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Six Transformative African Rooted Evaluation Frameworks and Tools

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FRAMEWORK REPORT

Six Transformative African Rooted Evaluation Frameworks and Tools

By

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6. Community Language Based Evaluation Framework

Introduction

The inadequate understanding and recognition of African values in the project cycle leads to low participation and commitment of beneficiaries, ultimately leading to low project success. The **Community Language Based Evaluation Framework (COLABEV)** is a community empowerment tool for conducting evaluation in African communities using community language including proverbs, songs, idioms, storytelling, folktales, myths and taboos.

The value add of the COLABEV is that it gives convening space to the targeted beneficiaries, project designers and implementers and funders to discuss the applicable community languages in their community that can shape the project intended purpose, projected outcomes and indicators of success. In so doing, the COLABEV improves the relevance and impact of the project interventions through informing the design, implementation, monitoring and communication of evaluation findings.

Rationale for the framework

The rigorous systematic review[2] conducted by the Pan African Indigenous Evaluation Consortium (PAIEC) highlighted the Euro centric approach to evaluation in Africa that promotes Western values and methodologies. These approaches are not aligned with the values and realities of the African people, making decolonizing and indigenizing evaluation an imperative for making projects to be sustainable and impactful in Africa.

Development projects and evaluations that incorporate African values from community languages address power asymmetries among beneficiaries and enhance inclusiveness and participation for greater ownership, impact and sustainability of interventions. The COLABEV offers opportunity for raising voices of the marginalized in society, bringing out their needs and aspirations.

Community languages are part of the Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) that embodies traditional knowledge acquired by local people through the accumulation of generation wise experiences. Indigenous knowledge is understood as local knowledge, native, traditional unique practices to a given culture or society, which is usually transmitted from one generation to generation by word of mouth such as oral folk-stories and proverbs.

The indigenous pedagogies of the various African oral literatures include fairy tales, legends, tall tales, jokes, proverbs and riddles, among others. However, proverbs stand from the rest of the crowd because they offer a wider lens and hence are adapted as an illustration for the COLABEV. Proverbs have unique characteristics that position them as evaluators of society. Proverbs outside cultural spaces or specific encounters in a given can be easily misread or viewed as less significant. Cultural context and interaction matter when interoperating Proverbs.

[2] Chilisa, et al. (2024). Mapping African Rooted Evaluation Approaches methods and Tools: A Systematic Review. University of Botswana

Proverbs are complex, poetic, and condensed. The listener and Proverb presenter must have some knowledge of the context, history, and culture in which the Proverb originates. "An example in the Hausa language might be girman kai, rawanin tsiya, which translates as "big head, indigent turban" and conveys in just four words the idea that an inflated self-image and boastful behaviour lead to beggarly status in the community". The use of proverbs in evaluations can operate as an illustration of expression, assessment, measurement of performance of a particular project.

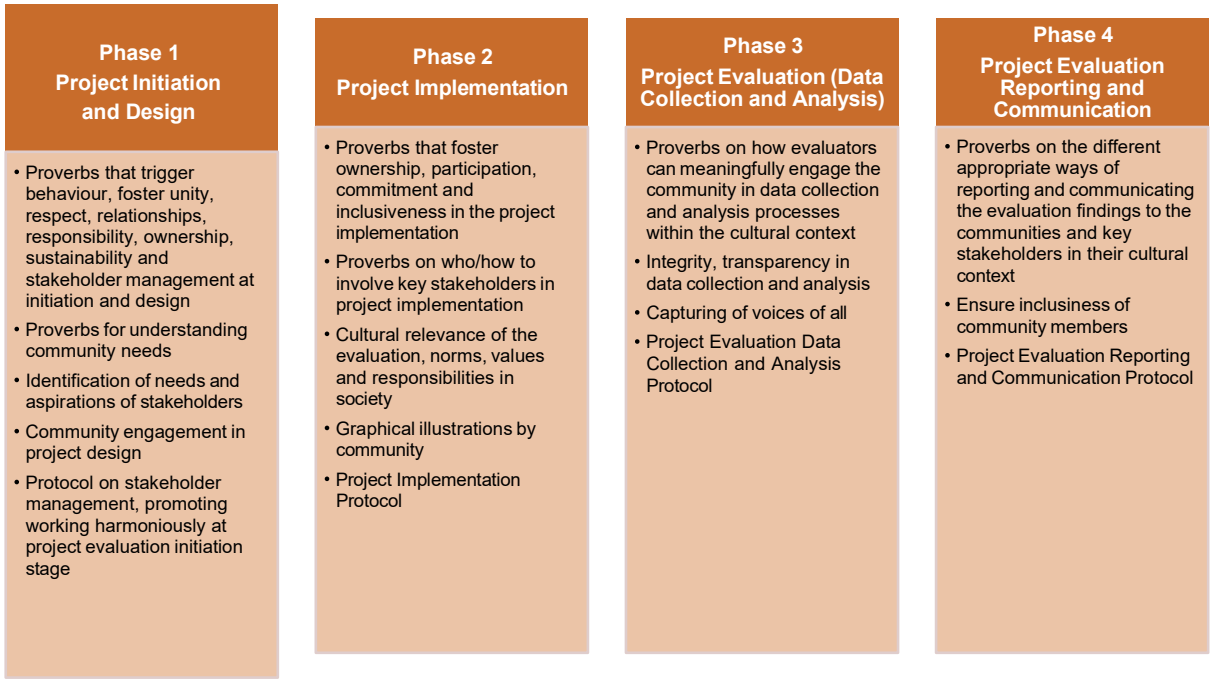
Proverb based evaluation is therefore important due to the following inherent values:

a) Proverbs have evaluative insights; they play an important role in relationship building, communicating governance, understanding the wellness of a community and identifying community needs and what is important
b) Proverbs connect us as Africans and foster connectedness, relationships
c) They communicate and symbolize the cultures, values and norms of a community
d) Proverbs bring out the voices of the people, especially the unheard and marginalized
e) They bring to the fore community knowledge that is already in existence
f) Proverbs are a medium of passing wisdom from one generation to another
g) They help to deal with elitism in evaluation since all community members understand and can associate with the proverbs
h) Ownership of projects is fostered in projects when evaluation is culturally sensitive

Community Language Based Evaluation Framework

The COLABEV is a four-stage framework that enables evaluators to undertake evaluation from the initiation, design, data collection and reporting and communication phases, using community languages. The four phases of the framework that cover the entire evaluation life cycle are presented below in **Figure 1**, using proverbs as an illustration of how community languages can be applied.

Figure 1: Community Language Based Evaluation Framework



How to Apply the Community Based Evaluation Framework

The first step is for evaluation stakeholder to gain acceptance from the community to engage. The second step is to organise the key stakeholders to engage along the project cycle. The third step is to apply the COLABEV by inquiring about community languages and their insights for project initiation, design, implementation and evaluation.

The framework is operationalized through a COLABEV Protocol that addresses the four phases of the project cycle. **Table 1** presents the key evaluation questions in each of the four phases, seeking for wisdom in the proverbs to inform the project cycle.

Table 1: COLABEV Protocol

Evaluation Stage	Evaluation questions
1. Project Initiation and Design	Evaluators seek wisdom of proverbs: • Understanding the community from their perspective • Engage with gate keepers and community leaders • Entry into community • Understand the key stakeholders, their roles and responsibilities • Understand the culture, norms and values of the community • Introduce the evaluation and its benefits • Ownership: invite people to own the project • What kind of proverbs emphasize ownership, responsible participation, respect • Identify proverbs that speak about success factors and project sustainability • Roles and responsibilities • Who are the voiceless
2. Project Implementation	Identify proverbs that speak about: • Roles and responsibilities of community members • Proverbs that enhance participant engagement, commitment, respect, ownership and inclusiveness in project implementation • Proverbs that identify community values that will foster project sustainability, how they should be addressed during implementation
3. Project Evaluation Data Collection and Analysis	Proverbs that speak to: • Values, norms, principles and ethics of interaction in data collection • Preferred methods and tools of data collection and analysis • Credible data sources • Competence of people collecting data • Integrity in collection of information • Avoiding biases • Fair and inclusive data collection and analysis • Proverbs on quality of community engagement tools and approaches • Projects that tell us about tools, methods for reaching the voiceless, marginalised
4. Project Evaluation Reporting and Communication	Wisdom of proverbs on: • Most culturally appropriate reporting, communication and feedback strategies • Most relevant methods of information dissemination • Platforms and means of appropriate communication • Identification of the right audiences • Appropriate communication tools • Fairness and integrity in reporting and dissemination

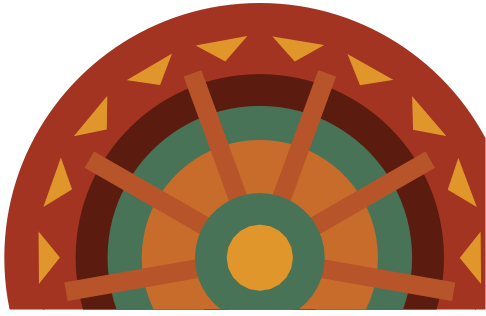
5. Project Initiation and Design	Evaluators seek wisdom of proverbs: • Understanding the community from their perspective • Engage with gate keepers and community leaders • Entry into community • Understand the key stakeholders, their roles and responsibilities • Understand the culture, norms and values of the community • Introduce the evaluation and its benefits • Ownership: invite people to own the project • What kind of proverbs emphasize ownership, responsible participation, respect • Identify proverbs that speak about success factors and project sustainability • Roles and responsibilities • Who are the voiceless
6. Project Implementation	Identify proverbs that speak about: • Roles and responsibilities of community members • Proverbs that enhance participant engagement, commitment, respect, ownership and inclusiveness in project implementation • Proverbs that identify community values that will foster project sustainability, how they should be addressed during implementation
7. Project Implementation	Identify proverbs that speak about: • Roles and responsibilities of community members • Proverbs that enhance participant engagement, commitment, respect, ownership and inclusiveness in project implementation • Proverbs that identify community values that will foster project sustainability, how they should be addressed during implementation
8. Project Evaluation Data Collection and Analysis	Proverbs that speak to: • Values, norms, principles and ethics of interaction in data collection • Preferred methods and tools of data collection and analysis • Credible data sources • Competence of people collecting data • Integrity in collection of information • Avoiding biases • Fair and inclusive data collection and analysis • Proverbs on quality of community engagement tools and approaches • Projects that tell us about tools, methods for reaching the voiceless, marginalised
9. Project Evaluation Reporting and Communication	Wisdom of proverbs on: • Most culturally appropriate reporting, communication and feedback strategies • Most relevant methods of information dissemination • Platforms and means of appropriate communication • Identification of the right audiences • Appropriate communication tools • Fairness and integrity in reporting and dissemination

Sample Application of the COLABEV Protocol Toolkit

Table 2 provides a sample application of proverb wisdom in the COLABEV protocol. The same approach can be used for any other community language in the COLABEV.

Table 2: Application of the COLABEV using proverbs

Project phase	Strategy	Main Evaluation Questions
Project Design and Initiation *(Including Data Collection and Analysis and communication stages)*	Evaluators engage project **initiators and design participants** to find out if the wisdom from proverbs were used in the design and initiation of the project; and data collection and analysis approaches	1) Who were the key players in project initiation and design? 2) Did you use the wisdom of proverbs, myths, or folktales that foster ownership, unity, respect, relationships when initiating or designing this project as well as designing data collection and analysis tools? If you used them, which proverbs did you use and which values did you incorporate in this project based on the wisdom from these proverbs? If not used, why? 3) If you did not use local wisdom, we would like to role play designing and initiating this project and data collection using local wisdom from proverbs, myths, folktales that foster these values. 4) If we want this project to bring impact and success, are there proverbs that bring out these values? 5) Assess the extent to which the selected project utilized the above wisdom in crafting the data collection, interpretation and analysis approach; Who was involved?



Project phase	Strategy	Main Evaluation Questions
Project Implementation	Evaluators engage project implementers to find out if the wisdom from proverbs, myths, folktales were used in the implementation of the project	• Who were/are the key players in implementing the project? • When delivering the project, was there any local wisdom used in delivering the project • Did you use the wisdom of proverbs, myths, or folktales that foster ownership, participation, inclusiveness, respect, relationships when implementing this project? If you used them, which proverbs did you use and which values did you incorporate in this project based on the wisdom from these proverbs? If not used, why? • If you did not use local wisdom, we would like to role play implementing this project using local wisdom from proverbs, myths, folktales that foster these values During implementation of the project, we want inclusiveness, engagement to succeed, commitment, devotion by the participants; are there any proverbs, myths, folk tales that foster these values, working hard?
Project Evaluation Reporting and Communication	Inquire if wisdom from proverbs were used on the different appropriate ways of reporting and communicating the evaluation findings to the communities and key stakeholders	1) Who are/were the key players in reporting and communicating the project progress and evaluation findings? 2) Did you use the wisdom of proverbs, myths, or folktales that foster ownership, unity, respect, relationships when preparing tools and approaches for reporting and communicating project information? If you used them, which proverbs did you use and which values did you incorporate in this project based on the wisdom from these proverbs? If not used, why? 3) If you did not use local wisdom, we would like to role play reporting and communicating project data and information using local wisdom from proverbs, myths, folktales that foster these values

Users of the COLABEV

The COLABEV can be used in evaluation of African communities by all evaluation stakeholders, mostly the funders, commissioners of evaluations, communities, evaluators/researchers, ethics bodies and universities/academia. The COLABEV will be applicable in most communities in Africa that use proverbs, stories, folktales, idioms or any other community language for assessing their daily context and happenings. The degree to which each stakeholder group uses the COLABEV will vary by the phase of the evaluation, ranging from low to high **(Table 3).** In some cases, the degree of application may be high in some phases and not others for different stakeholders.

Table 3: Degree of use of the COLABEV by the different evaluation stakeholders

	Level of engagement at the stages of the evaluation cycle			
Users	**Project Evaluation Initiation**	**Project Evaluation Design**	**Project Evaluation Data Collection & Analysis**	**Project evaluation reporting & Communication**
Funders	High	Low	Low	High
Commissioners	High	Medium	Medium	High
Community	High	Medium	Medium	High
Evaluators/Researchers	High	High	High	High
Ethic Bodies	High	Low	Low	Medium
Academia	High	High	High	High

Scale: Low = 1; Medium = 2; High = 3

What the COLABEV offers

- Gives convening space to the targeted beneficiaries, project designers and implementers and funders to discuss the applicable proverbs and other community languages in their community that can shape the project intended purpose, projected outcomes and indicators of success.
- Ownership of projects is fostered in projects when evaluation is culturally sensitive.
- The framework improves relevance and impact of the project interventions through informing the design, implementation, monitoring and communication of evaluation findings.

- The tool advocates for voice, participation, inclusiveness, unity, relations, respect, connectedness and wellness in interventions.
- The solicitation of community languages and the wisdom embedded at each stage of the project cycle encourages more participation and relation building among young people and women.

Conclusion

The Community Based Evaluation Framework can be used together with other PAIEC developed tools. Community languages can be used to create togetherness, involvement and participation at every stage of project cycle to support planning, implementation and evaluation.

7. Technology Integration in African Rooted Evaluation Frameworks

Introduction

African-rooted evaluation recognises Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural expression, oral traditions, symbols, storytelling and collective meaning-making as legitimate and essential sources of evidence. Technology, when intentionally and ethically applied, can strengthen these practices by enhancing how such knowledge is gathered, preserved, interpreted and shared. This guideline outlines how digital tools can be integrated in a way that respects context, mitigates digital exclusion, and protects cultural integrity while improving the quality, credibility and reach of evaluation processes.

Rationale

The integration of technology in African-rooted evaluation is justified by the following drivers:

- **Preservation of cultural knowledge**: Video, audio and visual tools capture gesture, tone, symbolism and performance that written methods cannot.
- **Expanded participation**: Mobile tools allow broader inclusion where literacy, language or distance are barriers.
- **Youth engagement**: Digital platforms align with the tools and environments already used by young people.
- **Efficiency and data integrity**: Digital systems reduce data loss, improve traceability and enable multiple formats of evidence capture.
- **Equity and accessibility**: Offline functionality and local language adaptations allow inclusion in low-connectivity and marginalised communities.

These benefits are only realised when digital exclusion risks (poor connectivity, limited digital literacy, cost of data, and cultural misrepresentation in AI tools) are intentionally managed.