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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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5. Engagement, Participation, Involvement and Ownership Framework

Introduction

The Engagement, Participation, Involvement, and Ownership (EPIO) tool is designed to provide a unique, Afrocentric framework for managing and evaluating projects, deeply rooted in the African philosophy of Ubuntu, emphasizing interconnectedness, humanity, and collective well-being. It emphasizes social responsibility. Social responsibility entails fostering genuine collaboration, ensuring inclusivity, promoting shared accountability, and empowering communities to take ownership of their development while honouring their cultural values, knowledge systems, and collective aspirations.

Social responsibility in African evaluation goes beyond individual accountability to prioritize the collective good. It ensures that evaluations are not extractive or externally imposed but are co-created with communities, respecting their knowledge systems, beliefs, and aspirations. It prioritizes inclusivity by ensuring that marginalized voices, including women, youth, and Indigenous groups, are heard and valued. This fosters equitable participation and ensures no one is left behind in the evaluation process or project outcomes. Furthermore, EPIO framework sees sustainability as a moral imperative. Evaluators ensure that interventions leave a lasting, positive legacy, empowering communities to maintain and build upon the outcomes without creating dependency.

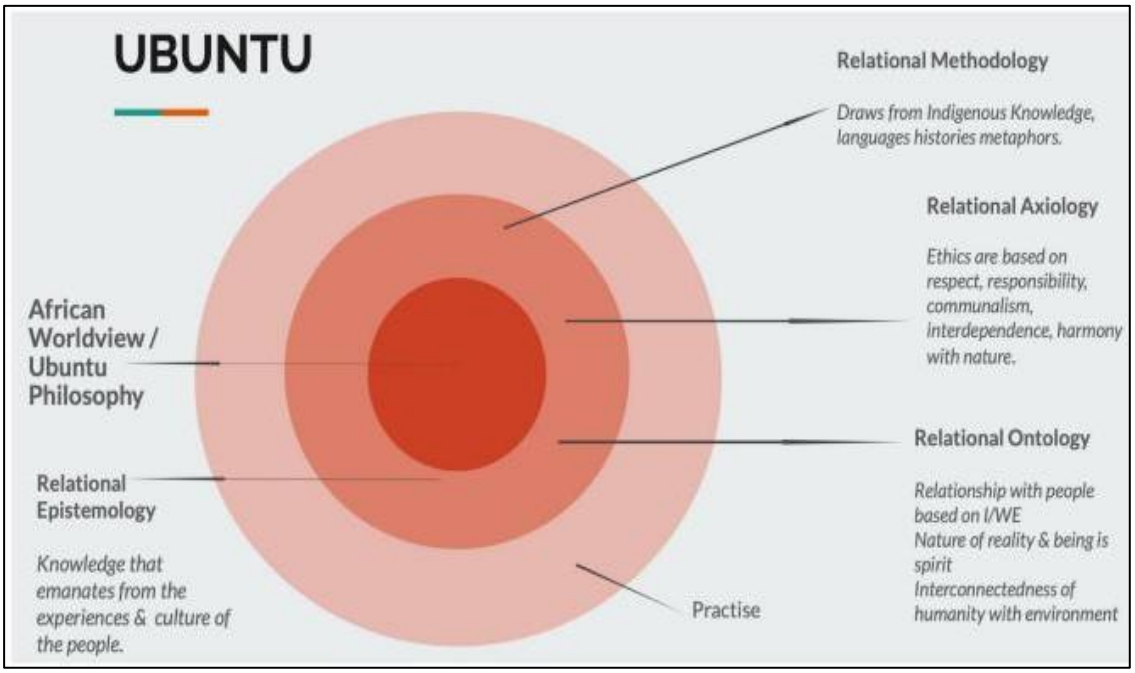
Contribution to the field

1. Encourages active participation of all stakeholders, ensuring projects align with community needs and values.
2. Builds trust and ownership by fostering inclusivity and collaboration
3. Promotes long-term impact by integrating indigenous knowledge, local resources, and cultural practices.
4. Strengthens community resilience and self-reliance through empowerment.
5. Reinforces the dignity and humanity of all participants, avoiding exploitative or top-down approaches

Application of the EPIO project management and evaluation framework/tool

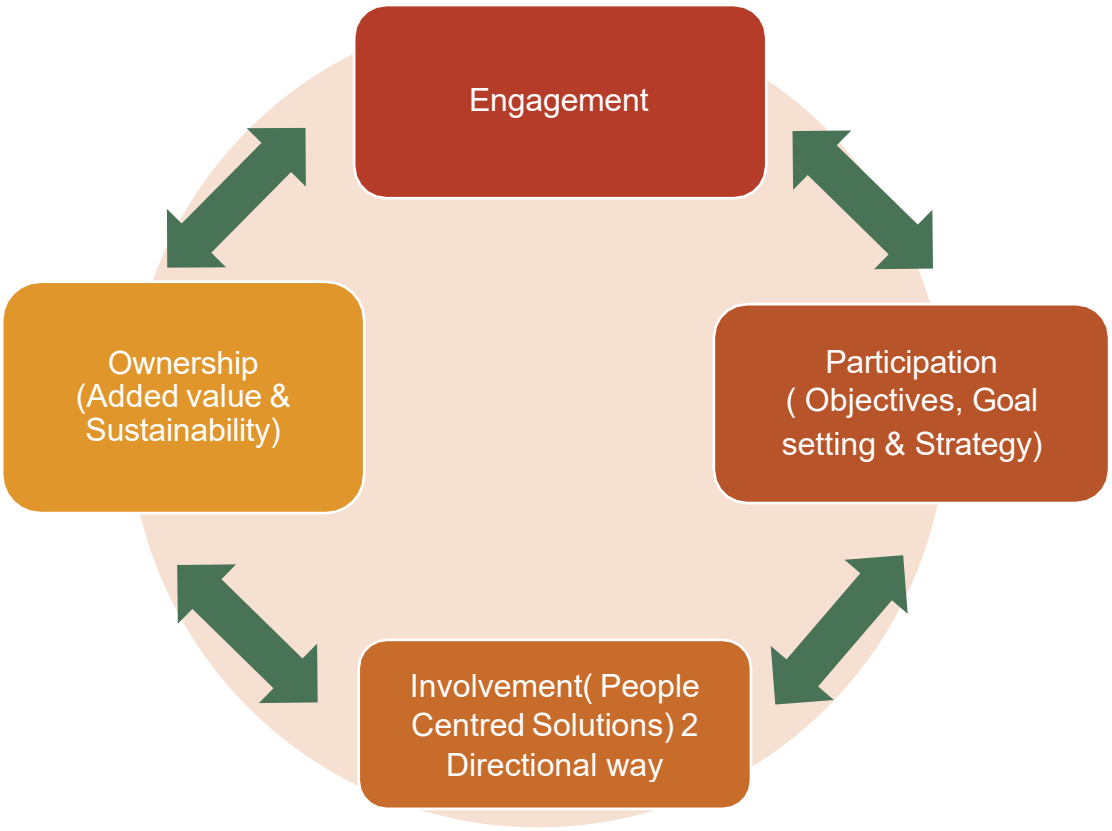
The EPIO Framework/tool emerges from an Ubuntu-centred understanding of development where transformation is relational, dialogical, and community-led. The framework/tool assumes that effective and sustainable development must be built on authentic community engagement, inclusive participation, active involvement, and a strong sense of ownership. The main contribution of this tool is that it integrates cultural relevance, social responsibility, and power sharing into each stage of the project, from initiation through implementation, monitoring, and impact evaluation. Furthermore, EPIO invites all stakeholders to engage in co-creating the goals and indicators of success, enabling the communities to lead transformative processes that reflect their lived experiences.

Figure 1: The Engagement, Participation, Involvement and Ownership Tool



At the centre is the Ubuntu philosophy. This shows that the framework is guided by African values, cultures, and worldviews. The evaluators should recognize, appreciate, and include African cultures, languages, and values. The second circle shows the African relational ontology, African relational epistemology, African relational axiology, and African relational methodologies. African relational ontology is based on multiple realities. There is a connectedness between human beings and the universe. In African culture, there are multiple ways of knowing, and knowledge is a community property. African values togetherness, plants, and other animals. African relational methodologies are integrative and transformative. The outer layer is practice that is guided by the two inner circles.

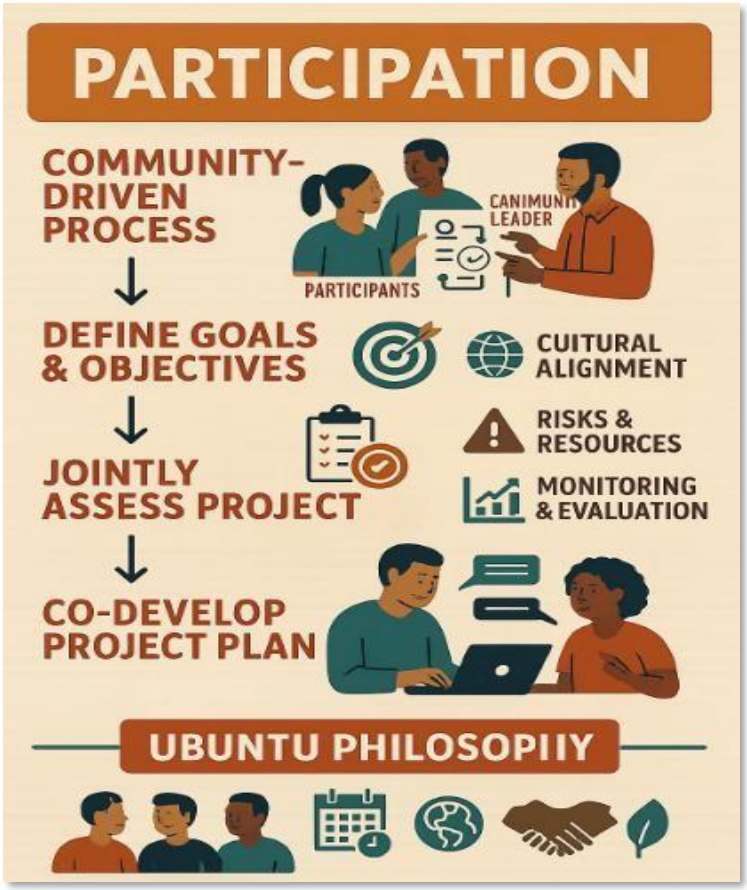
Figure 2: Phases for developing the EPIO project management and evaluation tool.



ENGAGEMENT

In the EPIO Evaluation framework/ tool, engagement refers to respectful, community-centred interaction that embraces the use of indigenous languages, proverbs, songs, and other cultural expressions to foster trust and mutual understanding. Engagement begins with pre-engagement, where evaluators prepare by learning about the community and setting the stage for respectful dialogue. This is followed by relationship building, which involves establishing rapport, observing community protocols, and recognizing the role of gatekeepers. A core principle is understanding the community's social, cultural, and historical context, guided by the Ubuntu philosophy that honours the community's customs, languages, and lived experiences. Engagement also requires that communities initiate or lead their projects, with any involvement by government, NGOs, or researchers being negotiated respectfully rather than imposed. Finally, informed consent, whether verbal or written, is essential, ensuring that community participation is voluntary and based on a clear understanding of the process.

PARTICIPATION



According to the EPIO Evaluation framework/tool, participation is conceptualized as a collaborative and community-driven process that ensures all stakeholders, particularly the community, are actively involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of a project. Central to this approach is the principle that communities should define the goals and objectives of any intervention based on their priorities and contextual realities to ensure sustainable outcomes. Community members are responsible for nominating their representatives, who collaborate with external actors to establish a mutually accountable project team. This team jointly assesses the feasibility of the project and, if necessary, refines it to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Roles, responsibilities, and team membership are defined through collective

decision-making, with all partners reaching consensus on the indicators of success. Furthermore, the project must align strategically with the cultural practices, values, and aspirations of the community. Through this participatory process, stakeholders are engaged in the co-development of a comprehensive project plan, which includes the identification of risks, setting of implementation timelines, resource mobilization, and co-creation of monitoring and evaluation standards, grounded in Ubuntu philosophy. Dedicated teams for monitoring and evaluation are formed collaboratively, and the final project plan is shared transparently with the wider community, reinforcing accountability, cultural relevance, and shared ownership. Ubuntu-based participation assumes dignity, interdependence, and co-creation, not extraction or top-down planning.

INVOLVEMENT

In the EPIO Evaluation Tool, involvement refers to the active and sustained engagement of community members during the implementation phase of the project. It emphasizes the execution of a collaboratively developed project plan, where project recipients also serve as co-evaluators, ensuring that implementation remains responsive to community realities. A culturally grounded approach is prioritized through the use of indigenous languages, storytelling, participatory observation, and traditional assessment tools, which enable progress to be measured in ways that are aligned with the community's values. Involvement is characterized by a two-way, reciprocal learning process, where both the community and external stakeholders learn from one another.

Decisions and solutions must be inclusive of diverse community interests, with a particular focus on communal benefit over individual or institutional gain. Where adjustments are needed, they should emerge from community consensus-building forums, such as lekgotla or other traditional councils, reinforcing collective ownership and cultural relevance in project execution.

OWNERSHIP

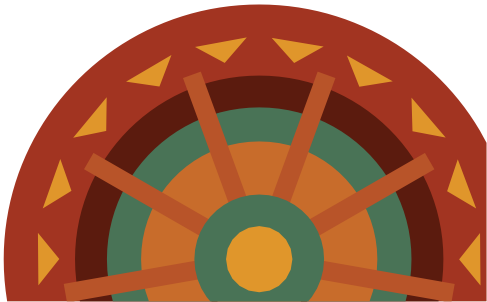
In the EPIO Evaluation framework/ tool, ownership represents the sustainability phase of a project, where long-term success is anchored in the community's continued leadership and involvement. Ownership is marked by community acceptance of the project outcomes, reflecting alignment with local values and priorities. It also involves sustained participation, where the community remains actively engaged beyond the initial phases of implementation. True ownership is realized when the community sees the project as their own, initiated, shaped, and led by them, rather than imposed by external stakeholders.

This phase emphasizes empowerment and capacity building, equipping community members with the skills, knowledge, and structures necessary to maintain, adapt, and scale the intervention over time. Additionally, ongoing engagement ensures that the project remains relevant, responsive, and rooted in Ubuntu principles. Ultimately, ownership ensures that the project's impact is not only preserved but also deepened through community-led stewardship, promoting resilience, autonomy, and cultural continuity.

Table 1: Application of the Ubuntu project management

PHASES	STEPS	HOW TO	THEMES
Engagement	1. Pre-engagement with the community	Identify the Local leadership structures. -introduce yourself to the community leadership in reverence to the Ubuntu spirituality (Go ipega). -Gather information from the community leaders concerning the historical context, customs, languages and world views, taboos, rituals, behaviours of the community. The leaders link the evaluator to the community.	Showing respect to the community Courtesy Humility Interconnectedness Hospitality
	2. Relationship building (building rapport with the community, exploring community protocol and gatekeeping)	Acknowledge every person. Engage every member in the evaluation equally (Considerations: age, gender, professions, socioeconomics) Respect each member by acknowledging everyone's opinions and viewpoints.	Respect for others. Communalism Have a sense of belonging. Tolerance
	3. Understand the evaluated community's social, cultural, and historical context. An Ubuntu approach respects local customs, languages, and worldviews, ensuring that the evaluation reflects the community's lived experiences.	Have a dialogue with leaders, gatekeepers, influencers, etc. on the community's lived experiences. This can be done through speaking to community members and attending community events, ceremonies rituals, etc. to gain a deeper context.	Respect for one another. Dignity Relatedness with the environment and people Respect for others. Mutuality
	4. The communities should initiate their programs/ or standing	Provide the platform/space for the communities to share their views. For example, through Kgotla meetings,	Collaboration

	projects, respectfully negotiated by the government/research institutions/ NGO.	expectations, projects that they desire to be carried out in their community. Facilitate the process of project teams engaging with communities. The evaluator will ensure the local leader is in alignment and facilitates introduction to the community. Ensure community feedback.	Courtesy Sharing, cooperation
	5. Informed consent from the community for participation (it can be verbal or written) 6. Stakeholder Engagement	Establishes existing protocols in the community. Together with the community, adapt or design protocols. Ensure to consider people's values, culture, & realities. Convene conversation sessions with stakeholders involved regarding what has been established.	Community engagement, respect for community values, and ethics Partnership Collectiveness



PHASES	STEPS	HOW TO	THEMES
Planning phase	1. The community identifies and nominates their representatives that will partner with the project team.	Based on the context and nature of the project, support the community to identify, nominate & select the ideal people through a democratic process.	Collectiveness
		Establishment of one mutually accountable project team (Partners).	Solidarity
		The combined project team establishes the feasibility of the project and adjusts it to a mutually beneficial outcome if necessary.	Common good
	2. The communities should set the goals of the program based on their priorities and needs to promote sustainable benefits over time.	As the evaluation team: Identify, establish community priorities and needs. Establish sustainable benefits of the project.	Interdependence
		The Partners lay the ground rules for respect and understanding.	
		The team to identify co- leaders for the team for shared responsibility and accountability.	Social justice
		Emphasis holistic view of individual as part of the larger community (not based on performance matric)	For respect and understanding among individual
	3. Determination of the roles and functions of the combined project team members.	The team to create guidelines for the roles and responsibilities of the team members for the success of the project. - Be transparent in all the communication to build trust	

		- Create community connections by identifying and aligning core values Empowerment and confidence building through lifting one another)	Humanness
	4. Mutual agreement of all partners on the success of the planned project.	Create space for dialogue and communication for all stakeholders.	Sharing Wholeness Social interdependence
	5. stakeholder engagement		Dialogical Morality Cooperation, Community participation Collaboration, Communal Interdependence Spiritual Compassion Trustworthiness Sharing, Collaboration, Active participation

PHASES	STEPS	HOW TO	THEMES
Design Phase	Risks and mitigation strategies	The partners will collaborate to identify things that may hinder project progress in a dignified manner. Partners will develop or adapt possible mitigation strategies that are cultural relevant.	Dignity Social justice Collaboration
	Strategic alignment of the project goals, aspirations and contextual cultural practices of the community	The combined team works together to align the community needs, aspirations, and contextual cultural practices with the project goals.	Shared responsibility Dignity Inclusivity
	Mutual Setting of estimated timelines for roll out of the project	Involve the community in identifying the resources needed. Involve the team in identifying the community/Indigenous knowledge, skills and local assets that can be used in the project Setting of estimated timelines.	Inclusivity Community engagement
	Co-creation of standards for evaluation	Co-create/design or adapt an African-rooted monitoring tools. Co-create/design or adapt an African-rooted or context-relevant evaluation tools e.g. songs, observations, folklore, poems, histories, storytelling, and others common in their communities. These should be participatory tools that are context-relevant based on the Ubuntu epistemologies.	Collaboration Ownership Relational epistemology
	Assembling the project monitoring team	Assembling an inclusive team that is representative of all the key partners.	Community engagement Inclusion Ownership
	Assembling the project evaluation team Mutual agreement on the success in the execution of the project plan	Assembling an inclusive team that is representative of key partners.	Community engagement Ownership

PHASES	STEPS	HOW TO	
Implementation phase	1. Execution of the comprehensive project plan	Recognizing the context, culture, belief systems, and values knowers in the community, the project team identifies the best ways to execute the project. Ensure that everyone understands their roles, gets involved, and participates by taking ownership in the execution of the project. Provides regular feedback to all stakeholders after reaching a communal agreement The community and the evaluator all agree to changes. Together (the evaluation team) write the report.	Cooperation Ownership Communalism Consensus Cooperation Togetherness
PHASES	**STEPS**	**HOW TO**	
Monitoring phase	Assess and track project progress. 1. Compare the actual progress with the planned progress and propose adjustments where necessary.	The monitoring team to assess the progress of the project by using the monitoring tool. identifying the overarching problems or challenges that may be a contributing factor to the implementation of the project. Participatory monitoring of the implemented activities and resources to establish that the project does not harm asserts, spirituality, relationships, and values of the community, or is it enhancing or bringing benefits wanted by the community.	Communal participation Community participation benevolence

	2. Community engagement – in monitoring the whole community is engagement	engage the community itself in the identification of challenges that they feel bear on the community communal good taking priority over individual priorities	Humility Social interdependence consideration collectiveness
Impact Evaluation phase	1. Utilize the co-created standards to assess the project's successes and outcomes. 2. Analyse the data collected. 3. Disseminate the results to the community and the world. 4. Stakeholder engagement	Examining the human resource availability locate the best way in which the project may help the community. Take collective decision-making. Transparency and respect for the community with genuine reflection. Developing authentic research. Mutually beneficial outcomes for the community.	Respect for the community Sharing Mutuality Cooperation
PHASES	**STEPS**	**HOW TO**	
Sustainability Phase	Community ownership Community ownership Community empowerment/capacity building Stakeholder engagement	Social responsibility Address the more pressing social needs within their communities Enhance consent processes Promoting equity in public voices and empowerment of the communities represented. Embrace reciprocity & consensus	Social responsibility Empathizing collaboration Consensual Equity Reciprocity

Assessment guidelines

THE EPIO MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION TOOL

These questions help an evaluator assess whether the monitoring and evaluation tools are effective in tracking the project's progress and are deeply rooted in Ubuntu spirituality. Ubuntu spirituality is the main tenet that distinguishes indigenous approaches from Western approaches of collective well-being, cultural relevance, and shared responsibility. By aligning these tools with local values and practices, the evaluation process becomes a meaningful and empowering experience for the community. Therefore, the four pillars of the Ubuntu Evaluation tool, Community Engagement, Community Participation, Community Involvement, and Community Ownership, are critical in the EPIO Evaluation Tool.

Table 2: EPIO evaluation tool

	Ubuntu Evaluation questions/qualitative	Quantitative
Inception Phase ***Community Engagement***	Who initiated the project? At what phases of the project was the community involved? Who selected the community/core researchers for the project? What were the roles of the community members? Was the community involved in the identification of the problem targeted? for intervention What role does spirituality play in this project?	Which of the following groups initiated the project? 1 = Community members 2 = Government officials 3 = External organizations (NGOs) 4 = Private sector At what phases of the project was the community involved? Please indicate at which phases the community was involved (select all that apply): Planning phase Implementation phase Monitoring phase Evaluation phase Other (please specify)

		Who selected the community/core researchers for the project? 1 = Community members themselves 2 = Project leaders 3 = External consultants 4 = Government agencies What were the roles of the community members? Which of the following roles did community members play? (select all that apply): Decision-making Implementation of activities Monitoring and evaluation Providing local knowledge None Other (please specify) What role does spirituality play in this project? On a scale of 1-5, how significant is spirituality in the project's implementation? 1 = Not significant at all 2 = Slightly significant 3 = Moderately significant 4 = Very significant 5 = Extremely significant

Planning phase *Community Participation*	Were cultural leaders or elders consulted during the design of these tools to ensure they align with local customs and traditions?	Were cultural leaders or elders consulted during the design phase of the tools? 1 = Yes, extensively 2 = Yes, somewhat 3 = No, but their input was considered 4 = No, not consulted at all
	Ubuntu Evaluation questions/qualitative	**Quantitative**
Design phase *Community Participation*	Did the partners work together respectfully to find challenges in the project? Were all partners' views considered when identifying problems? How were sensitive cultural issues handled during discussions? Were the solutions created based on the community's cultural values? Did the strategies respect and reflect local cultural practices? Were the solutions suitable for the community's specific needs? Did the team work well to match community needs and cultural practices with the project goals? Were the community's long-term goals and traditions included in the project? How well were the cultural practices of the community integrated into the project's objectives? Did the community help identify the resources needed for the project? Were the resources chosen based on the community's input? How was the community's voice considered in the process? Did the project use Indigenous knowledge and skills effectively?	

	Were local knowledge and assets valued and included in the project? Did the team create monitoring tools based on African traditions or community practices? Were tools like songs, storytelling, or observations used for monitoring? Did the monitoring tools fit with Ubuntu principles? Were the evaluation tools based on African or local traditions? Did the community participate in using tools like songs, poems, or stories to evaluate the project? How well did the tools connect with the community's culture and practices?	
	Ubuntu Evaluation questions/qualitative	**Quantitative**
Implementation phase *Community Involvement and Participation*	What indigenous tools were used to collect data? How was cultural knowledge explored from the knowledge holders? Do the tools capture the community's holistic understanding of success, such as spiritual, social, and relational well-being, beyond just material outcomes? How do the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools reflect the community's cultural values, norms, and practices?	Which of the following indigenous tools were used to collect data? (Select all that apply): 1 = Oral storytelling 2 = Focus group discussions with elders 3 = Local symbols or art forms (e.g., carvings, drawings) 4 = Traditional ceremonies or rituals 5 = Songs or chants 6 = Other (please specify) Which methods were used to elicit cultural knowledge from community knowers? (Select all that apply): 1 = Direct interviews with elders or cultural leaders 2 = Group discussions or community gatherings 3 = Observation of traditional practices 4 = Participation in cultural rituals or activities

		5 = Use of Indigenous communication tools (e.g., proverbs, oral history) 6 = Other (please specify) To what extent do the tools capture the community's holistic understanding of success, including spiritual, social, and relational well-being, beyond material outcomes? 1 = Not at all 2 = To a small extent 3 = To a moderate extent 4 = To a great extent 5 = Completely
	Ubuntu Evaluation questions/qualitative	**Quantitative**
Monitoring Phase *Community Involvement*	Were community members actively involved in the co-creation or adaptation of the M&E tools?	On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not involved at all, 5 = highly involved), how would you rate the level of involvement of community members in the co-creation or adaptation of the M&E tools? How many community members participated in the co-creation or adaptation process?
	How were the perspectives of different groups (elders, youth, women, marginalized individuals) incorporated into the design of the tools?	On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do you think the perspectives of elders were incorporated into the design of the M&E tools? On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do you think the perspectives of youth were incorporated into the design of the M&E tools? On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do you think the perspectives of women were incorporated into the design of the M&E tools? How many representatives from each group (elders, youth, women, marginalized individuals) were involved in the design of the tools?

Impact Evaluation Phase *Community ownership*	How do the tools ensure that data is collected in a way that fosters respect, dignity, and reciprocity among participants?	On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 5 = to a great extent), to what extent do you feel the data collection tools foster respect for participants? On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do you think the data collection process upholds the dignity of participants? On a scale of 1 to 5, how effectively does the data collection process promote reciprocity between participants and researchers What percentage of participants reported feeling respected during the data collection process? (0% to 100%) How many participants mentioned that the data collection process upheld their dignity and fostered a sense of reciprocity
	Ubuntu Evaluation questions/qualitative	**Quantitative**
	What were the benefits of the project to the community and the community researchers?	On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = no benefit, 5 = highly beneficial), how would you rate the overall benefit of the project to the community? On a scale of 1 to 5, how beneficial was your involvement in the project to your personal or professional development?
Sustainability Phase *Community Ownership*	How has the project ensured the continuity of benefits after its completion? What strategies have been implemented to transfer ownership and responsibility to the community? What challenges are foreseen in maintaining the project outcomes over time	On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident are you that the project's outcomes will be sustained for at least 5 years after the project ends?

	How have local resources (human, financial, or material) been integrated into the sustainability plan? How have community members' skills or capacities improved to manage the project independently?	

Conclusion

The Engagement, Participation, Involvement, and Ownership (EPIO) of the community are critical determinants of a project's sustainability and overall success. When communities are actively engaged, meaningfully involved, and empowered to assume ownership, projects are more likely to be culturally relevant, socially accepted, and sustained beyond external support. Conversely, the absence or weakening of these EPIO pillars diminishes community commitment, reduces accountability, and ultimately undermines the long-term impact and continuity of development interventions.