize those that have a certain amount of power—in a binary sense—that's why groups get left behind, why individuals get left behind. So, these are structured measures of injustice. And unless we broaden our understanding of how the world actually runs, we continue to just reinvent the normal status quo.*
- *"The way we have defined ethics has very much been from a Global North perspective. Often, and…this is…my major critique: That the frames that we use—even the do-no-harm principle—are defined by a Northern, logical, homogenous structure of what people think other people ought to behave like. We think that Global North understanding of rational behavior is the benchmark of ethics…. I am in the process of trying to understand, 'What are the different ideas and frames of ethics that we can bring into our work?'*

Here, informants raise questions about why evaluation/ M&E and development/ humanitarian aid look exclusively to philosophical and ethical traditions rooted in European history and culture—however reduced and distorted their meaning may be in present-day usage—for field-wide guidance. Any other philosophical or ethical tradition is considered culturally specific and reserved for niche projects—for special populations and undertaken by specialists—whereas traditions from Europe are considered quite literally to be universal.[36]



How does harm relate to M&E?

In thinking about the relationship between harm and evaluation/ M&E more specifically, informants had a hard time pinning harm to specific times or places within evaluation—and in fact, some resisted doing so, amicably mocking the inquisition-like tone of questions about "who, what, when, where." Some offered concrete examples of what harm is, however, and many raised questions about who determines what constitutes harm. This section describes informants' examples of harm inflicted in relation to evaluation/ M&E and illustrates the ways they see that harm relating to M&E. The next section briefly addresses who should identify harm and how harm can be undone.

Examples of harm

While we intentionally recruited and subsequently interviewed informants with backgrounds in digital privacy and climate justice, the vast majority of examples that informants shared focused on human systems. Again, many connected these to much larger power imbalances and many referred to the effects of international policies on Africa, specifically. Brief examples of harm that informants listed included evaluators creating proposals and contracts without informing the people who would be involved—even the RFP process itself in which proposers prepare workplans and budgets with no local conversations and context; outsiders not recognizing the values of the community that they are visiting; destroying ecosystems on which human and other beings' lives depend; the dispossession of people's culture, lands, and self-determination. One informant's detailed example is followed by a longer vignette, edited to mask their identity and organization per their request.

Example: Privilege with harm

> *"When we try to work with an organization, we could do harm just by wasting their time, because what they're doing is stopping the bleeding in their communities. We have to add more good by what we do. The stakes are higher. When we're working in communities in crisis, that are in life and death kind of situations every day, this is different than working in a more privileged, largely white community that usually has more time and money, and is not in crisis mode.…This is the issue I had in academia with the usual approach of formal evaluation, and the time and money usually budgeted. Many of our Native organizations don't have these kinds of resources…. They're able to do evaluation, but not the way privileged communities not in crisis do evaluation, because too many of our resources have to go to higher priorities and meet more critical needs. For example, many of our Native communities declared a "state of emergency" caused by the Opioid crisis, with many young people dying each week… Privilege with harm, I think needs to be looked at together….*

Vignette: Who defines empowerment?

> *"It's important that first we identify what harm is and what do we mean by phrases like, "leave no one behind." M&E is a donor requirement. Sometimes the purpose of M&E is to help projects understand what is going right, what is not going right, having lots of tools in place—results framework analysis, M&E plans, frequency of data collection—which is all good. But then sometimes, the context in the field is different from what we are doing sitting in our offices.*
>
> *"I can even give you an example, when I felt very sad…. As an organization, we had decided that we would be doing livelihood projects to support women-headed households, or actually to empower women through their livelihoods. While I was meeting beneficiaries, I met a woman. And she told me her story—how she ended up getting married to this man and he's already married. She had a newborn baby girl and she started crying and said, 'I don't want to let her live my life. So why don't you take her?'*
>
> *"That was the moment when I was feeling that we cannot do anything about her. We cannot go beyond our scope of our work. We wanted to empower them, we wanted to help them—they were making quilts, they were making baskets. We were trying to kind of play a role of middleman—taking their stuff to the capital, selling it, giving them the money. But there are lots of other things that need to be considered as well. The concept of empowerment is beyond our approach. We want to empower them, and they are telling us their issues. That's where it becomes very difficult—how to incorporate things like that.*

Cycles of harm

Many informants noted the siloed, narrow view of harm, including from the perspective of time, that is prevalent in development and evaluation/ M&E.

- *"I don't think that as development actors and humanitarian actors we necessarily think about harm in a holistically cross-cutting way through all our work. So, traditionally, we thought about harm…like, you've either come from crisis, so you've either been a victim of harm, or you're in a particularly vulnerable situation—you've had some violence perpetuated against you, etc. And that's sort of been the boundaries of how we think about harm. But harm perpetuates itself, through practices that are not just violent, or are implicitly violent. It perpetuates itself through practices that are structurally inequitable, that are racist, that are homophobic, that don't see people—that perpetuate those forms of colonialism that development work does anyway. And so, when I think about harm…I think about how is our practice of development or humanitarian aid causing more damage? …[H]arm is about the damage that we're causing when we continue to think about, maybe, harm just as impacts of violence, rather than how do we as individuals working in this space perpetuate other forms of harm that are a result of structural and systemic inequity? …I think one of the issues of our time is often those of us that work in the sector don't see ourselves as perpetuators of it. We don't see ourselves as part of the cog. We see ourselves as the saviors coming to fix the problem, rather than the very structures and frameworks and methodologies, the questions that we're asking in even M&E processes, the questions that we're asking in project design, perpetuate harm in and of itself, when we're not checking our biases and assumptions. So, we are all a part of it. And, one of the damages that we have done is this, Us and Them narrative that we perpetuate through our work.*
- *"When we have a development project, it is usually designed after tremendous harm has already been caused. And people are not willing to look backwards and ask the people. We talk about what needs to be done after harm but what we need to be doing is retracing the steps from the past to the present and to the future—the ecosystem of harm.*

It's kind of like a cycle within a cycle

Informants spoke about harm in dynamic, systems-oriented ways that account for history and context rather than static, linear, and reductive ways. The next segment expands upon the ecosystem of harm mentioned by the informant quoted above.

Infinitely amplifying harm

In describing their understanding of harm—its doing and undoing—informants repeatedly chose words and phrases that evoked cycles. For example, one said,

- *"One of the greatest critiques of Oxfam when this year they announced that they were pulling out of countries and there was all this drama: 'We've been in some countries for 50 years.' If you've still been in that country for 50 years—what the hell are you still doing there? Are we as development practitioners creating cycles where in order to keep our multibillion-dollar industry going? We're perpetuating dependency—that's a form of harm.*

Another described almost in passing,

- *"I think ethical conversation can be challenging in the case of where certain responses perpetuate suffering, instead of support. And, helping communities be lifted out of those situations that are uncomfortable and really perpetuate a cycle of poverty, a cycle of violence, a cycle of gender-based violence because of the conditions where these programs are implemented.*

A third shared their attempts to *undo* harm,

- *"The whole first phase of anything in terms of our process and practice was going out and asking them, 'This is what we're doing. This is why we're doing it. How would you like to participate in this process? How would you like to join? What is your worldview? What are your information needs?' And that kind of cycle went all the way through to the end where we went back to the villages….*

When asked about the cycle they were imagining in their head, they responded,

- *"It's not the traditional M&E cycle. It's kind of like a cycle within a cycle. When I kind of saw that [the cycle diagrams], I saw a little cycle kind of going (motions with hand as if looping in and around an embroidery ring). I don't have the visual.*

We presented informants with multiple visual interpretations of "the M&E Cycle" (see **Appendices E through G**): Commonplace in the development and evaluation/ M&E fields, one portrays the research/ evaluation process, another portrays continuous learning throughout the program life cycle, and a third portrays the larger policy and program life cycle. Informants generally identified with none of these interpretations as depicted and explained, however. One said,

- *"[These diagrams] are not really cycles—they are linear processes put into a circle to make them look more indigenous. The thinking itself has to be circular. Come in, listen, listen, listen. Value knowing, reflect back knowing. Facilitate a process that will answer their question—their unknowing. Every step within the process is actually a cycle.*

We then shared with informants how we as researchers differed in our interpretation of "the cycle"—that one had envisioned the M&E process whereas the other had envisioned the cycle of harm. We presented a fourth visual interpretation of "the Cycle" that contrasts the compounding of harm over time with the balancing of harm through an external regulator (see **Appendix H: Amplifying and Balancing Cycles of Harm**). To illustrate amplifying feedback loops, we shared the example of trauma compounding intergenerationally since Indian Boarding Schools were established in the USA and Canada to "kill the Indian and save the man."[37] Another example of amplifying feedback loops is the initial difference between property and property-owner compounding intergenerationally over 150 years since the Emancipation Proclamation to produce today's black-white wealth gap in the USA.

When asked which cycle captured "Harm and the M&E Cycle," nearly all informants identified with the cycle of harm as depicted and explained, even if they did not all necessarily agree on the details. We asked informants directly about their responses and received the following answers.

- *"I think they're intertwined, really. I don't think they're separate cycles running parallel to each other. It comes at different points: It comes at the design, it comes at the implementation.… We don't have the checks and balances…. Is the collection of data reinforcing some kind of harm that the program has already established? So, it's kind of intertwined.*
- *"What we're really talking about is the interaction of the monitoring and evaluation cycle with the harm cycle. So, it's not this or that. It's the two in relationship to each other.*
- *"It has a life of its own…The harm cycle can be a much bigger cycle than the M&E cycle. It can be amplified concerning the specific harm that is happening.*
- *"If you start with evaluation: As I said, I think because of the paradigms, because evaluation has been more Northern and Western defined in everything, it is implicated. It is a part of our basic definitions that we don't even question, and that we have learned. So, there is also this initiative that we have with Africa and with Asia to promote South to South evaluation, for example…our own paradigms and even to have a voice in the global dialogue and the global architecture and the global definitions. We do a lot of political work in that area…. [I]t is in the DNA of evaluation, I would say. And on the other hand, if you start with harm, like your analysis: I think that in not being aware—by action or by omission—evaluation reproduces, may even reinforce, harm. I think it is an interconnected relation.*

We offer two images inspired by informants' language: In the first—drawn from the bulleted quotations immediately above on this page—a vicious cycle of harm intertwines with the evaluation/ M&E process potentially infinitely (see **Figure 4**); in the second, however—drawn from the last quotation on the previous page and visually described in the first quotation on this page—the cycle of healing intertwines with cycles of research/ evaluation/ M&E, continuous improvement, program/ policy, and other processes that may be relevant for organizations and communities (see **Figure 5**). The cycles remain aligned, connected through processes of reciprocity—broadened accountability and democratic decision making that serve as external regulators. There is no risk of leaving anyone behind because the exponential growth of repeated patterns of asymmetry is balanced.

Every step within the process is actually a cycle



Figure 4. The vicious cycle of harm intertwines with M&E potentially infinitely



Figure 5. Undoing harm requires virtuous cycles of healing and reciprocity

Below we quote one informant's description of the cycle of harm at length:

- *"When we're thinking about M&E, …the very practice of the questions that we're asking is important…how we are asking those questions…. We make a lot of assumptions. And this is where the issue of harm comes in, about people's needs, people's agency, people's desires, etc., right? And we see this in reductive frames. Particularly in M&E, because we have been trained in the idea of log frames, [is] the idea of linearity—change is linear. So therefore, if you hold a capacity development workshop, you know, 50% women 50% men, blah, blah, blah, all of that happens, then change happens. That's bullshit, right? [If you know] systems and complexity theories [that's not] how change actually happens, which is why development interventions…and humanitarian interventions consistently are siloed and not connected to each other, because we don't see the links between each other. Now the problem with thinking in linearity, as you know, is that in M&E cycles and project design cycles, we cannot change our mind. We never ask, 'What assumptions did we make about this project, about this intervention? How are we going to test those assumptions? What are we going to do if those assumptions get challenged or are proven wrong?'*

  In mainstream, generalized M&E, we have to ask questions that reinforce the starting position. So, we start off with a project output. And then the questions that we ask reinforce that position. And we don't ask questions that are genuinely open and allow us to change direction or move. Now, when we do that, when we continue to ask questions in linearity, that reinforce the existing hypothesis we started off with, that's harmful, because we are choosing to ignore change, or we're choosing to ignore different types of vulnerability that might emerge from that, but didn't support our original hypothesis in the first place. And that's powerful. So, M&E practices designed to reinforce your starting position…isn't a genuine process of inquiry, an open process of inquiry that allows you to change direction in your project cycle and your project design is fundamentally harmful, because then you're either pushing your interventions down on groups of people that don't need it. Or your intervention, you're just going to continue to do it for the sake of doing it, because you've already invested $50 million, and you have to keep going, you know, until the cows come.



How do we undo harm?

This section focuses on how we undo rather than do harm. We draw from restorative and regenerative practices as reviewed during the desk research as well as from interviews with informants. Restorative practices are inherently relational and associated with feminist, indigenous, and decolonizing traditions, particularly from Africa.[38] Informants raised several questions about who should determine not only the harm to be undone but also when it has successfully been undone—prevented, ameliorated, or repaired.

Through lateral, mutual accountability,[39] restorative practices provide alternatives to the top-down, centralized logic of carceral systems that focus on punitive control. While the success of such practices can be measured by how much harm they repair or prevent, the relationship among truth, reparations, and restoration in truth and reconciliation attempts as typically practiced thus far has been questioned.[40] Some argue, however, that these questions arise from a mistaken focus on violence and rehabilitation at the individual rather than structural level.[41]

political decisions, but masquerading as technocratic decisions —we should try to undermine that part

Who should identify & determine harm?

Informants raised several questions about who should identify and determine harm as well as who should be engaged in evaluation/ M&E processes more generally. Many stated that we—within M&E and within this process of researching harm and M&E—are not necessarily talking, or listening, to those we should be.

- *"So, you might find programs that are designed by a particular agency in New York, to be implemented in a village somewhere or to be implemented across countries, but they really don't have a context. And they also don't engage the beneficiaries, the people who are targeted, they are not included in that. Their voice is not there. So, there's something that is well intentioned, and then they come up with all these monitoring indicators that do not speak to the needs of the people. So, they continue doing that, and they don't know when they're doing harm to people…. And also, funders go with evaluators. So, if a fund is from the west, or from the north, or from wherever, they go with the evaluators, because the evaluators will give them products that they are accustomed to… Even the people who are going, they're blind to what is being done, because they are not culturally sensitive.*
- *"If I go to Indonesia after a tsunami, I could give them money to give everyone—boys, girls standing on the road—to give them some money to build the road and get the money to their family and all those things. Next day, the mothers will come and tell me that, 'look, my child does not go to school, my child is wasting time. And my neighbors were volunteers before; now they are demanding money to build back my road.'*

Even when members of the harmed or potentially harmed groups speak, however, they are not listened to.

- *"So, when we think about climate change—as an example, the negotiator from Sudan who went to the Conference of Parties in Copenhagen in 2009: [He] came out at the end of the agreement and he said, 'You're asking us to sign a suicide letter, because for us to sign on to this deal and accept the very limited benefits that we'll get out of this climate negotiation is basically a death sentence. For many, many people in Africa, this is completely unacceptable.' Now, if we live in a just world, him saying that out loud, in public with thousands of people there to capture it and then millions getting to know his methods, …we would have stopped. And we would have said, 'Wait a minute, we have to pay attention to what the gentleman is saying, and we have to course-correct.' But instead, from 2009 to 2015, the Paris Climate Agreement—many people who are privileged and professionals living in the Global North celebrated it as a tremendous victory. For people who are African in the world, the 2015 Paris agreement is a failure if we evaluated from the basis of harm. It is a generator of harm, perpetuator of the pattern of harm built into climate injustice or what Desmond Tutu calls climate apartheid. It's completely unacceptable.*

Speaking similarly about the reaction to an indigenous woman who spoke publicly about how evaluation/ M&E had harmed her community, another informant said,

- *"But people didn't want to hear it. Because it's confronting. It's like, what am I doing? And what impact am I having on the people that I meet to be doing M&E—I am extracting this information from…. People don't think about the people. And what and why and how you're doing it—the impact of it, and acknowledging that and then thinking of ways of mitigating that harm. And, again, according to whom? As I said, what has happened? Whose—what worldview? Are you taking this from scientists? If you really want to know about the harm, you need to go and talk to people who we have done harm to.*

the wisdom already there that's ancient and that's much bigger than any one person or team could ever bring to anything…simply value the knowing they already had… because those inside of it might not be able to see and value it, which…may be a result of colonization

Informants acknowledged the complexity and the fallacy in assuming that even members of the harmed or potentially harmed group would recognize it as harm. "[M]y perception of harm in a certain community might not necessarily be the perception of harm for the community, because I'm coming with a whole lot of different backgrounds versus what that community I'm working with might consider harm."

Strategies to prevent, reduce, or ameliorate harm

Shifting the gaze onto those perpetuating harm, one informant said, "In many of the contexts I work in, the answer to the question of, 'are the people who are causing harm willing to stop?' The answer is no: They're not willing to stop. So, then I have to work with the people in the community that has been harmed." This informant and others suggested deliberative democratic processes in which community members weight competing concerns themselves.

Deliberative democratic traditions

Informants distinguished democratic processes from participatory processes, which remain framed by those who control the resources. They emphasized the process of deliberation.

- *"It is the deliberative aspect, where the community decides…. I don't want to paint the community as monolithic…. So, I don't believe in that virtue of a community. But at the same time, I also think that the alternative that [a] bunch of guys that are sitting at the bureaucratic level making technocratic decisions, which are actually political decisions, but masquerading as technocratic decisions—we should try to undermine that part. In fact, our job should be to undermine.*

Others referred to similar dialogic processes even if they did not name deliberative democracy in particular.

- *"Working together, how do we make sense of this? Forming conclusions and recommendations. Not many reciprocate. Reciprocity is not widely practiced—going back and saying, 'This is what came out of it.' I'm not sure if that's restorative practice, but even those mechanisms helped. It's quite challenging. People weren't used to operating that way. People weren't used to being asked. It means writing different reports for different audiences.*
- *"To say we are in a situation in which no harm is any longer caused in a particular community, we have to begin with who defines the end goal, the means by which they believe that end goal can be reached, the impediments expected along the way, and how our processes may successfully navigate beyond these impediments to success.*

Despite its origins in many indigenous governance traditions—many of which foreground deliberation and extend democratic relations beyond human beings[42]—"democracy" carries connotations of, and is often conflated with, imperialist expansion of colonial mechanisms and industrialized capitalism, wherein decision-making takes place among an increasingly concentrated and homogenous group. As early as 2000, Hood noted the violence that has been perpetrated in the name of democracy and the imprint that leaves on deliberative democratic traditions, including those of evaluation.[43] Undoing harm is therefore not a matter of unquestioningly adopting this framework or that methodology. It is rather a matter of engaging in the ongoing labor of producing knowledge relationally—specifically the caring labor of regenerating ancestral systems of knowledge and accountability.

Emergent design

To democratize the process of evaluation/ M&E, including the undoing of harm, informants spoke about the need for institutional cultures and flexible designs that provide space, time, and funding to encompass relationship-building; individual and collective dialogue and reflection; reciprocal processes; and responsiveness to constantly changing conditions internally and externally—including the learning taking place. They spoke about evaluation/ M&E taking place throughout the program life-cycle—before, during, and after—including meta-analyses. They similarly spoke about accounting for past, present, future. Like relationally produced knowledge, accounting for the past would constitute movement toward repairing harm.

- *"Self-determination and self-agency: This is the biggest way that evaluation can cause or prevent harm in Native communities…because…as an expert from the outside, you're revered. Whenever there is an outsider visiting the community, they are respected, automatically, and often recognized as having value to bring into our community. But where it's been violated over and over again is when that person does not recognize the value of the community that they're visiting—the knowledge already there, and the wisdom already there that's ancient and that's much bigger than any one person or team could ever bring to anything. So, the role of facilitator can help the group simply value the knowing they already had and have—seeing their knowing from the outside—because those inside of it might not be able to see and value it, which in part may be a result of colonization. Affirming self-determination and self-agency is reparative in indigenous communities.*

Informants overwhelmingly felt that undoing harm would require an explicit commitment by the fields of evaluation/ M&E and development/ humanitarian aid to move beyond their token and fringe accommodation of indigenous knowledge and values.



Conclusion

Even if harm and evaluation/ M&E are inseparable, informants suggested that harm is not inevitable. None—regardless of position—suggested doing away with processes for critical inquiry, reflection, action, and accountability. On the contrary, they advocated for deeper, more genuine engagement in all these areas. We conclude that as much as harm is intertwined with evaluation/ M&E, its *undoing* is intertwined as well. However, the potential for repair does not lie in another tool, policy, or training developed without harmed communities.

Our process of conducting research on harm and evaluation/ M&E parallels the evaluation/ M&E process itself, relying on many of the same approaches to knowledge production and risking the same pitfalls. In ways similar to our view of this parallel, we see the racialized relations of dominance and control between donor and INGO, headquarters and country office, management and staff, and staff and participants also as parallel. Rather than safeguarding populations considered vulnerable through top-down control that risks reinforcing carcerality, we propose flattening hierarchies and flipping accountability structures by practicing and modeling collaborative and democratic relations with participants, intended beneficiaries, and local communities to produce knowledge relationally.

Truth-telling & regeneration

To begin repairing harm, we suggest engaging in collaborative knowledge production processes that do two things:

1. truth-tell about the harm inflicted in both the recent and distant past, starting with organizations' origin stories in their surrounding communities: What harm took place for this organization or program to live? What life and knowledge and leadership moved where? Voluntarily or involuntarily? At whose expense?
2. conceptualize and attend to the (re)birth of processes that allow participants, intended beneficiaries, and local communities to hold accountable those that claim to serve them. This includes organizations and countries that sustain entire workforces through development/ humanitarian aid and related occupations like evaluation/ M&E.

Such collaborative inquiry would necessarily involve looking carefully at dominant processes of knowledge production and recognizing how harm may be inflicted through routine, taken-for-granted practices. These practices have the power either to amplify or to regulate simplistic narratives of poverty, violence, disease, and inequality depending on whether or not they engage reciprocal processes. Democratizing evaluation/ M&E in hopes that it tells the truth necessary to repair past harm and prevent future harm requires creating spaciousness in the process such that it can bring ancient systems of knowledge and accountability into existence and to nourish their survival and growth.

Areas for further research

We suggest conducting empirical research collaboratively with those who have been and continue to be harmed by evaluation/ M&E, development/ humanitarian aid, and the third sector more generally. This research could focus specifically on areas that this report did not fully address and those raised by informants:

- digital privacy
- non-human natural systems
- the psychological effects of participation in development/ humanitarian aid programs
- indigenous ethical systems
- the current state of education, professional development, and funding with respect to the application of indigenous systems of knowledge and values to evaluation

Informants called attention to work already taking place among indigenous, colonized, and enslaved peoples to connect many of the above areas. This includes, for example, the study and application of the pan-African concept of interdependence and intersubjectivity known by the Zulu word *ubuntu* to artificial intelligence. We also suggest devoting time, space, and funding to more fully understand and describe the actors and processes that are involved in doing and undoing—preventing, ameliorating, and repairing—harm.



Notes

[1] Hopson & Cram, 2018
[2] Kaybryn, November 3, 2019
[3] Porter, 2019
[4] "The concept seeks to identify and develop a uniquely African approach to evaluation. It emphasises [*sic*] that context, culture, history and beliefs shape the nature of evaluations, specifically in the diverse, often complex African reality. AfrEA's objective is to promote and adapt to an African evaluation framework—an approach initiated from inside the continent, and overwhelmingly supported from outside Africa." ("Made in Africa Evaluation," 2018)
[5] Dearden & Kleine, 2018
[6] *Evaluation Standards for Aotearoa New Zealand*, 2015
[7] Raftree, 2020
[8] Phillips, June 6, 2020
[9] Bui, July 1, 2020
[10] "…[T]he carceral state encompasses the formal institutions and operations and economies of the criminal justice system proper, but it also encompasses logics, ideologies, practices, and structures, that invest in tangible and sometimes intangible ways in punitive orientations to difference, to poverty, to struggles to social justice and to the crossers of constructed borders of all kinds." (Tapia, May 15, 2020)
[11] Charancle & Lucchi, 2018
[12] "…[T]he essence of American exceptionalism—a nation state with a special mission to bring freedom to all mankind—depends on the 'otherness' of the outside world…." (Foner, August 2013)
[13] See J. Lepore's The Invention of the Police (July 13, 2020).

See also U. Kothari's descriptions of the racialized origins of international development in colonial administration (Kothari, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c).

And see F. P. Besag's (1981) description of the racialized origins of educational research, one of evaluation's precursors; and A. M. Madison's (1992) description of the role that the Moynihan Report on *The Negro Family* (1965) played in evaluation's origins.
[14] In addition to A. M. Madison, scholars Bob Covert, K. Lee, H. Symonette, J. LaFrance, G. L. Peak, R. Millett, S. Hood, R. Hopson, M. Hall, K. Kirkhart, and D. Mertens were among the earliest to challenge the racialized origins of evaluation in the USA.

Some of the many contemporary scholars working globally to decolonize and indigenize evaluation, often tracing their academic lineage to L. T. Smith, include L. Aponte-Soto, N. Bowman, H. Cakici, B. Chilisa, F. Cram, P. Feodoroff, C. D. Francis, M. Gaotlhobogwe, S. Ghanbarpour, A. D. Guajardo, K. Johnston-Goodstar, S. Koloi-Keaikitse, Y. Liu, L. P. Luo, T. E. Major, C. B. Mapitsa, H. Mokgolodi, T. Mustonen, L. C. Neubauer, T. P. Ngwato, A. P. Noguez, M. A. Palotai, K. Pipi, G. M. Robles-Schrader, R. P. Shepherd, N. Wehipeihana, and S. Ziabakhsh.
[15] Hippocrates, 430 BCE
[16] The results and framework of this process are documented in *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—Or War* (Anderson, 1999)
[17] Wallace, 2013
[18] Wallace, 2015, p. 3

[19] See for example *Do No Harm Workshop Trainer's Manual*, 2016; *Guidance Note on Evaluation and Do No Harm*, 2012; Haider, 2014; Oxfam, nd; Wallace, 2015
[20] See *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*, 2011
[21] Duty of Care is defined as "The responsibility or the legal obligation of a person or organization to avoid acts or omissions (which can be reasonably foreseen) to be likely to cause harm to others," and the definition is attributed to a Business dictionary by Charancle & Lucchi (2018, p. 15)
[22] Charancle & Lucchi, 2018
[23] *Do No Harm Workshop Trainer's Manual*, 2016; Wallace, 2013
[24] Charancle & Lucchi, 2018
[25] Haider, 2014; *The "Do No Harm" Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict: A Handbook*, 2004
[26] Bolton et al., 2007
[27] Charancle & Lucchi, 2018
[28] *Do No Harm Workshop Trainer's Manual*, 2016, p. 189
[29] "After 1900, and supported by medical reforms, the alliance of corporate power and money, medicine became increasingly masculine. This had a direct impact on health delivery. It became a space whereby the health profession, instead of being a caring profession, came to be seen as part of a class system, with the male figure at the helm. Most women were channelled [*sic*] into nursing. These reforms were followed by the building of medical institutions, and medical schools gained control of the clinical experience of medical students, and the establishment of scientific laboratories in conjunction with the development of medical schools in Europe, especially in Germany, whereby coveted medical models were offered." (Mji, 2019)
[30] See also Pourchez, 2017
[31] See Shi & Singh, 2011
[32] See Notterman & Mitchell, 2015
[33] Chilisa et al., 2017
[34] Relational ethics refer not necessarily to individuated, atomized beings developing relationships with each other but rather to the recognition that we are not in fact individuated or atomized, but rather already exist in relation with each other, and to the understanding of associated implications. (Hollway, 2010)
[35] "Women are the first environment: An interview with Mohawk elder Katsi Cook," March 31, 2018
[36] Saghaye-Biria, 2018
[37] "To document his experiment, what scholar David Wallace Adams has referred to as 'Education for Extinction,' Pratt commissioned John N. Choate to take before and after 'contrast' photos to document the progress they were making in 'civilizing' the Indian children. These photographs were then sent to officials in Washington, [DC] to potential charitable donors and to other reservations to recruit new students." ***Please be warned that these photographs are very upsetting***. (*Analyzing Before and After Photographs & Exploring Student Files*, nd)
[38] Henkeman, November 14, 2016
[39] Coker, 2001
[40] Allais, 2011; Graybill & Lanegran, 2004; Llewellyn, nd; Mawhinney, 2015; *What Is Restorative Justice?*, 2005
[41] Henkeman, November 14, 2016
[42] See Shiva, 2015
[43] Hood, 2000
[44] Mhlambi, 2020



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Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of Informants

Professional identities	Areas of Expertise	Personal/ cultural/ geographic identities	Years of experience
• 4 evaluators/ M&E practitioners within multi-lateral agency • 4 independent evaluators/ M&E practitioners • 2 development practitioner/ strategist within large INGO, multi-lateral agency • 1 ED of NPO • 2 faculty in higher ed (evaluation, community organizing/ policy-making)	• 6 in development/ rural development/ agronomy/ bioscience/ climate justice/ environmental racism/ civil engineering • 1 in conflict/ fragile states • 1 in inclusive and equitable technology • 1 in ethics • 1 in evaluation, professionalization • 1 in gender/ feminism • Leaders in EvalMENA, EvalYouth, EvalIndigenous, International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation	• 4 African (East, Southern, West, North) • 3 West Asian/ South Asian • 1 African American • 1 Indigenous North American • 1 Settler Pacific • 1 Settler South American	• 6 have 3 decades • 2 have nearly 2 decades • 1 has 2 decades • 1 has more than 1 decade • 1 youth

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

HARM AND THE M&E CYCLE

Researchers:

- Vidhya Shanker, PhD (Principal Investigator)
  Independent Research/ Evaluation Consultant
  1-612-723-3494
  shan0133@umn.edu
- Antony Maikuri
  Doctoral Student in Evaluation Studies at the University of Minnesota
  1-952-686-1696
  maiku001@umn.edu

Researchers' Statement

We are seeking to interview you as a key informant in a research study. The purpose of this form is to give you the information that you need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read it carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, the types of questions we will ask you, the possible benefits and risks, your rights as a participant, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When we have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. As you may know (many of you being researchers and evaluators yourselves), this process is called "informed consent." We will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Anthony Maikuri, an international doctoral student from Kenya in Evaluation Studies, and Vidhya Shanker, a South Asian American who just completed my dissertation in Evaluation Studies, are working on a research project exploring harm in relation to the monitoring & evaluation of nonprofit and nongovernmental projects/ programs. This research was initiated by representatives from the World Bank, Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results-Anglophone Africa, Rockefeller Foundation, Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation & Assessment, and MERL-Tech.

Mr. Maikuri and Dr. Shanker have reviewed some literature selected for its potential to expand and deepen the way that the fields of Evaluation and Monitoring & Evaluation thinks about harm. Based on that desk research, in conjunction with our personal and professional experience, we think that the way that Evaluation/ M&E discuss harm is limited by its emphasis on technical rigor at the expense of

any discussion of ethics. We also think that the ethical frameworks that our field does discuss are limited by their Eurocentric underpinnings. We would like to run some of our initial ideas by others who have been thinking about some similar issues.

STUDY PROCEDURES

I. Having conducted desk research on bodies of literature that have the potential to expand and deepen understanding of, and response to, harm within the field of Monitoring & Evaluation, the researchers are asking to interview 10 to 15 individuals like you because you meet the following criteria:

   A. Have conducted or experienced monitoring and/ or evaluation of a nonprofit or nongovernmental program/ project, whether as:
      - an evaluation or M&E practitioner
      - a program/ project participant
      - nonprofit/ nongovernmental organization staff
      - contracting/ sponsoring agency (foundation or government) staff

   B. Have deep and ongoing material, cultural, and/ or linguistic ties to groups that nonprofit/ nongovernmental organizations claim to serve, particularly but not exclusively groups:
      - Representing West, Southern, and Central Africa
      - Representing West/ Central Asia & North Africa
      - Representing South East Asia
      - Indigenous to the South Pacific
      - Indigenous to the Americas (North, Central, South)
      - Representing African America

   (We have not listed some regions where we already have some representation, e.g., South Asia and East Africa.)

   C. Can speak about actual and potential harm to such groups from a perspective informed by personal/ professional/ political understanding of one or more of the following:
      - Gender-based oppression, including homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism
      - Ableism, substance use, or HIV/ AIDS
      - International development aid, humanitarian aid, or disaster relief
      - Ecocide, ecological apartheid, or climate change
      - Surveillance, big data, or digital privacy
      - Poverty, racism, colonization, or war

D. Are available between September 7 and September 18 for an hourlong interview in English and audio-recorded via Zoom.

II. We are requesting that you commit to one 60-minute interview, and possibly the exchange of a few short emails to confirm details before and afterwards.

III. We will ask you about

A. your journey in relation to the field of Monitoring & Evaluation

B. your current personal, cultural, and professional affiliations, at whatever level of detail makes sense for you

C. your understanding of the notion of harm and—to the extent appropriate—that of the groups that you represent

D. your suggestions for delimiting the appropriate M&E cycle to focus on in relation to the notion of harm

IV. Interview data will help shape a paper for publication in fall 2020 and subsequent conference presentations, workshops, and trainings.

V. We will audio-record the interviews. The audio-recordings will be saved on a password protected computer available only to the researchers. They will be used only for purposes of summarizing informants' answers. They will not be transcribed verbatim in preparation for the fall 2020 publication but may be for subsequent publications and presentations. Audio-recordings will be destroyed by December 31, 2020. Any transcriptions of them will be destroyed by December 31, 2021.

VI. You may refuse to answer any question in the interview, request to have some answers or sections of answers not audio-recorded, or terminate the interview at any time.

VII. You may choose to have your name and other identifying information remain entirely confidential or you may choose to have them associated with particular comments that you make during the interview.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Participating in published research about harm in relation to the Monitoring & Evaluation cycle has the potential to serve as a cathartic experience. It has the potential to instigate a sense of connectedness and community among those concerned with harm in relation to M&E. It has the potential to inform training of and awareness among M&E practitioners regarding harm, creating the possibility of ultimately preventing, disrupting, or healing harm.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Answering interview questions about harm in relation to Monitoring & Evaluation has the potential to trigger distressing memories or thoughts of trauma experienced by yourself or others. You may request to engage in a preventive, healing, or restorative tradition of your choice before, during, or after the interview. You may have someone of your choosing with you during the interview. If you find yourself experiencing stress or discomfort *during* the interview, you may inform the interviewer; skip certain questions; terminate, reschedule, or participate in the interview over multiple sittings. If you find yourself experiencing stress or discomfort *after* the interview is complete, you may contact one or both researchers at the contact information on page 1 and request amends or to engage in a healing or restorative tradition.

For speakers of languages other than English, answering questions in English carries the potential for misunderstanding and distortion of ideas more easily or accurately expressed in the speakers' primary language. All informants will have the opportunity to review English drafts of publications and presentations for their accuracy in representing the spirit of their words. You may choose to type clarification of your spoken answers.

Participating in research that is disseminated about harm in relation to the M&E cycle also has the potential to expose M&E work, including work that you have been affiliated with, to public scrutiny, leading to the possible loss of or exclusion from employment, funding, and professional collegiality. If you find yourself experiencing such socio-economic or professional loss and exclusion, you may inform the researchers. You may request to engage in a restorative practice. You may request connection with an affirming and generative community.

SOURCE OF FUNDING

The researchers are receiving financial support from the Center for Learning on Evaluation & Results-Anglophone Africa in exchange for conducting this research.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

Interview data will be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer confidentially but not anonymously. The link between interview data and identifying information will be broken by December 31, 2020.

Limits to confidentiality include information about child abuse, elder abuse, or harm to yourself or others that has not been reported to appropriate authorities.

OTHER INFORMATION

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Printed name of researcher	Signature of researcher	Date

Informant's statement

This study has been explained to me. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions or concerns later about the research, I can ask one of the researchers listed above. I volunteer to take part in this research. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed name of informant	Signature of informant	Date

Copies to:

- Researcher
- Informant

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Our journeys

1. How do we each intersect with this work?
2. What are our relevant affiliations?

Brief summary of desk research (share list of bodies of literature)

1. The thinking underlying the bodies of literature selected
2. Preliminary findings

Defining Harm

1. How do you think about harm?
    - In relation to Monitoring & Evaluation?
2. How might groups that you are personally, culturally, professionally, or politically tied to or part of define it?
3. What ontological distinctions and dimensions are relevant to your/ your people(s)' understanding of harm? (share prompts)
4. What ethical distinctions and dimensions are relevant? (share prompts)

Levels of harm: cause & effect/ subject & object (refer to Ecological Systems Model)

1. Who/ what interacts in M&E cycles?
2. Who/ what is harmed?
    - How?
    - According to whom?
3. What roles do individuals play in causing, distributing, or ameliorating harm?
4. What good and bad practices emerge?

Delimiting "the Cycle" (refer to M&E, program, and policy life cycles; cycle of harm)

1. Does "cycle" refer to M&E or to harm?
2. What delimitations are useful for deepening and expanding M&E's understanding of "harm"?
3. When/ where does harm show up and how?
4. What responses for preventing/ reducing/ healing harm emerge?
    - How successful have they been?
    - How do we know?

Questions/ Discussion/ Next Steps

Appendix D: The Do No Harm process



Figure 6. The Do No Harm Seven-Step Process Diagram

Appendix E: The M&E Cycle

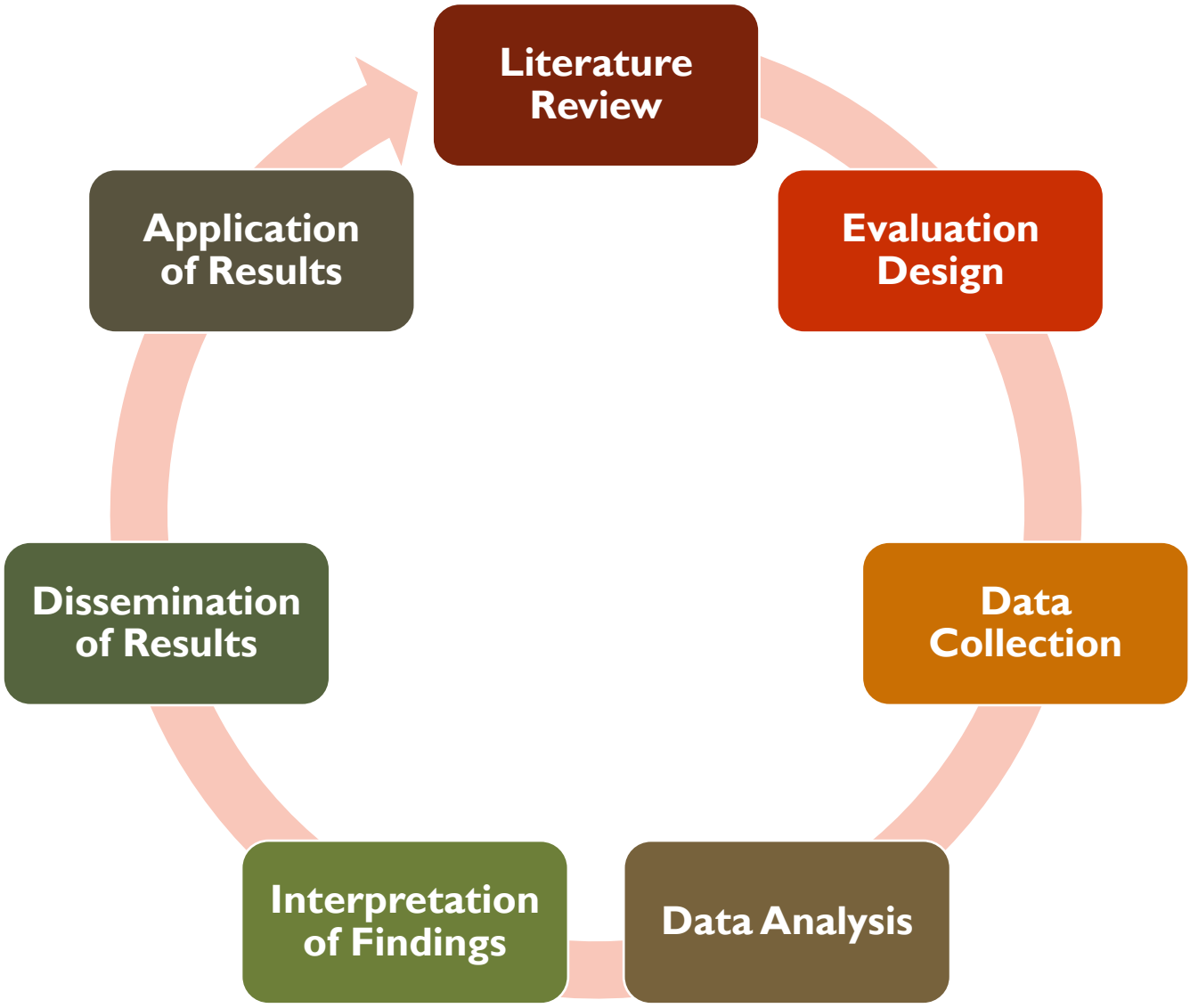


Figure 7. The M&E Cycle

Appendix F: The Continuous Learning & Improvement Program Life Cycle

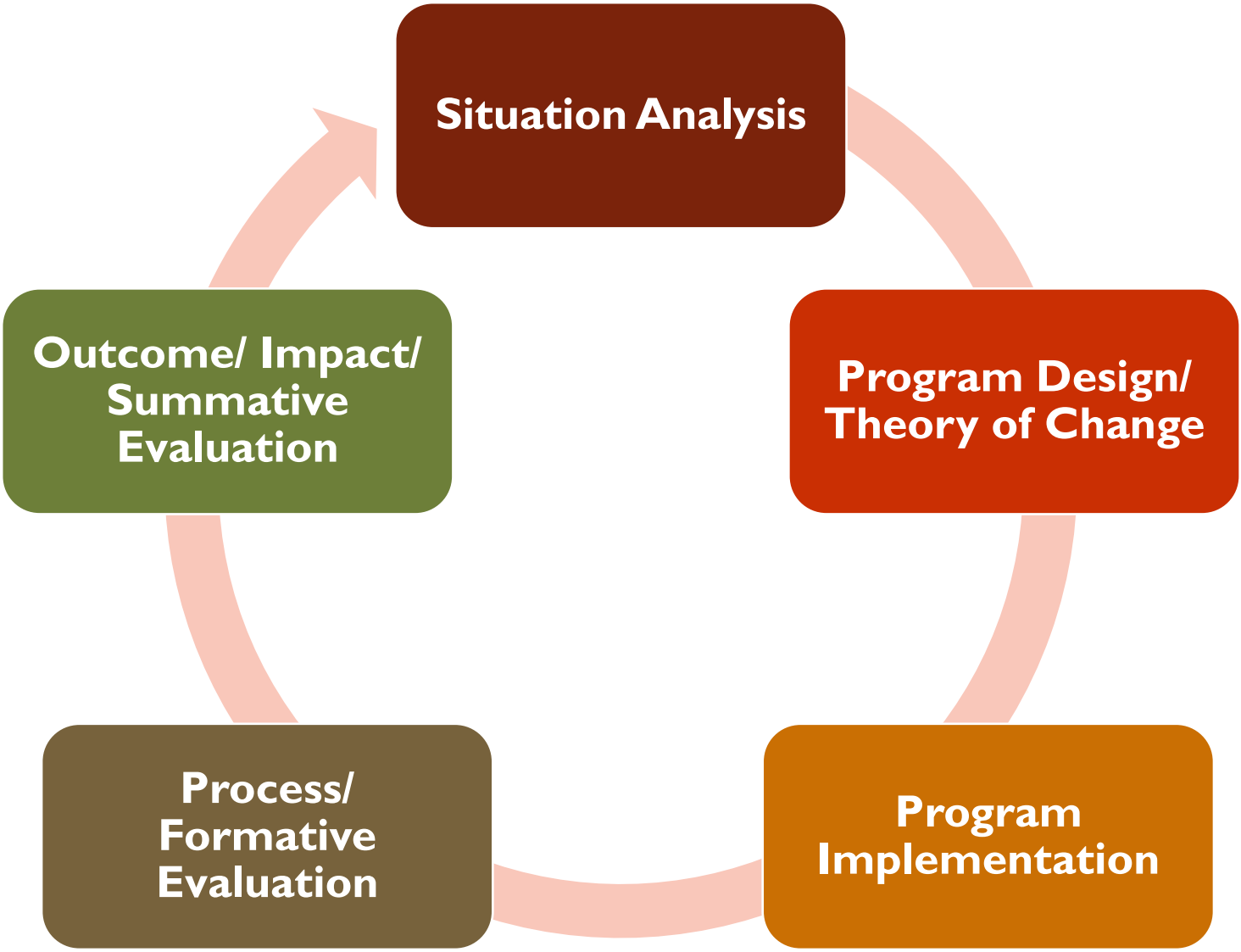


Figure 8. The Continuous Learning & Improvement Program Life Cycle

Appendix G: The Policy & Program Life Cycle

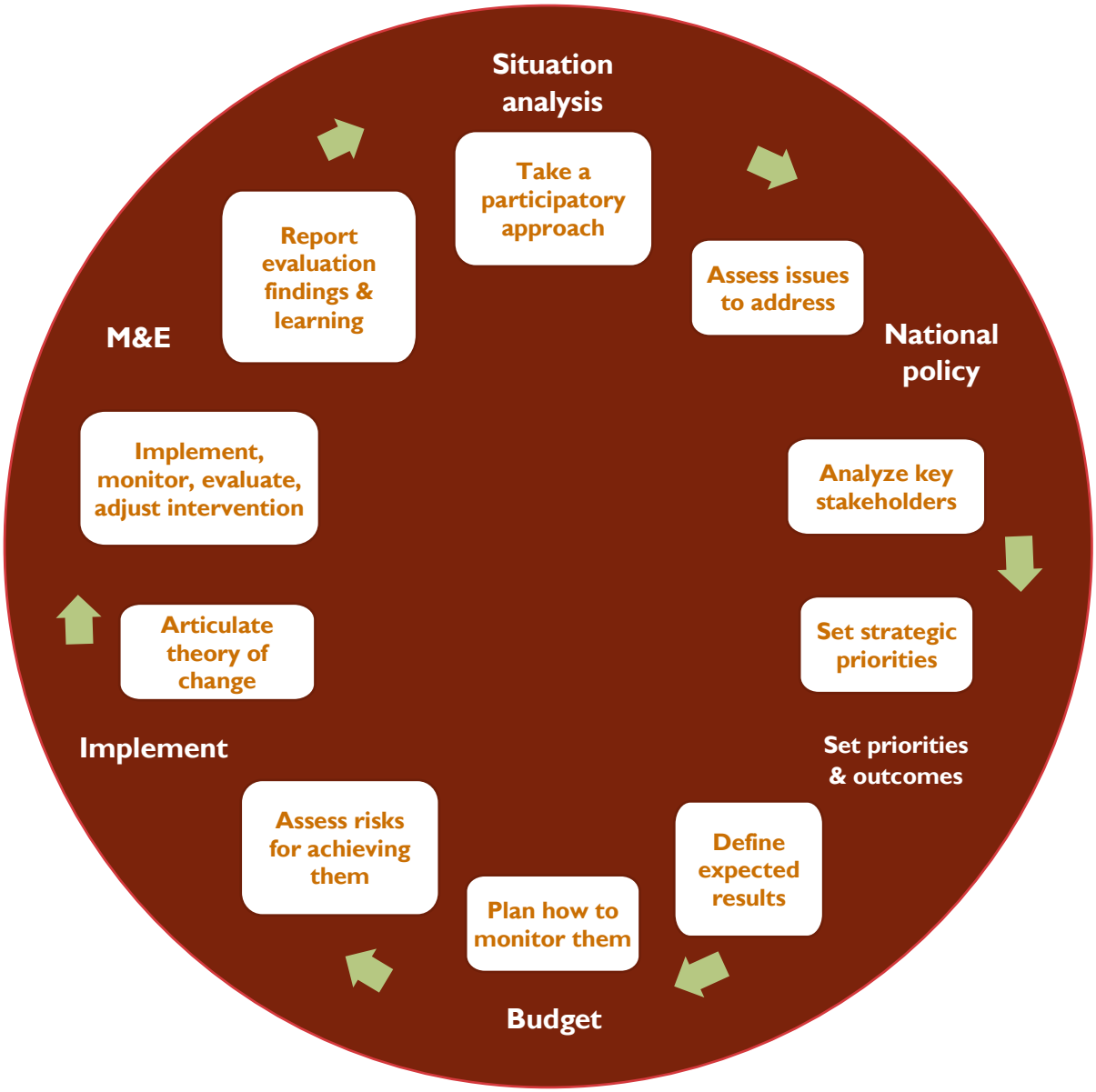


Figure 9. The Policy & Program Life Cycle

Appendix H: Amplifying and Balancing Cycles of Harm

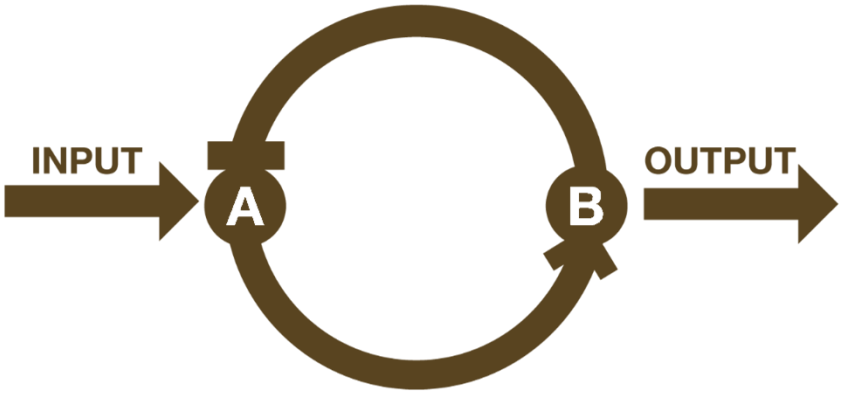


Figure 10. Amplifying feedback loop:
Growth in A causes B to grow; growth in B causes A to grow more

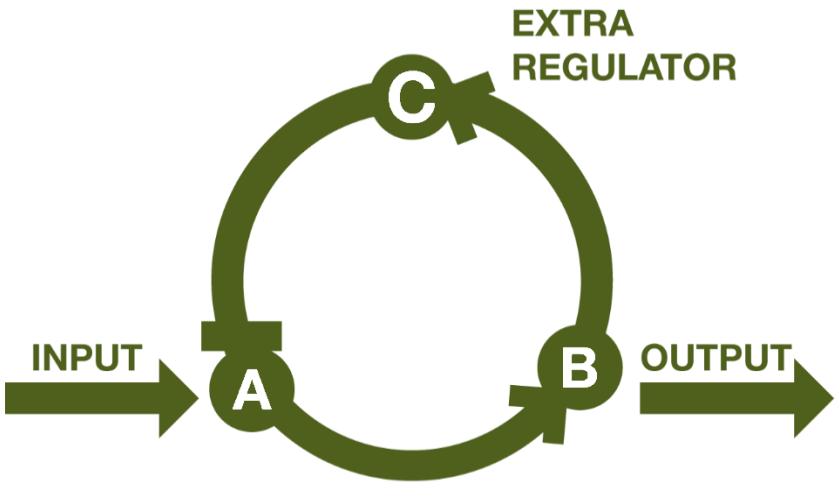


Figure 11. Balancing feedback loop:
Growth in A causes B to grow; growth in B causes C to happen;
C inhibits more growth in A