DSPACE

https://dspace.org/

Approaches to embedding indigenous knowledge systems in Made in Africa Evaluations

Nedson Pophiwa; Umali Saidi

2022-09-13
African Evaluation Journal
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/33186

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

African Evaluation Journal
ISSN: (Online) 2306-5133, (Print) 2310-4988

Approaches to embedding indigenous knowledge systems in Made in Africa Evaluations

Authors:
Nedson Pophiwa[1]
Umali Saidi[2,3]

Affiliations:
[1]Wits School of Governance, Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

[2]Centre for Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe

[3]The Dyke Journal, Research and Post Graduate Studies, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe

Corresponding author:
Nedson Pophiwa,
nedson.pophiwa1@wits.ac.za

Dates:
Received: 18 Feb. 2022
Accepted: 26 July 2022
Published: 30 Aug. 2022

How to cite this article:
Pophiwa, N. & Saidi, U., 2022, 'Approaches to embedding indigenous knowledge systems in Made in Africa Evaluations', *African Evaluation Journal* 10(1), a623. https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v10i1.623

Copyright:
© 2022. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:
Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Background: In this article, the authors make a case for weaving indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) with monitoring and evaluation of interventions targeted at communities on the African continent. Current efforts do not make explicit reference to indigenous knowledge in Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE). Indigenous knowledge systems are implied as the defining aspect of MAE, being called upon to be fused with existing evaluation systems and practices in order to enhance evaluation in African communities.

Objective: To call for enrichment of the MAE in setting the agenda and bring agency to evaluation practices in Africa against centuries of unsustainable developmental practices that continue to underdevelop the continent.

Method: This article explores aspects of IKS which challenge Western hegemonic epistemologies in evaluation approaches and practices in Africa.

Results: It is argued that associations such as African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) should strive to become knowledge hubs which pursue the mission to re-project and reposition Africa within the existing continuum of global knowledge.

Conclusion: The article makes several recommendations for fusing IKS with MAE in a bid to bring the African voice to the fore in evaluations.

Keywords: evaluation; epistemology; hegemony; MAE; AfrEA; IKS.

Introduction

The African evaluation landscape has come of age. Today, there are almost 30 national evaluation networks or voluntary organisations for professional evaluation (VOPEs) across the continent. These institutions have played key roles in developing guidelines for evaluation and bringing together experts in various platforms to discuss topical issues on evaluation which concern their areas of work. In terms of evaluation capacity development, there are more universities, training institutions and several short-course training providers across the continent offering courses in monitoring and evaluation (M&E). In countries such as Uganda, South Africa and Benin, evaluation has garnered political support to the point of becoming ministries or departments of the state. One of the underlying reasons for such developments has been a heed to calls for a 'return' to the source, which have been happening since the late 1970s as a direct response to Euro-Western-induced theories of change as implemented in Africa (Cabral 1973). Much of the literature, especially that which was produced in the 1990s, when scholars began to clamour for 'made in Africa' approaches, focused more on lobbying for change in 'business as usual' approaches to evaluating programmes in the continent (Chilisa 2015). In 1999, the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) was formed, and this marked the beginning of a more structured approach to addressing concerns of the Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) project.

Despite the strides which have been made, there is evidence to the effect that for decades the African voice has demanded that the continent tell its own story (Olaopa & Ayodele 2021). Scholarship has revealed that what has been lacking is the political will and the enabling economic and cultural conditions for Africa to tell its own story (Mapitsa & Ngwato 2020; Mbava & Chapman 2020; White 2009). Political unwillingness, economic disadvantages and so on have acted as barriers from which Euro-Western epistemologies have been feeding in order to stifle growth and sustainable developmental programmes in Africa (Davies 2018). There is no doubt that colonialism and neocolonialism have upheld stereotyping of the continent and its people, rendering poverty and underdevelopment as synonymous with Africa (Cameron 1993). Likewise, evaluation methodologies and approaches in Africa have come under scrutiny as scholars are calling for change to the status quo regarding the perpetuation of Euro-Western epistemologies in

evaluation of African development (Chilisa 2015; Chilisa & Mertens 2021). Chinsamy and Koitsiwe (2016:137) proclaim that Africa needs 'to build on its own strengths' if sustainable development is to be achieved. As the article will show, this:

> [*S*]hould involve the remobilisation of the continent's abundant Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), which combine local skills, practices, technologies and innovations developed and nurtured through generations, and which enable communities to survive over time. (Chinsamy & Koitsiwe 2016:137)

In this article, the authors build a case for embedding IKSs in MAE after realising that there is no explicit reference to IKSs in the existing writings. It is the argument of this article that the fusion of evaluation with IKS approaches will bring about the success of MAE initiatives which are more contextually relevant to African challenges. Olaopa and Ayodele (2021) rightly refer to 'ingenuity' and 'innovation' as key in promoting the African story. Interestingly, 'ingenuity' and 'innovation' are part of African indigenous knowledge (AIK) and innovation (AIK & I), hence the AIK & I concept. African indigenous knowledge and innovation, Olaopa and Ayodele (2021:1) believe, has 'great potential for reducing some of Africa's interrelated development challenges listed to be addressed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).' For any society to survive, innovation is key because it depends largely on creativity 'for the sustainability of any economy's productivity and fiscal activities' (Olaopa & Ayodele 2021:1).

The state of research

Tracing 'evaluation'

Every developmental praxis has its roots somewhere to which it can be systematically traced. Mbava and Chapman (2020) trace the roots of evaluation to the United States of America as a concept used to evaluate the US government's social programmes during the eras of the 'New Deal' and 'Great Society'. From there on, the contemporary outlook of evaluation is a result of how the concept developed, was advanced and broadened to a 'highly globalised' world and is now practiced in a multicultural world and in complex contexts, impacting the lives of various and diverse communities globally (Mbava & Chapman 2020:2). In the context of Africa, the AfrEA observed and resolved that 'the role of values and culture in African contexts should be evident in current knowledge systems and infused in modelling evaluation in Africa' (Mbava & Chapman 2020:2–3).

Given that evaluation has become a global reality and phenomenon, it is important that values and contextual realities be part of African evaluation praxis, hence the call by AfrEA to have an Afrocentric evaluation in both theory and practice 'as a response to the imperatives of African cultural contexts' (Mbava & Chapman 2020:3). Advocates of MAE (Chilisa 2015; Chilisa & Mertens 2021) believe that this will guarantee sustainability because Euro-Western approaches have failed to reverse underdevelopment in the continent. They lament that current evaluation approaches have excluded indigenous people, who are beneficiaries of developmental interventions (Chilisa 2015; Chilisa & Mertens 2021).

Indigenous knowledge systems

Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) are a defining aspect of African existence (Olaopa & Ayodele 2021). Africans have always been able to identify their own problems or issues that affected them during the precolonial period. An example is with regard to military warfare, whereby the famous Zulu king, Shaka, needed no Western army general to school him on his military innovative techniques. Shaka, for instance, innovatively formed a sustainable weapon, 'the assegai', among other systems of governance and military strategies (Peires 2009). Furthermore, in African medicine, Asakitikpi (2020) demonstrates that African traditional treating and diagnosis of diseases were, and continue to be, holistic as social, psychological and even spiritual elements are part of the diagnosis and treatment of ailments.

Decolonisation concepts or projects at the dawn of independence called for a return to the source by most pan-Africanists such as Ngũgĩ (1987), Cabral (1973), Chinweizu (1987), and Fanon (1967), to mention but a few. While at the surface, it appears as a return to subscribing to African values, culture and identities, crucially the call by the aforesaid African thinkers was to have Africans reconnect with aspects that had traditionally been at the centre of African existence. It follows, therefore, that Africans rely on IKSs as a resource for solving 'daily and developmental challenges through their various innovative ideas and uses in order to improve their living standard and quality of life' (Olaopa & Ayodele 2021:1). Hence, Western philanthropic interventions and donor activities in Africa have tried to pin development against IKS concepts – however, without the urgency it requires (Chilisa & Mertens 2021). From the outlook, inference to IKS has been cosmetically projected by Western approaches with the hope to achieve outcomes one hopes would guarantee self-sustenance by Africans in order to improve their livelihoods in their own geopolitical spaces and landscapes.

At independence, Africa sought to rebuild its communities in areas of politics, education, health and infrastructure development, among others, following the ravages of colonialism or apartheid. Colonialism brought Africa and the Euro-West into contact, resulting in Africans adopting practices brought by imperialism. In this endeavour, international institutions and their agencies, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) moved a gear up to 'facilitate', support and monitor development-related initiatives globally. For instance, the Kariba Dam project in the former Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was funded by IMF (Matanzima & Saidi 2020) with main objectives to provide development initiatives and support to white settlers. The BaTonga people, whose ancestral home has been the Zambezi valley, remained languishing in abject poverty and have not benefited directly from the Kariba Dam project itself (Saidi 2020).

Limited recognition of indigenous knowledge systems in development discourse

While IKSs are acknowledged by international institutions and their agencies, working in collaboration with local governments, they tend to water down its application in real-world contexts. One way of integrating the locale in the development initiatives was obviously to take a bottom-up approach, rather than top-down, from which ideas exemplified in the body of IKSs needed to be included in the developmental agendas. However, in practice, the Euro-Western imposition has sidelined IKSs. Olaopa and Ayodele (2021) bemoan the silence by the UN SDGs on IKS. This silence on IKSs in the developmental agenda is a systematic exclusion of the indigenous people from the developmental agenda itself, yet Africans are supposedly the beneficiaries of the development advanced.

Studies have shown that IKS-based policy formulation and developmental agendas are sustainable in the sense that indigenous people will be encouraged and begin to accept development ideas; they will become fully involved during implementation and evaluation processes (Chinsamy & Koitsiwe 2016). Challenges of developmental nature that indigenous people face are usually exemplified by unemployment, balance of payment problems, climate change, environmental degradation, poor resource management, hunger and diseases, among other indicators. Yet indigenous people usually benefit from the connections they have to their natural environment using their capabilities, skills, knowledge and technologies in a sustainable manner (Matanzima & Saidi 2020), to which imposed interventions more often than not have resulted in further disruptions. Therefore, IKSs usually guide African survival even in a globalised world (Asakitikpi 2020).

Although some have dismissed IKSs as unscientific, it is heartwarming that generally, scientific and IKSs have increasingly been accepted as two areas of expertise complementing each other (Masinde 2015). Makhado, Saidi and Tshikhudo (2014) demonstrate how small-scale farmers in southern Africa have adapted to drought conditions using indigenous knowledge, noting, however, the weaknesses of solely relying on IKSs, as technologically-driven practices have advantages that play out where IKS is weak. Thus, accumulated knowledge is always viewed as working for the locals, and the question within MAE would then have to be on addressing the levels of success and sustainability.

There has been a shift from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), designed and directed towards achieving global development by 2015, to the SDGs of 2016–2030. This shift, generally raising crucial sustainable development issues, did not even achieve goals as anticipated prior to 2015, further showing the inadequacy of the concept of sustainable development (Masinde 2015).

Thus, to address gaps such as the above, the focus of evaluation in African countries should adopt Made in Africa approaches to evaluation (Chilisa 2015). Evaluation of projects, services, products or systems needs to explicitly draw its energy from IKSs, from which human capacity development in evaluation, practices, models and ideologies may be pinned on IKSs as the point of departure.

Indigenous knowledge systems define African existence for the simple reason that indigenous knowledge is a key resource Africans use to engage with each other and the environment for the common good of all, as well as their survival. Indigenous knowledge systems are entrenched in real-life experiences which in turn define their worldview, relations and practices, creating a system far removed from the Euro-Western celebrated orthodox scientific systems (Asakitikpi 2020). The crucial aspect of IKS is that practices are embedded in the daily lives of the people. For instance, when the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) hit the globe, most African countries' economies and health care systems could not easily cater for the needs of the populations against the pandemic (Dandara et al. 2021; Mphekgwana, Makgahlela & Mothiba 2021). A number of communities in Africa resorted to indigenous herbs, foods, concoctions and other practices to augment available orthodox systems to manage the pandemic. This offers a glimpse of the capacity to utilise inborn local skills and traditions to facilitate decision-making and modify practices to resolve the challenges societies may face from time to time (Olaopa & Ayodele 2021).

Hence, to omit or exclude IKSs in developmental initiatives is tantamount to creating unsustainable developmental programmes or services, which makes evaluation weak and sometimes misplaced. It is also to deny the majority of Africans, most of whom live in rural or remote areas, from participating in using their ingenuity to drive their developmental agenda, despite the many campaigns by international developmental agencies calling for an IKS-centred point of departure.

It is unfair to place the blame on institutions such as the UN, IMF or World Bank for gracing developmental blueprints devoid of indigenous knowledge systems and innovation (IKS & I) for implementation mostly in Africa. The challenge is that IKSs have not received adequate documentation. Agency to use IKSs should therefore be brought to evaluation of projects, services and products or systems. However, African countries need not 'convince' anyone or attempt to convince 'all and sundry of the significance of these African resources' (Olaopa & Ayedele 2021; Rodney 1973); rather, they should tell their story. As such, epistemologically inclined bodies such as AfrEA and African governments should therefore support research, documentation and various practices premised on IKS & I. In doing so, the Nigerian proverb that 'a tiger does not parade its tigeritude' (Soyinka 1967) is noted, because the continent owes no one an apology.

Modernisation and imperialism, premised on epistemologies that push the scientific validity of knowledge, imposed their worldviews on African epistemes. Interestingly, paradigms for imposition were not designed to convince recipients but

were calculated to force Africans into submission, disrupting IKSs in the process (Matanzima & Saidi 2020). In other words, IKSs in African countries were never allowed to be documented, practised or preserved. The idea was to delete Africa's epistemes from existence and replace it by that which was imposed (Saidi 2019). Not all was lost, however, as such IKS preservation is key, as this affords the rebirth and reshaping of continental identity, systematically or otherwise.

Another dimension that suffices regarding the appreciation of IKS as a determinant of African livelihoods includes aspects of evaluation which involve theorisation and practice. The realm of theorisation could be attributed to the roots of the evaluation theory itself, which Kirkhart (2010:400) believes have several functions, notably to provide the language as well as to reflect 'priorities and values, sets agendas and defines conversations, provides both professional and public identity, and provides knowledge base of evaluation'. The relationship between IKS and evaluation (for those who have IKS as central) is to realise validity of actions and interventions undertaken with the objective of improving human endeavours in a sustainable way.

Suggested approaches to embedding indigenous knowledge systems in Made in Africa Evaluations

Although there is a marked improvement in political and economic systems in Africa, Mbaku (2013) observed that the continent is eager to address economic development, but the challenge is that most Africans remain trapped in extreme poverty. By 2011, the UN reported that 81% of countries with high poverty index were in Africa, with 50% of these having extreme poverty. Fast-forward to 2021 – conditions were reported as having worsened, with 42% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa continuing to live below the poverty datum line. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, officially announced by the World Health Organization in 2020, stifled efforts to alleviate poverty in Africa and elsewhere. The discussion hence elaborates on several points related to MAE and the need to fuse it with IKSs.

In the global development space, there has been a tendency to overlook the importance of African IKSs in realising development goals, right from the times of MDGs to SDGs. Realising that Africans continue to be trapped by underdevelopment, the UN proposed that if by 2015 Africa successfully implemented the MDGs, this would guarantee sustainable development, improved services and programmes on the continent. Development indicators such as wealth creation, employment generation, safeguarding the environment and resuscitating and sustaining the culture of the people were used as the rallying points to initiate sustainable development interventions. In the context of SDGs, it remains to be seen by 2030 whether the missed opportunities of 2015 will be repeated.

Thus, reading the SDGs 2030, one notes the intentions of the UN blueprint currently in force, which – if diligently pursued by all countries, regardless of status – are hoped to lead to sustainable development and improved services. For Africa, this comes at an opportune time as IKS & I has the potential of becoming the bedrock of implementation. Indigenous knowledge systems and innovation can be the springboard to guarantee the attainment of the UN SDGs by 2030. The advantage is that IKS & I have always been utilised since time immemorial, but they have not adequately been accepted, promoted and invested in by scholarship, governments and developmental agencies.

An example which demonstrates the efficacy of IKSs is the experience of a community in the south-east of Zimbabwe which was displaced by overflowing of a river. When the Tokwe-Mukosi people were relocated after flooding in 2014 following the construction of the Tugwi-Mukosi Dam (Mucherera & Spiegel 2021; Nhodo, Ojong & Chikoto 2021), the displaced population were housed in an area called Chingwizi. Chingwizi was a heavily scorpion-infested area, so these new inhabitants of Chingwizi made their home with dangerous scorpions, from which people suffered bites and even deaths in some cases. Saidi (2020b) reports that the Chingwizi people applied IK and skills to eradicate the scorpion threat. If one was to conduct an evaluation of the impact of the Tugwi-Mukosi relocation project on the inhabitants of the area, such an evaluation would need to gain an understanding of the indigenous approaches which the inhabitants of the area used to fight the scorpion plague in the area and not only focus on the extent to which the relocation project met its intended outcomes as set in an M&E framework. Another difficulty, however, of evaluating such national projects is the extent to which the state regulates access to evaluators and even researchers who want to work on understanding the impact of dam projects on local residents (Mucherera & Spiegel 2021; Nhodo et al. 2021).

The discussion makes a case for some of the following approaches to embedding IKS in MAE evaluations.

Emphasising cultural competencies, contextual relevance and cultural validity

Made in Africa Evaluation–influenced research should therefore interrogate evaluation practices by emphasising cultural competencies, contextual relevance and cultural validity as requirements of an evaluation process. If this is not given urgent attention, Africa risks remaining at the periphery of the periphery, again, because each cultural and contextual set-up deserves to tell its own story, challenge hegemony and suggest its pathway, even as it rides on existing efforts from other regions dealing with seemingly similar issues of concern. This is what Mbava and Chapman (2020:2) reflect on when they note that there is need for meaningful engagement, seeing that '[i]n an African context,

the implication has been the perpetuation of one-size-fits-all evaluation methods that have not fully served both beneficiaries and policy decision makers'.

Kirkhart (2010:401) spoke of validity as central to evaluation, for the simple reason that 'validity' is a property of evaluation praxis and that there are 'numerous intersecting cultural identifications and assumptions; therefore, validity too must be multicultural'. This is what is posited by sociotechnical as well as actor–network theories (ANT) when they express systems operations, their dynamisms and relations, noting how they are inter-linked. It generally means that sustainability of policies, programmes and projects can be guaranteed when they are formulated on the basis of the IKS & I, from which evaluation will come to be conditioned by multiculturalism. One recalls how Lezaun (2017:11) emphasised that humans as agents 'are active and capable of making complicated decisions'; therefore, using stereotypical and imported paradigms may not result in intended outcomes.

Hence, the nature and outlook of the evaluation theory chosen should be the basis on which African practitioners are guided in their selection of epistemologies, appropriate procedures and methods or paradigms, without threatening culture or making it simplistic and theoretically stereotypical, which thus threatens validity. The failure of Western evaluation paradigms in Africa could be attributed to the fact that the evaluation theory conditioning evaluation practices cannot be reconciled, because the theoretical underpinnings used and the context of practice are not culturally congruent (Kirkhart 2010). The cultural location of the evaluation theory and the cultural dimensions of the context should therefore be reconciled, and IKS & I comes in as a reconciliatory aspect against the understanding that IKSs are culture based, and those cultures are plural rather than singular. As such, institutions, governments and/or development agencies have to impart knowledge, values and beliefs as well as skills 'that are also shared and communicated across cohorts' (Kirkhart 2010:401). Because IKS & I is based on cultural formulations, the caveats that apply to culture such as multiplicity (diversity within groupings), fluidity (shifting intersecting boundaries demarcated by culture) and non-neutrality (premised on power dynamics) also apply to IKS & I.

The above reflects Makhado et al.'s (2014:265) message that 'neither indigenous nor technologically-driven practices should be seen as panacea on their own, but integrating the two sets of practices could optimise adaptation by small-scale farmers'. In other words, amalgamations are required wherein evaluation must consider indigenous and technically-driven practices. The ethical dimension in this regard, however, must ultimately guarantee and protect the vulnerable. With this in mind, reflections on the debates on contextualised evaluations (Mapitsa & Ngwato 2020) befittingly come into play.

The need for contextualised evaluation theory

Another point to consider is that despite strides in MAE, there is still evidence of Western theories being applied in evaluations without due care for their relevance. Mbava and Chapman (2020) argue that the major challenge with current evaluation systems in Africa has been that the theory and practice of evaluation largely emerged from Euro-Western worldviews, and continue to evolve in a manner that addresses the needs of Euro-Western interests. The importance of focusing on evaluation, as Africa continues to search for answers to sustainable development, means that governments have increasingly moved to build state capacities to evaluate systems, programmes and products. It also means the private sector and nonprofit organisations have come to use evaluation as a tool for accountability, wherein all aspects of livelihoods and developmental projects are subjected to evaluation – assessed against some quality criteria deemed 'universal' or global. However, in challenging Euro-Western epistemologies, questions which continue to be asked are geared at establishing whose values and worldviews should inform such evaluation processes and designs.

It is therefore encouraging to note that Africa as a region has taken centre stage in becoming active to debate and call for an 'indigenised' or contextualised evaluation theory. For Mapitsa and Ngwato (2020), the preoccupation for Africa is to:

> [*D*]efine itself beyond its roots in the global aid industry and the still-dominant unequal power dynamics of international donor/local beneficiary relationships' prompting the African Evaluation Guidelines (AEG) to 'move beyond 'developed country' assumptions about methods, program design, and development outcomes…. (pp. 1–2)

The above is an interesting dimension which also brings attention to ethical decision-making in evaluations, because the ultimate goal should firstly be to have 'evaluators who understand the local context and local stakeholder relationships' (Mapitsa & Ngwato 2020:2). Secondly, evaluators should be trained and have tools for dictating 'multiple layers of power and complex webs of relationships between stakeholders' (Mapitsa & Ngwato 2020:2).

Africa is positioned to benefit from developing evaluation paradigms because it has already been exposed to Euro-Western evaluation approaches, but now it requires the support of African value systems. Hence, Africa will not be throwing away positive Euro-Western approaches, as it were, but adapting them to suit the African contextual realities, as Chilisa (2015:17) rightly noted that humans learn from each other and adoption is 'a good practice that is supported by African value systems'. Clearly, one reads a pluralistic evaluation theory and practices as compared to having domineering or imposed 'big brother' evaluation paradigms that have proved to be distant and foreign to beneficiaries. Dualism promotes the African voice to be heard; African epistemology, ontology and axiology in evaluation need to

have space and power to question imposed methods seeking attention in evaluation.

Therefore, it is time for AfrEA to promote and push even further the calls to have empirical research designed to guarantee Afrocentric epistemologies in evaluation, as well as to provide knowledge and skills to query interventions whose theoretical underpinnings may be devoid of any residue that addresses indigenous knowledge. The African Evaluation Association is busy doing this, assessing their progress and recommending improvements. The major question to be addressed should be, as Mbava and Chapman (2020) suggest, whose value system should inform evaluation enquiry within an Afrocentric context. Fusing African IKS & I cannot be overemphasised, and studies (Asakitikpi 2020; Chilisa 2015; Chilisa & Mertens 2021) vehemently agree on this point. What needs to be addressed is the 'how' part, which, for instance, Mbava and Chapman (2020) do not adequately address. While Chilisa (2015) recommended adoption of orthodox values and practices into the Afrocentric context, the 'how' question remains blurred. Whether adapting or adopting Euro-Western evaluation theories and practices or fusing IKS with orthodox scientific epistemologies, what needs to be clarified are the parameters within which such mechanisms can be created. Suggest concrete improvement strategies.

Power dynamics in the evaluation landscape

Power dynamics exist in evaluation. Such power structures should be questioned, and the process has already been set in motion by decoloniality scholars who call for epistemic justice in addressing issues of identity and representation between the Global North and Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). Rightly so, discourses challenging Western epistemologies have been pushed by debates in the localities of Native Americans, New Zealand Maoris and Australian Aborigines (Mbava & Chapman 2020). The African region is sadly lagging behind in adding its own voice.

Evaluations do not happen in an apolitical context, because there are power dynamics at hand largely defined by observation (Kirkhart 2010). Compounded to this is that Africa as a region has a colonial history, meaning:

> [*T*]he varied landscape of tertiary education for evaluators, public sector capacity, access to information, and political incentives have all shaped the region's political economy in ways that fundamentally impact how evaluation needs to be understood and practiced. (Mapitsa & Ngwato 2020:2)

Therefore, challenging Western epistemologies should not be based on citing cosmetic developmental initiatives in the region. Instead, it is to re-engage all aspects that are linked to evaluation, including reference to ethics, which are abstract sets of norms. Hence, clear guidelines are required to be formulated, against references to global guidelines often linked to the Australian Evaluation Association (AEA) and the American Evaluation Association (AmEA). African Evaluation Association adopted the AEG in 2002, and despite being revised in 2006–2007 and 2019, there is a dearth of literature or research about the guidelines (Mapitsa & Ngwato 2020).

There is also need to challenge Western epistemologies at the level of expression as well. When evaluation reports are availed, stakeholders deserve to access the knowledge created for their benefit, to which the media is also an important vehicle through which such knowledge is used by intermediaries to reach beneficiaries. However, the language of expression is a key factor in this regard, both the language used in the evaluation reports and the language used to translate the knowledge contained in the evaluation reports. When Mpofu and Salawu (2018) speak of the need to use indigenous languages in the media as an investment, they are battling with sustainability aspects of the semiotic medium of expression that represents indigenous epistemologies. Among the many advantages of using indigenous languages is the involvement of indigenous-language media as an essential tool for conveying communication for development.

Interventions should be premised on indigenous epistemologies

In this article, the authors call for a broad-based take wherein the very identification of challenges that indigenous people face should be locally based and formulated. Interventions should be premised on indigenous epistemologies and the affected communities invited to actively involve in the implementation of the programmes or policies. When these are tightly established and centred on indigenous people's value systems, evaluation paradigms will then be formulated using the same mechanisms. Euro-Western interventions can then be reached out to for possibilities of adoption or adaptation to help speed up the resolution of local problems. One needs to address what or which of the two epistemological systems should be fused into which one.

Failure to address this aspect tends to create a situation where African systems may be exposed to domination, given the stereotypical mentality that African epistemologies have no history worth talking about. Much of the IKSs remain scarcely documented against historical colonial realities. The continent continues to seek a solution on how to incorporate indigenous languages, for instance, in various aspects of national operations such as in education, media, government, economics and so on, as colonial languages continue to dominate business and government work.

The colonial past of the African continent, its long history, ravaging of its epistemologies and stereotyping practices have resulted in a heavily battered IKS & I in Africa (Cavino 2013). It follows, therefore, that MAE in matters of having to train local evaluators, knowledge development and packaging of evaluation should be part of this fundamental. This knowledge must be designed in such a way that the curriculum first challenges Western epistemologies and critiques and exposes anomalies in what has already been propagated. This is a strategic way of deconstructing Western epistemologies, theories and constructions on evaluation. In

doing so, indigenous languages (Mpofu & Salawu 2018) must have a place, especially in matters of revoking IKS (Asakitikpi 2020). Ultimately, it should be known that the exercise is as ideological as it is technical. In other words, Western evaluation practices and culture were institutionalised in Africa; as such, AfrEA, MAE or African governments need not be romantic in having to change the status quo, but be robust in their approach while paying particular attention to detail.

Over the past few years, droughts in southern Africa have become recurrent, thus increasing vulnerability of the poor (Makhado et al. 2014). In reponse, regional governments and their development partners have been quick to roll out programmes designed to empower locals on managing drought, utilisation of modelled drought-resistant seeds and food distribution (Nangombe, n.d.). An example is that of the Chivi and Zaka districts of Zimbabwe (south-east), where drought-induced challenges can be traced back to the colonial period. This means such communities have developed indigenous methods of coping with erratic rainfall periods. Most programmes pushed by donor agencies in such communities are, however, intended to serve those pushed to the margins on the basis of various contextually dependent variables such as education, disabilities, socio-economic challenges or immigrant status, to mention a few. Inadequacies of Euro-Western evaluations could be the reason why African governments over the years have grown to silently detest them, as evidenced by their under-utilisation or lack of political will. There is no doubt that:

> [*D*]ominant Euro-Western frameworks continue to evolve in a manner that primarily addresses the needs of donors and international agencies without sufficiently considering the realities of African beneficiaries. (Mbava & Chapman 2020:4)

Under such circumstances, evaluation theories and approaches, in order to have standing, need to address the complexities that may characterise the context of operations. This is because such contexts may need their own unique solutions in order to support what Chilisa (2015), AfrEA (2017) and Mbava and Chapman (2020) call for. The African continent itself is not a homogenous village, as it is too diverse in social, political, economic and religious perspectives. African values and experiences in themselves are complex (Mertens & Musyoka 2007), and disregarding this seemingly 'simple' fact has serious implications in conversations of sustainable development. This is true especially when one considers that evaluators have had a tendency of entering 'each context with a set of preconceived assumptions that guide their decisions about what variables are important to consider and how and from whom the data will be collected' (Mertens & Musyoka 2007:5). Africa, through its various situations, demands attention in its own right, in order to significantly deal with its array of complexities.

To place the aforesaid into perspective, a review of selected programmes may come in handy from the region. Chinsamy and Koitsiwe (2016) report on the Lekgophung Community Women Indigenous Vegetable Garden Project (North West province, South Africa). The project, at the time of the study, had only six of the 20 original members. The rest left, citing unsustainability of the project as it had failed to alleviate poverty as initially envisioned. The challenge with this report is that it approaches 'indigenous' projects as projects initiated and run by indigenous people without external developmental agencies supporting it, mostly in financial terms. Results are presented as appalling, as if to suggest that any project that is initiated by local people to run their affairs is doomed to fail. The studied project indicates that only six of the 20 members were continuing with the project under difficult circumstances, and those who opted out are said to have done so because the project had failed to meet their expectations, mainly regular income, yet they were not interviewed or engaged in the study to provide their voices. One reads a Eurocentric evaluation in this aspect.

The above presents aspects needing reconfiguration inasfar as MAE is concerned. At what point is a project deemed indigenous? Is it indigenous with respect to its initiation and running, or should it be incorporating indigenous systems (in terms of knowledge and technologies) but foreign funded? It is not disputed that foreign-funded projects have a degree of manipulation to. Asakitikpi (2020) noted that African governments and institutions such as UN and WHO have recently come to recognise and encourage adoption and use, for instance, of African traditional medicines alongside orthodox systems, but this has only been accepted on paper as there are no budgets, training or respective legal frameworks to support indigenous systems. This reads in tandem with the Lekgophung Community Women Indigenous Vegetable Garden Project, noted as having suffered because of the government of South Africa pulling out as there was practically no support outside the community.

Engaging indigenous people in formulating and evaluating interventions targeted towards them

An important aspect, often ignored, is the concept of 'participation' by indigenous people in project initiations, although their indigenous knowledge is vital in shaping the project plan and conditions of its implementation. Ultimately, they are the key players to provide necessary information during evaluations. Havemann (2009) defined 'participation' as the right to contribute to:

> [*T*]he deliberations and decisions of decision-making bodies, in contrast to the mere opportunity to be consulted or to be an observer of proceedings at the behest of the state parties. (p. 2)

Just as the human rights component was called upon to be fulfilled in climate change governance in accordance with declarations at the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, a more or less similar dimension is required during programme formulations, implementations and evaluations, to which MAE approaches and paradigms are applied. It will then mean that projects will be legally bound to human rights

laws and observance. This way, indigenous people and their knowledge will be accorded agency, such that there will be more participation guaranteed by evaluation rather than reducing evaluation to being a mere consultation exercise. By making MAE human rights–based, where rights are proactively integrated into the designs, development and implementation of all programmes, this will ultimately lead to positive outcomes that impact on indigenous people. In other words, MAE must be accorded 'eyes' to see and 'teeth' to bite (Cavino 2013) in order for MAE-based laws to be tied to human rights protocols.

The 'elephant in the room' are indigenous people who are positioned to adopt a posture of prohibition with regard to nonindigenous evaluation paradigms and evaluator work in indigenous contexts. When the conversation is engaged from an indigenous perspective, evaluator competency is not the primary focus; rather, it is evaluation being reframed as a performance of power within which lies the potential for the realisation of indigenous sovereignty. It is precisely that line of thinking that draws one to the body of IKSs to reconfigure it as evaluation in Africa, in this context, exposing Western epistemologies regarding development, survival and existence.

Euro-Western epistemologically influenced paradigms reflect not only complexities in undertaking evaluations but draw one's attention to the ultimate knowledge and conclusions associated with it regarding projects and the targeted people. The bias must be that evaluation be accountable to indigenous people or communities to which they are undertaken, rather than to funders of the projects whose support of a project might be for their own ends.

Conclusion and recommendations

This article has demonstrated that a gap exists in current approaches to MAE, where IKSs are not explicitly referred to in some of the scholarly arguments. Indigenous methods of data collection are, however, acknowledged in the works of scholars such as Chilisa and Mertens (2021). This is a good start for the fusion of MAE with IKS. But the article also shows that there are several ways in which indigenous knowledge has been applied in dealing with developmental challenges, although such innovations may not be documented because of the lack of approaches to evaluation which pay attention to IKS.

The article has discussed several approaches to embedding IKS in MAEs. In sum, it recommends the following:

- Lead organisations such as AfrEA and other VOPEs on the continent should promote contextualised evaluation theory. They need to heed a call by Cavino (2013:342) for 'the development and implementation of a distinctly [African] epistemology that includes theoretical, philosophical, and methodological components, generating a cohesive and diverse range of models and pedagogies'.
- Increased advocacy by African evaluators for a stewardship relationship between funders or principals and developmental agencies (agents) in order to address power dynamics in the evaluation landscape.
- Interventions should be premised on indigenous epistemologies. Part of doing this requires that evaluators should be empowered to work with indigenous languages, especially in reporting, in order to represent beneficiaries of the programmes as well as involve them in communication for development.
- Lastly, there is a need to engage indigenous populations in formulating and evaluating interventions targeted towards them. This could be done also by mandating that evaluators be locals or those who can prove to be well versed in local value systems.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

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

Authors' contributions

N.P. contributed towards the formal analysis, writing of the original draft and the reviewing and editing thereof. U.S. was responsible for conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, writing the original draft and the reviewing and editing thereof.

Ethical considerations

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

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

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

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

References

Asakitikpi, A., 2020, 'African indigenous medicines: Towards a holistic healthcare system in Africa', *African Identities*. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1820311

AfrEA, 2017, *8th International Conference close-out report*, March 27–31, 2017, Kampala, Uganda.

Cabral, A., 1973, *Return to the source: Selected speeches of Amilcar Cabral*, Africa Information Service, New York.

Cameron, J., 1993, 'The challenges for monitoring and evaluation in the 1990s', *Project Appraisal* 8(2), 91–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/02688867.1993.9726893

Cavino, H.M., 2013, 'Across the colonial divide: Conversations about evaluation in indigenous contexts', *American Journal of Evaluation* 34(3), 339–355. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214013489338

Chilisa, B., 2015, *A synthesis paper on the Made in Africa evaluation concept: Commissioned by African Evaluation Association* (AfrEA), viewed 17 August 2021, from https://afrea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/MAE2-Final-31st-august.pdf.

Chilisa, B. & Mertens, D.M., 2021, 'Indigenous Made in Africa Evaluation frameworks: Addressing epistemic violence and contributing to social transformation', *American Journal of Evaluation* 42(2), 241–253. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214020948601

Chinsamy, M. & Koitsiwe, M., 2016, 'Indigenous knowledge-based vegetable garden projects for poverty alleviation in South Africa', *Journal of Social Sciences* 46(2), 137–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2016.11893521

Chinweizu, O., 1987, *The West and the rest of us: White predators, Black slavers, and the African elite*, Pero Press, Lagos.

Dandara, C., Dzobo, K. & Chirikure, S., 2021, 'COVID-19 pandemic and Africa: From the situation in Zimbabwe to a case for precision herbal medicine', *OMICS: A Journal of Integrative Biology* 25(4), 209–212. https://doi.org/10.1089/omi.2020.0099

Davies, R., 2018, 'Representing theories of change: Technical challenges with evaluation consequences', *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 10(4), 438–461. https://doi.org/10.1080/19439342.2018.1526202

Fanon, F., 1967, *black skin white masks*, Pluto Press, London.

Havemann, P., 2009, 'Ignoring the mercury in the climate change barometer: Denying indigenous peoples' rights', *Australian Indigenous Law Review* 13(1), 2–26. https://doi.org/10.2307/26423114

Kirkhart, K.E., 2010, 'Eyes on the prize: Multicultural validity and evaluation theory', *American Journal of Evaluation* 31(3), 400–413. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214010373645

Lezaun, J., 2017, 'Actor-network theory', in C. Benzecry, M. Krause & I. Reed (eds.), *Social theory now*, pp. 305–336, Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Makhado, R.A., Saidi, A.T. & Tshikhudo, P.P., 2014, 'Optimising drought adaptation by small-scale farmers in southern Africa through integration of indigenous and technologically-driven practices', *African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development* 6(4), 265–273. https://doi.org/10.1080/20421338.2014.945391

Mapitsa, C.B. & Ngwato, T.P., 2020, 'Rooting evaluation guidelines in relational ethics: Lessons from Africa', *American Journal of Evaluation* 41(3), 404–419. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214019859652

Masinde, M., 2015, 'An innovative drought early warning system for sub-saharan Africa: Integrating modern and indigenous approaches', *African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development* 7(1), 8–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/20421338.2014.971558

Matanzima, J. & Saidi, U., 2020, 'Landscape, belonging & identity in North-west Zimbabwe: A semiotic analysis', *African Identities* 18, 233–251. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1777839

Mbaku, J.M., 2013 (in review), 'The Brookings Institution presents: Evaluating poverty elimination: Boosting entrepreneurship in Africa', *Harvard International Review* 35(1).

Mbava, N.P. & Chapman, S., 2020, 'Adapting realist evaluation for Made in Africa evaluation criteria', *African Evaluation Journal* 8(1), 2306–5133. https://doi.org/10.4102/aej

Mertens, D.M. & Musyoka, M., 2007, 'Making research and evaluation our own: Ethical implications for strengthening the foundations for Africa-rooted and Africa-led inquiry', *Mosenodi* 15(1), 5–16.

Mphekgwana, P.M., Makgahlela, M. & Mothiba, T.M., 2021, 'Use of traditional medicines to fight COVID-19 during the South African nationwide lockdown: A prevalence study among university students and academic staff', *The Open Public Health Journal* 14(1), 441–445. https://doi.org/10.2174/1874944502114010441

Mpofu, P. & Salawu, A., 2018, 'Culture of sensationalism and indigenous language press in Zimbabwe: Implications on language development', *African Identities* 16(3), 333–348. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2018.1473147

Mucherera, B. & Spiegel, S., 2021, 'Forced displacement: Critical lessons in the protracted aftermath of a flood disaster', *GeoJournal*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-021-10471-w

Nangombe, S.S., n.d., *Drought conditions and management strategies in Zimbabwe*, viewed 05 October 2021, from https://www.ais.unwater.org.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2015, 'Decoloniality as the future of Africa', *History Campus* 13(10), 485–496.

Ngũgĩ, W., 1987, *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*, ZPH, Harare.

Nhodo, L., Ojong, V.B. & Chikoto, D., 2021, 'Ethical and ractical reflections of resident anthropologists in conflict zones: Experiences from the Tokwe Mukosi Dam Project and displacement at Chingwizi, Zimbabwe', *The Oriental Anthropologist: A Bi-Annual International Journal of the Science of Man* 21(1), 210–220. https://doi.org/10.1177/0972558x21994733

Olaopa, O.R. & Ayodele, O.A., 2021, 'Building on the strengths of African indigenous knowledge and innovation (AIK & amp; I) for sustainable development in Africa', *African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development* 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/20421338.2021.1950111

Peires, J., 2009, 'Shaka the great', *Historia* 54(1), 159–179.

Rodney, W., 1973, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, Bogle-L'Ouverture Publishers, viewed 21 August 2021, from http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/rodney-walter/how-europe/index.htm.

Saidi, U., 2019, 'African heritage Isn't "dead": Glitches in organizing knowledge and memories with a focus on the BaTonga in Zimbabwe', in P. Ngulube (ed.), *Handbook of research on advocacy, promotion, and public programming for memory institutions,* pp. 314–333, IGI Global, Hersey, PA.

Saidi, U., 2020, 'Of Tokwe-Mukosi: Displacement, Culture & Heritage –Lessons from the BaTonga', in V.Z. Nyawo, M.T. Mashingaidze & U. Saidi (eds.), *Dams, society and the environment in Zimbabwe,* MSU Press, Gweru.

Soyinka, W., 1967, 'The Anti-Man cometh', *Transition* 48(1975), 45–53.

White, H., 2009, 'Theory-based impact evaluation: principles and practice', *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 1(3), 271–284. https://doi.org/10.1080/19439340903114628