



**TWENDE MBELE**

LEARNING BRIEF

# WHAT IS MEANT BY TRANSFORMING EVALUATIONS FOR AFRICA?

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*Phrases such as: Made In Africa Evaluation; Indigenous Evaluation; and Decolonizing Evaluations have been touted more and more frequently. Do they all mean the same thing? If not, then what do they mean? This brief will look to define what the meanings of terms such as, 'Made in Africa Evaluation', 'Indigenous Evaluation' and 'Decolonizing Evaluations'. And how they could fast-track the achievement of the continental development agenda.*

## INTRODUCTION

In light of the recent global 'Black lives Matter' protests, we are increasingly seeing a movement for the complete overhaul of racist systems that reinforce and recreate the types of actions that result in global inequalities and discrimination based on race, gender and sexual orientation. The protesters, which are made up of people of different races, ethnicities, religions and sexual orientation, took to the streets to destroy modern colonial representations in the form of [statues, monuments](#) and even [flags](#). Although victory seems to be far away, protestors across the globe have forced politicians to sign regulations and laws which may go a long way in stemming the systemic racism that exists in law enforcement and in the representation of history.

The call for transformation and decolonization is nothing new in African vocabulary – movements toward [decolonization of the education](#) and [healthcare sectors](#) have been in existence since the 1960s. The development evaluation space has not been exempted from these calls. Over the years, there's been growing calls for the transformation of the evaluation landscape with more female representation and the use of more black evaluators in the space. Phrases such as: Made In Africa Evaluation; Indigenous Evaluation; and Decolonizing Evaluations have been touted more and more frequently.

Do they all mean the same thing? If not, then what do they mean? This brief will look to define what the meanings of terms such as, 'Made in Africa Evaluation', 'Indigenous Evaluation' and 'Decolonizing Evaluations'. And how they could fast-track the achievement of the continental development agenda.

## BACKGROUND

Unlike its earlier Euro-Western roots, evaluation is now practised in a multicultural and globalized world, touching the lives of millions of people from diverse corners of the world. The degree to which evaluation practice effectively engages with its multicultural and diverse participants has been increasingly contested. In recent years, the extent to which African worldviews, values systems, knowledge and perspectives are incorporated in current evaluation has been vigorously challenged (Mbava, 2018). This comes from a real concern that while program evaluation may be addressing the needs of donors, it has not proved as useful as it can be to African decision-makers and others engaged with the development of the continent.

The adopted theoretical models and approaches that are applied in the evaluation of programs in African contexts are largely dimensional and homogeneous in orientation and often provide limited insight into Africa's values, beliefs and evolving cultures.<sup>1</sup> Pluralist perspectives that build on the strengths of local knowledge and value systems to inform credible and useful evaluation from the viewpoint of local users are missing. African ownership of the evaluation process is important. African values and worldviews<sup>2</sup> need to guide and shape evaluation in African contexts.

Euro-Western influences and theoretical models engendered and embedded through international development efforts have largely provided inadequate and inconclusive evidence regarding program impact (Mbava & Rabie, 2018; Mbava, 2017). It has been further maintained that adopted methods in evaluation and development have not fully appreciated the complexities of fragile contexts and developing societies and have tended to focus on simple interventions rather than on the reality of complex adaptive systems (Ofir, 2013:585). Many have argued that local evaluation participants should be conceptualized as an intrinsic part of the evaluation process rather than as mere "data sources" (Chouinard and Milley, 2018:77).

Whilst evaluation theory and practice has North-American roots, the extent to which evaluation practices and theoretical lenses are contemplative and inclusive of those involved in the evaluation process is under interrogation. Whilst globally, evaluation increasingly engages with multicultural and diverse stakeholders, the extent to which such engagements have influenced the theory and practice of evaluation has not been fully interrogated by the evaluation community. While this issue is gaining resonance from an African perspective, other indigenous evaluation stakeholders such as Native Americans, New Zealand Maoris and Australian Aborigines, amongst others, continue to interrogate evaluation theory and practise from the perspective of their lived experiences.

## DECOLONIZING EVALUATION

The decolonization of evaluation is viewed as the restructuring of the features and curriculum of evaluation tools based on local conditions and cultural nuances. However, it should be viewed as the catalyst for the total restructuring of power dynamics in the global construction and implementation of African evaluation (Bagele, Thenjiwe, Gaotlhobogwe, & Hildah Mokgolodiuch, 2016). This process questions the very nature of monitoring and evaluation in Africa. What is the role of M&E institutions that have the power to fund or de-fund local and national initiatives? How do these organizations decolonize their analyses, views, strategies and ideologies while still meeting their core mandate? Research findings argue that to authentically develop Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) resources, both individuals and the community of evaluators must tackle the question, decolonizing knowledge production and its relationship with evaluation in Africa.

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1. *Recognising that there is no homogenous 'African values and culture'. This further encourages evaluators and researchers to be contextually relevant.*

2. *For the field, Ubuntu stands out as the most recognized philosophy based on African culture. It is through Ubuntu that African personhood can be interpreted as a key component of evaluation and monitoring. It integrates the notion of both individual and collective responsibility for governance, development, democracy, education and much more (Gnaka, 2009).*

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## MADE IN AFRICA EVALUATION (MAE)

Accepting that the evaluator brings an inherent value judgement in the evaluation processes has implications for objectivity in evaluation. The role of evaluators in appraising the merit and value of a program or policy and their concomitant roles as an important decision-making function have implications for what is deemed as legitimate and credible.

According to the former president of the African Evaluations Association (AfrEA) Adeline Sibanda, “Made in Africa Evaluation” (MAE) promotes Africa-led and African-rooted evaluations. MAE champions that African’s development should mainly be spearheaded by Africans using Afrocentric paradigms or worldviews, ways of knowing and working, and their interaction over time with evolving African contexts. This implies that efforts to embed African ways of knowing, methodologies and approaches in the evaluation practice should be continually pursued (AfrEA, 2019). In this context, MAE is a specific contribution to the body of knowledge by evaluators and thought leaders informed by African perspectives (Mbava, 2018). This ownership is important since the theory and practice of evaluation in African contexts has been externally driven.

Research suggests that the credibility and practice of the the evaluator has an influence on the extent to which evaluation findings are ultimately utilized by African policy-makers and citizens engaged with the development of the continent (Mbava and Rabie, 2018; Mbava, 2017).

It is important to consider the extent to which African values and worldviews guide and shape evaluation in African contexts. Cultural norms and values, beliefs and perspectives of program participants could be the key drivers that influence participants to act in specific ways and result in the observed program outcomes. Therefore, it is logical to assume that program participants, based in African contexts, might have particular African philosophical assumptions about phenomena and specific African worldviews, hold specific traditional belief systems which inform their lived realities and ways of doing things. Accepting that these axiological, ontological and epistemological assumptions influence how program participants engage with any intervention is critical in a Made in Africa evaluation agenda.

Failing to appreciate these contextual dynamics and infusing these into evaluation practice poses critical limitations. In this context, adopted methodological approaches, singularly informed by Euro-Western value systems, standards and norms, when used for the assessment of attribution and causality, also pose critical limitations in the quest of finding out what works, why and how.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:17) implores us to implicitly own and liberate our knowledge with a freedom to “think, theorise, interpret the world, develop own methodologies and write from where [we are] located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism.”<sup>3</sup> In this regard, we must interrogate contextual factors that might influence evaluation methodological choices, what is construed as evidence, and whose voices are amplified in evaluation design.

It is apparent that **one of the pillars of the Made in Africa perspective includes the active participation of key stakeholders in the construction of what is evaluated, when, by whom.**

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*3. Modern evaluation approaches are contaminated by Eurocentric biases, evaluators must begin by replacing Eurocentric prejudice with new premises that value diversity over universality. Scrutiny of scientific research methodologies is critical so as not to further alienate or oppress the evaluated communities.*

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Credible participation of relevant local stakeholders in evaluations and knowledge generation, can move evaluation enquiry toward African-rooted understandings of success or otherwise. Leveraging African values such as collective deliberation and communal decision-making in the evaluation process can guide and inform development efforts, resulting in what Ofir (2013:584) regards as evaluation *for* development rather than *of* development.

## DEVELOPING MADE IN AFRICA EVALUATION (MAE)

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks used in Africa are often a direct reflection of the relationship between Africa and the Global North. This relationship is usually driven by power dynamics that favour knowledge and practices developed in the Global North.

Rather than serving as a deterrent to MAE, this fact should constitute a constructive challenge MAE proponent to create evaluation models that are truly based on African values, principles and culture<sup>2</sup>, while integrating political, social and economic conditions. MAE content must consider the multiple stories in Africa.

The decolonization project is historically rooted in the struggles against slavery, colonialism and Apartheid (in South Africa). Decolonization as a vehicle to acknowledge the agency of African people must include the following four key components:

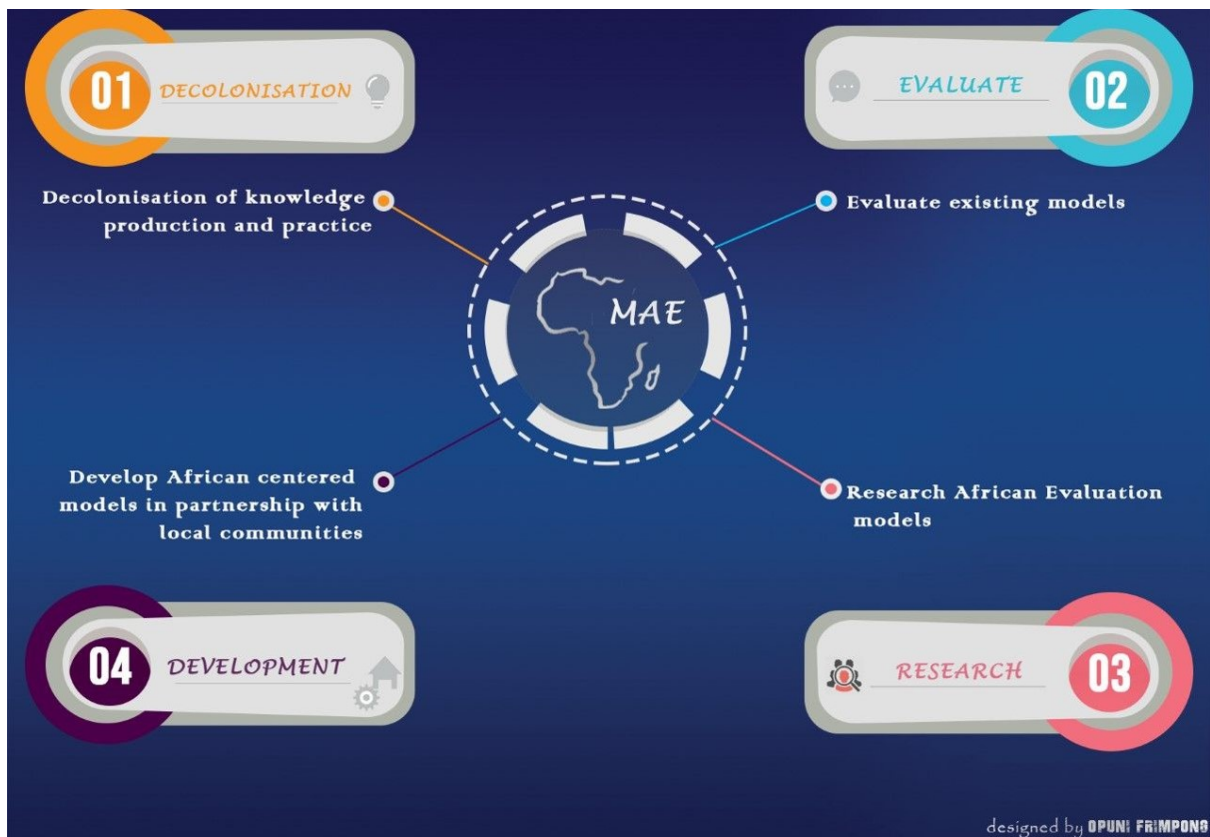
**1. Deconstruction and reconstruction** - The decolonization process must include a comprehensive review of the ideological foundation of current practices and knowledge all of which should be gathered, taken apart, broken up and critically examined to identify their benefits and weaknesses to the people of Africa. The deconstruction process is then followed by the reconstruction of the ideology and philosophy of evaluators and institutions using the data collected.

**2. Self-determination and social justice** - At the root of decolonization is the right and fight for self-determination and social justice. The questions to ask are: How is the current state of African evaluation hindering or supporting the right for self-determining the programs that are being evaluated? How is the evaluation process impacting the individuals that the programs serve? Does our class position impact our relationship with self-determination and social justice? These are questions that can guide the quest for self-determination in the journey for decolonization.

**3. Acknowledgment of indigenous knowledge** - This is paramount to the decolonization process. This does not mean simply acknowledging the presence of indigenous knowledge or positioning it as an add-on to internationally recognized practices. Indigenous knowledge must be recognized as an equal in the global knowledge production conversation.

**4. Internationalization of African experiences** - This is an essential aspect of the decolonization process as it shows how local experiences can shape the current world. How do we project the experiences of people living, working and residing in the Global South as legitimate and valuable at the global stage? These experiences must not be juxtaposed to a

FIGURE 1 : FOUR STEPS TO DECOLONISATION (DR MJIBA FREHIWOT,2019)



Western analysis of development, but rather contextualized and situated in the cultural, political, geographical, historical and economic conditions of the people.

Developing an authentic approach requires a method that includes four key steps that can be repeated along the process and/or also revert temporarily to eventually move forward (Frehiwot, 2019). They include:

- Step 1:** Decolonize African evaluation and evaluators. This involves freeing evaluation and evaluation specialists from all the preconceived notions from the Global North;
- Step 2:** Understand/research the historical/ traditional evaluation models in Africa;
- Step 3:** Evaluate existing evaluation models, primarily western models; and
- Step 4:** Develop Made in Africa models using the information from the first three steps and in partnership with local community members and other relevant stakeholders.



Although some international donors consider the recipients of their funding as partners, there is still a power dynamics that exists. The fear of losing funding or the need to increase funding may be a leading factor to the lack of transformation to orthodox evaluation practice.

The following questions should guide your assessment when conducting evaluation on contemporary development interventions (Frehiwot, 2019):

1. Who are the main actors? International financial institutions, government bodies, independent evaluators or evaluation organizations?
2. What ideology does the evaluator/ evaluation body follow?
3. How does the said ideology impact their lens?
4. What benefits or consequences will the body face based on the evaluators' report?
5. How do theory and methods dictate the execution of the evaluation process?
6. Are theory and methods rooted in Western or African evaluation thought?

The MAE should include most of the following elements:

1. **Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs)** - Creating evaluation models based on indigenous knowledge systems is the key to MAE. However, this does not mean taking wholesale the knowledge systems or cultural components that are not positively impacting the community. It is also necessary to distinguish between IKS and traditional African culture. Culture is dynamic and ever changing, as are IKSs with the difference that they evolve based on technology, politics, the economy and the relationships between humanity and the environment.
2. **Localized and led by local actors** – The process of ensuring that evaluations are led by local actors may seem out of reach as many evaluations are spearheaded or mandated by funding agencies and/or service providers. This can make it difficult to include local actors as partners in both the service delivery and evaluation. However, this approach will truly reflect its impact on the recipients.
3. **Class dynamics** - The class position of evaluators, institutions and those being served must be critically examined. Those individuals being served will generally find themselves in the “lower” class, while those serving will by virtue of their position be in the “middle/ upper” class. These class positions carry certain views about the other class and these views tend to dictate how we interact.

Development projects are based on mutual respect, especially those that are being evaluated. This reinforces the notion of citizen participation in the development process and in policy dialogue.

## INDIGENIZING AND TRANSFORMING EVALUATION

The big question: is evaluation a transformative agent in its own right? Or is it complicit in entrenching and maintaining conditions of inequality? Evaluation for transformational change or transformative Evaluation for Africa simply means that evaluations should be located around social justice and equity in the continent (Morkel, 2020). This is to say that evaluations should be embedded within the wider premise of social justice and equity. When thinking about this premise, two important points that needs to be considered for this broader framework of transformational change is:

- There need for awareness of the existing systemic and structural limitations to evaluation, particularly where it sits in the broader development discussion.
- The asymmetries of power which are embedded in development and in evaluations.

When thinking about transforming evaluation for the continent, one needs to think about some of the existing challenges that induce the ongoing injustices and inequalities. These include:

- Historical, contextual conditions that continue to impact development in post-colonial Africa
- Insufficient consideration of the history of M&E and the impact of public sector reform programmes – predominance of technocratic solutions and monitoring systems
- Aid dependency and the deficit of Africa
- The nature of evaluator supply, given the influence of donor demands
- Narrow interpretation of M&E by many governments on the continent

The practice of evaluation must become transformative. That is to say that it must recognize existing injustices, in other words, it cannot be race-blind, or gender-blind, or ignore power asymmetries. To tackle some of the challenges facing evaluations, there are a few things that can be done (Morkel, 2020). These include:

- Intentional focus on the political, contextual and ideological drivers of evaluation systems
- Embrace co-production, partnerships, embedded autonomy
- Shift to interdependence, not power relationships, centred on negotiation and persuasion, not control (Phillips & Smith, in Evans & Sapeha, 2015:251).
- Foreground current initiatives and build momentum e.g. The Transformational Evaluation for Transformations Development Working Group of the SDG Transformations Forum
- Reflect on our practice, and our ‘artefacts’:
- Think about what constitutes as valid evidence, and rigour, western essentialism
- Problematize “Culturally responsive” evaluation; “indigenized evaluation”; “contextually relevant” evaluation
- Think about what are our values? How do our values contribute to addressing systemic issues based on issues of transformation, e.g. race and diversity?



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**TWENDE MBELE IS A MULTI-COUNTRY PEER-LEARNING PARTNERSHIP CENTRED ON COUNTRY GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES FOR BUILDING NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS IN AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO CITIZENS.**



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TWENDE MBELE is a multi-country peer-learning partnership centred on country government priorities for building national evaluation systems in an effort to improve government performance and accountability to citizens.

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