Innovative Transformative AFRICAN ROOTED FRAMEWORKS

There is growing demand for African-led development approaches that enable communities, practitioners and policymakers to design, monitor and evaluate programmes in ways that strengthen participation, ownership and sustainability. In response, the Mastercard Foundation contracted the University of Botswana, led by Bagele Chilisa, to develop African-rooted evaluation frameworks, tools and guidelines. The work was undertaken through the Pan African Indigenous Evaluation Consortium, comprising the University of Botswana, University of Ghana, Africa Nazarene University, AfrEA, Tiyimele Consultants and Data Innovators.

The frameworks were informed by a systematic review and a sense-maker narrative survey involving 101 stories from 25 African countries. They were further refined through a three-day co-creation workshop with 48 participants, reviewed for content validity, and pilot-tested in Malawi, Zambia and Uganda. The final frameworks are Ngwanake Cultural Empowerment, PEPST, Pamoja Safarini Theory of Practice, EPIO, and the Community Language-Based Evaluation Framework.

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Executive Summary

The five African-rooted frameworks offer distinct approaches to strengthening culturally responsive evaluation. Ngwanake integrates culture and technology to support youth and community empowerment. CoLABEV draws on community languages, proverbs, stories and other forms of cultural expression to inform evaluation practice. PEPST focuses on the interaction between people, environment, place, space and time, ensuring that evaluation reflects the context in which development takes place.

Pamoja Safarini treats development as an evolving journey shaped by reflection, historical experience, local knowledge and community aspirations. EPIO concentrates on meaningful engagement, participation, involvement and shared ownership throughout project design, implementation and evaluation. Collectively, the frameworks provide practical ways of grounding evaluation in African knowledge systems, values and lived realities while giving communities a more active role in defining and assessing development.

Recommendations

1. **Include cultural empowerment part of all developmental programs.**
   Governments and NGOs should include the Ngwanake Framework in their project designs and evaluations.
2. **Train and support youth.**
   Give young people the skills and resources to lead evaluations using both culture and technology.
3. **Encourage community innovation.**
   Support projects that blend local traditions with new ideas.
4. **Protect Indigenous knowledge.**
   Ensure communities receive recognition and benefits when they share their cultural knowledge.
5. **Work together.**
   Build strong partnerships between communities, government, schools, and funders to spread this approach.

Why this matters

When young people and communities integrate their own culture and technology in evaluation, they become active players in their own development. The Cultural empowerment framework promotes Intergenerational learning through innovation, inclusion, ownership.

CULTURAL EMPOWERMENT TOOL ("NGWANAKE")

What is at stake?

This is a youth/community cultural empowerment tool that combines the use of technology and cultural knowledge and skills in the evaluation of interventions. Many development and evaluation projects in Africa continue to use methods of project design and evaluation that do not fit local cultures or ways of life. This leads to exclusion and marginalization of youths and local communities in evaluation practice resulting in the projects not being relevant or meeting their needs and aspirations.

Key insights from Ngwanake

The Key insights of the framework is cultural empowerment, leveraging on the integration of culture and technology which makes evaluation more local, more meaningful, and easier to sustain

What does Ngwanake offer?

The Framework offers a new way to do evaluation that combines African culture, youth energy, and technology through;

1. **Cultural Integration**

   This stage helps youth and communities incorporate their culture into project planning and evaluation.

2. **Cultural Innovation**

   This incorporates the integrations of culture and technology which promote creativity in 'projects design and evaluation practice.

3. **Autonomy (Jitegemee)**

   This stage focuses on independence and pride. Communities use their culture to share success stories – through songs, proverbs, or videos – and keep improving their work. It builds self-reliance and ownership of results.

This framework helps turn evaluations into tools for empowerment – not just for measurement. It shows that when people's culture and technology work together, the results are stronger and longer-lasting.

Recommendations

- National Governments, Development Partners, Evaluation Stakeholders and Funders should:
  - Promote and support awareness creation and institutionalization of the Community Language Evaluation Framework in policy, legal frameworks and financing.
  - Build capacity to use Community Language Evaluation Framework in training, education and evaluation systems

Why this matters

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.
It offers opportunity for inclusiveness of marginalized and vulnerable groups, more especially youth and women.

PEOPLE, ENVIRONMENT PLACE/SPACE AND TIME

What is at stake?

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 tool for conducting Made in Africa Evaluation in African communities using community language including proverbs, songs, idioms, storytelling, folktales, myths and taboos while observing African cultural values and practices

Key insights from The Community Language Based Evaluation Framework

- Evaluators can undertake project evaluation using evaluative wisdom from community languages at four stages: Phase I: Project Initiation and Design; Phase 2: Project Implementation; Phase 3: Project Evaluation (Data Collection and Analysis); and Phase 4: Project Evaluation Reporting and Communication.
- Application of the framework is through a step-by-step protocol with key evaluation questions for each of the four phases that solicit the community languages and the wisdom embedded in them.
- Community languages encourage cultural specific values on participation, commitment, unity and respect during the various stages of the project cycle

What does Framework offer?

- 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.

PEOPLE, ENVIRONMENT PLACE/SPACE AND TIME

What is at stake?

The use of Evaluation frameworks and tools that were developed from the global North Africa without paying attention to the culture, values, historical experiences and African knowledge systems. Using these frameworks and tools borrowed from other cultures result in collecting evidence that does not accurately reflect the realities on the ground. For example, projects are reported as successful while on the ground, nothing changes.

What is PEPST

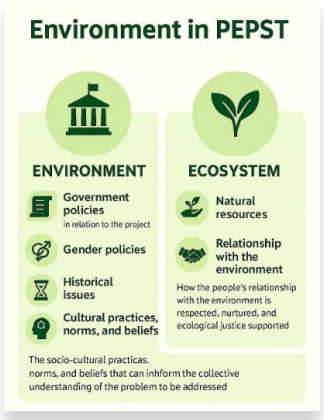
The PEPST framework is an African-rooted, people centred context first evaluation tool that promotes a holistic approach to contextualising project planning and evaluation. It has four pillars to guide the planning and evaluation process namely, People, Environment, Place/Space, and Time. The interconnectedness of these four pillars – People, Environment, Place/Space, and Time underscores the importance of adopting a holistic context-first planning and evaluation practice.

PEPST Framework

PILLARS

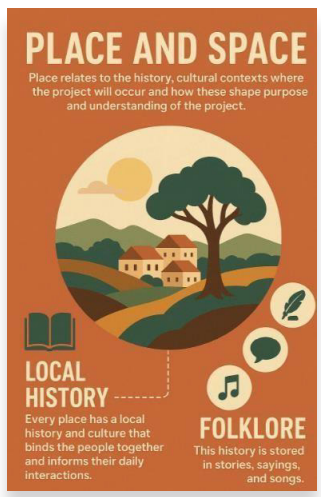
People

Engagement of all stakeholders – community leaders, youth, women, and local authorities – ensures inclusivity and mindset change. Proverbs, storytelling, and local language foster collective responsibility and trust, while building relationships that sustain projects.



Environment

Evaluations must consider socio-cultural practices, gender norms, and ecological relationships. Indigenous agricultural practices and respect for cultural norms strengthen project outcomes. The integration of local and expert knowledge fosters mutual learning and environmental justice.



Place/Space

Communities attribute spiritual and cultural value to specific lands, rivers, and forests, which must inform project design and evaluation. Sacred and communal spaces are key to ensuring projects are contextually appropriate and culturally responsive.

Community Protocols should guide the evaluation.

Emphasis is on community ownership of data and knowledge sovereignty.

Recommendations

- Embed PEPST in National Evaluation Policies and M&E Frameworks
- Align with AfrEA principles, Agenda 2063, and the SDGs to harmonise African evaluation standards
- Invest in capacity building for indigenous and context-responsive evaluation practitioners
- Enhance policy relevance and evaluation legitimacy
- Strengthen community ownership and learning

Why this matters

The current M&E paradigms largely exclude African epistemologies and cultural dimensions, resulting in low legitimacy and utilisation of evaluation outcomes. By contrast, the PEPST Framework recognises that effective evaluation must reflect the dynamic relationships between people, their environment, cultural spaces, and time.

Time

Time is cyclical, linking past, present, and future. Evaluation should capture ongoing adaptation, reflection, and co-creation of futures envisioned by communities rather than fixed project endpoints. Success is measured in relational and generational continuity, not only in outputs.

What does PEPST offer

The interconnectedness of four pillars within PEPST provides a context-responsive evaluation framework that aligns with African philosophical principles, promoting inclusivity, sustainability, and transformation. It:

- Enables integration of indigenous and expert knowledge to inform policy, practice and transformative innovative evaluation
- Fosters multi-stakeholder collaboration and co-creation at every stage –planning, implementation, and impact evaluation through adaptive learning cycles, community involvement, and equitable participation;
- Reorients evaluation toward relationship building, the environment, changing mindsets and future thinking rather than compliance.

Recommendations

1. **Institutionalise Culturally Responsive Evaluation Standards**
   Adopt PSTP principles into national and regional M&E frameworks to ensure that monitoring and evaluation processes respect local knowledge systems and are grounded in community realities.
2. **Engage Traditional Leaders and Youth Early**
   Include elders, spiritual leaders, and youth voices in programme initiation, design, and reflection sessions. This ensures community ownership and enhances sustainability.
3. **Redefine Success Beyond Economic Metrics**
   Funders and implementers should allow for flexible indicators such as spiritual harmony, cultural revitalisation, and ecological balance, alongside income or employment targets.
4. **Invest in Participatory Communication Tools**
   Support the development of participatory visual methods such as storyboards, oral histories, and community theatre. These methods improve understanding, reflection, and feedback.
5. **Support Indigenous Evaluators and Institutions**
   Develop and finance African-led monitoring and evaluation institutions that can mentor local practitioners in culturally grounded methodologies and generate context-relevant evidence.

Why this matters

African communities are not passive beneficiaries of externally designed interventions. They are active agents of change with deep knowledge systems and lived experience. Monitoring and valuation that centres their voices, values, and visions is not only more ethical but also more effective; thus, the tool offers a practical, tested framework to achieve this goal.

THE PAMOJA SAFARINI THEORY OF PRACTICE

What is at stake?

The PSPT *"Pamoja Safarini"* is a Swahili phrase meaning "together on the journey, and that's exactly what this model is: a journey, not a destination. It's an indigenous Theory of Change that integrates African worldviews.

PSTP framework

- **Sankofa (Reflexivity & Cyclical Learning):**
  a reflexive process that advocates for consulting and borrowing from Africa's rich historical past to shape the current and foretell the future
- **Njiani (The Journey & Process Focus):**
  Focuses on the process rather than the product. Therefore, the process is more important than the product *(On the journey on the path)*
- **Holistic Outlook:**
  Takes a holistic, timeless view that includes historical and cultural context.
- **Dhani(Questioning Assumptions):**
  Promotes questioning assumptions through African worldviews and traditional knowledge systems.
- **Maono (Dreams and Vision):**
  Links past and future through imaginative and aspirational thinking
- **Visual Depiction:**
  Encourages using culturally meaningful images and symbols

What does PSTP offer?

The **PSTP framework** introduces six interconnected principles that guide programme design, implementation, and evaluation across the full project cycle. It empowers communities to plan,

PSTP Principle	What It Means for Policy and Practice
Njiani	Promotes process-based adaptation, community-defined milestones, and flexible feedback loops.
Sankofa	Emphasises relexify and cyclical which draws from ancestral wisdom, past experiences, and lived histories.
Holistic Outlook	Recognizes well-being as spiritual, ecological, and relational. Outcomes include family cohesion, cultural vitality, and land stewardship.
Visual Depiction	Promotes culturally relevant storytelling and visuals that bridge communication gaps and foster shared understanding, especially in low-literacy contexts.
Dhani	Encourages evaluators and policymakers to question external assumptions and centre local knowledge. Supports epistemic justice.
Maono	Fosters intergenerational visioning by ensuring that programme goals reflect community aspirations and are rooted in ancestral legacies.

Recommendations

- Adopt the usage of the EPIO in project development
- Engaging all stakeholders
- Support Indigenous Evaluators and Institutions

Why this matters

It brings a new approach to planning, managing, and evaluating projects that leads to people-centred solutions, engagement, participation, involvement, and ownership. Its application, which nurtures cultural roundedness and sustained process development, is key in enhancing project sustainability.

ENGAGEMENT PARTICIPATION INVOLVEMENT AND OWNERSHIP (EPIO)

What is at stake?

Many evaluation frameworks imported from the Global North fail to capture the relational and communal essence of planning and managing projects that are meant for African societies.

This overreliance on externally designed tools has resulted in lack of engaging the communities to actively participate in planning and managing sustainable projects. As an Afrocentric framework, the Engagement, Participation, Involvement and Ownership (EPIO) tool serves as a planning and management framework that ensures communities are meaningfully engaged at every stage of project design and implementation. It promotes collective ownership and sustainability, enabling community-driven decision-making and long-term impact grounded in Ubuntu values. Situated within the Ubuntu philosophy and the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is designed and developed for funders and policy makers to close this gap.

EPIO framework

The EPIO Framework is an African-rooted, people-centered, Ubuntu-guided model for participatory evaluation. It encourages evaluators to view communities not as subjects of evaluation, but as co-owners and co-narrators of their development stories. EPIO has four dimensions.

What does EPIO offer?

The EPIO framework, offers a thinking lens and an operational guide, which introduces four interconnected pillars that guide programme design, implementation, and evaluation across the full project cycle:

- The value of pre-engagement with the community to understand its social, cultural and historical context.
- Creates inclusive spaces for dialogue and knowledge exchange amongst all stake holders
- Demonstrates the need for the involvement of community support structures
- Ownership of decisions and their implementation as critical marker of collective success.