


Embedding evaluation theory on African philosophies: An asset to evaluation transformation

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Dates:

Received: 29 Jan. 2024

Accepted: 25 May 2024

Published: 21 June 2024

How to cite this article:

Chilisa, B.M., 2024, 'Embedding evaluation theory on African philosophies: An asset to evaluation transformation', *African Evaluation Journal* 12(2), a735. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v12i2.735>

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Background: The article is in honour of Sulley Gariba, an advocate for a Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE), who encouraged, promoted and mobilised African thinkers to write about African-based ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies and their contribution to knowledge production.

Objectives: To map out the application of MAE concept in evaluation projects in Africa. It will be argued that in Africa, although there is remarkable progress conceptually on MAE partly because of Gariba's influence, there is less application of the concept in evaluation projects.

Method: It is based on a commissioned report on the evaluation landscape in Africa and the progress made in implementing MAE funded by Evalpartners. The results are based on a review of literature and an online survey on selected evaluators' views.

Results: African philosophies and indigenous philosophies from the Global South are increasingly being embraced to inform the discourse on evaluation. Spiritual reality and relational existence, which are common features of indigenous evaluation, have become powerful tools for 'inventiveness', abstract thinking, theory building and development of models and tools unique to Africa and other parts of the Global South and inform an evolving fifth research and evaluation paradigm.

Conclusion: The reluctance of Western-trained evaluators to embrace a spiritual reality and a relational existence, funder colonialism, methodological colonialism and myths and misconceptions about MAE are major obstacles to its application to evaluation practice.

Contribution: Sulley Gariba's contribution was in his articulation of the value of African Philosophies, Values and culture in evaluation, theory and practice in Africa.

Keywords: fifth research; evaluation paradigm; myth; misconceptions; MAE; African philosophies; evaluation.

Introduction

This article is based on work commissioned by Evalpartners, a global movement that shapes the international evaluation agenda by supporting and encouraging the evaluation profession to take a more inclusive approach in addressing world problems and creating a platform for evaluation capacity development. The task involved conducting research and producing a research report on the evaluation landscape in Africa, the progress made in implementing the Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) and highlight the role Dr Sulley Gariba played in promoting MAE principles on the continent.

Research methods and design

A search for articles on the MAE concept, African rooted evaluation, evaluation landscape in Africa post 2015 was conducted and a document analysis performed. Documents of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) proceedings post 2015 MAE concept paper were reviewed. Thirty-nine documents identified by the reference group were reviewed. In addition, an online survey was conducted. Evaluators who participated in the 2015 MAE concept paper were requested to respond to an online survey that had structured interview questions. Additional evaluators selected on the basis of their active involvement in evaluation in Africa and globally were invited to respond to the online survey. Twenty-five participants were reached and 18 responded resulting in a response rate of about 70%. Participants' affiliated institutions included AfrEA, United Nations organs, academic institutions, evaluation research centres and networks. The evaluation experience of the participants

Note: Special Collection: Addressing Knowledge Asymmetries.

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ranged between 5 years and 50 years. Participants were from Southern Africa, East Africa, West Africa, USA, Canada and Europe, with the majority of the respondents coming from Africa.

Analysis and interpretation

The document reviewed and the interview data were analysed in the context of global issues on evaluation and development, and the role evaluation is expected to play in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To ground the discussion in the global debates on evaluation, the evaluation tree metaphor, its branches and the philosophical foundations that inform the branches were invoked to inform the analysis. The landscape in evaluation was also reviewed within this broad context. To assess the progress made in implementing the MAE and discuss current capacities to meet transformation from an MAE perspective, a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis was used. The MAE evaluation concept of 2015 was used as a baseline to evaluate the implementation of MAE, its successes and strength, opportunities, weaknesses and threats post 2015. The evaluation questions addressed under SWOT are as follows.

Strength

Where are we with the MAE post 2015? What strategies are there for MAE to influence national, regional and international evaluation policies? Who drives these strategies? Who drives MAE? What research teams, groups, institutions use the MAE in their work? What do the literature, scientific papers, dissertations say about MAE?

Weakness

Where is the discord in the discussion on MAE post 2015 MAE concept paper? Are there aspects that are receiving little attention? Are there aspects in need of clarification post 2015 MAE concept paper?

Opportunities

How has the MAE concept worked in practice and what direction is it taking post the MAE concept paper? What exemplary work and scholarship illustrates MAE? What funded research exist on MAE? What influence does MAE have on the AfrEA guidelines post the 2015 MAE concept paper? What short courses exist on MAE? How many conference papers have been funded on MAE? What concepts, world views, philosophies, frameworks, principles guide the MAE?

Threats

What challenges and barriers to success lie ahead for the MAE concept? What is the primary criticism the concept faces and how can it adapt in response?

A thematic approach was used to derive themes from the interview data. Data from the interview and the document analysis were triangulated to inform the findings. To achieve

balance reporting of the findings, counter narratives from the literature were used to counter dominant narratives that often erase other less known views.

In this article, the focus is on the progress made in implementing MAE and Dr Sulley Gariba's role in shaping the decolonisation evaluation discourse.

Ethical considerations

This article does not contain any studies involving human participants performed by any of the authors.

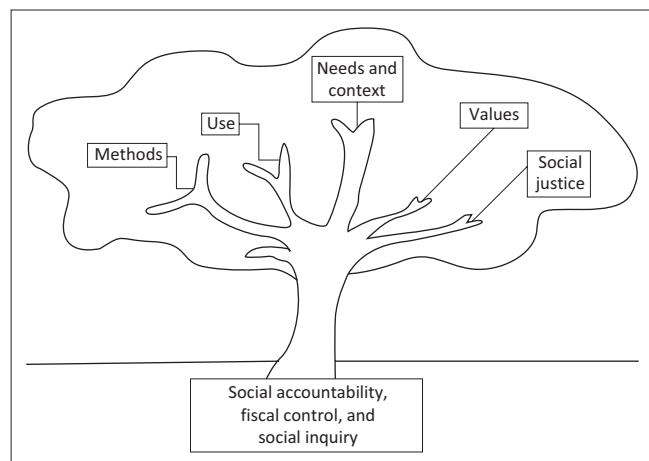
Decolonising research and evaluation paradigms

Gariba was a major contributor to the AfrEA's efforts to decolonise evaluation by promoting high quality evaluation led by, and rooted in Africa, including evaluation theory and practice that is relevant and responsive to African contexts and needs. He was one of the core catalysts in positioning the debate for the ongoing contemporary discussions on decolonising evaluation globally. It was at the 4th AfrEA conference in Niger in 2007 that Sulley Gariba and Zenda Ofir organised and facilitated the day-long session where the MAE concept was discussed, and the 'Making evaluation our own' statement was drafted (<https://vopetoolkit.ioce.net/sites/default/files/resources/3.8e3>). Throughout his career, he advocated for indigenous evaluation methodologies. In his speech in 2017, he noted that 'at the global context, evaluation is driven by the donor and the powerful institutions in the global North'. According to Gariba, these power houses dictate the paradigms and set conditions for evaluation in Africa. He further argued that the evaluators and evaluations are also led by the donor-selected 'experts', and local African evaluators serve as data collectors. The theories, methods and approaches were dictated by the 'donor', and this was of great concern. He advocated for a paradigm shift in African Evaluation, which should be participatory and show respect and appreciation of the African approaches and ways of knowing. It was partly because of his influence that the resolutions passed at the 4th AfrEA conference in 2007, the Bellagio conference of 2012, the recommendations from the 2015 concept paper (Chilisa 2015), and the South to South Initiative (S2SE) proposal (2018) emphasised the need to make clear the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that inform African and S2SE rooted evaluation frameworks.

There is currently a decolonisation wave that is driving a call for indigenous paradigms (Chilisa & Bowman 2023). The current debate is on whether we should decolonise the paradigms by acknowledging and applying a fifth paradigm to our evaluation practices. Evaluation has been conceptualised in the image of a tree with three branches depicting methods, values and use (Carden & Alkin 2012). Mertens (2009) added a fourth branch that she named 'social justice' and further aligned the branches to the four dominant

research paradigms, namely post-positivist, constructive or interpretive, pragmatic and transformative paradigms. An evolving discourse on indigenous research and evaluation (Chilisa 2011; Held 2018; Kovach 2010; Romm 2015; Smith 2019; Walter & Andersen 2013; Wilson 2008) has called for a space for a fifth paradigm. Chilisa (2020) and Chilisa and Mertens (2021) argue that the evaluation can best pay attention to the needs and context of Africans and other formerly colonised societies if it is articulated in a separate evaluation tree branch with clear philosophical assumptions that drive the evaluation process. Chilisa and Mertens (2021) have advocated for a separate context and needs evaluation branch that accommodates indigenous evaluation approaches with roots in the culture, philosophy, history and experiences of the formerly colonised peoples of Africa and indigenous peoples of New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the USA. This brings the branches to five under the evaluation metaphorical tree (see Figure 1). The main contention is that indigenous knowledge, world views, philosophies, not available to nonindigenous researchers and evaluators should inform the realities that we seek to articulate. The evaluation sector is interconnected to the development sector and therefore Western theories of progress and development with orthodox measures of change and progress continue to dictate to evaluators what they should look for when they measure success. The context and needs branch embraces other meanings of progress and development by indigenous scholars like Amartya Sen (1985). According to Sen, the primary element of development is freedom for people to choose the life they want to live. Questions of who initiated the programmes, whether the programme is a priority and the programme relevance to the peoples' wellbeing are critical in indigenous evaluation. The new alternative seeks evidence of improvement in programme beneficiaries' needs and priorities using indigenous paradigms and indigenous theories of progress and development to guide evaluative evidence.

There is now literature on a postcolonial indigenous paradigm coming out of Africa and influencing how evaluation can be grounded on communities' understanding of reality, knowledge and values. Table 1 summarises the philosophical



Source: Adopted from Chilisa, B., 2011, *Indigenous research methodologies*, p. 118, Sage, Los Angeles

FIGURE 1: A five-branch tree of evaluation approaches.

underpinning of a postcolonial indigenous paradigm that draws from Ubuntu philosophy and emphasises relational existence, relational knowledge and values.

There is also a view that decolonisation of the paradigms should include recognition of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) as a science, enabling an evaluation tree metaphor of an indigenous science paradigm. According to Held (2023), Western science colonises the world by referring to alternative science knowledge as indigenous knowledge systems and indigenous scholars perpetuate the hierarchy by consistently referring to their indigenous science as indigenous knowledge systems. A cultural view of science sees science as historical, sociological, cultural and political (Kuhn 1962). Knowledge revolutions occur leading to paradigm shifts. We are witnessing a knowledge revolution giving recognition to indigenous science paradigms. Under this perspective, we can grow an indigenous science metaphorical tree that is an umbrella for cultural paradigms that share common assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge and values and are informed by the social theory of slavery, colonialism, imperialism and globalisation. The view valorises IKS as a science that is rational and based on information gathered through methods that are empirical, experimental and systematic, and as such, rather than being fundamentally incommensurable with Western Science, it can be complementary. Figure 2 depicts a tree showing, among others, evaluation branches based on Maori philosophies, Hawaiian philosophies and African philosophies that share common assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge and values that inform the evaluation methodologies.

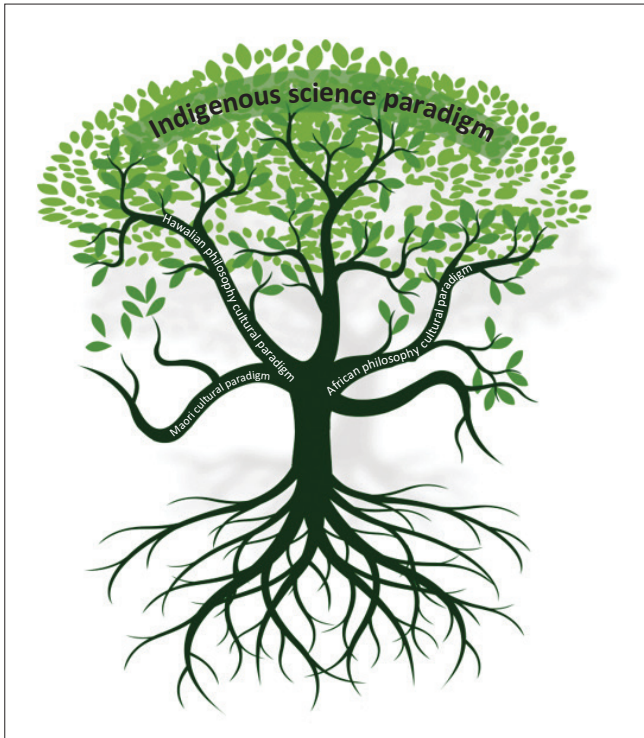
There is also a view that for visibility of the diversity of philosophies that emphasise contextualised evaluation, there should be regional metaphorical trees. Under this view, the MAE tree depicts evaluation frameworks informed by African philosophies. The tree shows, for example, Asante's afro-centric paradigm branch, Sulley Gariba's perspectives branch and has the potential to grow more branches (see Figure 3).

Offir (2021) and Dighe and Matthias (2023) are inclined towards an image that depicts evaluation as a forest

TABLE 1: Tenets of a postcolonial indigenous paradigm.

Variables	Postcolonial indigenous paradigm
Philosophical underpinning	Informed by Ubuntu, and other African philosophies, discourses on development, Amartya Sen's work on development as freedom, indigenous knowledge systems, critical theory, postcolonial discourses, feminist theories, critical-race specific theories and neo-Marxist theories.
Reality: A Relational ontology	Multiple constructed realities grounded in material, social and spiritual context and marked by the interconnectedness of the living and the non-living and relational existence.
Knowledge: Relational epistemology	Knowledge is subjective, historically located, situated in space and time, objective, complex, relational and includes spirituality and vision.
Values: Relational values	Social as well as epistemic and ecological justice guided by principles of relationality, respect, reverence, responsibility, reciprocity, reflexivity, responsiveness, decolonisation and decoloniality and freedom for people to choose the life they want to live.
Methodology	Transformative participatory lens for mixing indigenous science qualitative and quantitative methods with Western quantitative and qualitative methods.

Source: Adapted from Chilisa B., 2019, *Indigenous Research methodologies*, p. 47, Sage, Los Angeles



Source: Chilisa, B. & Bowman, N., 2023, 'Special Issue Editors' Introductory Note: The Why and How of the Decolonization Discourse', *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation* 19(44), 2–10. <https://doi.org/10.56645/jmde.v19i44.919>

FIGURE 2: Indigenous science paradigm.

ecosystem, with trees aligned to the different purposes of evaluation (see Figure 4). Of interest is the depiction of an ecosystem where the forest and human beings are one. The image is more in line with indigenous cultural paradigms and their emphasis on relational existence.

Clearly, then Sulley Gariba's vision of evaluation theory and practice embedded in the philosophies and world views of the communities created momentum for the discourse on evaluation in Africa and the S2SE. Of interest, however, is the extent to which there is transformation of evaluation from an MAE perspective. A review of the landscape of evaluation in Africa revealed that there are limits to transforming methods and approaches in monitoring and evaluations because government and public institutions still remain embedded in systems of planning and implementation that are untransformed and value Eurocentric models of knowledge. There is a perception that MAE concept is not informing general evaluation practice and that global asymmetries continue. Made in Africa Evaluation has little traction within the evaluation community, governments, foundations and those that commission evaluations. Myths, misconceptions and prejudices rooted in colonialism and power imbalances between the north and the south are barriers to the transformative capability of MAE. What follows is a discussion of the conceptualisation challenges, myths, misconceptions and tensions delaying the uptake of MAE and the counter arguments. Counter narratives against colonial prejudices about the formerly colonised are an anti-colonial strategy to guard against flooding the



Source: Chilisa, B., 2015, A synthesis paper on the Made in Africa evaluation concept, commissioned by African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), viewed 26 January 2022, from <https://afrea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/MAE-Chilisa-paper-2015-docx.pdf>.

FIGURE 3: Made in Africa metaphorical tree.



Source: Chilisa, B. & Bowman, N., 2023, 'Special Issue Editors' Introductory Note: The Why and How of the Decolonization Discourse', *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation* 19(44), 2–10. <https://doi.org/10.56645/jmde.v19i44.919>

FIGURE 4: Evaluation as an ecosystem.

literature with negative stereotypes about the formerly colonised. Conceptualisation challenges, myths of protectionism, misconceptions about Ubuntu philosophy, the myths of science versus sorcery, the myth of a neutral science method, the myth of difference and inventiveness versus imitativeness and tensions with adaptive approaches are discussed.

Conceptualisation challenges and myths of protectionism

While MAE is visible in the global discourse in evaluation and across literature from different disciplines, its conceptualisation still remains elusive and poses a threat to its transformative capabilities. Michelitsh (2019) notes that there are too many conversations taking place on what MAE should be or can be, with no final agreement made. Omasa (2019) notes that the divergent and sometimes fractured discussion about MAE has resulted in splintered understanding of the concept.

One of the misconceptions delaying progress in embracing the MAE concept and its transformative vision is the view that MAE means 'protectionism' and rejecting support and approaches from the north, making MAE a contender rather than an alternative or even a partner. Proponents of MAE and the 2015 concept paper, however, are clear that MAE is not exclusive of other knowledge systems. Another misconception is that MAE is interpreted as a one-size-fits-all model of evaluation in Africa rather than an umbrella for frameworks to guide contextualised, localised evaluation in diverse environments and situations. This myth was also deconstructed in the concept paper (Chilisa 2015). Participants referred to Uwizeyimana's (2020) article on the challenges of establishing an Africa-rooted public policy evaluation approach based on *Ubuntu* philosophy noting that some of the myths and misconceptions discussed in the article needed to be addressed to build a momentum on its implementation. What follows is a discussion of the myths and misconceptions discussed in the article and counter-arguments drawn from the literature.

Misconceptions about Ubuntu philosophy

Using the Ubuntu relational philosophy as an example, Uwizeyimana (2020) makes an argument against an African epistemology. He argues that the *Ubuntu philosophy*, which is indigenous to Africa, is not embraced or does not form part of the culture and norms of other groups of people living in Africa, for example, 'Indians, Coloureds, Arabs, Jews Chinese' (Uwizeyimana 2020); he also notes:

Non Indigenous African people might find it difficult to accept an evaluation approach based on African values, traditions, and practices of Ubuntu. (p. 125)

This perception of Ubuntu demonstrates the need for a wide dissemination of materials on African philosophies and how they inform MAE; for example, in the Ubuntu 'I am because we are' adage, the 'I' emphasises self through others and the 'We' does not necessarily erode the 'I'. The principles of Ubuntu are inclusive and respectful of others' cultures. Thus, the cultivation of knowledge during evaluation takes into consideration context that has a particularistic orientation and prioritises the needs of the beneficiaries.

There is also reference to Africa as a vast continent with major regions that do not share a common colonial language, for example, Anglophone and Francophone Africa, and have diverse cultures. While the adage 'I am because we are' and Ubuntu as a philosophy is common in Southern Africa, it is important to note that there is a convergence in the perspective of scholars on the continent on a relational understanding of a person and their connection to the environment (Ibhakewanlan & McGrath 2015). Thus, a relational ontology, epistemology and axiology sum up the 'cultural unity' in the continent (Diop 1962) and Africa's unique perspective (Ibhakewanlan & McGrath 2015) that lies beneath the African diversity. Among the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a country in Central Africa, a relational understanding of a person and their connection to the environment is expressed in the concept of 'us-ness' and 'we-ness' (Nyasini 2016), a clear demonstration of a shared understanding of reality. The world view of compassion, reciprocity, harmony, balance and relational existence comes in multiple forms across Africa with the Baganda of Uganda referring to it as Obuntu, the Baluba of Central Africa as Ubuntu and the Yoruba of Nigeria as Iwapele, while in Tanzania it is embodied in the Kiswahili term Ujamaa (Tamale 2020). The philosophy of Ubuntu stretches from the Nubian Desert to the Cape of Good Hope and from Senegal to Zanzibar (Ramose 2002).

Furthermore, Ubuntu philosophy is but just one of the African world views that are dominated by the African self, in relation to one another, the environment, the living and the non-living. Other philosophies such as the Afrocentric world view (Asante 1988, 1990; Easton 2012; Emagalit, 2001; Mkabela 2005; Muwanga-Zake 2009; Rivierie 2001) make assumptions about a relational epistemology. These philosophies do not sum up all the possible world views that can come from Africa (Chilisa 2017), thus creating a space for other world views including those from 'Indians, Coloureds, Arabs, Jews Chinese' that are inclusive and seek to stamp out decontextualised evaluation in Africa and the genocide of other knowledge systems in general.

The myths of science versus sorcery

In discussing the challenges of an Ubuntu-driven public policy evaluation approach, Uwizeyimana (2020) notes:

Most indigenous African conceptions of causality, beliefs in magic and supernatural powers, which are associated with African indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu and communalism, cannot systematically and scientifically be proven. (p. 125)

Blaut's theory (1993) on the coloniser's model of the world demonstrated how the European theory of diffusionism has created binary opposites of Westerner or European that believes in Science and the non-Westerner 'other' who believes in sorcery. The model is a powerful tool to use to deconstruct, expose and talk back to damaged focused assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes about the 'other'. Beliefs in magical power and supernatural powers cannot be ascribed to Africans only. Rene Descartes, a philosopher, mathematician and

scientist credits his methodology to a supernatural encounter during which the Spirit of truth descended upon him and possessed him (Billman 2019). Wilhelm Dilthey's philosophy of hermeneutics in the interpretive paradigm and its methodology of interpretation comes from the name Hermes, a god in Greek mythology who had the power to communicate the desires of the gods to mortals (Chilisa & Preece 2005; Neuman 1997). Shakespeare, a British author, in the book *Macbeth*, showed how Lady Macbeth and the three witches plotted to kill Duncan and she, Lady Macbeth became the fourth witch. Today in the Western world, plots to conquer, control and erase other knowledge systems do not happen through witchcraft but other sophisticated ways of controlling the mind that while not labelled witchcraft in reality serves the same purpose. In seeking to further understand Uwizeyimana's (2020) assertion, one can interrogate the following question: Is it superstitious and therefore irrelevant to the evaluator if mothers in a given community did not pursue one of the programme goals to kill chicken when they are 2 months old to satisfy the requirement for a nutritious meal on the grounds that it is against their culture to kill baby chickens? An evaluator steeped in the Western Baconian philosophy of empiricism will, of course, assign the failure of the intervention to the superstitious beliefs of the mothers. Is it superstitious and therefore irrelevant to the evaluators when a health clinic is not utilised because it was erected in a place the community considers sacred? The post-positivist view of a reality, knowable through objective measurement will of course dismiss the communities' behaviours as ignorance perpetuated by witchcraft beliefs.

The metaphysical, for example, superstitious beliefs, taboos in the context of a relational ontology are important in evaluation. When the programme participants believe something or act in a way because of their belief, which could be called non-scientific, it should not matter if the external evaluator shares those beliefs or not. Knowing that the programme participants believe that, and understanding their actions in relation to their beliefs, is simply good culturally responsive, context-aware evaluation. Dismissing programme participants' beliefs as sorcery raises issues of cultural insensitivity and perhaps even racism. From a relational African-rooted ontology informed by *Ubuntu*, even an evaluator steeped in western empiricism should not find the beliefs irrelevant.

Most evaluation practitioners and theorists recognise that conceptual frameworks to guide evaluation may use a theory, a philosophy or a model wholly, or they can borrow concepts from several theories or frameworks to craft a conceptual model to guide the evaluation design. Readers are invited to consider how the following ethics principles built on Ubuntu principles may be harmful to an African-rooted public policy evaluation approach. These principles are not in any way antagonistic to the United Nations Ethics Guidelines (UNEG) ethical principles of integrity, respect, accountability and beneficence. They complement these principles and add valuable dimensions emanating from African philosophical assumptions on relationality. Whereas the UNGE ethical principles emphasise the role of the individual, that is the evaluator, these principles

based on an I and we relationship place responsibility of a successful evaluation process on all stakeholders including beneficiaries, funders and commissioners.

Relationality

The emphasis is on belongingness, togetherness, interdependence, collectiveness, love, harmony and relationships of humans with each other and with earth-creation. There is emphasis on valuing community strength and building community relationships to inform research or evaluation intent, motive and methodology. Implicit in this principle is the need for healing of communities. The 'hand in hand' is a method based on the principle of relationality that serves to build relationships and coalitions for working together during the evaluation.

Responsibility

It is about the role of a researcher or evaluator in pursuing social, economic and environmental justice, resisting dominant ideologies that silence local communities and community ideologies that discriminate on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, race, ableness, age, among others and contributing to unity and harmony within the community and of all stakeholders' responsibility in playing their roles.

Reverence

Indigenous research recognises the critical nature of spirituality and values it as an important contribution to ways of knowing. Many indigenous people place value on sacred sites and spiritual practices. The evaluator or researcher applying a relationality lens needs to figure out what is revered, how they will participate in it and how it will inform interpretation of their findings and feed into a radical change of programme development, design, planning and implementation.

Reciprocity

Whose development programme is it? Who initiated it and how will they benefit from it? Who will hear and learn from it? These are fundamental questions that address the pitfall of colonial research that serves the interests of the funders and commissioners. Requiring evaluators to pay attention to who initiated the programme helps to hold governments accountable to their citizens instead of serving as an easy market for projects floating in the North.

Respectful (representation)

Respect requires that the process, from the initiation of the research, the questions asked, the methodology, the data-collection procedures and the reporting and dissemination of the report, is guided by the community and that the community has ownership and access to the data collected. This should include the evaluator's recognition of indigenous knowledge holders' specialist knowledge and their contribution to the knowledge production and respect for diversity (Guijt 2014).

Reflexivity

The principle of reflexivity requires evaluators and commissioners and all stakeholders to continuously reflect

on their position within existing powers and ensure that the evaluation will address the priority needs of communities. Radical change can happen if evaluation ethics direct donors and commissioners to reflect on current practice in Africa where evaluation too often provides performance assessment compliance and accountability functions for donors and commissioners at the expense of the learning agenda and relational knowing.

Responsivity

Responsiveness is the ability of researchers or evaluators to learn from the process, recognise the evolving changes and adapt their approaches and methodologies to become the change agent and ensure a context-based and culturally sensitive, transformative and appropriate evaluation process. South-to-south evaluation approaches are to play a critical role in transforming programme design, planning and implementation. Evaluators under this principle question 'learning' for whom. Under the conventional model, the evaluator's main role is to provide performance assessment for funders and commissioners and perform compliance and accountability functions, not communal learning.

Rights and regulations

This calls for ethical protocols that accord communities the rights and opportunities to prioritise their needs, claim and guard against misappropriation of indigenous knowledge and have the rights to confidentiality.

Decolonisation and decoloniality

This calls evaluators to resist the blind borrowing of Western theories, conceptual frameworks and methodologies and to adapt these methodologies and theories where necessary to make them contextually and culturally relevant. When done well, adaptation leads to new method theories that are African rooted. It calls for decolonisation of self and cultivation of knowledge through formation of coalitions.

The myth of a neutral science method

Arguing against MAE, one participant (Chilisa 2022) remarked:

'Science is science, data in one context is data in another, and that the objectivity of the scientific method cannot be affected by the subjectivity of contextual realities.' (p. 31)

This is clearly an argument against decolonising research and evaluation methodologies. During the 2021 AfrEA conference, there was a training session on the 'big four paradigms', namely, Post-positivism, Constructivism, Pragmatic and Transformative and how they created codes, rules and methods on how truth can be investigated, analysed, reported and disseminated. The myth of an objective truth lies within the post-positivist paradigm and is heavily contested by the constructivists who subscribe to a socially constructed reality and subjective knowing; while in the transformative paradigm, truth is seen as a game of power relations and the pragmatist value practice that leads to change. It is clear that the argument for a single,

unchanging, knowable reality expressed above is from a post-positivist standpoint and is contested by other paradigms. What was missing from the 2019 AfrEA conference discourse was a discussion of an indigenous paradigm. The assertion of a neutral science method points to the need for training on evaluation methodologies that clearly create awareness of the subjectivity of science and how evaluation models come out of diverse world views and are best applied if situated in their philosophical assumptions. Using an evaluation model without knowledge of its paradigmatic stance is like walking on a road blindfolded.

The myth of difference and inventiveness versus imitateness

Another concern is that MAE should make clear how it differs from 'people-centered evaluations including participatory, stakeholder, empowerment and transformative evaluations'. This thinking is driven by Western essentialism and its inability to see and appreciate characteristics in other cultures that are similar to and those that do not fit Western preconceptions. Essentialism drives the colonial binary thinking of Western or European as characterised by inventiveness and abstract thinking and Non-Westerners as imitators at the developmental stage of concrete thinking incapable of theorising (Blaut 1993). Complementing the call for difference is the view from a minority of the participants that 'MAE is underdeveloped as a body of knowledge, with distinct tools, techniques, and methods'. The majority of the participants were of the view that the problem is not underdevelopment but the lack of visibility perpetuated by Western hostility or indifference to other knowledge systems. Corroborating this view, one participant (Chilisa 2022) noted that:

'In the Western academy, MAE's recognition of abiotic-biotic relationships and spiritual ontologies is not widely discussed. Evaluators do not understand how to engage realities outside the limited material one they were trained to do.' (p. 31)

African relational philosophies driving MAE, for example, *Ubuntu* are well-developed bodies of knowledge that are informing research practice. The problem is buying into a relational ontology, epistemology and axiology that recognise connectedness with the living and the non-living (abiotic-biotic relationships). Another challenge is that AfrEA and S2SE are slow in implementing their communication, dissemination and publicity strategies. Thus, while *Ubuntu* might be a well-developed body of knowledge, it is also not visible in global south platforms despite promises to expand publishing and communication of existing work in the global south.

There are some similarities between what has been labelled a transformative evaluation paradigm and the indigenous paradigm driving the MAE concept (Chilisa & Mertens 2020). Paradigms are by nature porous, thus offering opportunities for evaluators across cultures to work together at times adapting existing approaches and at times creating completely new approaches. The indigenous and transformative paradigm, for example, is concerned with engaging multiple stakeholders in culturally responsive ways to achieve social, economic and

environmental justice. Made in Africa Evaluation goes further to address questions of who does the evaluation and with whose models, frameworks and tools of evaluation, pointing to power differentials between Westerners and non-Westerners as a stumbling block in conducting culturally responsive and transformative evaluation. Mbava and Chapman (2020) also note shared characteristics across paradigms. For example, the realist evaluation addresses some of the requirements of the MAE framework and may be relevant to adapt to African monitoring and evaluation conditions to make evaluation.

Tensions with the adaptive approach

There is also a persistent dialogue on how to interweave conventional Northern and MAE approaches and whether it is possible in the words of one of the participants 'to push for revolution while still ensconced in the dominant structure'. The concern is that, often, MAE is subsumed within the discourse on 'transformative evaluation', where it gets lost in 'the global challenges we are facing in the age of the Anthropocene'. The 'how to' and the distinct benefit of the integration is also not visible. Mbava and Chapman (2020), highlighting the tensions in the adaptive approach, note the approach 'has limitations because the thought leadership, design and development of theories and instruments largely remain outside Africa' but can be useful when some of the features of a Western-based approach meet the requirement of an MAE (p. 7). Mbava (2017) has developed a model of an adapted realist evaluation cycle that features the *Lekgotla* method as the main tool for gathering qualitative data and for building relations and seeking consensus among stakeholders. The model clearly delineates 'how to' and the benefits of the model. It remains for evaluators to test this model in other contexts within and outside Africa.

Community-based research methodology (CBR) is another example of an approach that, though developed outside Africa, has shared characteristics with the principles of an MAE. Ibhakwanlan and McGrath (2015) argue that CBR's four principles of a constructivist approach, purpose-driven inquiry, community participation and a context-based approach, though relevant to MAE, are not attached to a specific philosophy. Attaching CBR to an African philosophy defines its uniqueness in theory and practice. They have adapted CBR methodology to MAE using assumptions of a relational understanding of the individual (relational ontology), a social view of knowledge existence (relational epistemology) and a theocentric perspective of the environment (relational axiology). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) office has, for example, developed a generic procedure for implementing participatory methodologies (Guijt 2014). Guijt (2014), however, notes that one of the challenges in implementing participatory approaches is that evaluators lack cultural and contextual understanding of the evaluand. Adapting generic evaluation approaches leads to better data, which leads to more accurate interpretation of findings, appropriate recommendations and better uptake of findings (Guijt 2014). A methodology that is not situated in an identified philosophical assumption about the nature of reality,

knowledge and values is limited in its application to a community and its needs, priorities and cultural norms and values. Clearly then, existing adapted evaluation models that take into account MAE principles and delineate 'the how to' may go a long way in addressing the limitations of generic approaches coming from the North. An inventory, manual or book on these methodologies will go a long way in making them visible and available for use by evaluators.

Of note in the discussion of myths and misconceptions on MAE and tensions between Western and Non-western methodologies is the development of evaluation knowledge, for example, Mbava and Chapman's adapted realist evaluation model and ethical principles based on relational knowing (Chilisa & Mertens 2020). These efforts fulfil AfrEA's resolution to encourage and stimulate African scholars to participate in knowledge development and contribute to global knowledge. The knowledge base coming from Africa is a powerful strategy to inform evaluation practice and therefore transform evaluation from an MAE perspective.

In addition to addressing the conceptualisation challenges, misconceptions, myths and tension delaying the implementation of MAE, the 18 participants who responded to the structured e-interview questionnaire also made suggestions on how to transform evaluation in Africa from an MAE perspective. What follows are views coming from the participants on how to transform evaluation from an MAE perspective.

Views on how to transform the practice of evaluation from Made in Africa Evaluation perspectives

Participants' views came under the following themes:

- Clarification of MAE guided by African philosophies, decolonisation discourse and development theories.
- Indigenous knowledge as a powerful tool for innovative evaluation tools and frameworks.
- Involvement of governments and commissioners to create demand for MAE.
- Development of courses, programmes and curriculum that drive the MAE vision.
- Funding research on MAE.
- Formalisation and dissemination of the MAE concept paper (Chilisa 2015).
- Leveraging academic interest in MAE.
- Aggressive communication and dissemination strategy.
- Forming coalitions and engaging stakeholders.

Clarification of Made in Africa Evaluation guided by African philosophies and development theories

The dominant view is that more work is needed on the MAE concept. The view is that the philosophies and theories driving MAE need to be clarified. Theories that can play a broader role in the discourse on MAE should be embraced and used to

enhance the discussion. While there has been mention of the African renaissance, postcolonial theory, decolonisation and others, the decoloniality discourse and its accompanying concepts of modernity, decolonising self and theories on development and progress, especially Sen's (1985) definition of development as the right for one choose the life they want to live, should be incorporated into the MAE discourse. Concepts such as decolonising self can go a long way to 'push a narrative of Afro-optimism rather than Afro-pessimism in evaluation'. This view reiterates the 4th AfrEA conference in 2007, the Bellagio conference in 2012 and the recommendations from the 2015 concept paper to embed evaluation theories and practice on African philosophies, world views and values.

Indigenous knowledge an asset to transformation

There is a view that to succeed in transforming evaluation practice in Africa, MAE should be completely liberated from external forces and be more indigenous. This view is also in line with the thinking that MAE should not be subsumed under the umbrella of the transformative evaluation paradigm but should be allowed to show its distinctive purpose, the benefits it offers to evaluation in Africa and applicability to other cultures (see the evaluation tree metaphor, Figure 3). Indigenous knowledge is seen as a powerful tool for 'inventiveness' abstract thinking, theory building and development of models and tools unique to Africa and yet available and amiable for adaptation in other cultures, Western and non-Western. Dr. Sulley Gariba also advocated valuing the uniqueness of indigenous and African methods and indigenous knowledge, valuing the history and culture of the communities and seeing things in the lens of the community, especially how they define success and how they measure it. In this way, MAE stands to enrich the evaluation knowledge space by exploring areas that would otherwise be impossible to explore with the mainstream approaches. One participant (Chilisa 2022), optimistic about a transformation driven by African thought, noted:

'[I]f we push a narrative of Afro-optimism rather than Afro-pessimism in evaluation [e.g. *the value of African thought as well as the capacity of African evaluators*], and combine that with designing and or documenting or formalizing and practicing African evaluation methods we would shift not only evaluation practice, but also development in Africa.' (p. 35)

This view reiterates the 4th AfrEA conference in 2007, the Bellagio conference in 2012 and the recommendations from the 2015 concept paper on the value of indigenous knowledge and world values.

Involve governments, commissioners and development practitioners to create a demand for Made in Africa Evaluation

There is a view that MAE is being pioneered and orchestrated from outside Africa. This perception may be because of the fact that most MAE projects are external-funded. African governments have not put any money into MAE. To address

this anomaly, academics in Africa and AfrEA should be encouraged to lobby their governments and systems to support the MAE initiative from within Africa. Governments are the biggest consumers of monitoring and evaluation results and therefore positioned to be a significant game changer in the evaluation landscape. The majority of African governments do not yet have monitoring and evaluation policies. In addition, a paucity of local evaluators commissioned to carry out evaluation in Africa characterises the landscape of evaluation in Africa (Tarsilla 2014). Commissioner, government and funder reliance on Western-based evaluators who often times are not knowledgeable of the context, and the culture of the evaluand is affecting the quality of evaluation in Africa. Mapitsa, Trivanhu and Popiwa (eds. 2019) add that relationship between donors and host governments also affects the quality of the evaluation. Donors ignore issues concerning quality of data when they have a good relationship with the government. This trend is likely to grow in countries where there is no appropriate legislation around the practice of M&E policy (Mapitsa et al. 2019).

Despite the anomaly, African governments are at a juncture where they can be influenced to position MAE in their development, planning and implementation of monitoring and evaluation policies. United Nations (UN) organisations, for example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Independent Evaluation Office, UNICEF, the World Bank and other commissioners and the Independent evaluation office of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have embraced culturally responsive evaluation and participatory methodologies and are therefore positioned to work with governments to create a demand for MAE in Africa by promoting tools and adapted models that come out of Africa in the evaluations they do. The challenge is that although many funders 'talk about it', believe it is ethical to embrace the idea and the concept, few put funds into it or reverse the way they commission evaluation and write the Terms of Reference or the calls for proposal to conduct evaluation. To simply put, the funders do not create demand for MAE. In the voice of one of the participants (Chilisa 2022):

'Most mainstream practice is driven by multilaterals, UN system are top down, donor driven in terms of the evaluation questions, hiring of expatriate and with not enough evaluators with local context and knowledge, and no real investment in doing evaluation differently.' (p. 36)

The funders, UN organisations and other commissioners have a huge responsibility to create a market demand for MAE. In the words of one of the participants (Chilisa 2022):

'UNEP and the big agencies could change the market if they were brave enough to do that ... UNDP, World Bank do the majority of evaluations-if they changed the market, the market would shift.' (p. 36)

Clearly then, the perception of the participants is that the 4th AfrEA conference in 2007, the Bellagio conference in 2012 and the recommendations from the 2015 concept paper calling for partners and governments to create demand for

MAE have to a large extent not been fulfilled. In what ways, for example, did EvalPartners in this commissioned work build in the use of the MAE approach? There is a view that even though EvalPartners has embraced MAE, it has no strategy to ensure its application in its commissioned work.

Development of courses, programmes and curriculum that drive the Made in Africa Evaluation vision

Participants expressed the need for AfrEA to intensify active engagement of institutions of higher education in offering courses or programmes that drive the MAE vision. African Evaluation Association should actively engage evaluators in Africa to design courses or programmes in their institutions that drive the MAE vision and mission. Participants noted that it is important to have a course (Certificate or Post graduate certificate) in MAE that can be offered in one or two institutions in Africa with the possibility of courses offered online. In addition, participants indicated the need to emphasise African philosophies, notably, critical theories, postcolonial theories, decolonisation, decoloniality, indigenisation and theories on development and progress in institutions of higher learning, so young evaluators can understand these philosophical, theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of evaluation alongside the Western dominant theories and paradigms. Creating courses or curriculum on MAE and funding short courses on evaluation are some of the transformative strategies recommended in the MAE concept. The CLEAR-A A DETA training programme supports the vision of an African approach to evaluation, acknowledging that context, culture, history and beliefs are critical in shaping evaluation to respond to the diversity and complexity of development in Africa. The Winter School, formerly known as the Development Evaluation Training Programme in Africa (DETPA) has changed its name to the Development Evaluation Training in Africa (DETA). It is unclear if the course offered by the DETA programme culminates in any certificate or postgraduate diploma with a focus on MAE and African philosophies and world views. The AfrEA website at the time of compiling the report had advertised conventional evaluation methods.

Funding research on Made in Africa Evaluation

Getting funders on board is critical for strategic enabling of MAE. According to the participants, it is important to have fully funded projects that are led by seasoned African Evaluators (MAE advocates) that can serve as a test case for evaluations that use a MAE approach from inception to the end. It is also critical to fund a project to develop a MAE school of thought with theoretical foundations and methodological guidelines and innovation laboratories that is driven by affiliated research institutions. Wallis (2019), for example, has proposed the development of a theory of evaluation that has transformative concepts based on the *Ubuntu* philosophy. Funding of such research stands to demonstrate the utility of afro-centric thought. Funding of higher institutions and Voluntary Organisation for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) to engage with the concept

is also useful. Participants also suggested a need for a survey to provide evidence on how MAE is transforming evaluation in Africa or the world. In the voice of one participant, 'Huge investment in research, documentation and true belief in the decolonization of knowledge are required to move the needle'. Evidence of funding of African academic institutions to engage in research that promotes African thought and models of MAE is limited. Most of the documented research on MAE comes from students pursuing their Masters or PhD studies. Mbava's (2017) dissertation on an adapted realist evaluation based on MAE and Omosa's (2020) PhD dissertation on the MAE are examples of work coming from universities that build a new generation of evaluators committed to promoting evaluation theory and practice informed by African world views, values and culture.

Formalisation and dissemination of the Made in Africa Evaluation concept

An observation from the majority of participants is that the MAE concept paper is not widely known. On 18 February 2018, one of the participants, responding to Zenda Ofir's blog on MAE, expressed their wish to access the MAE concept paper. The response was that 'AfrEA was about to upload it'. By the year is 2021, some people had still not accessed the MAE concept paper. One of the interviewees who was a respondent in the research on the concept paper would not participate in the research on MAE expressing dissatisfaction that although he was one of those interviewed during the MAE 2015 concept paper, he had not received the document and did not know where to access it. It was uploaded to the internet the same year and month that there was query. The concept paper is titled 'Synthesis Paper on MAE, Final draft paper' 31st August 2015. Years after its completion, the concept paper is still a draft. One participant (Chilisa 2022) had this to say:

'It needs to be made a must-read for ALL African evaluators and external evaluators especially those doing evaluation in Africa. A campaign needs to be mounted to popularize it and raise its profile. It needs wide dissemination.' (p. 38)

Each year, funders commission research and evaluation in the global south. Typical of funder colonialism where knowledge produced is property of the funder, the reports are not in most cases in the public domain.

Uptake of the documentation of the transformative strategy

Participants expressed the need for an aggressive collection of African evaluation histories, experiences and the collective theorising and meaning making of what MAE really is, and an inventory of what is happening or what is being done, where and by whom. Documentation is part of the AfrEA strategy to transform evaluation from an MAE perspective. The views expressed by the participants reflect weak evidence in AfrEA's uptake of documentation of activities on MAE and information dissemination.

Participants also noted the need to document, formalise and disseminate principles, tools, frameworks, models and

methodologies that demonstrate how MAE's purpose, utility and benefits can be used and are adaptable in diverse contexts within the region and in other cultures, Western and Non-Western. These should be widely disseminated through textbooks, manuals, workbooks, journal articles and every dissemination space available. The AfrEA website is mentioned on the S2SE call to action as another essential communication strategy. The African Evaluation Association's website while it has most of the key features, lacks relevant details. The website does not have an updated and detailed call-to-action page. This page could be improved by providing information on policy and advocacy, up-to-date education and research programmes, events, publications and community issues. The site makes mention of AfrEA's contribution to promoting MAE but fails to set a stage to provide options that can promote the growth of MAE. The typical characteristic of the AfrEA website is that the created pages are not fully updated and the call-to-action page lacks details and essential information.

Forming coalitions and stakeholder participation or engagement

Participants expressed the need to form coalitions 'with allies or accomplices from the global north and the global south'. Most of the participants also noted that the engagements of all key stakeholders when conducting evaluation projects are key for MAE to transform evaluation in Africa. They noted the importance of engaging development practitioners, researchers and evaluators, universities and policy makers. They noted that it was critical that communities are actively involved from the beginning of the evaluation so that their voices can be heard in order for them to own the development projects. The African Union agenda 2063 pledges to mobilise people to participate in the continental development of programmes to the extent where they can claim ownership, thus endorsing participatory community-based evaluation approaches.

Conclusion

There is a growing realisation that the evaluation discourse has undermined the role of ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies in evaluation and has therefore missed opportunities to increase the responsiveness of evaluation to diverse cultures. Sulley Gariba was an advocate for a MAE informed by African philosophies, realities, ways of knowing and values. Under the current call for more indulgence in ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies, African philosophies are increasingly being embraced to inform the discourse on evaluation, for example, Wallis' (2019) argument on invoking Ubuntu to inform transformative evaluation concepts. Indigenous knowledge is thus a powerful tool for 'inventiveness' abstract thinking, theory building, and development of models and tools unique to Africa.

When we embed evaluation in the world views and philosophies of African people, we can define MAE as an umbrella name for evolving approaches to evaluation that

are guided by the diverse philosophies, cultures, values, histories, languages, indigenous and local knowledge systems, experiences and practices of the African people, have a decolonisation intent and apply the AfrEA principles to evaluation practice. Africa has a common understanding of a relational existence that defines a person's connection with others, the community and the environment and sums up a relational paradigm that is also central to evaluation practice in Africa. It is this relational existence that is at the centre of assumptions about the nature of reality, ways of knowing and ethics that inform evaluation practice from the beginning to the end.

The conclusion drawn in this article is that although there has been some remarkable progress conceptually, there is less application of the MAE concept in evaluation projects. The conceptualisation challenges, myths, misconceptions and tensions that delay the uptake of MAE were discussed in this article and counter narratives that create alternative narratives presented. While it is clear that there are evaluation practices made from Africa that are gaining momentum, the policy environment to support these is lacking with observers suggesting that the lack of national evaluation policies in most African governments may lead to poor quality evaluation with some donors turning a blind eye to quality data where they have a good relationship with governments. It is safe to say that governments' readiness to drive the African agenda for participatory and community-based evaluation approaches under the MAE umbrella is at risk.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

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

Author's contributions

B.M.C is the sole author of this research article.

Funding information

Evalpartners provided funding to conduct this study.

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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