







# Editorial: Addressing knowledge asymmetries in memory of Dr Sulley Gariba



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What remains to be determined is the most effective means of assessing and analyzing the growth and development of human capacity and the 'intangible' interventions that coalesce to generate increased capacities for development at the grassroots. (Gariba 1998:64)

Some of the goals of collective action are long-term processes, such as democratising government or gaining recognition and policy space for slum dwellers or for the livelihood activities for informal traders in Africa's urban centres. When evaluated against these broad processes, collective action may be considered to have failed. However, uncovering the intermediate or unintended benefits of collective action, such as the building of an aware citizenry, may change what we consider to be 'success' or 'failure'. (Anyidoho & Gariba 2015:27)

With these words, the late Dr Sulley Gariba inspired evaluators to reflect on levels of engagement and participation with communities and responsiveness to the needs as expressed by communities, particularly in Africa.

Jackson (2021) reminds us that Sulley Gariba understood that deep-seated asymmetries of power and knowledge prevented universal access to affordable basic services including education, food security and the rule of law – and a better life for all. Because of this, he sought to equalise power and knowledge to shatter these asymmetries and replace them with reciprocal partnerships of respect and mutual benefit.

This special issue of the *African Evaluation Journal*, in memory of the late Dr Sulley Gariba was a collaborative project led by EvalPartners with the support from the United Nations World Food Programme, in partnership with regional Voluntary Organisations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) in the Global South, including the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization (ReLAC) and the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA). It builds on three memorial lectures delivered at conferences organised by these regional VOPEs between 2022 and 2023. EvalPartners with support from WFP and UNICEF conceptualised the Sulley Gariba memorial lecture series shortly after his passing in April 2021 in honour of his contribution to the global evaluation community.

During his career, Sulley served as a senior presidential advisor, diplomat, lecturer, and board member with several international non-profit organisations and foundations. He was a visionary leader in the global evaluation movement: the founding President of the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) from 2002 to 2005, the President of the AfrEA from 2007 to 2009, and an advocate for Made in Africa Evaluation.

Evaluators are, in the spirit of Dr Sulley Gariba, encouraged to be catalysts of change, engaging in critical self-reflection and exercising prudence in how evaluation evidence is generated and utilised to enhance societal values and impact lives. Such endeavours should strive towards equitable evaluation practice, ensuring inclusivity and leaving no individual or community marginalised, in accordance with the ethos encapsulated in the slogan 'leave no one behind'.

We are also reminded of his support for the approach of 'rethinking, reshaping and reforming evaluation' as far back as 2001. It is our view that Sulley Gariba would, if he was still around, support a revised version of this mantra focusing on *rethinking*, *reshaping*, and *transforming* evaluation in Africa, and elsewhere for that matter. Dr Gariba was very much aware that this type of approach to grapple with development and evaluation is not an event but a process that must be informed by historical, prevailing as well as pre-emptive or visionary factors.

**Note:** Special Collection: Addressing Knowledge Asymmetries.

## The rethinking and decolonisation of evaluation in Africa

Dr Sulley Gariba was an advocate for concepts such as local innovation, indigenous knowledge, local voices in evaluation, transformation, and the strengthening of evaluation in the Global South that involved civil society, parliamentarians, and emerging evaluators. He knew that the task would be a difficult one primarily because the asymmetries of power and knowledge prevented universal access to affordable basic services. The decolonial task is about rebuilding histories, indigenous knowledges, and worldviews, and imagining alternative futures. Chilisa (2012) states that decolonisation is the seeking of self-determination; it is about internationalising the common experiences, struggles and hopes of colonised people.

Dr Sulley Gariba's rethinking of evaluation was guided by three 'critical elements' that related to the purposes of evaluation: (1) *Evaluation must be a learning tool*. The purpose is not to investigate but to create an opportunity for all the stakeholders, the donors included, to learn from their roles in the development intervention exercise. (2) *Evaluation is part of the development process*. The evaluation cannot be a separate activity from the development intervention. The results and tools should become mechanisms for change rather than historical reports. (3) *Evaluation must be a partnership and sharing of responsibility*. This is in sharp contrast to the 'them' and 'us' tendencies of most evaluations (Gariba 1998).

Ignoring the epistemological context within the sphere of evaluations can inadvertently perpetuate colonial practices wherein the process of learning, a fundamental objective of evaluation, ineluctably becomes unidirectional and benefits others to the detriment of target communities. Anyidoho and Gariba (2015) have delineated insightful typologies of learning in a deliberate quest to rectify knowledge asymmetries in collective action: *learning in struggle* (i.e. learning informally and incidentally), *learning through struggle* (i.e. emerging from conflicting moments along the liberatory journey), and *learning to struggle* (i.e. learning the best methods or strategies of achieving the goals of the struggle). By embracing Gariba's evaluation as a learning tool, evaluators engaged in and advocating for indigenous and localised evaluation invariably align themselves with one of these typologies of learning-struggle. The delineation of who learns what, how, and why in evaluation is poised to engender methods and strategies to equalise both the numerator and denominator. It would be a substantial oversight to disregard the existence of two primary antagonistic views of epistemologies, asymmetric ways of knowing about and learning from evaluation: western epistemologies in the Global North versus indigenous knowledge systems in the Global South.

The late Dr Gariba laid the groundwork in his keynote presentation 'Global context, African realities in evaluation: Establishing an African identity in evaluation' delivered on 15 August 2017. In his keynote, he underscored these emerging

imperatives: development is people-centred and a constitutional obligation; emergence of citizenry participation and demand for accountability, exerting pressure on governments to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of development interventions; a push for African knowledge systems, values, purpose and ownership within evaluation frameworks to advance locally conceived development agendas.

### In this edition

This edition brings together rethinking, reshaping, and transforming aspects of evaluation from Global South perspectives. First of all, Mark Mulobi (2024) provides a sincere and pointed tribute to Dr Sulley Gariba for his pivotal role in transforming youth engagement in evaluation, particularly on the African continent, under the theme 'Addressing Knowledge Asymmetries'. This is followed by an article by Chilisa (2024) that is based on a research article on the evaluation landscape in Africa and the progress made in implementing Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE), commissioned by EvalPartners as the inaugural Sulley Gariba memorial lecture in his honour, and delivered in March 2022.

Among other things, Chilisa (2024) states that, 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 externally 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 initiatives 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. When we embed evaluation in the world views and philosophies of African people, we can define Made in Africa evaluation as an umbrella name for evolving approaches to evaluation that (1) are guided by the diverse philosophies, cultures, values, histories, languages, indigenous and local knowledge systems, experiences and practices of the African people, (2) have a decolonisation intent and (3) 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.

At the 4th Asia Pacific Evaluation conference in December 2023, in Manila, another Sulley Gariba lecture was presented. This lecture, now an article, was entitled, 'Asia Pacific world views in evaluation: Inspiring culturally responsive practice from across the region'. The article by Dinh (2024) describes examples of and efforts by evaluators, VOPes, regional and international evaluation bodies and evaluation commissioners to utilise both Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE) and Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation (CRIE) in the Asia Pacific. The examples are drawn from across the sub-

regions of South Asia, Southeast and East Asia and the Pacific in order to demonstrate the diversity of forms that CRE and CRIE can take. Some of the examples recognise *pluriversalism*, or the interconnectedness between Western, colonial and community or indigenous cultures, and use hybrid approaches that respect and intermingle Western and localised evaluation approaches and methods (Jordan & Hall 2023). They also highlight how some large-scale commissioners of evaluation are undertaking gradual processes of adoption and experimentation with CRE and CRIE in the region. In the article that follows, also based on a paper in the Sulley Gariba lecture series, delivered at the ReLAC Conference in Quito, Ecuador in November 2022, Ghiana asks, *Can we talk about a 'Made in Latin America and the Caribbean' evaluation?* This article seeks to honour the legacy of Dr Sulley Gariba by contributing various ideas on what evaluation is and how it is carried out in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The hope is that it will serve to encourage ongoing conversations about their collective evaluation culture. It may also be used in comparative studies with other regions, mutual learning with others in the Global South, and in open dialogue with the Global North.

Attipoe-Dorcoo and Martínez-Rubin (2024) contend that evaluation that fails to account for people's lived experiences often fails to produce solutions with sustainable, positive impacts. Hence, they created the I.M.P.A.C.T. framework to advance culturally responsive and equitable evaluation (CREE) among multicultural, under-resourced communities. They state that in the context of Africa, evaluation has to be part of solutions both on the continent and the world. Sefa-Nyarko et al. (2024) recognise the current evaluation modus operandi as an extension of colonial practices. They argue for locally led, locally centred, locally relevant, contextualised, decolonised evaluation systems and practices. The current systems must be radically re-engineered, both in theory and in practice to go beyond mere participation in evaluation, but transformed and recalibrated to accurately mirror the uniqueness of the African continent. They synthesise African ways of knowing into: (1) symbolic interaction; (2) lived experiences; (3) witch doctoring, soothsaying, and the prophecies; and (4) folklore and storytelling, and a critical reader may ask: Are evaluators doing justice to these ways of knowing in the African context?

An article by Mazigo et al. (2024) discusses evaluative insights embodying Swahili proverbs and how these could constitute the content of and practical strategies for operationalising Made in Africa Evaluation. The analysis of the 25 Swahili proverbs can, according to them, inform unique framing of the meaning, and purposes of evaluation, as well as rights and duties of participants in the evaluation process. These are also the concepts that Sulley Gariba advocated for, to strengthen evaluation, particularly in the Global South. With the inspiration from the late Dr Sulley Gariba on the need for evaluators to reflect on levels of engagement and participation, the article shares other forms of wisdom that provide the rationale for conducting and commissioning evaluation. It provides insightful guidance

on democratising evaluation, and practical strategies for effective engagement of evaluation stakeholders. In addition, the proverbial wisdom provides practical guidance on conducting quality evaluation by emphasising the attention to indicators, generation of credible evidence, selection of stakeholders, co-learning and co-production of contextual knowledge, and learning from local people and contexts.

Almas Mazigo (2024) presents the perceived wisdom of African proverbs in another article where he states that philosophical assumptions embodying African worldviews and collective wisdom can provide a basis for programme evaluation's intent, expected outcomes, and dissemination of evaluation findings. The wisdom in African proverbs can, according to him, inspire and shape the practice of development evaluation in Africa. The article presents the Swahili Evaluation Approach to highlight its constitutive elements and guidance for evaluating development interventions with diverse stakeholders. He is optimistic that the philosophical beliefs discussed in the article can make the Swahili Evaluation Approach philosophically acceptable and successfully inspire and guide inquiries about valuing, and judging some or all aspects of development interventions. He presents a summary of theoretical and practical guidelines for doing evaluations embedding those philosophical beliefs.

Participatory Systems Mapping (PSM) is presented in the article by Bouyoufsi (2024) as an appropriate approach to evaluate complex interventions. He states that the PSM, with its system-based approach, emerges as a helpful tool for coping with complexity, fostering collaboration, and enriching participation among stakeholders. Participatory Systems Mapping provides a comprehensive understanding of intervention contexts and interactions. It facilitates a practical exploration of complexity, integrating well-documented and transparent processes. Furthermore, it complements existing evaluation approaches and methods, particularly when coupled with the System-based Theory of Change diagrams, allowing for the development of practical theories considering feedback, broader context, and potential adverse outcomes. The article highlights the role of PSM as a tool for co-creating system maps, incorporating stakeholders' insights to illustrate the interaction between the intervention and the entire system to tackle the difficulties associated with evaluating complex interventions.

In their article, *'Decolonising national evaluation systems'*, Goldman et al. (2024) provide an analytical framework around decolonisation and social-ecological systems from a 'new institutionalism' perspective and apply this to two African national evaluation systems – Benin and South Africa. They use decolonisation not just in the sense of moving away from Western systems of thinking, valuing and knowing, but moving away from an externally defined and controlled neo-liberal economic system which, according to them, is causing both climate/ecosystems breakdown and extreme inequality. They analyse these National Evaluation

Systems (NESs) against the framework and suggest ways that national evaluation systems could be adapted to be more responsive to the social-ecological system changes needed by humanity now.

For this edition, we included a review of the book by Goldman, I. and Pabari, M. (Editors) (2020), entitled, *Using Evidence in Policy and Practice: Lessons from Africa* (Routledge). The review, by Grace Igweta and Nikki Zimmerman (2024), provides a summary of the purpose and outline of the book contents and concludes that the book is a critical part of Africa's contribution to the burgeoning literature on evidence-based policymaking. Its strength is in the richness and diversity of the case studies and sources of evidence, deliberate conversation between researchers and policymakers in telling the evidence stories and doing so through an explicit and easy-to-understand analytical framework. Readers will, they hope, appreciate the authors for steering clear of the debates about evidence hierarchies and for being pragmatic in showing what can be achieved if policymakers, researchers, and practitioners work together to use evidence in a broad sense in making timely decisions. The book also makes an important contribution in managing expectations on the role of evidence, especially in the short-term. The review points to one improvement that the editors should consider giving more thought and space to evidence generation and the interplay between supply and demand in the conceptual framework. They state that if policymakers only have access to and use evidence that they demand, we may miss opportunities to learn from evidence generated because of other triggers including academic pursuits, media, or evaluation of citizen collective action as shown by Anyidoho and Gariba (2015).

Finally, the readers of this edition are treated to a brief photo collage of Dr Sulley Gariba. This is unusual for an academic or research-based journal, but he was a unique individual who contributed immensely to the growth of evaluation on the African continent. We salute him and through this edition we also appreciatively remember the contributions of Marie Gervais (AEJ Editorial Board Member), Bali Andriantseheno (AfrEA Board Member) and others. We thank all the reviewers who participated in

this edition and we encourage all evaluators, young and not so young from the North and the South to emulate their work and to rethink, reshape and transform our evaluation frameworks and practices.

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