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Country-led monitoring and evaluation systems through the lens of participatory governance and co-production: Implications for a Made in Africa Evaluation approach

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Background: The history of evaluations on the African continent can be linked to the introduction of upward systems of accountability resulting from the rapid introduction of international aid programmes for the (re)building of African states during the post-independence era. Results-based management and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) became commonplace, the features of which continue to imbue national M&E systems across the continent. These systems, if not intentionally so designed and implemented, are not particularly focused on learning for course-correction and performance improvement from the perspective of citizens. Conducting evaluations, in particular, is often based on the need for accountability to funders or decision-makers, as opposed to downward accountability to the public and intended beneficiaries of the interventions.

Objectives: This article explores how localised approaches to governance (merged with co-production) could ensure that evaluation systems are liberatory if they are endogenous and indigenous in their design and respond to the needs of citizens (rather than serving an upward accountability agenda).

Method: Through the analytical framework of participatory governance and co-production, this article examines how participatory approaches to establishing national evaluation (and monitoring) systems may help the African continent liberate itself from the instrumental adoption of M&E systems, defined by compliance and accountability, and instead design systems based on a citizen-owned, people-centred notion of downward accountability.

Results: Participatory governance and co-production are well aligned to the principles of MAE (Made in Africa Evaluation) and may provide the means to arriving at more inclusive forms of M&E systems development and, concomitantly, more inclusive ways of producing and using evidence for policy, governance and development on a national scale.

Conclusion: Although desirable due its potential to transform systems of governance to become more citizen-centred, co-production must not be romanticised nor over-simplified. Increasing levels of citizen participation in governance must consider that there are significant changes that need to be made to institutional structures and processes, such as new forms of accountability, governance, systems and structures for citizen involvement. Therefore, a combination of practical, technical, ideological, relational and political factors must be considered in the adoption of more participatory approaches in establishing national M&E systems.

Keywords: Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE); participatory governance; co-production; people-centred; national evaluation systems (NES); results-based management (RBM); monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems embedded autonomy.

Introduction

In a bid to strengthen accountability, transparency and improve performance, governments in Africa have increasingly engaged in establishing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems (Engela & Ajam 2010). These systems have existed in the developed world in the 1980s and in Latin America in the 1990s, while in Africa, the concept of a 'national M&E system' only emerged around the mid-2000s (Goldman et al. 2018). The *sui generis* [individual or of its own kind] nature of states and state institutions, in particular postcolonial African states, requires an awareness of the need for contextually relevant and perhaps Africa-specific forms of national M&E systems,

which can take into consideration the historical legacies of colonial and postcolonial institutions and the foundations that these have created for the establishment of effective systems of evidence production and use (Fraser & Morkel 2020). To this effect, this article considers how participatory forms of governance and principles of co-production may frame country-led and owned approaches to establishing M&E systems, building on principles of the Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) approach.

Current approaches to building National Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

A scan of the literature on evaluation systems and their strengths and weaknesses reveals that the participation of citizens in building national (and particular state-led) M&E systems is underexamined. The scholarship and practice tend to focus on the factors characterising the structural, institutional and technical aspects of M&E systems, such as the production and use of evidence. Ba (2021), for example, focused his research on measuring technical aspects as key factors illustrating the success of M&E systems, while Holvoet, Gildemyn and Inberg (2012) found that:

> M&E systems generally score better on technical components (and more particularly on indicators, data collection and statistics development) and somewhat weaker on policy and organisational issues, which are more difficult to address. (p. 754)

Citizens, as beneficiaries of government programmes and public goods, rarely participate in the establishment or strengthening of M&E systems, particularly if these are mediated by government, although some countries in Latin America have made some progress in this regard (Peréz-Yarahuán & Maldonado 2020). The focus of much of the research and analysis is on the state machinery and its institutionalisation of practices for the production and use of evidence, and where downward accountability is featured, it does so in the context of the participation of citizens in evaluations, not in the systems that produce them. Factors such as whether or not citizens should be involved in decision-making around whether or not national M&E systems should include national and subnational levels of evidence production and use, the architecture for the selection of evaluations by the state or budgets allocated to M&E are not the focus of such analyses (see e.g. Goldman et al. 2019; Ishmail & Tully 2020; Mapitsa & Korth 2017).

Another key aspect of M&E systems in African governments is that much of the attention has been focused on monitoring systems, and a compliance-driven culture has had a significant influence on the form and function of M&E systems across the continent. This has meant that many of the systems have prioritised monitoring rather than evaluations. For example, just under a decade ago, research showed that although 89% of government departments in South Africa had an M&E unit, the focus was on tracking outputs at an operational level and not on learning (Goldman et al. 2015; Porter & Goldman 2013). Since then, a shift has occurred in governments across Africa because heightened attention is being paid to the importance of learning from M&E and the importance of the use of evidence for improving programming and service delivery towards ultimately improving development outcomes. It remains widely accepted in modern democratic states that effective M&E systems are a fundamental component of effective policymaking. In the wake of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and its intersection with the multiple crises of what geologists term the Anthropocene, governments are looking to better systems of evidence production and use as a catalyst to enabling them to respond to the various development challenges (both historical and contemporary) facing them. However, we are still in the process of discovering what, precisely, an effective M&E system looks like, and what fundamental characteristics and factors are essential to its success, even though some research and practice guides do exist that have shed some light on these (e.g. Crawley 2017; Görgens & Kusek 2009; Holvoet & Renard 2007).

As far back as 2007, 'greater participation by civil society' has been touted as a key issue in the diagnosis of a Government's M&E system (Mackay 2007:68). However, there has been an unevenness in the way in which participation is included in M&E systems in Africa and other parts of the Global South, and the building of M&E systems remains based on upward-accountability mechanisms, whether donor- or country-led (Porter & Goldman 2013). For example, research on Uganda's results-based approaches found an absence of participation mechanisms in planning and decision-making processes and a gap in the influence of the local population on target-setting and downward accountability (Klingebiel et al. 2019:1349). Although the National Evaluation System in South Africa is well known and has involved external, non-state stakeholders such as the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) in various ways, the evaluation of the National Evaluation System (NES) revealed that civil society was 'underutilised and underengaged' (Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation [DPME] in Goldman et al. 2019:6). Citizen participation in local planning is more regulated at subnational levels in South Africa. For example, the setting of key performance indicators and targets at local government level is mandated in a number of legislative frameworks, including the *Municipal Systems Act* and the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) (Chirau & Blaser-Mapitsa 2020:3). Monitoring and Evaluation systems at this level are more 'likely to be characterised by outreach, multistakeholder engagement and broad participation' as a result of direct protests and petitioning against poor service delivery and weak development outcomes (Chirau & Blaser-Mapitsa 2020). In Kenya, the establishment of a National Integrated M&E System was meant to inform policy dialogue both within government and between government and other non-state actors such as civil society, but this has not been realised (Warinda 2019). Based on a review of six country case studies on African

M&E systems, co-convened by the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) and the DPME in South Africa, Porter and Goldman (2013) averred that there is a gap in understanding how citizen demands influence the demand for evaluation by governments and recommended that this gap be filled, particularly as citizens' voices are increasingly prevalent in demands for socio-economic justice across the continent.

Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) approaches to M&E systems do exist that are underscored by the valuing and prioritisation of local participation. However, these are not written about extensively. In Rwanda, for example, the traditional, ancient cultural practice of results-based target-setting is applied in respect of government and community priority-setting (Klingebiel et al. 2019). The process of deciding on national priorities is initiated by the Government of Rwanda (GoR), followed by the setting of local priorities at the subnational level and finally the inclusion of *Imihigo* (a domestic performance approach wherein households, villages, cells, sectors (*Umurenge*), districts, provinces and national set ambitious and transformational targets to be achieved within a certain period) (Klingebiel et al. 2019). Similarly, in 2009, the Republic of Uganda introduced the *Baraza* initiative. The *Barazas* are public fora that are set up as monitoring tools at the subcounty level where the leadership of local government is expected to demonstrate resource use and the results achieved in each sector. The government instituted the *Baraza* fora as measures to increase transparency in the management of public funds, improve accountability and enhance the public's involvement in holding the government to account for service delivery (The Republic of Uganda 2013). Efforts such as these to move beyond beneficiary participation are important, as initiation of the decision-making processes and evaluation agendas by citizens means true ownership and commitment to endogenous and indigenous approaches to development (Mejos 2006). It is clear that national M&E systems can strengthen accountability and deepen democracy by magnifying the voice of citizens and civil society. Participatory approaches such as these to building M&E systems could therefore serve as a 'hook' or 'focus point' to strengthen local ownership of development processes (Goldman et al. 2019:6; Mackay 2007; Mejos 2006).

Made in Africa Evaluation principles

Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) was birthed at the fourth conference of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) in Niamey in 2007. It questioned the cultural and contextual relevance of evaluations and the paradigms, methods and tools that were used in evaluation that were imposed from the Global North. The MAE approach to evaluation is shaped by *ubuntu*, that is, African values, philosophies, ways of knowing and worldviews (Chilisa et al. 2015). It aims to develop an evaluation practice that emanates from local culture, values, indigenous knowledge, African philosophies and worldviews (Chilisa & Mertens 2021). It is a relational philosophy that contributes to better, transformative theory and practice. Made in Africa Evaluation and *ubuntu* principles are seen as a solution to the pursuit of decolonisation of evaluation practice (Wallis 2019).

Ubuntu is a relational philosophy that is embraced in most of sub-Saharan Africa. It is a Zulu word which means humanity. In Zulu, the literal translation is 'a person is a person through other persons' (Gianan 2011:63). The values of *ubuntu* include relationships, caring, reciprocity, compassion, empathy and cooperation. For human beings to flourish, it is important to promote the well-being of others (Mawere & Van Stam 2016). It raises awareness about interdependence among people (Tshivhase 2018).

In 2021, AfrEA developed a set of principles that should guide evaluations from an MAE perspective. There are five key principles that are supported by 22 implementation principles. The five key principles are:

1. The evaluation empowers Africans
2. The evaluation is technically robust
3. The evaluation is ethically sound
4. The evaluation is rooted in Africa, yet draws from across the world
5. The evaluation shows the connectedness of the world, with special attention to where humanity's footprint calls for new ideas and knowledge for change and transformation. (The African Evaluation Association 2021:4)

Table 1 gives the five key principles and the corresponding 22 implementation principles.

TABLE 1: Summary of the African evaluation principles 2021.

P. Empowers Africans	T. Technically robust	E. Ethically sound	A. Africa-centric yet open	C. Connected with the world
P1. Conduct an appropriate, empowering process	T1. Be systematic and analytical	E1. Be sensitive to stakeholders and relationships	A1. Engage with issues that matter in Africa	C1. Acknowledge interdependence and interconnectedness
P2. Encourage reciprocity, including mutual accountability	T2. Be transparent and clear	E2. Protect the rights of people	A2. Consider framings and methods from Africa	C2. Foster the evaluation of sustainability in keeping with key international agreements and with the stewardship of nature
P3. Enable learning for useful insights	T3. Be aware of dispositions	E3. Safeguard diversity and inclusion	A3. Learn and adapt from the Global South, indigenous communities and other contexts	C3. Strive to contribute to the urgent need for sustainable and transformative change
P4. Value and strengthen domestic capacities	T4. Ensure a feasible evaluation	E4. Address inequalities and power asymmetries	-	-
	T5. Be efficient	E5. Be free from vested interests		
	T6. Be culturally responsive	E6. Consider trade-offs		

Source: African Evaluation Association, 2021, *The African Evaluation Principles*, p. 4, viewed n.d., from https://afrea.org/AEP/new/The-African-Evaluation-Principles.pdf

Participatory governance and co-production: levers for localisation of monitoring and evaluation systems

The study and practice of systems of democratic governance have become ubiquitous the world over and in particular across the African continent, where sustained waves of democratisation and democratic consolidation over the last six decades have influenced systems of statehood and state functionality. In particular, participatory governance has been the subject of much attention, both lauded and critiqued for its potential in undoing hierarchical, bureaucratic forms of governance, which exclude communities from having a voice in governance processes and ultimately in decisions that directly impact service delivery and development outcomes (Dawes & Préfontaine 2003; Gaynor 2010; Mahmood & Muntaner 2020; WahedUzzaman & Alam 2015; Wilkinson et al. 2019). Participatory governance is an important consideration in the establishment and strengthening of National M&E Systems. Monitoring and Evaluation and the establishment of systems to ensure the supply of high-quality data and evaluative evidence for policy and decision-making have become a critical component of good governance and a key contributing factor to strengthening evidence-informed decision-making towards the attainment of sustainable development outcomes in contemporary democratic states.

The rising popularity of participatory governance arose from the idea that stronger democracies come from increased participation of citizens in decision-making, particularly with regard to the delivery of services that impact their lives and well-being. Participatory forms of governance are a departure from more traditional forms of governance, and the concept has been widely adopted by policymakers as a more effective form of decision-making and public good delivery, promising greater results in meeting the needs of citizens (Baldwin 2020). However, the implementation of participatory governance has generally been challenging, despite numerous attempts and experiments in this regard (Akarçay 2019; Baiocchi 2003; WahedUzzaman & Alam 2015). New public governance is often seen as the catalyst of this new approach to decision-making, signalling that the world has moved on from new public management (NPM) in recognition of its failure to ensure greater degrees of efficiency and effectiveness of the state in the aftermath of the great public sector reform experiment of the 1970s (Alford 2016; Baldwin 2020; Osborne 2018).

Baldwin (2020) defined participatory governance:

> [*A*]s any process that convenes diverse stakeholders outside of or in addition to the traditional regulatory process to share information, deliberate, and produce a set of recommendations that are used as an input to administrative decisions. (p. 366)

The author makes a distinction between authentic participation versus the extension of invitations to citizens for the purposes of simply informing or allowing them to comment on various governance processes (Baldwin 2020). This is an important distinction, as the concept of participation itself conjures up images of robust citizen engagement and collaboration, commended for its potential to facilitate bureaucratic efficiency, governance and redistribution (Fung & Wright in Baiocchi 2003). In evaluation, participatory methods and approaches have enjoyed a long history of support, with scholars and practitioners alike extolling the virtues of ensuring greater levels of collaboration and participation in deriving value judgements about programmes and interventions that are meant to contribute to citizen well-being and development results. Examples of evaluation types that promote a citizen-focused collaborative approach are empowerment evaluation, participatory evaluation and participatory rural appraisal. However, the establishment of the systems and machinery of government, such as the establishment of M&E systems for performance tracking and policymaking, have always been considered the sole mandate of the state. The inclusion of citizens in the actual design of M&E systems has not been considered part of the participatory process of evaluation. It is argued in this article, however, that the dividends of co-production and collaborative governance can accrue to the actual process of the establishment and strengthening of evaluation systems (or at least parts of it not regulated by policy or legislation, such as accountability and utilisation mechanisms) and not only in the evaluation process itself.

However, citizen participation has not been without its critiques. Levine (2017) pointed to the romanticisation of participation in America since the era of colonialism and its growing popularity in the form of extensive public engagement processes in various local governance matters, without a concomitant increase in influence of citizens on decision-making. Some argue that an illusion of inclusion and equality is created in participatory governance in state-driven deliberative processes, which hides the reality that decision-making ultimately rests in the hands of the state (regardless of the inputs made by citizens). Lemanski (2017), for example, argued that state-sponsored spaces for deliberation will always produce a statist vision and agenda and that more powerful actors would make decisions that suit their own interests. This would be an important factor to consider in state-led processes of establishing national M&E systems, especially if less hierarchical, more networked forms of governance are held in high esteem and the inclusion of citizen voices towards more collaborative forms of governance is valued. If Fung and Wright (in Watson 2014) are to be believed, then such alternative forms of democratic deliberation and state–society synergy are a necessity, owing to the increasingly ineffective traditional and formal bureaucratic mechanisms of liberal democracy that have failed in achieving the ideals of democratic politics.

An often-overlooked critique of increasing levels of citizen participation in matters of the state is the danger of an imbalance in 'embedded autonomy'. Embedded autonomy is defined by Evans (1995) as the balancing of the intimate

partnership between non-state actors and the state with an autonomy that prevents it from being fettered by undue private interests, which may spiral into neo-patrimonialism and state capture (Morkel 2020). Despite the transformational power of 'bottom-up' state-society relations on successful development outcomes and the synergy of heightened engagement between the state and civil society, precautions would need to be made to circumvent such potentialities (Morkel 2020).

Therefore, as existing power asymmetries and structural inequalities between actors (e.g. the state and civil society, funders and recipients, the bureaucracy and citizens) may negate any of the gains that might have been made by participatory processes in M&E system development, every effort must be made to strengthen democracy and democratic principles of inclusion in the very systems that produce evaluations and monitoring data to support evidence-informed decision-making. Including participatory governance principles in the design, establishment and strengthening of national M&E systems would therefore need to be part of broader transformative efforts. These would need to be characterised as authentically collaborative and inclusive, taking into account the propensities of postcolonial systems of governance to be hierarchical and characterised by command and control. These systems, built on traditional and market-based principles of governance, subscribe to a semblance of democratic participation through elections and representation, but they did not consider the active collaboration with citizens in public good production as critical (Williams, Kang & Johnson 2016). As a result, they often exclude the voices of the subaltern because of systemic and structural race, class, gender, wealth and power asymmetries, which are known to influence the rules of engagement between individuals and institutions, particularly between the state and non-state actors.

The goal of participation is to introduce new forms of governance that depart from hierarchical and asymmetrical 'command and control' structures and processes that disempower citizens, instead moving towards empowering processes that include facilitation and negotiation (Bevir 2006). The European Union (EU), for example, has stated that 'the linear model of dispensing policies from above must be replaced by a virtuous circle, based on feedback, networks and involvement from policy creation to implementation at all levels' (CEC 2001:11 in Bevir 2006:427). To this effect, co-production as a form of participatory governance can be employed to meet the demands of more collaborative, people-centred means of governance and by extension, more participatory forms of establishing national M&E systems.

Ostrom (1996), the seminal theorist on co-production, defined the concept as:

> [*T*]he process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not 'in' the same organization. The 'regular' producer … is most frequently a government agency. (p. 1073)

This implies that citizens have an active role to play in producing public goods and services. Co-production has been linked to networking, collaboration and partnership as a trend that has grown out of a practical adaptation to the complex, fragmented and interdependent emerging conditions in contemporary public administration and management (Osborne, Radnor & Nasi in Osborne 2018; Ryan 2012). Tsujinaka et al. (2013:412) referred to 'co-governance', or 'consensual governance', in their observations around the increasing shift to deeper alliances between civil society and the state in matters of governance and the use of these social networks to meet political commitments. Further developments in these communitarian-type forms of governance include the concept of 'co-creation' as explored by Osborne (2018), which 'assumes an interactive and dynamic relationship where value is created at the nexus of interaction' (Osborne 2018:225). Increased authentic participation in decision-making in government can therefore strengthen co-production and perhaps even satisfy the conditions for co-creation, and concomitantly, applying the principles of co-production can ensure that citizen participation in governance processes remains authentic and inclusive.

Linking participatory governance, co-production and the African Evaluation Association Made in Africa Evaluation principles

According to Rice (2016:224), 'Decolonisation is intertwined with the concept of governance'. The notion that there is a severed connection between Western models of citizenship and the numerous culturally varied contexts within which it has been assimilated, supports this statement (Gaynor 2010:802). As discussed before, more networked, people-centred systems of governance are a break from the linear, bureaucratic and traditional forms of governance, based on Western politics. This return to communitarian forms of governance can be seen as a decolonial move.

Made in Africa Evaluation is a response to the call to decolonise evaluation practice, in recognition that African worldviews, ontologies and epistemologies have largely been excluded from the traditional scholarship and practice of evaluation and certainly from the establishment of governance and institutional arrangements that make up national M&E systems. In recent years, the discourse on transforming evaluation and transformational evaluation has begun to emerge. However, these are not generally applied to the configuration and establishment of national institutions for the practice of M&E and tend to be confined to the practice of evaluation itself (see e.g. descriptions of what might be required in the transformation of evaluation in Patton 2016 and eds. Parsons, Dhillon & Keene 2021).

Including the voices of local people in establishing national M&E systems in a process of participatory governance and co-production is important, as co-production 'potentially

increases both the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery – in those policy arenas where it is appropriate' (Ryan 2012:315). It should therefore be required of those tasked with managing and coordinating the establishment or strengthening of national M&E systems to ensure the engagement of citizens. Citizens may become disengaged if they are not included in deliberations over decisions that may have a direct impact on them (Rice 2016). Moreover, indigenous communities who have resilient traditions of collective decision-making may be especially prone to this kind of disengagement if they are not meaningfully included in decision-making processes (Rice 2016:225), which could jettison the potential gains of co-production. In a further analysis of this, Chilisa, Major and Khudu-Petersen (2017 cited in Mbava & Dahler-Larsen 2019:2) reflect that 'the prominent role of collective deliberation and communal decision-making in African contexts has not been fully appreciated'. Introducing (and indeed fully appreciating) such collective deliberation and consultation towards more participatory forms of co-creation and co-production in the processes of establishing national M&E systems would be liberatory.

As mentioned before, participation without transforming the rules, powers and authorities by which engagement is held will not be effective (Lemanski 2017). As stated by Rice (2016:223), 'The project of decolonisation entails re-imagining the nation-state as indigenous'. Therefore, in the process of including hitherto ignored voices of local communities in establishing M&E systems, rather than seeing local communities as needing to change (i.e. expecting local communities to assimilate into normative and traditional notions of what the bureaucratic machinery and institutional arrangements for M&E systems should be), or simply inviting a multitude of local stakeholders in consultative processes around such, decolonising evaluation practice means transforming the state itself in order to deepen the commitment to citizen voice and choice. This would mean adapting the rules, systems and structures of evaluation, which have traditionally served the interests of upward accountability (including governments, donors and other international actors in aid and development) and transform the system to truly serve the needs and interests of society (Rice 2016).

Participatory democracy must therefore be part of a broader project of transformation. However, to be truly decolonial, more radical commitments would have to made in building M&E systems. Participation must go beyond simply consulting with, and providing information to, communities. It must include a commitment to the MAE principles. Bevir (2006) posited that:

> Radical democracy, in contrast, attempts to foster pluralism and dialogue in ways that do not require citizens and associations to conform to the perceived needs of existing elites and institutions. (p. 435)

Completely new forms of governance and collaboration, partnership and co-creation should therefore ideally be imagined in order to truly transform, liberate and decolonise the practice of building national M&E systems (which may include new forms of capacity development, assessments and diagnostics, support in building institutional arrangements and regulatory frameworks, etc).

The equalisation of power, which is what decoloniality requires, means that interventions towards co-production go beyond citizen engagement and embrace 'equal partnership'; equalisation of power also turns public services 'inside out', involving the redesign of service delivery so that people are involved, and the decisions, rights and responsibilities for outcomes are shifted to the people (Boyle & Harris 2009 cited in Ryan 2012:316). Hickey and Mohan (in Lemanski 2017:31) recommended that participation 'be situated within a broad historical process of socio-economic transformation', within 'a wider political project that empowers people to transform their social context outside of the institutional structures in which participation is initiated'. They do warn, however, that this kind of radical approach – that is, calling into question and confronting existing power structures as opposed to forcing citizens to conform to them – is a notoriously difficult task for states (Lemanski 2017).

Table 2 presents a comparison of the principles of participatory governance, co-production and AfrEA MAE evaluation principles. There is a strong case to be made that there is significant alignment between the five key principles and the corresponding 22 implementation principles of MAE as outlined before, and the principles of co-production and participatory governance. For example, the following MAE principles speak specifically to increasing community or citizen participation in government decision-making: conducting an appropriate, empowering process; encouraging reciprocity; including mutual accountability; valuing and strengthening domestic capacities; being culturally responsive; interdependency and interconnectedness; and being sensitive to stakeholders and relationships.

Co-production, in particular, seeks to redefine the relationship between the state and citizens in such a way as to engender a working relationship between the state and the people it is

TABLE 2: Participatory governance, co-production and Made in Africa Evaluation principles.

Participatory governance	Co-production	AfrEA MAE
Authentic participation of citizens, robust citizen engagement	Citizens have active role	Value and strengthen domestic capacities (P4)
		Reciprocity, including mutual accountability (P2)
People-centred networks	Partnerships networking, social networks, people-centred	Acknowledge interdependency and interconnectedness (C1)
Collaboration, inclusive	Collaboration	Learn and adapt from indigenous communities (citizens) and other contexts (A3)
Empowering processes	Alliances between state and civil society	Conduct an appropriate and empowering process (P1)
		Address inequalities and power asymmetries (E4)
		Be culturally responsive (T6)
Facilitation and negotiation	Co-creation	Sensitive to stakeholders and relationships (E1)

AfrEA, African Evaluation Association; MAE, Made in Africa Evaluation.

meant to serve, repositioning government as a facilitator rather than simply a purveyor of services (Ryan 2012:317). This aligns with the MAE principles of protecting the rights of people, safeguarding diversity and inclusion, addressing inequalities and power asymmetries and ensuring that evaluations are free from vested interests. They also include engaging with issues that matter in Africa, considering framings and methods from Africa, as well as learning and adapting from the Global South, indigenous communities and other contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the rationale for more participatory, collaborative processes in the establishment of NES, which is aligned to MAE principles expounded on here, a number of recommendations are in order.

Firstly, unmasking governance processes and the establishment of rules, systems and processes are usually actions that are undertaken internally by the state, and where stakeholder participation is allowed, this is limited to consultation and spaces where comments and inputs are invited but where citizens do not necessarily have any input to the machinery of state functionality. In this article, it is argued that the involvement of citizens in the unmasking and laying bare some of the core activities of the state, such as the design and establishment of M&E systems, may be an extremely effective approach to improving accountability and governance in the state (Ackerman 2004:448).

The commitment to authentic participation must be real and sustained. The temptation for 'checking the box' and adopting an instrumental approach to participation can pose a risk to authentic participatory governance and co-production, wherein participation is not geared to addressing power asymmetries or invigorating democracy (Blackstock et al. 2015:254). It is vital for the state to learn and adapt from the citizens and value the capacity of citizens to contribute and actively engage in these processes. Authentic participation and genuine engagement of citizens should be adopted.

In establishing or strengthening NES, governments must commit to a truly endogenous and indigenous system of governance, particularly in previously colonised territories, and avoid only narrowly speaking to simply the inclusion of citizens and indigenous voices in democratic and governance processes through information-sharing and 'consultation'. Indigenous knowledge systems should be tapped into and adapted to inform inclusive governance processes while taking into consideration differing local contexts.

Participatory governance and co-production are not immune to political encroachment, and who is invited or permitted to participate in state processes (and to what end) may be influenced by pre-existing relationships. This can result in the involvement of a narrow grouping of elitist non-state actors such as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) or social enterprises in collaborative efforts with the state. This is not a desired end-state, and the risks of this should be mitigated through transparent processes that build up a dividend of trust and ethical behaviour. The undesired alternative is that such elite capture could result in a reinforcement of existing inequalities, 'lending legitimacy and support to the hegemonic development project which, while ostensibly engaging the poor through their NGO representatives, results paradoxically in their further marginalisation' (Gaynor 2010:801–802). This could also be applied to individuals, where the depoliticisation of actors may result in elite capture and predatory behaviour (e.g. middle-class citizens who may use their power to ensure that their interests are prioritised) (Benit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2011 cited in Lemanski 2017:19). In effect, greater embeddedness between the state and civil society invites greater potential for rent-seeking and predatory behaviour.

Some have also accused participation as being professionalised in such a way that an entire industry of 'participation experts' has emerged, which has reduced participation to a teleological exercise and which has decoupled deliberation and engagement from 'authentic grassroots mobilisation' (Levine 2017:1157). In building national M&E systems, the industrialisation of participation must be curtailed to avoid creating a new supply chain of participation experts who are assimilated into existing structural power dynamics of inequality. Doing so may involve a range of practical and systemic interventions, such as building the capacity of the state around public participation (including building trust and greater embeddedness between the state and the public), rather than outsourcing the function to external agents, interlocutors or consultants.

Participatory governance may also sometimes be disguised as the extension of invitations to civil society for participation in governance processes, as representatives of broader society. However, their representation of all citizens cannot be assumed. Heller (in Lemanski 2017:30) posited that decentralised participatory democracy needs a 'well-developed civil society'; however, there is no guarantee that civil society is an accurate representation of all citizens. In South Africa, for example, civil society itself is fractured, with some sectors being accused of not being transformed and actually reproducing patterns of inequality (specifically in the welfare sector). Civil society is not necessarily a homogenous group of people or organisations, and they are not necessarily representative. Special care should therefore be taken to understand the contextual factors underpinning 'civil society' and their role in participatory governance as representatives of broader society. Ethics of care, as espoused in the *ubuntu* principles and reflected in the MAE principles, should guide civil society in order to engage in authentic representation. Participation should therefore be people-centred, and as discussed earlier, it is important to identify social networks of citizens and communities through an empowering process to ensure inclusive participation. In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge the interdependence and interconnectedness among communities, bringing in the idea of reciprocity and the need to embrace humanity.

Gaynor (2010:801) also argued that 'who' gets invited and 'to what end' to participate further adds to the *illusion* of democratic principles of inclusion and participation being applied, while ignoring the fact that it might only be extended to a narrow group of elites. In processes of co-production, it is usually the 'usual suspects' who get invited – key individuals who are known and recognised as leaders in civil society and other non-state sectors, at the exclusion of lesser-known voices at the lower end of society or class spectrum. Participation should open up spaces for communities and citizens to participate in their own right and ensure that their voices are heard. Opening up and decolonising the spaces and opportunities for participation could encourage citizens from all classes of society to participate.

What has not been discussed in this article is the actual value that must be ascribed to evaluation by the public – what is known in the evaluation sector as 'building a culture of evaluation'. According to Williams, Kang & Johnson (2016), there needs to be some kind of normative consensus that evaluation is a fundamental public need and good, in order to link co-production and public value. Osborne (2018:228) posited that value co-creation is a growing strand of work in the field of public management, taking the concept of co-production even further and placing a greater responsibility on the state to co-create such value. It may be easier for citizens to accept that the provision of water, sanitation, education, health and public works services have public value and are a public good, but this might be less easy in the case of evaluation. In order for co-production and participatory approaches to building national M&E systems to work, NES must be seen as a public value, and this might be the groundwork that needs to be the foundation before embarking on a process of co-production, led by the state.

Conclusion

The body of knowledge around what constitutes an effective national M&E system is still being built, and although more attention has been paid in the past to the technical and institutional requirements of such systems, there is a growing interest and scholarship around the nontechnical aspects of such systems. One key issue that has gained attention in the last few years is the recognition of the value of indigenous ways of knowing and being in evaluation practice, and this article has examined how this may be extended to how one thinks about the establishment of the institutions and systems that produce and use evaluations (and not just the evaluations themselves). This article has, in particular, considered participatory governance and co-production as means of arriving at more inclusive forms of M&E systems development and, concomitantly, more inclusive ways of producing and using evidence for policy, governance and development on a national scale. However, this article has also raised a caution around viewing co-production as a panacea or seeing it as simplistic (Bovaird in Williams et al. 2016:698). In addition to the critiques around increasing levels of citizen participation in governance, a shift towards such an approach must consider that there are significant changes that need to be made to institutional structures and processes, such as new forms of accountability and governance and systems and structures for citizen involvement (Mayo and Moore in Williams et al. 2016:698). Therefore, a combination of practical, technical, ideological, relational and political factors must be considered in the adoption of more participatory approaches in establishing national M&E systems.

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Authors' contributions

C.M. and A.S. contributed equally to the conceptualisation and write-up of the article.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

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

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