

# The African Evaluation Journal and the field of monitoring and evaluation in Africa



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Along with the task of 'making evaluation our own', refining 'Made in Africa Evaluation' and engaging in the decolonisation debates that includes recognising indigenous manifestations of our monitoring and evaluation (M&E) ontological and epistemological orientations, practitioners and thought leaders are encouraged to build the field of M&E in Africa. Field-building is purposely used here because for decades evaluators have been trying to convince everyone that evaluation research is an academic discipline. It was argued that evaluation is a discipline because it has institutional manifestations in the courses taught at universities and meets other criteria (Krishnan 2009) of having a body of specialist knowledge, theories that organise the specialist knowledge, specific terminologies, as well as specific research methods. However, the prominent philosopher and evaluation theorist, Michael Scriven (1991) described evaluation as a trans-discipline, because every discipline and profession engages in some form of evaluation. He concluded that evaluation is a discipline that serves other disciplines, which makes it an emergent trans-discipline, in the same way that statistics and logic – as examples of trans-disciplines – are used in different areas of inquiry such as education, health, economics, environmental studies, et cetera.

These conceptions of academic disciplines may constrain our efforts to build the field of Monitoring and Evaluation in Africa. The constraints are inherent in the compartmentalising and routinisation of knowledge creation or knowledge production as they relate to not only M&E but other fields of study. This kind of object-based tradition of knowledge creation is essentially a Eurocentric approach that treats phenomena as objects and leads to categorical thinking about difference and similarity. When applied to culture, it creates groups or sets that allow static and universal ideas to hold sway (Martin & Pirbhai-illich 2016). The pursuit of knowledge requires different perspectives because knowledge constitutes a form of power. When we theorise from a particular perspective, in this case, the object-based orientation, we cement the power within certain paradigms and social reality gets constructed by the paradigms we hold as dominant. Oelofsen (2015) states that:

[K]nowing and understanding this ought to result in a quest for objective truth (as opposed to 'objective truth' which is a particular perspective masquerading as objective truth) which always admits to the possibility that accepted 'truths' could be false. (p. 138)

This requires what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) calls decoloniality – a redemptive and liberatory epistemology that seeks to de-link from the tyranny of abstract universals.

It is in this context that a more African centred, and indeed, human-centric approach to knowledge creation is proffered in a dialogical and relational orientation. In the relational orientation, knowledge comes into being in each moment of relation with difference and through dialogue that seeks to understand those differences in relation to the socio-cultural, environmental, economic and political contexts that formed them. The relational approach also focuses on the relationship between different ontologies and epistemologies, the historical-cultural context within which these are formed and the hegemonic structures that privilege one group over another. This approach should be incorporated into the M&E field building efforts, and the *African Evaluation Journal* (AEJ) should be considered as a key component of this exercise. Field building is defined as the activities or investments that drive a field's progress towards impact. There are many existing frameworks for field building, and they share common features. The most common feature is that of **knowledge base**. A field's knowledge base encompasses the common ideas, research base, the shared knowledge and communities of practice. It involves developing a common set of ideas that the research base can support; the collection of credible evidence that achieves desired outcomes; a growing community of researchers to study and advance practice and having vehicles or mechanisms to collect, analyse, debate and disseminate knowledge. Another feature of field building is **standards of practice**. The standards are codes, exemplary models, resources to support implementation, credentialing and training. The codification of standards of practices involves defining key terms,

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articulating core values and principles, et cetera. This feature also ensures the inclusion of standards into existing bodies of work. A further feature of field building is having a **network of leaders**. The network of leaders is influential people, leaders and exemplary organisations, with broad base of support, who enjoy shared values, across disciplines, fields and network infrastructure. They can surface shared values, among early collaborators and create space for broader collaboration underway. The last feature to note here is that of **funding and policy**. This feature encourages an enabling policy environment and organised funding streams across public and private, sectors. The identification of available and sustainable funding and resources is important for this feature.

The AEJ as open access source for information and knowledge, plays a significant role in each of the above features. Its contribution to the knowledge base of M&E is also captured in the African Evaluation Database (AfrED) located at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. The database captures basic bibliographic and other metadata on evaluation reports, journal articles and doctoral dissertations (currently limited to South Africa) in the field of M&E that have been produced since 2000. More than 100 AEJ articles are listed in this database. The journal has been in existence for only 10 years and is a space to debate and deliberate about standards, including the African Evaluation Principles. Young and emerging evaluators utilise the journal as a platform to express themselves and provide leadership for the field. It remains a valuable resource that is supported by policies – in some countries such as South Africa – whereby authors are financially supported to publish their work. This resource should be supported, maintained and sustained.

In this edition, we finally present the work of Savanhu et al. (2023) who used data from Operation Restore Hope (ORH) in Zimbabwe (Chimanimani district) to assess the effectiveness of models used during disaster response. Disasters take the form of emergencies and demand rapid response. In assessing the rapid response process, it was not possible to include evaluation participants who were not residents of Chimanimani because the intervention specifically targeted affected communities. As such, the study was designed as a single-holistic case study of the Chimanimani district. The case study from ORH demonstrated that models for disaster response must be prepared way before disasters approach people, rather than preparing them when a disaster is upon people. This is so because the unusual nature of emergencies demands rapid response and some important factors such as pre-planning can be overlooked in resultant models.

The article by Agbodjan et al. (2023) is the only French publication for this edition. The journal strives to include more articles written in French because, as the authors claim, ‘the state of development of M&E functions in Francophone countries are poorly known’. They found that the poor knowledge of the state of M&E in Francophone African countries was an impediment to the process of institutionalising M&E and evidence-based decision making. Through the sharing of the unfortunate state of M&E institutionalisation,

the authors hope that the results of this research would provide guidance to the various stakeholders on the measures to be put in place to effectively support Francophone African countries in their process of institutionalising M&E within public policies.

The authors, Donessouné, Gbènamblo and Rachidatou (2023), share insights about an assessment of the fidelity of the implementation of a community-based TB tuberculosis programme that was set up with the Global Fund (GF) to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in Burkina Faso. According to the author, the findings showed that it was possible to set up a community programme with associations to improve the screening and follow-up of patients with tuberculosis. Also, that community-based organisations (CBOs) were able to develop a community TB control programme with an acceptable level of fidelity.

Authors, Grand and Mutereko (2023), question the taken-for-granted ‘Global health partnerships’ (GHPs) that have flourished across Africa as alternative governance mechanisms seeking to strengthen local health systems for effective national planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The study demonstrates how global health monitoring and evaluation partnerships (GHM&EPs) are contested spaces contrary to the pervasive collaborative discourse in official government policies. They claim that soft power strategies suggest that collaboration for M&E conceals and prolongs opportunities for addressing practical and contested challenges, hence failing the test for ideal partnerships. The article provides a critical understanding of the limitations of the current theorisation of partnerships, which erroneously assumes trust, mutuality and equality between resourced and under-resourced partners.

Sibanda et al. (2023) discuss the African Evaluation Principles, which they claim are aimed at addressing power asymmetries that exist within the evaluation ecosystem in Africa while giving agency, voice and power to Africans. For them, the principles are aligned with the Ubuntu philosophy, which is based on the premise that ‘a person is a person through other persons’. The Ubuntu philosophy guides African socio-cultural, political and ethical epistemological, ontological and axiological orientation, according to the authors. They share the exploration of how the African Evaluation Principles can be used to contribute to addressing inequalities and power asymmetries and discuss the role of African Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, values and traditions to inform what equitable evaluation could look like from an African perspective.

The use of the multi-criterion decision analysis (MCDA) methodology, using the analytical hierarchical process (AHP) to assess cost versus quality is shared by Duffy and Minne (2023). The article shares the context of as in developing countries, where clinics and hospitals are located far from many patients with disabilities. The lack of public transport further compounds the problem of accessibility of such services by the underprivileged. These individuals are also

not able to afford rehabilitative care. This has led to not-for-profit organisations (NPOs) implementing community-based rehabilitation interventions. Community-based rehabilitation is both a philosophy and a strategy for making rehabilitative care more need-specific and accessible. However, incorporating the services of occupational therapists makes the programme costs significantly higher than those of similar community-based organisations. Using the AHP MCDA method, they constructed decision models, elicited the raters' judgements and assigned criteria weights. This was followed by establishing local priorities about alternatives, aggregating judgements, model synthesis and conducting a sensitivity analysis. This was done in order to show the accuracy of using this method of evaluation, which could be used in the design of interventions and could assist in explaining and justifying the costs of interventions to donors, which may enhance buy-in.

Boadu (2023) states that African indigenous evaluators hold the view that the continent's mainstream evaluation theories, studies and practices are profoundly founded in Euro-American ideals and tend to exclude Afrocentric evaluation philosophies, approaches and practices. The article discusses some of the obstacles to conceptualising indigenous evaluation values into evaluation activities in Africa, with a focus on Ghana, using a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in culturally responsive evaluation philosophies. The article points out several challenges that arise when attempting to incorporate indigenous epithets and other relational theories into evaluation activities in an indigenous

context. He claims that the revealing of these inadequacies can inform and deepen the discourse regarding 'Made in Africa' evaluation.

We again thank our reviewers for their ongoing support, their valuable feedback and insights and for their efforts to sustain the journal as an important resource for building the field of M&E in Africa.

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