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The debate around Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) is a timely one, which urges M&E professionals in Africa to reflect on their profession and their practices. It asks the question: what does it mean for evaluation to be rooted in the African context? It acknowledges the colonial and precolonial African history, the resulting governance systems, the inequalities, the gender concerns, the multiple worldviews informed by traditionalism and the conflicting norms, values and diverse cultural nuances of the African context. The debate further demands clarity about the theoretical foundations of MAE, how it should be defined and what it looks like in practice.

The University of the Witwatersrand's Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results in Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) commissioned this *African Evaluation Journal* MAE Special Collection in response to the growing need for literature and tools for MAE. As part of the centre's ongoing engagement in the development of M&E systems across Africa, CLEAR-AA is confronted with the challenge laid down more than a decade ago at a gathering of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) to develop MAE as a uniquely African approach to evaluation. The AfrEA gathering of evaluation leaders, scholars and practitioners felt that the MAE approach would counter the Western epistemological dominance in evaluation practice in Africa. As a concept, MAE seeks to identify and develop a uniquely African approach to evaluation.

This will not be a simple task, because there is a realisation that colonisation has altered African modes of thought and patterns of political, social, economic and cultural development. Some even claim that colonialism took away African epistemic freedom – the freedom for African people to think, theorise, interpret the world and write from where they are located, unencumbered by Eurocentrism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). There is also a growing concern that evaluation in the African space continues to be practised under the same colonial power matrix that allows the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonialism. It posits that the widely used evaluation methods, theories and approaches are largely from the Global North – meaning that they are designed for the Global North context, worldviews, values and cultural settings. In addition, evaluation training approaches, curriculum and content in the African space are dominated by the Global North thinking. Lastly, the M&E space and evaluation practice in the African context is a microcosm of the African development space, which is dominated by Western funding, development ideals and initiatives. The M&E space and evaluation practice also reflect the dominance of Western funders, evaluation commissioners and evaluation theories, curriculum and approaches (Chilisa et al. 2015).

The MAE challenge is a call for M&E professionals to become visionaries – to envisage and present a decolonial perspective of the development trajectories for Africa; to deconstruct the inherited structures of domination; and to deal with the many paradoxes and contradictions that will inform African-rooted evaluation theories and practices. The MAE challenge is also a journey, one that realises that decolonisation is not an end point or a point of arrival but a space to address unequal power relations, to problematise historical and traditional approaches and to surface the beneficial attributes of indigenous knowledge systems and practices. The MAE challenge is a task that confronts all African evaluators, as we take the baton passed on by Dr Sully Gariba; as we use the wisdom created by current M&E theorists; and as we build the MAE we require and desire.

This MAE Special Collection recognises that M&E practice and theory in Africa have also evolved through Western thought, philosophy, practices, values and experiences. The key argument in this issue is that the African M&E profession needs to adapt and be rooted in the African context, acknowledging the historical background, governance systems, inequalities and nuances of gender and culture. The Special Collection examines the following research questions: what epistemological transformation is needed for MAE to succeed? What can be done to challenge the clear-cut hegemony of Western epistemologies in evaluation approaches and practices that are being used in the African continent? What are the indigenous approaches to evaluation

practice that address the key issues raised by MAE? What does it mean to decolonise evaluation practice in Africa?

In response to the questions above, Frehiwot (2022) states that evaluation in Africa is often based on an epistemology and ontology that is aligned to Western understanding of evaluation, culture and Africa's positionality globally. The author contends that MAE as a method and theory is waging an uphill battle against epistemic injustice in knowledge production as well as unequal power relations and projects funded by donors who prescribe to an ideology that promotes quantity over quality. Frehiwot (2022) proposes a pan-African framework for evaluation that incorporates African cultural practices across borders and recognises the interdependent relationship between community-level culture and collective and diverse African culture. The framework, according to the author, provides an opportunity to develop a collective ontology and epistemology of knowledge production in African evaluation. Masvaure and Motlanthe (2022) also highlight the point that the African development space is dominated by a Western hegemony that shapes the structural funding model, knowledge transfer and aid. The Western hegemony defines the Western countries or development funders as superior to the aid receivers, without necessarily acknowledging the role of colonial history and racism that defined and influenced the underdevelopment of African countries. They maintain that the evaluation field is a microcosm and an appendage of Western hegemonic influence on international development. The authors share key issues for consideration in MAE, including that any programme design and evaluation should be rooted in the sociohistoric context of the community. If evaluations and programme design do not touch on the root causes of underdevelopment, then nothing will change. In addition, there is an inherent need to realise that part of decolonising international development requires an understanding that those in sub-Saharan Africa are not passively awaiting support from the international community but are actively working to improve their situation.

The article by Dlakavu, Mathebula and Mkhize (2022) endeavours to provide recommendations on how to make the MAE paradigm practical (applicable) for evaluators in Africa, based on decolonisation and indigenisation methodological prescriptions. Key areas of consideration regarding MAE should include how to champion and lobby support for Afrocentric evaluation practice among development and evaluation practitioners, stakeholders and scholars. A related area of focus is how to solidify MAE as a branch of decolonisation theory and assigning it to African evaluation scholars, evaluators, researchers and others who believe in, or benefit from, the utility of the Afrocentric approach to evaluation. Tirivanhu (2022) explores the praxis implications of MAE to development evaluation practice and concludes that in practice, MAE evaluation should adopt methodological approaches that borrow from African-rooted paradigms, including relational approaches and tools grounded in African institutional frameworks, social systems and values. Khumalo (2022) discusses the effects of coloniality and international development assistance on MAE. The author proposes recommendations for achieving a more decolonised evaluation agenda and highlights the importance of the legitimisation of African knowledge systems, a multidisciplinary approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E), ensuring inclusivity and representation in evaluation and negotiating power balances with international development agencies.

Using an evidence gap map (EGM) exercise, Fish (2022) identifies five main paradigms that fall within the MAE, namely the Afrocentric paradigm, the postcolonial indigenous paradigm, the African relational evaluation paradigm, the transformative evaluation paradigm and the culturally competent evaluation paradigm. The EGM shows that these paradigms and approaches have been well established theoretically and conceptually; however, the application of these in evaluations has mostly been found in the adaptive or integrative approach, which integrates Western methodologies. This suggests a lack of practical guidelines to using the paradigms, approaches and methods originating from Africa, including the African relational-based evaluation approach. The challenges for evaluation posed by the dominance of the Global North are also raised by Chirau, Ramasobana and Ngwabi (2022). They state that African countries are struggling with common issues of how MAE can gain enough traction. Key factors observed are (1) the over-reliance on Western worldviews or paradigms, (2) the dominance of Global North donors as commissioners of African evaluations, (3) the supply-chain practices of African evaluators and (4) the perceived infancy of the evaluation profession in Africa. They claim that there is a need for more intensive MAE-oriented interventions aimed at championing the MAE discourse led by African and non-African practitioners and scholars alike. Maikuri, Shanker and Hopson (2022) discuss findings from an earlier study on harm and the M&E cycle. They show how care, trust and courage are connected in the research process, and they discuss solidarity across artificially constructed differences and name systems of oppression. The authors reflect on and respond to the principles and praxis of courage and care to provide a better understanding of harm and evaluation in Africa. They state that MAE's adoption of courageous conversation as its overarching mental model or narrative would offer the fields of evaluation and development aid ethical principles rooted in mutuality and consensuality around which to approach relations between knowledge systems – whether cultural, geographic, disciplinary or occupational.

Blaser-Mapitsa (2022) provides a scoping review of intersections between indigenous knowledge systems and complexity-responsive evaluation research. The author states that indigenous knowledge systems have been a priority research area for decades, often in fields of science and technology, education and in research methods, but not necessarily in evaluation. The study found that there is considerable scope for the evaluation sector to draw on indigenous knowledge systems research, particularly drawing on process and methodological lessons from

designing studies, as well as defining power dynamics and critical systems approaches. The article by Pophiwa and Saidi (2022) shares approaches to embedding indigenous knowledge systems in MAEs. The aim and objective are to call for the enrichment of MAE in setting the agenda and bringing agency to evaluation practices in Africa against centuries of unsustainable developmental practices that continue to underdevelop the continent. They recommend the formulation of guidelines specifically designed by AfrEA to direct discursive practice in order to support research and position researchers to operationalise research practices and outcomes; these guidelines may also bring about as well as document cultural aspirations, understandings and practices of indigenous people, thereby developing a 'participatory mode of consciousness'. The final article by Morkel and Sibanda (2022) considers the implications for a MAE approach through an analysis of country-led monitoring and evaluation systems that promote participatory governance and co-production. Through the analytical framework of participatory governance and co-production, the 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 and beneficiary-defined notion of downward accountability. They conclude that 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. The authors propose participatory governance and co-production as a means of arriving at more inclusive forms of monitoring and evaluation systems development.

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Authors' contributions

This editorial was conceptualised by all the M.A., S.M. and C.M. all conceptualised the editorial. S.M. produced a draft based on the collection proposal; M.A. completed the final draft with a summary of all articles after input from all authors.

Ethical considerations

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

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Data availability

All data available for use and no codes are required for access.

Disclaimer

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