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# The genesis and meaning of MAE

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# THE HANDBOOK

# MADE IN AFRICA EVALUATION

AfrEA

VOLUME 1

AFRICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION

# HANDBOOK ON MADE IN AFRICA EVALUATION

African Evaluation Association

Volume 1

# Introduction: The Genesis and Meaning of MAE

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter is based on a synthesis paper commissioned by AfrEA in 2013 (Chilisa 2015). The purpose of the commission was to bring together the disparate literature and voices on what defines the MAE concept both in theory and practice. The synthesis paper, led by Bagele Chilisa funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMFG) marked the beginning of a process of more clearly articulating, building, and making visible and accessible the scholarship that underpins MAE.

The methodology for the synthesis paper included a Skype meeting with key staff from AfrEA who defined the scope of the work and identified documents required for the study. The key informants for the interviews consisted of eight evaluators, three from the USA and five from the rest of Africa who responded to a structured interview e-questionnaire. In addition, former AfrEA Presidents were interviewed through Skype. A review of literature on African rooted paradigms, worldviews and philosophies that articulate African culture, and history and belief systems was conducted and included a search and review of exemplary work and scholarship that illustrates MAE approaches. A document analysis of the AfrEA Conference Proceedings (2007, 2013), the Bellagio Conference proceedings (2012), and the Paris Declaration (2012)

was conducted to provide evidence on the chronology of events that shape the discourse on MAE and the organizations and individuals that drive the discourse. A content analysis of evaluation literature and literature on African rooted paradigms, world-views and philosophies that articulate African culture, history and belief systems was conducted to: 1) place the discourse on MAE within the international discourse on cultural competence in evaluation; 2) trace the genesis of evaluation in Africa; 3) reveal the African rooted paradigms, world-views and philosophies that articulate African culture, history and belief systems, and 4) provide exemplary work and scholarship that illustrates a MAE. The chapter focuses on evolution of AfrEA and the MAE concept.

## THE GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF THE MAE IDEA

The origin of the MAE can be traced back to the beginning of the re-invention period in the 1990's that was characterized by African resistance to the universalization of Euro-American thought and in particular the resistance by researchers, policy analysts and evaluators to evaluation practice dominated by external evaluators who often times were ignorant of the context and culture within which evaluation was conducted and focused on program evaluation outcomes as defined by the sponsors at the expense of the beneficiaries views on what counted as valuable program outcomes. In response to this colonial evaluation there was a call for local researchers to conduct independent policy evaluation research (Cloete Fanie 2014). Organisations such as SADCC, CODESRIA, SAPES, AEC and OSSREA developed independent local capacity that engaged in policy evaluation. UN program sponsors, for instance, UNICEF created evaluation networks to enhance capacity building for UNICEF and other evaluators (Cloete & Fanie 2014). The emphasis in these early initiatives on evaluation in Africa was on building capacity

of Africans to carryout evaluation and on creating a network of evaluators.

In the late 1990's there was a shift towards making evaluation cultural appropriate. For instance, (Odhan 2000) noted that Africa was dependent on North America and European literature for criteria or standards for evaluating the success of programs and that these did not always reflect the African realities. Augmenting this view, Kate and Patel (2000) called for 'evaluation thinking for a better Africa' and creating 'a common vision' of evaluation in Africa. In 1999 AfrEA was formed in response to the growing demand for information sharing, advocacy, and advanced capacity building in evaluation in Africa, The Africa Evaluation Association (AfrEA) plays a unique role in Africa and globally. AfrEA is the only pan-Africa umbrella organization for national monitoring and evaluation associations and networks in Africa (also known as VOPEs), and a resource for individual evaluators in countries where national bodies do not exist. Historic to these developments was the formation of Monitoring and Evaluation Associations, starting with Ghana. In 2018 AfrEA had a growing Anglophone-Francophone membership base of 39 evaluation associations, 12 institutional members and 113 individual members in countries where there are no evaluation associations.

The African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) seeks to promote high-quality evaluation that is led by and rooted in Africa, ensuring that evaluation theory and practice are relevant and responsive to African contexts and needs. In pursuit of this objective, the discourse on Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) emerged primarily through conferences, academic reports, international literature, and grey literature. Although this conversation has been ongoing since 2007, stakeholders continue to engage and collaborate on defining, implementing, and critiquing MAE. MAE traces its origins to the 4th AfrEA Conference in Niamey, Niger (January 17–19, 2007), where a special session, "Making Evaluation Our Own: Strengthening the Foundation for Africa-Rooted and Africa-Led Monitoring and Evaluation," organized by Zenda Ofir, Sulley Gariba, and Oumoul Khayri Ba Tall, laid its foundation. The

keynote by Michael Patton and Sulley Gariba formally launched this Africa-rooted evaluation discourse.

MAE is an ongoing journey to uncover, identify, develop, and codify the uniqueness of the African approach to evaluation. This handbook seeks to extend and expand the influence of knowledge generated in Africa on African evaluation practices, theories, and methods. It is the second major knowledge product on evaluation, following the African Evaluation Journal (AEJ), launched in 2013, which has stimulated critical thinking and publication of papers on African evaluation. Since the emergence of the Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) discourse in 2007, numerous publications have explored the concept and synthesized its diverse contributions.

## THE MADE IN AFRICA EVALUATION CONCEPT

The closest to a concept of a made in Africa Evaluation can be traced back to the 2007, 17th – 19th January 4thAfrEA Conference in Niamey, Niger. At this conference there was a special stream to discuss the topic: *Making Evaluation our Own: Strengthening the Foundation for Africa Rooted and Africa Led Monitoring and Evaluation* organised by Zenda Ofir, Sulley Gariba and Oumol Tall. Michael Patton and Sulley Gariba fielded the keynote that launched the Making Evaluation Our Own Concept. The introductory session set the scene for the day's discussions by considering:

I. *The African Evaluation Challenge* (Dr Zenda Ofir, South Africa).
II. *The Trends, Shaping M&E in the Developing World* (Prof Robert Picciotto, UK).
III. *The African Mosaic and Global Interactions: The Multiple Roles of and Approaches to Evaluation* (Prof Michael Patton & Prof Donna Mertens USA).

The last two presentations explained, among others, the theoretical underpinnings of evaluation as it is practiced in the world today.

The second session focused on evaluation methodologies used internationally and the variety of paradigms related to evidence in evaluation. This session was a panel discussion led by Jim Rugh, Bill Savedoff, Rob van den Bert, Fred Carden, Nancy MacPherson and Ross Conner. The final session led by Bagele Chilisa, considered some possibilities for developing an evaluation culture rooted in Africa. In this session some examples of how the African culture lends itself to evaluation were given. In addition, some examples that demonstrated that the currently used evaluation methodologies could be enriched if it considered African worldviews were given. The stream was funded by NORAD. NORAD also offered to fund an evaluation that could be used as a test case for an African rooted approach.

At the end of the plenary, three broad challenges facing evaluation in Africa were noted as follows: cultural and contextual relevance of evaluations; Appropriateness of evaluation methodologies and approaches and ethics and values in evaluation.

## CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL RELEVANCE OF EVALUATIONS

The conference reiterated concerns raised earlier by researchers' policy analysts and evaluators that much of the evaluation practice in Africa is based on external values and contexts, is donor driven and the accountability mechanisms tend to be directed towards recipients of aid rather than both recipients and the providers of aid (Report on the Special Stream at the 4thAfrEA Conference Jan 17-19, 2007).

## ETHICS, ATTRIBUTION AND POWER RELATIONS

Evaluation must contribute to development in Africa by addressing challenges related to country ownership; the macro-micro disconnects; attribution; ethics and values; and power relations; Independence

versus dependence evaluations and transactional/commercial versus development focus.

**Paradigms and Methodologies in Evaluation** There is need to re-examine our own preconceived assumptions; underpinning values, paradigms (e.g. transformative v/s pragmatic); what is acknowledged as being evidence; and by whom, before we can select any particular methodology/approach.

## RESOLUTIONS PASSED

AfrEA further passed the following resolutions:

- African evaluation standards and practices should be based on African values and world views
- The existing body of knowledge on African values and worldviews should be central to guiding and shaping evaluation in Africa.
- There is a need to foster and develop the intellectual leadership and capacity within Africa and ensure that it plays a greater role in guiding and developing evaluation theories and practices.

To enable the implementation of this resolution, it was recommended that AfrEA consider the following:

- AfrEA guides and supports the development of African guidelines to operationalize the African evaluation standards and in doing so, ensure that both the standards and operational guidelines are based on the existing body of knowledge on African values and worldviews.
- AfrEA works with its networks to support and develop institutions, such as Universities, to enable them to establish evaluation as a profession and meta discipline within Africa.

- AfrEA identifies mechanisms in which African evaluation practitioners can be mentored and supported by experience African evaluation professionals.
- AfrEA engages with funding agencies to explore opportunities for developing and adopting evaluation methodologies and practices that are based on African values and worldviews and advocate for their inclusion in future evaluations.
- AfrEA encourages and supports knowledge generated from evaluation practice within Africa to be published and profiled in scholarly publications. This may include:
  - Supporting the inclusion of peer reviewed publications on African evaluation in international journal on evaluation (for example, the publication of a special issue on African evaluation)
  - The development of scholarly publications specially related to evaluation theories and practices in Africa (e.g. a journal of the AfrEA). (Making Evaluation our Own – Report on the Special Stream at the 4thAfrEA Conference Jan 17-19, 2007).

One of the key resolutions passed by AfrEA that should guide our understanding of an MAE was that the existing body of knowledge on African values and worldviews should be central to guiding and shaping evaluation in Africa and that AfrEA should foster and develop the intellectual leadership and capacity within Africa and ensure that it plays a greater role in guiding and developing evaluation theories and practices.

An additional fourth concern focused on the paradigms and methodologies in evaluation. The making evaluation our own stream Expressed the need to re-examine our own preconceived assumptions; underpinning values, paradigms, e.g. transformative v/s pragmatic; what is acknowledged as being evidence; and by whom, before we can select any particular methodology/approach. Resolutions and recommendations passed were as follows:

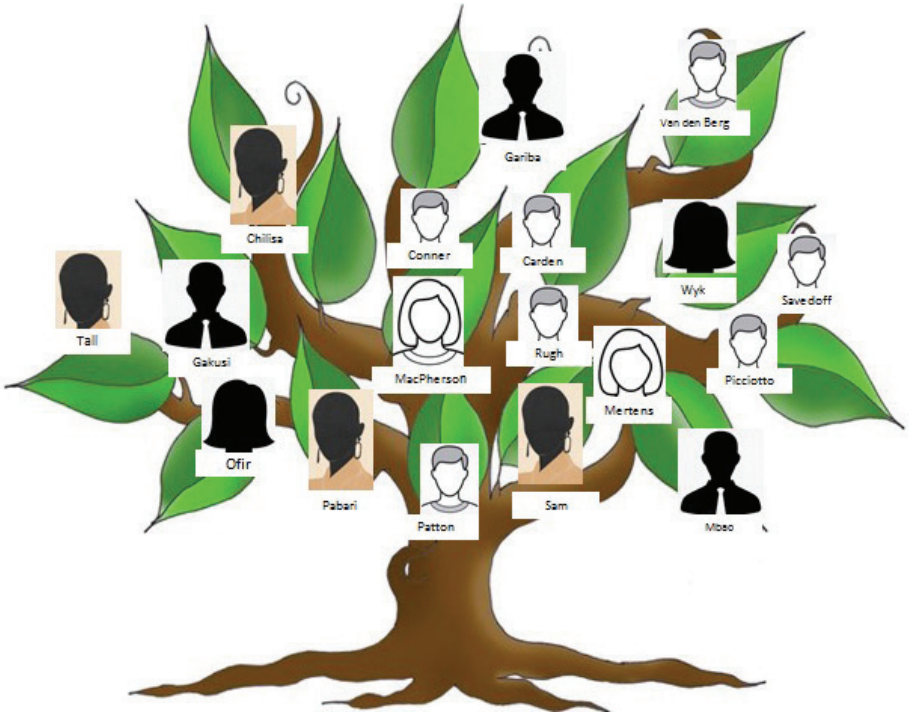
1. African evaluation standard should be based on African values and world views
2. Resolved that the existing body of knowledge on African values and world views should be central to guiding and shaping evaluation in Africa
3. Expressed the need to foster and develop intellectual leadership and capacity within Africa.

AfrEA was to:

i. Support the development of African guidelines to operationalize the African Evaluation standards.
ii. Work with its networks to support and develop institutions such as universities to enable them to establish evaluation as a profession and a meta discipline.
iii. Identify mechanisms in which African evaluation practitioners can be mentored and supported by experienced evaluation professionals.
iv. Engage with agencies to explore opportunities for developing and adopting evaluation methodologies and practices that are based on African values and world views and advocate for their inclusion in future evaluations.
v. Encourage and support knowledge generated from evaluation practice within Africa to be published and publicised in scholarly publications.

Figure 1 depicts a tree showing panellists, presenters and contributors at the historic AfrEA 2007 special stream on 'Making Evaluation our Own'. The session laid the foundation for what has become known as MAE. Figure 1 shows the 4th AfrEA Special Stream panellists and Presenter, Bellagio Thought leaders and Significant Others.

**Figure 1:** Panellists, Presenters and Contributors at The AfrEA 2007 Special Stream On MAE




**Note:** The black coloured pictures represent contributors from Africa while rest represents the contributors from Europe and America

**Source:** information retrieved from: AfrEA https://www.google.com/search?q=Report+on+the+Special+Stream+at+the+4th+AfrEA+Conference and https://www.google.com/search?q=made+in+africa+evaluation+synthesis+paper Bellagio Conference of 2012.

Another contribution towards the meaning of MAE came from the Bellagio conference. The idea of the Forum was initiated by Nancy MacPherson who was then at Rockefeller. Zenda Ofir developed the concept of and wrote the proposal that was eventually accepted by the Rockefeller Foundation for the Bellagio event. CLEAR-AA financially sponsored and facilitated the arrangements. (https://www.theclear-initiative.org/sites/default/files/2016-04/). The Bellagio conference further expanded on the resolutions made at 4th AfrEA conference and

expressed the need for developing capacities for innovation in African evaluation, while respecting the principles of capacity development as an endogenous process. It was recommended that such strategies be based, among others, on government goals for evaluation that go beyond responsiveness to challenges, to determining accountability for value for money, with key goals that include the following:

- Governance and accountability to citizens and those who provide support
- Develop capacity for innovation in African evaluation
- Development of learning nations and groups for informed reflection, innovation and change
- Stimulation of African thought leadership in evaluation, in particular through analytically oriented institutions (research and evaluation centres and universities) to enhance their role as independent evaluation institutions, centres of expertise and think tanks on evaluation.
- Knowledge development and contribution to global knowledge.

A strategy to expand the pool of evaluation knowledge generation from within Africa was to be achieved through the following specific actions:

- Generate, compile and classify a transparent repository of knowledge on African evaluations
- Map capacity and building initiatives in evaluation in Africa
- Move the compiled repositories and maps to the wider African public
- Gauge demand from specialist universities, think tanks and evaluation projects to partner in order to generate original knowledge, by drawing lessons learnt and best practices on the theory, perception and application of Africa-rooted-evaluation and capacity
- Document and disseminate the approaches and results of research into evaluation theory and practices done on the continent.

Another resolution was to catalyse a strong movement towards thought leadership that can enhance the evaluation profession in Africa and support development policy and strategy by engaging with

- key frameworks, policies and strategies at national and regional levels
- International aid and other Global policy and regimes that influence African development
- The diversity of new actors and development funding modalities
- The belief-and-value-laden nature of both development and evaluation
- Evaluation theory and practise rooted in Africa. (Bellagio Conference Proceedings, 2012, pp. 13-14).

## AFREA AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

AfrEA is a member of the South to South (S2SE) initiative. S2SE's main goal is to address global asymmetries in decision-making, knowledge, and resources in the evaluation ecosystem so that the Global South can fully contribute to sustained and transformational development, informed by evaluation that reflects the knowledge, realities, and philosophies of the Global South (S2SE). S2SE is spearheaded by the five Global South regional evaluation associations (also known as Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation, VOPES) in Africa, South Asia, Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean, and Latin America. As a member, AfrEA has an obligation to facilitate the uptake of its transformative activities. In their concept note, the South-to-South Cooperation (2018) critiques the notion that everything that comes from the global North is superior and scientifically more robust, with the Global South relegated to a passive recipient of 'tried and tested evaluation theories and practices. The S2S also notes the dearth of visible original work in the Global South, and the unidirectional lending and borrowing of knowledge where thus commissioned evaluations, M&E systems, and

education in evaluation continue to be informed by dominant paradigms from the Global South. ignoring the intricate contextual issues shaped by societal cultures and traditions in the Global South. S2S also note the dominant use of e frameworks developed by funders and commissioners, which has a narrow focus on results, hardly engaging with the approaches that can inform the customization of data collection and analysis to local contexts and societal cultures. S2S also laments the fact that Capacity strengthening tends to transfer knowledge from the Global North. Worse still, those who teach have been steeped in ideologies and frameworks from the Global North, thus, fresh perspectives, novel ideas and inspiring innovations remain limited

The S2SE Initiative launched 3-year strategic plan to mount a collaborative global campaign to begin to reverse asymmetries in the evaluation ecosystem by achieving the following four objectives:

1. **Awareness, capacity, and incentives**
   Expand awareness, strengthen capacity and stimulate demand for the engagement of Global South perspectives and knowledge in decisions about evidence - what is evaluated, with whom, for whom, and how - both within and beyond the aid/public sector agenda.
2. **Visibility, positioning, and influence**
   Engage in decision-making forums that shape evaluation and development in the Global South and globally to ensure that the perspectives of Global South evaluators, researchers, decision makers are central to determining agendas, resource flows and governance of evaluation and development.
3. **Knowledge and evidence from the Global South**
   Elevate the visibility and influence of Global South knowledge and evidence by collecting, publishing and communicating existing work and generating new knowledge, research, and evidence of what works in development in the Global South – including why, how, for whom, and under what circumstances.

4. **New spaces and new players driving change**
   Enhance the influence of Southern evaluators to engage with and respond to new spaces, new players and new generations driving global change in the Global South, including private investment, impact investing, philanthropy, and youth, (S2SE, 2018).

In addition, S2SE expressed a need to enable the Global South evaluation community to deepen its pride in and understanding of Indigenous experiences, values, perspectives, and philosophies that can help build the evaluation profession worldwide.

To achieve this objective, 'recognition prizes were to be used to elevate pride, credibility, and positioning of Global South evaluative knowledge and leaders who demonstrate and promote Global South evaluative knowledge and practice' (S2SE 2018).

The S2SE aimed to:

1. Engage knowledge management and innovation specialists to elevate valuable Global South knowledge from grey literature, which is not formally published or available to wider audiences.
2. Explore new digital technology to enable Global South evaluators to communicate their work in traditional and non-traditional ways, and through multilingual platforms.
3. Make assertive efforts to expand publishing and communication (print, digital, and non-traditional forms) of existing work in the Global South and the Global North, and to give greater visibility to knowledge products that illustrate advanced elements of Global South practice by presenting unique contexts, values, cultures, philosophies and experiences of the Global South.

**Table 1:** S2SE Objectives and Expected Outputs

| **Objectives** | **Outputs** |
|---|---|
| *Awareness, capacity, and incentives* | • Data on current expenditures and the extent of evaluation meant to benefit the Global South<br>• Landscape map of key influencers and decision makers<br>• Prize competition winners and best practice examples of authentic Global South evaluations<br>• Outreach events and products in 5 regions<br>• Engagements with indigenous studies institutions<br>• Capacity building in collaboration with global ECD players<br>• Business model for Glo |
| *Visibility, positioning, and influence* | • Critical engagement map – country, regional and global<br>• Negotiated changes – quick wins<br>• Pilots for complex changes<br>• Portfolio of cases illustrating changes in asymmetry, and lessons<br>• Phase 2 proposal for scale |
| *Knowledge and evidence from the Global South* | Inventory of Global South key knowledge products in each of 5 regions<br>• New Global South Indigenous knowledge products<br>• Selective work published, digitally and in print<br>• Research & development support programs<br>• Incentive system for mapping and publishing cutting-edge work<br>• Website content – new forms of publishing, blogging, etc.<br>• Innovation prize winners – new knowledge & new evidence<br>• Portfolio of expanded new knowledge products<br>• New partnerships with knowledge brokers, innovation hubs and platforms – regionally and globally |

**Table 1:** S2SE Objectives and Expected Outputs (*Continued*)

| Objectives | Outputs |
|---|---|
| *New spaces and new players driving change* | Identification and mapping of new spaces, new players, and new generation constituencies<br>• New partnerships and experiments with new global players driving change in the Global South<br>• New partnerships and deeper understanding of the role of innovation in Global South evaluation.<br>• New approaches and frameworks for Global South evaluation<br>• Emerging business model for Global South evaluators. |

The AfrEA resolutions and aspirations derived from the 4th AfrEA conference in 2007, the Bellagio conference in 2012, the recommendations from the 2015 concept paper, and the S2SE resolutions sum up the MAE purpose and strategies for implementation of activities to realise its goals.

## TOWARDS THE MEANING AND PRACTICE OF MAE

There is a vigorous ongoing discourse in the MAE, visible through conference papers, webinars, articles, blogs books and book chapters. MAE has "resurfaced as an important part of the discourse on evaluation practice and theory in Africa and is making a significant contribution to global evaluation discourse (Michelitsh 2019). The meaning of MAE is derived from discussions and resolutions from AfrEA Conference Proceedings (2007, 2013) Bellagio Conference (2012), a land scape review of MAE sponsored by Evalpartners (2023) the international debates on evaluation and its characteristics, the decolonisation and indigenisation discourses.

## PURPOSE AND CONTENT OF MAE

There is consensus that a MAE should challenge

- The current practice of designing evaluation tools without paying attention to context that is prevalent worldwide and to take the lead in recognising the African diversity that manifest itself in different cultures, religions, languages, histories, gender, ethnicity and so on.
- The extractive nature of evaluation of current evaluation practice that leaves participants wondering what exactly the community is getting out of the evaluation.
- Evaluation that shows wonderful successes of projects while the reality is completely different.
- Marginalisation of African data collection methods such as storytelling, folk lores, music, dance, oral traditions and the use of African languages.

The MAE content and or agenda should include the development of specific evaluation strategies that account for the local context that define locally sound and relevant development success measures. Evaluation should be a tool for development. MAE should address the disconnect between the way in which we think development works and the way we evaluate. That requires that evaluators become more explicit about African people's values and beliefs about development in Africa and to bring back the development discourse to evaluation when success measures are determined, and reports are written and findings disseminated. These views are fundamental in addressing the questions on what MAE evaluation is, its agenda and who sets it. One reviewer in the AfrEA concept paper of 2015 had this to say:

> If the development approach is re-oriented so that community partners understand that the resources no longer belong to the "donor" but to them (the community partners), a new dynamic to evaluation will emerge. If the elements of Evaluative Thinking

> are employed at the beginning of the intervention to build an evaluation component into the intervention and community partners are given the responsibility of deciding what success means to them, we will begin to see indicators that development practitioners never thought about. In Africa, communities will defend what they own and have but follow with scepticism what experts think they own.

Another dominant view is that MAE should be viewed as a trans-disciplinary concept that draws knowledge from African history, Anthropology, Political Science, Sociology, African Philosophy, African Oral Literature and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems. This is necessary to support and evaluation theory of change that capture the interconnection between the people and their environment and value systems that promote partnerships of knowledge systems. A MAE thus needs to engage African Thought Leaders from multiple disciplines and multiple knowledge systems. while the concept paper on MAE (Chilisa 2015) moved the field forward, conceptualizing MAE and preventing it from being a buzzword, there is still need for a concise definition around which a consensus may arise (Omosa 2019). Omosa (2019) has produced a working definition of MAE and defines MAE *as evaluation conducted based on AfrEA standards, using localized methods or approaches, with the aim of aligning the evaluation to the lifestyle and needs of African people and also promotes African values Omosa: 93.*

## DISCORD ON A MAE

### *The Naming*

From an analysis of the interview data and the literature, there was a minority voice that argue that it is unrealistic to name an evaluation MAE. Yantio (2012) observes as follows:

> *Being indigenous to Cameroon and Africa, I don't feel that what I do as a researcher is any different from what other researchers in other*

> *settings in the developed and the developing world do. I believe that it is a false idea to use a specific name to characterise the research that indigenous researchers carry out, except to say that their research is contextualised.*

One interviewee responded as follows:

> *…. there is no such thing as MAE, there is just evaluation carried out in a specific local context. There is just good evaluation that include elements of a certain context…. not necessarily a Made in Africa evaluation, just good evaluation that takes context into account'.*

Scholars expressing this view are dominated by the fear that African perspectives may be defined in terms of the exotic, not taken up seriously and suffer marginalisation from the international evaluation discourse. This fear is unfounded because the international community of scholars is calling upon African scholars, Indigenous scholars and all those whose knowledge systems have suffered marginalisation to contribute to the discourse on global knowledge production. Some interviewee felt that the denial of the pursuit for a MAE by some African scholars could reflect colonized minds that value unidirectional borrowing of knowledge from the West; and a 'captive mind' (Alatas 2004) that is prone to uncritical imitation of Western research paradigms.

## MAE AND THE DIVERSITY IN AFRICA

Evaluation practice from the no MAE perspective is also dominated by the argument that Africa is too diverse to constitute a monolithic worldview. Can we, claim a history of evaluation and a value system that is generic to Africans and therefore important for evaluation in Africa? Are there African specific practices or models for evaluation in Africa? One out of seven respondents to a questionnaire on views about a MAE, when asked what are your views on an MAE informed by an African world view, had this to say:

> *'Africa is too diverse to constitute a monolithic worldview in my opinion. There is no American approach to evaluation, or Canadian, or European approach, or Australian approach. Diversity is manifest in all aspects of evaluation I see no value in trying to treat African as a monolithic perspective. Each local context in Africa should be honoured and valued, that is the key point, but not some mythical generic or archetypal African perspective. It doesn't exist. Don't force it. It's not useful'*

There is generally an agreement that evaluation in Africa should be contextualised to make it culturally appropriate and relevant to the needs of Africans. The debate seems to be whether scholars can originate evaluation practices and theories rooted in African worldviews and paradigms and indeed if African paradigms exist. While it may be true that there is no American approach to evaluation, or Canadian, or European approach, or Australian approach, it is common knowledge that the evaluation tree metaphor (Carden F. and Alkin M. 2012) illustrates evaluation models emanating from American and other Euro-Western histories and cultures. Take, for example, Michael Patton's utilisation-focussed evaluation model or Tyler's objective-oriented evaluation model. These models originated in the USA and are classified as intellectual property of scholars in the USA. Mertens and Wilson (2012) further situate the Tylerian evaluation models in the post-positivist paradigm while Patton's utilisation focused evaluation fit into the pragmatic paradigm, all classified as Euro-Western paradigms. Carden F. and Alkin M. (2012) go further to note the absence of evaluation theorists coming from Low- and Middle-Income countries and from Africa in the evaluation tree metaphor and urges evaluators from Low- and Middle-Income countries and from Africa to build evaluation by originating evaluation practice and potentially theories rooted in their locations. The view is however important in making it clear that the MAE is about approaches, strategies and models of evaluation emanating from evaluation practice in Africa. MAE is not a one lens approach, but an attempt to make visible, multiple evaluation approaches informed by the diversities coming out of Africa.

## NOT ALL EVALUATION SHOULD BE MAE

There was also a minority view that not all evaluations should invoke the MAE principles. One interviewee had this to say:

> MAE should be something that we may invoke to do some evaluations for some reason, but it should not be a process that we should mainstream or apply across board. We shouldn't say that any evaluation that takes place in Africa should be MAE. I do not see it like that. I think that we will continue to do evaluation traditionally; donors would like to do evaluations for their reasons.

This view defeats the international call for evaluators to pay attention to the role of culture in evaluation and the pursuit of culturally responsive, indigenous and postcolonial approaches that expand ways to work in diverse evaluation settings with tools and methods that expand the range and depth of approaches in the field. The MAE does not sum up one approach but shows MAE along a continuum that range from the least contextualised evaluation approaches to approaches that are dominated by Africans world views.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION CHALLENGES AND MYTHS

While MAE is visible in the global discourse in evaluation and across literature from different disciplines, its conceptualization remains elusive and poses a threat to its transformative capabilities. There are many conversations taking place on what MAE should be or can be, with no final agreement made. Omosa (2019) notes that the divergent and sometimes fractured discussion about MAE has resulted in splintered understanding of the concept and misconceptions that challenge its growth. The misconceptions include the Myths of Protectionism, the Myths of Science versus Sorcery, the Myth of a Neutral Science Method, the Myth of Difference and Inventiveness versus Imitativeness and Tensions with the Adaptive approach.

**Myths of Protectionism:** One of the misconceptions delaying progress in embracing the MAE concept and its transformative vision is the view that MAE means 'protectionism' and rejecting support and approaches from the north, making MAE a 'contender rather than an alternative or even a partner.' Proponents of MAE and the concept paper, however, are clear that MAE is not exclusive of other knowledge systems. Another misconception is that MAE is interpreted as a one size fit all model of evaluation in Africa rather than an umbrella for frameworks that guide contextualized, localized evaluation in diverse environments and situations.

**Tensions with the Adaptive approach:** There is also a persistent dialogue on how to interweave conventional Northern and MAE approaches and whether it is possible in the words of one of the participants 'to push for revolution while still ensconced in the dominant structure.' The concern is that often, MAE is subsumed within the discourse on 'transformative evaluation,' where it gets lost in 'the global challenges we are facing in the age of the Anthropocene.' The 'how to' and the distinct benefit of the integration is also not visible. Mbava and Chapman (2020) highlighting the tensions in the adaptive approach note the approach 'has limitations because the thought leadership, design and development of theories and instruments largely remain outside Africa' but can be useful when some of the features of a Western based approach meet the requirement of a MAE (p. 7). Mbava (2017) has developed a model of an adapted realist evaluation cycle that features the Lekgotla method as the main tool for gathering qualitative data and for building relations and seeking consensus among stakeholders. The model clearly delineates 'how to' and the benefits of the model. It remains for evaluators to test this model in other contexts within and outside Africa.

**The Myth of Difference and Inventiveness versus Imitativeness:** Another concern is that MAE should make clear how it differs from 'people-centred evaluations including participatory/stakeholder/empowerment/transformative evaluations.' This thinking is driven

by Western essentialism and its inability to see and appreciate characteristics in other cultures that are similar to, and those that do not fit Western preconceptions. Essentialism drives the colonial binary thinking of Western/European as characterized by inventiveness and abstract thinking and non-westerners as imitators at the developmental stage of concrete thinking incapable of theorizing (Blaut, 1993). Complementing the call for difference is the view from a minority of the participants that MAE is underdeveloped as a body of knowledge, with distinct tools, techniques, and methods.' The majority of the participants are of the view that the problem is not underdevelopment, but lack of visibility perpetuated by Western hostility or indifference to other knowledge systems.

**The Myths of Science versus Sorcery:** In discussing the challenges of an Ubuntu driven public policy evaluation approach, Uwezeyimana (2020) notes:

> Most indigenous African conceptions of causality, beliefs in magic and supernatural powers, which are associated with African indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu and communalism, cannot systematically and scientifically be proven. (p. 125)

Blaut's theory (1993) on the colonizer's model of the world demonstrated how the European theory of diffusionism has created binary opposites of Westerner/European that believes in science and the non-Westerner 'other' who believe in sorcery. The model is a powerful tool to use to deconstruct, expose, and talk back to damaged focused assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes about the 'other.' Beliefs in magical power and supernatural powers cannot be ascribed to Africans only. Rene Descartes a philosopher, mathematician, and scientist credits his methodology to a supernatural encounter during which the Spirit of truth descended upon him and possessed him (Billman, 2019). Wilhelm's Dilthey's philosophy of hermeneutics in the interpretive paradigm and its methodology of interpretation comes from the name Hermes, a god in Greek mythology who had the power to communicate the

desires of the gods to mortals (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Neuman, 1997). Shakespeare in the book Macbeth showed how Lady Macbeth and the three witches plotted to kill Duncan and she, Lady Macbeth became the fourth witch. Today in the Western world plots to conquer, control and erase other knowledge systems do not happen through witchcraft but other sophisticated ways of controlling the mind that while not labelled witchcraft in reality serves the same purpose. In seeking to further understand Uwizeyimana's (2020) assertion one can interrogate the following question: Is it superstitious and therefore irrelevant to the evaluator if mothers in a given community did not pursue one of the program goals to kill chicken when they are two months old to satisfy the requirement for a nutritious meal on the grounds that it is against their culture to kill baby chickens? An evaluator steeped in the Western Baconian philosophy of empiricism will of course assign the failure of the intervention to the superstitious beliefs of the mothers. Is it superstitious and therefore irrelevant to the evaluators when a health clinic is not utilized because it was erected in a place the community considers sacred? The post-positivist view of a one reality, knowable through objective measurement will of course dismiss the communities' behaviours as ignorance perpetuated by witchcraft beliefs.

**The Myth of a Neutral Science Method:** There is an argument that Science is science, data in one context is data in another, and that the objectivity of the scientific method cannot be affected by the subjectivity of contextual realities. This is clearly an argument against decolonizing research and evaluation methodologies. In the last AfrEA conference as already discussed, there was a training session on the 'big four paradigms,' Post-positivism, Constructivism, Pragmatic and Transformative, and how they created codes, rules and methods on how truth can be investigated, analysed, reported and disseminated. The myth of an objective truth lies within the post-positivist paradigm and is heavily contested by the constructivists who subscribe to a socially constructed reality and subjective knowing; while in the transformative paradigm, truth is seen as a game of power relations and the pragmatist value practice that leads to change. It

is clear that the argument for a single, unchanging, knowable reality expressed above is from a post-positivist standpoint and is contested by other paradigms. What was missing from the AfrEA conference discourse as already pointed out was a discussion of an Indigenous paradigm. The assertion of a neutral science method points to the need for training on evaluation methodologies that clearly create awareness of the subjectivity of science and how evaluation models come out of diverse world views and are best applied if situated in their philosophical assumptions. Using an evaluation model without knowledge of its paradigmatic stance is like walking on a road blind folded (Chilisa 2024).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter traces the evolution of Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE), highlighting its role in transforming evaluation practices across the continent. Emerging in the early 2000s as a response to externally imposed frameworks, MAE seeks to centre African values, knowledge systems, and cultural contexts in evaluation. The chapter underscores AfrEA's pivotal role in advocating for high-quality, locally driven evaluations that resonate with Africa's diverse histories and experiences. While MAE has gained traction, challenges remain, including debates over its definition, the role of African philosophy in evaluation methodologies, the integration of indigenous theories and practices with mainstream approaches, and ethical concerns around power dynamics in evaluation. These complexities emphasize the need for interdisciplinary and mixed methods approaches (Chilisa 2023) and continuous dialogue on MAE's principles, theory and practice. Moving forward, fostering collaboration among evaluators, policymakers, and communities across cultures is crucial to shaping a shared understanding of MAE. By embedding African perspectives at the core of evaluation, MAE paves the way for a more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable evaluation ecosystem across the continent.

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THE HANDBOOK

# MADE IN AFRICA EVALUATION

The Handbook on Made in Africa Evaluation is a pioneering work that redefines evaluation practices by centering African epistemologies, values, and methodologies. Developed by the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), this volume challenges dominant Western frameworks and advocates for a transformative, culturally grounded approach to evaluation.

Divided into three comprehensive sections—Epistemology and Foundations, Theory and Methods, and Case Studies—the handbook brings together leading scholars and practitioners from across Africa. It explores a range of themes, including epistemic injustice, participatory evaluation approaches, and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Through frameworks such as the African Relational Evaluation Paradigm, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and the Swahili Evaluation Approach, contributors provide alternative perspectives that reflect African contexts and realities.

Emphasizing community empowerment, contextual relevance, and ethical accountability, this handbook not only documents the evolution of Made in Africa Evaluation but also serves as a political call to reclaim African agency in development evaluation. A vital resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners, this work offers insights that bridge theory and practice, ensuring that evaluation in Africa remains authentically rooted in indigenous knowledge and transformative change.

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