

Decolonizing and Indigenizing Evaluation Practice in Africa: Toward African Relational Evaluation Approaches

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Abstract: *Efforts at making evaluation culturally relevant have become central to evaluation discourses globally. However, global attempts at culturally responsive practice have not succeeded in incorporating African voices. This article discusses African perspectives on decolonization and indigenization of evaluation. It further provides a description of an African relational evaluation paradigm as a basis for originating evaluation practices and theories rooted in African world views, and provides examples of evaluation studies that illustrate relational evaluation approaches. It makes claims for an African evaluation tree metaphor that features approaches to evaluation in Africa by African theorists.*

Keywords: *African philosophy and evaluation, African-relational based evaluation, decolonizing evaluation in Africa, indigenizing evaluation*

Résumé : *Partout dans le monde, la volonté de donner à l'évaluation une pertinence culturelle est au centre des discours sur l'évaluation. Mais les tentatives mondiales pour mettre en place des pratiques sensibles à la culture n'ont pas encore réussi à intégrer les voix africaines. Cet article présente certains points de vue africains sur la décolonisation et l'indigénisation de l'évaluation. Il décrit également un paradigme africain d'évaluation relationnelle pouvant servir de fondement à des pratiques et à des théories de l'évaluation enracinées dans une vision du monde africaine, et illustre par des exemples certaines approches de l'évaluation relationnelle. Nous proposons la métaphore africaine de l'arbre d'évaluation, qui s'appuie principalement sur des méthodes d'évaluation conçues en Afrique par des théoriciens africains.*

Mots clés : *philosophie africaine et évaluation, évaluation relationnelle en Afrique, décolonisation de l'évaluation en Afrique, indigénisation de l'évaluation*

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We begin this article with the argument that evaluation is a lens through which judgements are made and standards are set about what should be considered real program outcomes, what knowledge measures that reality, and what values support the evaluation practice. Monitoring and evaluation further regulate the implementation of programs, what evaluators should see, and how they should measure and report what they see. In developing countries, evaluation has become the worst instrument of epistemological imperialism: an attempt to determine the kinds of facts to be gathered, the appropriate techniques for gathering and theorizing the data, and the generation of reports based on these marginalizing research processes. Unlike research where there is a choice on using knowledge that is generated, evaluation has accountability and utilization of evaluation results as one of its objectives. As a practice, evaluation thus makes compelling judgements about the realities judged as relevant to measure accountability and about ways to improve interventions.

In debating the role of culture in international development, one of the questions that we need to address is whether the evaluation inquiry paradigms are culturally neutral. Is it possible that the methods and procedures employed in evaluation are still culturally biased, racist, and still trapped in the historical moment dominated by global capitalism and its profit goals, therefore still recycling what [Bhabha \(1994\)](#) calls “colonial nonsense” about the “other”? Culture is lived realities (the nature of ontology), knowledge systems (epistemology), and values (axiology). There is compelling reason to debate the assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and values (axiology) that inform evaluation inquiry and practice. Research methodology paradigms that are applicable in social science research are also relevant to evaluation ([Mertens & Wilson, 2012](#)). Dominant research paradigms have been critiqued for constructing all human experience, including that of Africans, through Western hegemony and ideology ([Elabor-Idemodue, 2002](#); [Scheurich, 1997](#)) and for “seeing the world in one colour” ([Guba & Lincoln, 2005](#), p. 212). Evaluation in Africa, and in developing countries in general, is thus under criticism for adopting western epistemological approaches to social inquiry that reinforce a donor-driven accountability-based approach to measure evaluation outcomes. From our perspective, Euro-Western research paradigms reinforce blind reliance on Eurocentric models, strategies, and techniques that often lead to inadequate assessment, wrong prescriptions, and deflated evaluation models ([Jeng, 2012](#)). Under these circumstances, as Africans we ask ourselves fundamental questions about an African paradigm—evaluation is about values, and what is evaluated depends upon the realities that are seen, what is considered valuable knowledge, and for whom that knowledge is valuable ([Chilisa, 2015](#)).

Evaluation is also heavily implicated in politics, as knowledge production in itself is highly political. Politics represents culture and power. Understanding the politics surrounding evaluation thus provides insight into the dominant culture, potential power dynamics in international development evaluation, and how

knowledge is produced in evaluation inquiry. Commenting on power dynamics in knowledge production, Foucault (1977) observes:

What we know and how we know is grounded in shifting and diverse historical human practices, politics, and power. There are in the production of knowledge multiple centres of power in constant struggle; conflict, compromise and negotiation and whichever group is strongest establish its own rules on what can be known and how it can be known. A non-power related truth game is not possible, thus humanity installs each of its violence's in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination. (p. 151)

At the same time, we are experiencing the globalization of knowledge, a systematic process through which the West reaffirms its power as a centre of legitimate knowledge (Smith, 1999). Belief systems constructed along binary opposites of European and non-European, developed and developing, First World and Third World, colonizer and colonized have, for instance, constructed narratives about Africa that have come to be accepted as facts about the “other.” In Africa, these narratives began with colonization when Westerners propagated myths about the emptiness of intellectual creativity and spiritual values and the absence of rationality, to justify the displacement of natives from their lands and the erasure of their culture and knowledge systems.

Over time, the colonizer/colonized binaries have evolved and at each historical point the developed world scripts the social license by which its ideas “gain currency and hegemony.” In Africa today, the “except for Africa” myth, “doomsday” and the “crisis” narratives, partly create the context against which evaluation sponsors and commissioners create deficit-theorizing approaches to Africa’s challenges that inform the development of the evaluation agenda, its methodology, and the dissemination process. In the doomsday narrative, the three Ds—death, disease, and despair—script a deficit narrative that creates a dependence syndrome, resulting in the dearth of African leadership in designing development programs *for Africa*. Consequently, the bulk of evaluation in Africa is on aid programs or philanthropy interventions that do not necessarily translate successfully into national development programs (Moore & Zenda, 2012). The pertinent question in evaluation thus still remains: Who sets the evaluation agenda? This question provides a lens in which to address cultural competence and relevance in evaluation practice.

History, colonization, imperialism, racism, and globalization are powerful analytical frameworks to interrogate culture in international development evaluation. Understanding how Euro-Western research paradigms and methodologies marginalize and dismiss as irrelevant systems of knowledge from former colonized, historically oppressed societies, and understanding the narratives about Africa that produce deficit theories about the continent empower evaluators to be self-questioning, reflexive, and assess more critically power relations that are at work in setting evaluation agendas, deciding when evaluation starts and the evaluation methodology used. In Africa, participatory methodologies promote capacity building of participants as coevaluators to promote evaluation as a way

of life for all Africans. The challenge with using this approach is that evaluation commissioners will not always agree on the depth of stakeholder involvement in the evaluation process. Consequently evaluation methodologies that fall short of achieving their potential have become common practice in Africa.

In this article, we envisage a space where Africans may reclaim their languages, cultures, and “see through their own eyes” the history of colonization, imperialism, and its new form of globalization, and with that gaze recognize and label prevalent African-based evaluation practices that are steeped in the history, culture, lived experiences, philosophies, and world views of Africans. In a recent publication, [Carden and Alkin \(2012\)](#) identified the absence of evaluation theorists coming from low- and middle-income countries and from Africa in the evaluation tree metaphor, urging evaluators from these countries to build evaluation by originating evaluation practice and theories rooted in their cultural contexts. In this article, we invoke decolonization and indigenization discourses to locate African voices in the debate on culturally relevant evaluation approaches, and to make visible African evaluation theorists. Our overall purpose is to identify African relational forms of evaluation and an African-relational evaluation paradigm that become visible when we construct the evaluation tree metaphor from an African frame of reference.

DECOLONIZATION AND INDIGENIZATION DISCOURSES

Decolonization of evaluation may be viewed as the restructuring of power relations in the global construction of evaluation knowledge production, such that the African people may actively participate in the construction of what is evaluated, when it is evaluated, by whom, and with what methodologies. From this perspective, contextualized and culturally appropriate evaluation should be African-people centred, and should value culturally relevant and indigenized evaluation processes and methodologies that are predominantly informed by African world views and paradigms. Decolonization requires African resistance from blindly borrowing Western values and standards to evaluate programs in Africa; the capacity building of African policy analysts, researchers, and evaluators to enable them to carry out their own evaluation; the promotion and adaptation of evaluation tools, instruments, strategies, theories, and models to ensure relevancy in African settings; and the development of novel evaluation practices, theories, and methodologies that emanate from local cultures, indigenous knowledge systems, African philosophies, and African paradigms. [Adair, Puhan, and Vohra \(1993\)](#) use the term “indigenization” to describe “the blending of an imported discipline with the generation of new concepts and approaches from within a culture” (p. 155). Indigenization of evaluation can be measured by the extent to which the evaluation process is African-people centred, and the extent to which evaluation outcomes and standards and the methodology and evaluation tools emanate from African realities, and whether the ways of knowing and associated values are considered valuable by African stakeholders and beneficiaries. Historically, the decolonization and indigenization

process has ranged from very cosmetic changes, such as translating evaluation instruments into local languages and adapting instruments and evaluation theory using local norms and values, to evaluation approaches predominantly informed by African world views. In what follows, we discuss culturally relevant evaluation and invoke the evaluation tree metaphor from an African cultural perspective.

AFRICAN-RELATIONAL BASED EVALUATION APPROACHES

There are emerging African indigenous evaluation approaches that are informed by postcolonial indigenous paradigms (Chilisa, 2012), African world views (Carroll, 2008), the Afrocentric world views and Ubuntu philosophy (Asante, 1988, 1990; Mkabela, 2005; Muwanga-Zake, 2009; Reviere, 2001), ethno-philosophy (Chilisa & Malunga, 2012; Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Easton, 2012; Emagalit, 2001). These philosophies, world views, and paradigms share relational ways of perceiving reality and of being, ways of knowing, and value systems that together make up an African relational paradigm. While the African relational paradigm does not represent all the possible world views that can come from Africa, the paradigm is based on world views that are dominated by the African definition of self, relations with one another, the environment, and the living and the nonliving. It is a paradigm that creates a space for African evaluators to think out of the box, to decide how they want to reshape evaluation that resonates in an African context.

For some, there is something “generically African,” and that can indeed impact an evaluation (Chilisa, 2015). Just as we can talk of Euro-American methodologies or Euro-Western paradigms, so we can talk generically about African-rooted and African world views and paradigms. There is a growing literature on paradigmatic groupings, for example, an Eastern paradigm of evaluation (Russon, 2008), Kaupapa Maori theory based evaluation (Kerry, 2012), Indigenous research paradigms (Wilson 2008), postcolonial indigenous research paradigms (Chilisa & Malunga, 2012), and reference to Euro-American paradigms that lend support to attempts to debate and make concrete a “made in Africa” evaluation that is informed and driven by African philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and values in evaluation (Chilisa, 2015). A claim to an African-based relational evaluation paradigm has to make clear the philosophical assumptions that form the basis for program evaluation’s intent, motivation for the evaluation, expected outcomes, choice of methodology, methods and evaluation strategies or design and interpretation, and dissemination of evaluation findings. What follows is a discussion on philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and values from the perspective of an African-based relational paradigm.

RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

Among the Bantu people, the philosophy of *Ubuntu* captures the nature of being, expressing an ontology that addresses relations among people, relations with the living and the nonliving, and a spiritual existence that promotes love and harmony

among peoples and communities (Chilisa & Malunga, 2012; Chilisa & Preece, 2005). This African way of perceiving reality comes out more clearly when addressing the nature of being. The common answer on what is being comes out in the adage, “I am because we are, I am a person through other persons, I am we; I am because we are; we are because I am, I am in you, you are in me.” Relationships as opposed to individualism form an integral part of identity. Du Toit as cited by Forster (2010) noted that

in Africa a person is identified by his or her interrelationships and not primarily by individualistic properties. The community identifies the person and not the person the community. The identity of the person is his or her place in the community. In Africa it is a matter of “I participate, therefore I am.” (p. 248)

The community plays an essential part in defining one’s identity. Forster (2010) indicated that “one’s truest identity comes not just from a moment of encountering another person; it comes from a continuum of shared being (called having a relationship)” (p. 246). Thus, as Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) express, “one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation, and social memory” (p. 11). The “we” in the adage *I am because we are* includes the living and the nonliving. Thus, an African reality includes a spiritual and a material existence (Carroll, 2008) and recognizes people’s relation to the cosmos, and an interdependent and interconnected ontology that promotes peace, love, and harmony.

The “I am because we are” is evident in the everyday greeting practices of the majority of African communities, where a greeting involves a person asking the other about their wellness, the wellness of their children, and those related to them, including nonliving things. Relational evaluation valorizes an evaluation approach that is evident in the everyday evaluation of wellness as it comes out through the way people greet each other. The I/We relationship, with its emphasis on a connection of human beings to nonliving things reminds us that evaluation of projects from the African perspective should include a holistic approach that links the project to the sustainability of the environment. All areas of culture, including lived experience and indigenous knowledge systems, must be used to conceptualize the realities to be evaluated and to come up with techniques through which these realities can be known. The evaluation of development programs in Africa should involve projects that contribute to the quality and well-being of people; the well-being of relatives (and others) is as important as one’s own well-being. Thus, an African will usually say they are not that well if a relative is not well.

RELATIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY

A relational epistemology draws our attention to relational forms of knowing as opposed to the Euro-Western theories on ways of knowing that emphasize individuality (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Knowing is something that is socially constructed

by people who have relationships and connections with each other and with the environment, as well as the spirits of the ancestors, including the living and the nonliving. An African epistemology is oriented toward an affect-symbolic-imagery such that an affective-oriented evaluator studies reality through the interaction of affect and symbolic imagery (Carroll, 2008). Emphasis is on the process and use of words, gestures, dance, song, rhythm, well-established general beliefs, concepts, and theories of any particular people, which are stored in their language, practices, rituals, proverbs, revered traditions, myths, and folktales to access or convey meaning (Carroll, 2008; Chilisa, 2012). These modes of knowing are the basis for the design of methodologies used to access a reality that is connected with the knower, and includes a means of verifying this reality. For example, an evaluation of the utilization of a clinic has to start with the space and place where the clinic is located. The evaluation has to access process and methods that enable the exploration of all the revered traditions and myths about the space and place, in addition to describing clientele and the reasons for the visit. Of critical importance is what informs the evaluation process, what the outcomes of the evaluation are, and how best to access that reality.

RELATIONAL AXIOLOGY

Axiology refers to the nature of values and focuses on the question of what we value. The value system of most African societies is built around respect for others and oneself. This respect is built around the concept “humanness or personhood” (Segobye, 2000, p. 3) or respect. A relational axiology is embedded in the Ubuntu relational ontology principles of (a) I am we, I am because we are; (b) relations of people with the living and the nonliving; and (c) spirituality, love, harmony, and community building (Chilisa, 2012). The emphasis is on values grounded on collective responsibilities, cooperation, interdependence, and interpersonal relationships among people (Carroll, 2008). From these principles, an ethical framework emerges that is focused on the responsibilities of researchers and evaluators and on the creation of respectful relationships between researchers, evaluators, and participants, and that takes into account the participants’ web of relationships with the living and the nonliving. Community spirit, cooperation, collectiveness, democracy, and consensus building are the values espoused through this philosophy (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). These value orientations also influence the evaluation theory of change, criteria or standards, indicators of success or failure of projects, and conclusions about the worth or merit of programs, policies or projects. In what follows, we present three examples of African-relational based evaluation approaches.

1. Ethno-Philosophy and Proverb-Based Evaluation

Ethno-philosophy has been described as a system of thought that focuses on the collective world views of diverse African peoples as a unified form of knowledge (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Emagalit, 2001). According to this philosophy, knowledge

is the experience of the people encoded in their language, folklore, stories, songs, culture, values, and experiences. The language, stories, songs, and folklore are the banks where the knowledge is stored, and from where it can be retrieved and disseminated. Our languages, metaphorical sayings, proverbs, languages spoken through our tattoos, the languages spoken through the arts, artifacts, pottery, sculptures, home paintings, basket weaving, folklores, and legends are the only weapons to use to break the chains of academic imperialism and begin to theorize and conceptualize other ways of knowing outside the domain of Western disciplines.

2. Proverb-Based Evaluation Approach

Language, proverbs, metaphors, folklores, stories, songs, artifacts, and oral traditions contain African literature, concepts, and theories that African scholars can draw upon to originate or develop completely new evaluation practices (Chilisa and Malunga, 2012; Easton, 2012). By way of example, Easton (2012) has developed ways to contextualize five common evaluation concepts based on proverbs from Nigeria, East Africa, and Senegal.

- **Assessment measurement and performance:** Proverbs in this category illustrate the setting of standards, and the use of comparisons to judge merit or worth, the direct measure and the provision of empirical proof.
- **Inquiry, causal analysis, and discernment:** In this category the proverbs emphasize the importance of understanding the root cause of behaviour so that social reality can be seen from varying perspectives.
- **Transparency, responsibility, and governance:** Proverbs in this category emphasize the importance of transparency, accountability, and good governance.
- **Stakeholder involvement, collective effort, and political discretion:** Proverbs in this category frame dialogue as essential for ensuring the inclusion of beneficiaries in the evaluation.
- **Planning, foresight, and capacity building:** The proverbs in this category emphasize the need for new planning efforts and improved capacity building in a healthy cycle of program improvement.

Easton (2012) notes that, in his evaluation practice, proverbs were an integral part of the discussions in all the evaluation stages. The proverbs helped to embody a mindset and establish a climate for an unprecedented level of stakeholder buy-in. Proverbs thus play three roles: (a) they serve as a reminder of the cultural context in which the evaluation occurs and of the meaning conveyed by the culture; (b) they provide critical guidance for probing motives behind actions and behaviours; and (c) they mobilize local stakeholders to actively engage with the evaluation, thus promoting local ownership of the program.

Easton's evaluation framework focuses on culturally relevant methods that promote the use of evaluation results by both participants in the evaluation and

commissioners of evaluation. Evaluation should be a tool for development. The approach is not, however, explicit about African peoples' values and beliefs about development in Africa, and how evaluators can bring the development discourse back to evaluation when success measures are determined and reports are written and findings disseminated. The strength of the framework is on valuing participants' realities, knowledge systems, and value systems. From our perspective, the framework forms a separate evaluation branch in the African evaluation tree metaphor (Chilisa, 2015).

3. Afrocentric World View and the Ubuntu Philosophy

Muwanga-Zake's (2009) study illustrates an African-relational based evaluation approach predominantly informed by the Afrocentric world view and Ubuntu philosophy. In the study, the Afrocentric world view and Ubuntu philosophy were combined with aspects of Western participatory paradigms, namely post-modern, developmental, and constructivist paradigms, to evaluate a computer educational program for teachers in South Africa. The Afrocentric world view holds that African evaluators must hold themselves responsible for uncovering hidden, subtle, racist theories that may be embedded in current methodologies, work to legitimize the centrality of African ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data, and maintain inquiry rooted in strict interpretation of place.

Muwanga-Zake (2009) engaged with the decolonization and indigenization of evaluation research by moving the focus from externally determined program goals and objectives to a focus on the agenda of the people, namely the teachers' valued needs and priorities as represented by the program. For the teachers, a computer program would be a priority if it contributed to poverty alleviation and if it contributed toward learning leading to the future employment of learners. Using Ubuntu elements of collaboration, togetherness, cooperation, and consensus building, teachers were involved in the planning and execution of the evaluation. Ubuntu was used to inform a strategy of gaining access and achieving rapport with the participants. According to Muwanga-Zake (2009), the strategy used to gain entry into the research site was "greet Bantu, sit with them, understand their needs, and if possible eat with them. In short become a Muntu for full co-operation of Bantu in research" (p. 418). Becoming a Muntu is described as a method that involves evaluators being transformed and submitting themselves to Ubuntu. It is Ubuntu, for instance, to share with participants one's family, history, clan, and totem. It is the participants' depth of knowledge of the evaluator that determines the quantity and quality of indigenous knowledge accessed (Muwanga-Zake, 2009, p. 418). Through the application of Ubuntu and the I/We relationship, with emphasis on inclusiveness, a non-Muntu (through transformation) can become a Muntu. In short, a Muntu evaluator can go through a complete transformation by embracing generic African values and moving further to embrace the ethno-philosophy dominant in a particular location.

IDEAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Chilisa and Malunga (2012) articulated an ideal community development evaluation framework based on five interrelated and complementary Ubuntu principles, whose meanings are reinforced through proverbs, including the “lighting the fire” proverb. The five principles are

- Sharing and collective ownership of opportunities, responsibilities, and challenges—“Ants united can carry a dead elephant to their cave,” “A rooster may belong to one household but when it crows, it crows for the whole village,” and “A lit candle loses nothing by lighting another candle”;
- The importance of people and relationships over things—“It is better to be surrounded by people than by things”;
- Participatory decision-making and leadership—“Taking action based on one person’s views is like provoking wasps in a nest,” and “No matter how blunt, a machete should never be held by a mad person”;
- Loyalty—“The river that forgets its source will soon dry up”;
- Reconciliation as the goal for conflict management and resolution—“Those who live in peace work for it.”

The five principles describe the ideal community, resulting in concrete material, social, and spiritual benefits. They are used in African societies as a basis for the assessment of community/societal progress.

A RELATIONAL-BASED EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Carroll (2008) has proposed research methodology questions based on an African world view that can be adapted to a relational-based evaluation inquiry as follows:

- How does the evaluation inquiry reflect the interdependent and interconnected nature of the universe?
- How does the evaluation inquiry compensate for the spiritual and material nature of reality?
- How does the evaluation inquiry reflect the communal nature of African people?
- How does the evaluation inquiry access the nonmaterial reality?
- How does the evaluation inquiry reflect the both/and logic?
- How does the evaluation inquiry advance the interests of the African community?
- How does the evaluation inquiry contribute to the liberation of the African people?

Carroll’s (2008) questions reveal an evaluation strategy that is relational. The African relational-based evaluation methodology informs a relational-based

evaluation inquiry. What is critical in the approach is what informs the evaluation process and the identification of targeted outcomes. The evaluation process and the methods are focused on building relationships between the evaluator and the program beneficiaries, and among the beneficiaries and all other stakeholders. The methods target the advancement of communal interest. In a relational-based evaluation methodology it is thus important to understand the context and program site, and to collect information from people about their values, beliefs, customs, spirituality, and general characteristics of their perceptual space that includes the living and nonliving. It is critical for the evaluator to understand that reality is not only framed by a materialist ontology, but also by an African perspective; nonmaterial things such as spirits, witches, sacred places, and the universe also form part of that reality. In an African relational-based evaluation approach, there are multiple realities that need to be considered in the evaluation process. Knowledge is situationally located.

The targeted evaluation outcomes reflect the communal nature of Africans by concentrating on change for all rather than change for individuals. As the community is actively involved in the evaluation process through scribes, the community supports the external evaluator on ways of collecting data from the nonmaterial world. The evaluation processes reflect the African logic of circularity as opposed to the linear logic of traditional Western evaluation methods. The circular nature of African logic represents the interdependence and interconnectedness between the universe and nature. By actively involving the African people from the beginning to the end of the evaluation process, the process is participatory throughout. As such, African people are no longer viewed as passive recipients of knowledge constructed on their behalf, but as people who can coproduce knowledge and, more importantly, own their knowledge through the collection and interpretation of their own stories/narratives. Data are analyzed with the community or with the people who understand and can interpret the language, idioms, and proverbs of the local people. The process of building relationships throughout is as valuable as the evaluation outcome itself.

In an African relational-based evaluation methodology, evaluation questions are not predetermined but developed through consultation with participants or community. The community determines the measures and the goals of the evaluation study. There is a relationship between the evaluator and participants that is not based on a power hierarchy but on the coproduction of knowledge. Evaluation participants are involved in identifying the problem, defining it based on the understanding or incorporation of the living and nonliving, and collectively sharing their knowledge, life experiences, and needs as a frame of reference.

Muwanga-Zake's (2009) approach illustrates the valuing branch in the evaluation tree metaphor (see Figure 1). Chilisa and Malunga's (2012) evaluation framework and Carroll's methodology have a focus on the use of evaluation results by both participants in the evaluation and commissioners of evaluation for development and on valuing participants' realities, knowledge, and value systems. Chilisa (2015) has reviewed the evaluation tree metaphor (Chilisa & Malunga, 2012) to include a relational development evaluation tree (Figure 1).

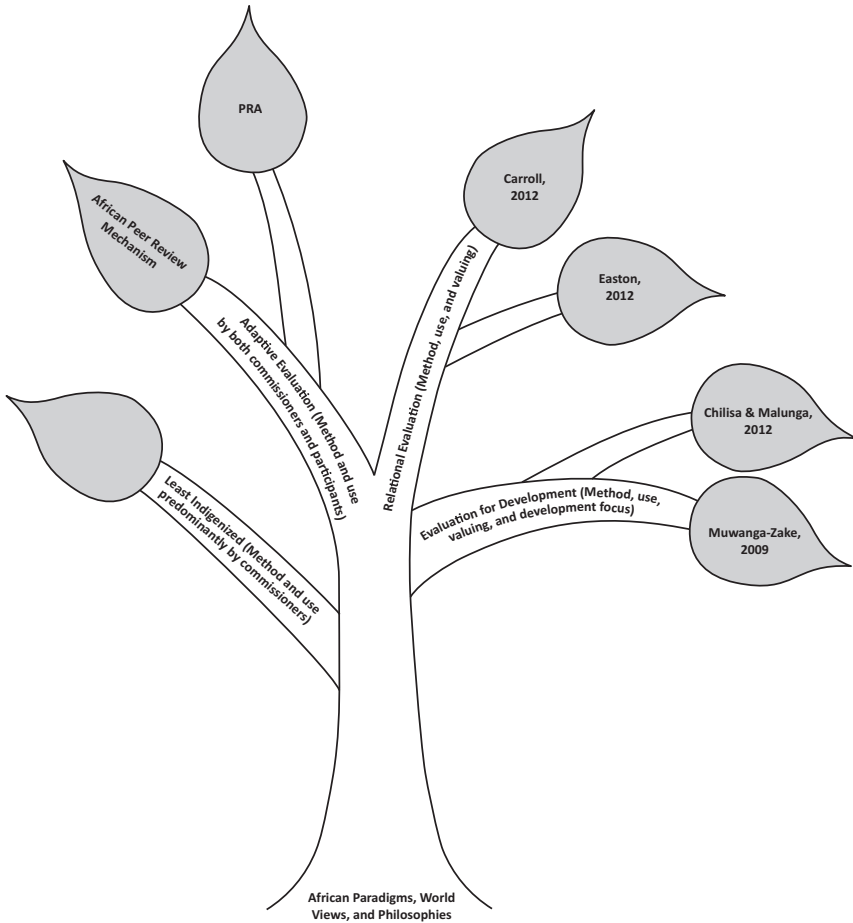


Figure 1. African Evaluation Tree Metaphor

Adapted from [Chilisa and Malunga, 2012](#).

THE ADAPTIVE EVALUATION APPROACH

In addition to relational evaluation approaches, [Carden and Alkin \(2012\)](#) have identified the “adaptive” evaluation approach as a dominant evaluation framework used in Africa. This approach is characterized by the adaptation of Western evaluation models, theories, and instruments to make them contextually relevant, culturally appropriate, and inclusive of local stakeholders and African evaluators. The goal is to ensure that the evaluation is African-driven and rooted in African values. The African Peer Review Mechanism is presented as a good example of an adapted evaluation approach that was indigenously developed and evolved locally in Africa. It is defined as a specific set of procedures for country self-assessment

around governance and human rights. The procedure was adapted from an OECD Peer Review Mechanism and developed by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). It is driven by African researchers and policy makers, leading to African-based assessments.

The adaptive evaluation approach is predominantly focused on integrative methods and the use of evaluation results by evaluation commissioners. As such, it lacks an approach for valuing and for addressing the disconnect between evaluation and development. This is reflected in the adaptive evaluation tree branch (see [Figure 1](#)). The approach demonstrates clearly that methods alone cannot adequately address the complex politics of evaluation. In fact, methods only tell researchers and evaluators what they must see, what they must investigate, what they must report, and how they must report.

LEAST INDIGENIZED APPROACH

There are other approaches to evaluation that make minimal attempts at contextualization, what [Chilisa \(2015\)](#) has referred to as the least indigenized approaches. These evaluations are dominated by Western evaluation theory and practice, with the emphasis simply on translating evaluation instruments to local languages and indigenizing techniques of gathering data, without addressing fundamental questions on world views that can inform evaluation theory and practice coming from Africa. In a critique of this approach, [Chilisa and Malunga \(2012\)](#) argue that they are essentially mere modifications of Northern-rooted and Northern-driven practices that do not go deep enough to qualify as African-rooted and African-driven. In a study of the extent to which the Centre for Development of People (CEDEP) ensures beneficiaries' and stakeholders' involvement in development evaluation in Northern Ghana, [Aliu Mohammed Nurudeen \(2012\)](#) found significant cosmetic contextualization that failed to make the evaluation of outcomes relevant to the beneficiaries. The indigenization entailed factoring in the beneficiaries' views on sacred issues such as sacred groves, gods, and taboos in the program. While participatory research tools were used (including dream mapping and community meetings to create a picture of the type of development intervention the communities required), the evaluation was conducted by external agencies contracted by the donors to evaluate predetermined objectives using a predetermined standard for the measure of success and failure, and requiring all that stakeholders adhere to that standard. This is a clear example of the least indigenized evaluation approach.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have argued that knowledge and dominant Euro-Western paradigms are based on Western culture. To contextualize evaluation and make it culturally responsive to Africans, there must be consistent reflection on evaluation approaches that span a continuum from the least indigenized

approaches to evaluation approaches predominantly driven by African world views, paradigms, and philosophies. Drawing from Carden and Alkin's (2012) evaluation tree metaphor, Chilisa and Malunga (2012) and Chilisa (2015) have developed an African evaluation tree metaphor that shows African scholars' attempts at decolonizing, indigenizing, and envisioning new evaluation tools and practices that push the boundaries of international development theory and practice to make space for other knowledge systems that promote cultural competence in evaluation.

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