

# Developing an Africa-rooted programme evaluation approach

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## **ABSTRACT**

*There is a growing concern across the globe that a one-size-fits-all programme evaluation approach according to the Western evaluation model is not always appropriate in culturally and developmentally different contexts. The history of evaluation in Africa is a case in point, but it is an open question to what extent this implies a totally new 'African' evaluation approach or 'paradigm' that can be regarded as substantially different from a so-called Western programme evaluation paradigm. Clarity is needed about what changes should be brought about for the prevailing Western model of programme evaluation to be more appropriate to Africa and how these differences should be dealt with.*

*The concept of a more appropriate Africa-rooted programme evaluation management model has now been explicitly placed on the evaluation agenda in Africa. Proposals for a coherent and dedicated implementation plan for the Bellagio Report proposals are summarised in this article. These proposals do not amount to a substitution of the prevailing model of evaluation, but rather to a customisation of the model for the African continent. A dedicated project management effort under the auspices of AfrEA and its member VOPE associations is necessary to do this. SAMEA can and should play a very strategic role in this regard.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The global domination of Western approaches to programme evaluation is increasingly questioned in non-Western contexts. Many of the evaluation principles, assumptions and practices that have developed in highly developed countries are frequently found to be unsuitable in lesser developed, non-Western cultural contexts where totally different principles and practices prevail. A one-size-fits-all recipe for evaluation is therefore impractical. Although this might be accepted as a common sense judgement, the problem is that evaluation cultures, practices and institutions in non-Western contexts are still weak and can in many cases not

compete effectively with the more established and entrenched evaluation systems in developed countries. Western evaluation approaches, norms, practices and evaluators therefore still dominate such non-Western contexts by default.

A conceptual breakthrough was made in the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) with the adoption of the Bellagio Report promoting the development of an Africa-rooted evaluation approach. The implications of the Bellagio Report (2013) are summarised and assessed in this article, and strategies are identified for building appropriate capacity to fast-track the implementation of the report's recommendations and taking the report findings further in the light of new developments and trends since its publication. The article will build on the findings and conclusions of Cloete, Rabie and De Coning (2014) on this issue and motivates why the envisaged Africa-rooted evaluation approach cannot comprise a substitution of the current Western one, but must of necessity be a refined and adapted version of it.

## **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EVALUATION IN AFRICA**

As happened in many other sectors, the practice of systematic programme evaluation was imported into Africa from North America and Western Europe where this emerging trans-discipline originated. It occurred as a result of important historical developments.

The first important general historical Western influence that impacted strongly on African evaluation was the colonial occupation of Africa by Western European powers during the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century, which brought the latest knowledge and practices especially from Britain and France to the African states colonised by those powers. These colonial influences did not end with the independence of most African states between the 1960s and 1980s, but expanded after independence in those states as a result of the continued economic and political reliance of those states for a variety of reasons on their former colonial rulers for development assistance and support. Political and economic independence were in many cases mostly on paper, rather than real substantive political independence. These continued colonial influences also included the systematic evaluation of development assistance programmes.

The second more specific external historical influence on evaluation in Africa is the fact that the current dominant global evaluation approaches, theories and practices largely originated in the United States of America (USA), Canada and Britain, and to a lesser extent on the rest of the Western European continent. This history is explained in a number of historical sources, and *inter alia* also summarised in Mouton, Rabie, De Coning & Cloete (2014: chapter 2). Influential evaluation scholars, especially in the USA, produced the first and later standardised text books on this emerging trans-discipline (e.g. Scriven, House, Stake, Weiss, Rossi & Freeman, Lipsey, Stufflebeam, Patton, Greene, Mertens, Fetterman), and also educated and trained professional evaluation scholars and practitioners across the world, including from African countries.

The third important historical root of the current Western domination of evaluation approaches and practices in Africa is the still prevailing influence of international development assistance agencies like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank



(WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and other international as well as national development agencies like those of the European Union (EU), the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom (UK) government, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Swedish International Development Coordination Agency (SIDA), the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ) and numerous others. These influences are based on the evaluation thought and practices developed and applied in the respective countries and agencies. Supplementing the primarily academic scholars, are highly influential evaluation practitioners in international agencies like Bamberger, Rist, Picciotto, Rugh, Segone and others who have come through the Western academic evaluation ranks summarised above, and developed professional evaluation practices and systems in international agencies like the WB, UNDP and UNICEF that were applied across the developing world. These mental models and practices are transferred to Africa via the requirements of development aid agreements which normally prescribe the involvement of existing approaches, practices and even evaluation practitioners and consultancies from the donor countries or agencies concerned.

The above factors are the main reasons for the current situation where evaluation thought and practices in Africa are still overwhelmingly Western-influenced. They are reinforced by other considerations like the fact that development assistance is not always readily available from non-Western sources, although the current involvement of China in Africa has opened up a new source of such assistance. Furthermore, as a result of the strong intellectual dominance of the above Western education practices, even in African countries themselves, it is only recently that more independent African voices articulating different routes to develop more explicit African approaches and practices in evaluation, have started to gain momentum.

## Responses from Africa

The history of evaluation in Africa is incomplete if one does not recognise the role of African researchers, policy analysts and evaluators in resisting colonial rule and policies. They played a crucial role in providing alternative views and evaluative opinions about the impact of Western powers on African developmental efforts, especially concerning the history of the evaluation of *structural adjustment* policies and experiences.

An important development for evaluation in Africa was the adoption of the *Lagos Plan of Action* at the first Extraordinary Economic Summit in Lagos, Nigeria in April 1980. The Lagos Plan of Action was a reaction to structural adjustment programmes imposed on African countries from the early eighties onward. The main argument was that Africa and the different regions in Africa should develop their own policy capacities in parallel to the African Capacity Building Initiative (ACBI) of the WB and the UNDP (see *inter alia* ACBF 1992; World Bank 1991 and Oosthuizen 1996). Another alternative policy capacity development agency established at the time, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), stated that: "...*(i)ndigenisation is not the notion of African leaders to create their own idiosyncratic 'indigenous' ideologies and then to insist that research efforts be harnessed to give respectability and coherence*" (CODESRIA 1993:19).

These developments included an increasing focus on the need for more resources for local researchers to do independent policy evaluation and research. Also, the injunction, *know thyself* which gives primacy to knowledge of Africa, was regarded as an important consideration. This could indeed be regarded as the early roots of self-assessment and peer review that later translated into the *African Peer Review Mechanism* (APRM) as a form of African-driven evaluation.

## **THE START OF SYSTEMATIC EVALUATION IN AFRICA**

The development of systematic evaluation in Africa started late as a result of mostly the same factors identified above. A network of evaluation practitioners was created by UNICEF in Nairobi, Kenya in 1977 to enhance capacity-building for UNICEF and other evaluations in East Africa. This initiative therefore attempted to create indigenous African evaluation capacity. The first of these developments took place in countries like the Comores, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda and Zimbabwe. In almost every case, the first meeting was initiated by UNICEF (Spring and Patel 2000).

In March 1987, an OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) seminar brought together donors and beneficiaries of development programmes to discuss objectives, means and experiences in evaluation. The outcome was an awareness of the need to strengthen evaluation capacities of developing countries. The OECD published the summary of the discussions in 1988 in its report titled *Evaluation in Developing Countries: A Step towards Dialogue*. This initiative called for a series of seminars to be held at regional level (i.e. Africa, Asia, Latin America), to intensify dialogue, discuss problems unique to each region, and recommend concrete and specific actions with a view to strengthening the evaluation capacities of developing countries.

Other prominent facilitators for evaluation capacity-building on the African continent during these early years, has been the AfDB and WB Operations Evaluation Departments. Two initial conferences hosted respectively by these two multilaterals in 1998 and 2000 raised further awareness around evaluation capacity development in Africa. It is important to note that even until 2012, the early initiatives to develop a more independent African evaluation character, therefore also originated from international multilateral agencies and not really from Africa itself.

## **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EVALUATION AS A PROFESSION IN AFRICA**

Until the 1980s, evaluation on the continent was largely driven by international actors—aid agencies, large non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and evaluators. It also manifested in the work of African community activists, political analysts, and later through policy analysis, research and policy evaluation. Since there was little indigenous evaluation capacity at the time as it had little prominence as a field of work or profession, subject specialists fulfilled this role (Ofir 2014). During the 1980s and the early 1990s, a diverse group of emerging evaluators in government, NGOs and the private sector (mainly from consulting firms),



showed a steady increase in number in responses to increasing evaluations by international donors and multi-lateral institutions. Since the early 2000s the momentum built up after the AfrEA conference in 1999 and the increasing formation of evaluation networks increased the profile of evaluation as a profession on the continent. According to Prof Zenda Ofir, a former President of AfrEA and also the main driving force behind the establishment of the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA), the inaugural AfrEA conference in 1999 represented a watershed moment for evaluation in Africa when more than 300 representatives from 35 countries converged in Nairobi to establish a continental association as platform for interaction between all Africans interested in evaluation. This conference was the genesis of AfrEA, whose activities over the past 15 years are seen by many as having been pivotal in the emergence of evaluation as a profession in Africa (Ofir 2014. See also Segone and Ocampo 2006 and Traore and Wally 2000).

In the late 1990s, increasing concern started to consolidate among African participants in these processes about the nature and impacts of the structural adjustment programmes of the WB and the IMF, as well as about the Western-dominated evaluation paradigms underlying the evaluations undertaken by non-African agencies and individuals in Africa. In a bibliographic review of evaluations undertaken in Africa,

*...the majority were found to have been requested by donors and international agencies. The majority of the first authors are not African. Of the original 133 articles that were reviewed, for example, three-quarters had a first author with a Western name, 15% were clearly African, and it was not clear in 12% of the cases. African author participation was acknowledged as second or third author in 12% of the total. There is some room for confusion as many of the authors and reviewers are African, but with names of European or Asian origin. While the authors are mostly non-African, the reviewers, however, are nearly all African, by conscious design of the authors (Spring and Patel 2000).*

In September 1999, AfrEA was established at a ground-breaking inaugural pan-African conference of evaluators held in Nairobi, Kenya, with 300 participants from 26 African countries. It was largely the result of efforts by Mahesh Patel, the Kenyan and other African country evaluation societies, financially supported by UNICEF. The theme of this conference was Building Evaluation Capacity in Africa. The main aims were to

Share information and build evaluation capacity;

- promote the formation of national evaluation associations;
- promote the knowledge and use of an African adaptation of the Programme Evaluation Standards;
- form an Africa-wide association, promoting evaluation both as a discipline and profession; and
- create and disseminate a database of evaluators.

The organisation constituted an important capacity-building and networking opportunity for everyone interested in systematic M&E practices on the African continent. It was the first attempt with an open invitation across sectors, institutions, including all countries and numerous policy-makers. Six AfrEA conferences have been convened to date. They have been held purposefully in different regions of the continent in order to stimulate interest in those regions.

The establishment of AfrEA was the consequence of the vision and energy of Mahesh Patel, then from UNICEF. It quickly flourished during these first few challenging years of its existence.

*We owe a debt of gratitude to Mahesh in particular, and the pioneers who supported him during that period. It is also important to note that AfrEA brought in many international experts for training, supported national evaluation association growth, established an Africa-wide community both virtually through a listserv and conferences. AfrEA also gave African evaluators a formal voice on international platforms where evaluation was being shaped among others in organisations such as the International Organisation for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), the High Level Meetings on Development Effectiveness, in arguing for a broader set of designs for impact evaluation during the formative stages of the Network of Networks on Impact Evaluation (NONIE) and the International Institute of Impact Evaluation (3ie), etc” (Ofir 2014).*

A South African evaluation community also emerged during this time, directly as a result of the establishment of AfrEA. Although there were some evaluation specialists in South Africa, few regarded it as a full-time occupation except in a few specialised units such as at the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) where a dedicated M&E unit was established in 1996, while the first M&E unit in the South African government was established in the Department of Land Affairs. After attending the first AfrEA conference, Ofir established Evalnet, one of the first consulting companies in South Africa that explicitly specialised only in evaluation. In 2002 she invited Michael Quinn Patton to South Africa. At one of his courses a decision was taken to establish the South African Evaluation Network (SAENet), also led by Ofir as an informal network with 2007 members connected via listserv. At the second AfrEA conference in Nairobi in 2002 she was nominated as the second AfrEA President, and as a result co-coordinated in 2004 with Dr Indran Naidoo, then Chief Director responsible for evaluation in the Public Service Commission (PSC), the third AfrEA conference in Cape Town. At this conference a process was also initiated to formalise SAENet as the South African M&E Association, SAMEA.

Ofir (2014) describes the evolution of evaluation into a profession in Africa as “a wave that gathered momentum during the 1990s and the 2000s”, but that still needs concerted, strategic efforts to develop it further if it is to fulfil its promise as a profession that can and should help accelerate the development of the continent. Its past and future growth should be considered against the background of the “colonialisation of evaluation”, where for decades foreign teams flew into the continent to evaluate African performance against measures and through processes often not understood or owned in Africa. Although much has been, and is still being learnt from international agencies and from the many committed international evaluators who have had African interests at heart, the practice and profession in Africa are now increasingly being shaped by local evaluators, and African evaluators are present in increasing numbers at international conferences. However, their work still tends to be less visible than desired, in part because only limited research on evaluation is being done at academic centres and by evaluators across the continent. Ofir (2014) emphasises that “...more innovative, and especially, visible scholarship and thought leadership in theory and practice from Africa is needed to push the frontiers of evaluation in support of our own as well as global development”.



## CURRENT STATUS OF EVALUATION IN AFRICA

Over the past 15 years the practice and profession of evaluation developed and expanded exponentially on the continent and elsewhere in the developing world. In 1999 there were only six national African evaluation associations. By 2002 this number had grown to 14, stimulated and supported by the new continent-wide community of evaluators. At the end of 2013 there were 143 verified evaluation associations and networks worldwide, of which 26 were in Africa (*now called Voluntary Organisations of Professional Evaluators (VOPEs)*). See *IOCE 2016*). This period also saw a significant increase in the interest of national governments in establishing M&E systems.

However, evaluations in Africa are still largely commissioned by non-African stakeholders who mostly comprise international donor or development agencies that run or fund development programmes on the continent. This is still a sensitive issue for many African evaluators, because perceptions have emerged in circles both in Africa and outside the continent that African evaluators have to improve their international competitiveness compared to their northern hemisphere counterparts because the profession in Africa is relatively new and there is much room for improvement. There is a major problem with the visibility of the profiles of African evaluators since there is not enough time to write about it for public consumption, or resources for large numbers of evaluators to travel to international conferences and other international events. Also there are just not enough evaluation scholars. However, this situation is changing fast and African evaluators are becoming increasingly internationally competitive. This is now *inter alia* facilitated by the publication of AfrEA's new mouthpiece, the African Evaluation Journal (AEJ 2016).

## AFRICA-ROOTED EVALUATION

As has become clear in the above summary so far, the main arguments in favour of a more Africa-rooted evaluation paradigm centre around the fact that the most visible evaluation approaches, models, theories, practices, specialists, scholars and practitioners that are currently operating in Africa are of Western origin (maybe with the notable exception of Huey Chen). The most influential argument is that the current Western evaluation paradigm is not always optimal in Africa and needs to be contextualised to be more suitable to African conditions, cultures and institutions. In this process the prevailing African ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies have to be infused in a more holistic transdisciplinary manner into the application of systematic programme evaluation on the continent (Chilisa and Malunga 2012 and Bellagio Report 2013).

Chilisa and Malunga state that there is a need for two main African transformations of current Western evaluation culture and practices in the Evaluation Tree (Alkin 2013). The first is

*...decolonizing and indigenizing evaluation ... to recognize the adaptation of the accumulated Western theory and practice on evaluation to serve the needs of Africans" while the second is the development of a "...relational evaluation branch' (that) ... draws from the concept of 'wellness' as personified in African greetings and the southern African concept of 'I am because we are'. The wellness reflected in the relationship between people extends also to*



*non-living things, emphasizing that evaluation from an African perspective should include a holistic approach that links an intervention to the sustainability of the ecosystem and environment around it.*

For evaluation to be *rooted* in Africa it should for example include an analysis of the intervention's contribution towards community wellness, and balance both Western and African priorities and indicators. The question is what this change would entail?

## The Bellagio Report 2013

The most authoritative assessment of the need for a specific Africa-rooted approach to evaluation was summarised in the 2013 Bellagio Report. The Report on the *African Thought Leaders Forum on Evaluation and Development: Expanding Leadership in Africa* provides a very well-articulated view of the concept of evaluation that is driven by, and rooted in Africa. This meeting was the result of a special initiative taken at the 2007 AfrEA conference in Niamey, Niger, where a day-long special session with support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) led to a formal statement encouraging Africa to *Make Evaluation our Own* (AfrEA Special Stream Statement 2007), later transformed by AfrEA into a *Made in Africa* strategy for evaluation. The stream was designed to bring African and other international experiences in evaluation and in development evaluation to help stimulate the debate on M&E. The Anglophile Africa Regional Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR-AA) facilitated a series of discussions in the Bellagio Centre in Italy, and subsequently published the Bellagio Report (2013)<sup>1</sup>.

The following key issues were identified in 2007 as a guiding framework for further discussion:

*“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”*

- *...evaluation...needs to address...country ownership; the macro-micro disconnect; attribution; ethics and values; and power-relations;*
- *Need to re-examine our own preconceived assumptions; underpinning values, paradigms (e.g. transformative vs pragmatic); what is acknowledged as being evidence; and by whom, before we can select any particular methodology/approach” (AfrEA Special Stream Statement 2007).*

*The purpose of the Bellagio meeting was to “...encourage fresh thinking for Made in Africa Approach to Evaluation by AfrEA”...“Thought leadership in evaluation in Africa is rare or largely invisible in shaping innovative national, regional or global evaluation thinking and practices in Africa “ (Bellagio Report 2013:5).*

The Report encourages evaluators to explore what *Africa driven and Africa rooted evaluation* means to them. It has been suggested that the African evaluation community should in the next phase of its evolution focus on developing substantiated theories and practices that illuminate the question *“if evaluation had originated in Africa, what would it be like?”* (Ofir





2014). It is also clear that a need exists to further explore what ‘indigenous evaluation’ means, and its origins, as is already being done elsewhere in the world.

The Bellagio Report (2013) noted that the lack or low profile of ‘thought leadership’ in evaluation in Africa has to be addressed: “

*Considering development contexts, frameworks and trends, and their implications for the evaluation profession provides a starting point for such thought leadership. Influential evaluation findings lead to new development approaches. As development strategies evolve, so do evaluation approaches. The African evaluation profession therefore occasionally needs to take stock of how the development context is influencing – or should influence – the direction of their theory and practice ... Participants discussed the development-evaluation interface and its implications for evaluation in Africa over the next decade, engaging with:*

- *The unfolding context for development and evaluation;*
- *The core belief in the value of Africa rooted evaluation for development;*
- *First steps towards a framework for Africa rooted evaluation;*
- *The notion of ‘Africa driven’ evaluation for development; and*
- *Potential strategies for action, change and influence”.*

The view expressed by the group who met in Bellagio is that this debate is not yet prominent or visible enough in the intellectual sphere in Africa. Chilisa and Malunga (2012) undertook a seminal exercise in preparation for the 2012 Bellagio meeting to identify, explain and contextualise different indigenous evaluation attributes that could be considered in future for African-rooted evaluations. These ideas are explained in the Bellagio Report which considered inter alia the historical significance of evaluation, i.e. its historical roots in Africa, the spiritual identity of Africans and how it relates to evaluation, the importance of empowerment approaches to evaluation, group participation and thinking in evaluation as well as African decision-making processes and methodologies, such as decision-making by consensus. It is for these reasons that participative evaluation, also through self-assessment and peer review, has become such an important approach in acknowledging the inherent value that lies in African evaluation. In their working paper for the Bellagio meeting, Chilisa and Malunga (2012:551) emphasised that

*an African lives in and for the community. The individual cannot exist without the community and the community cannot exist without the individual. The conscious interdependence between the individual and the community is what characterizes that which is essentially African. This model is built on the concept of Ubuntu ...which, in simple terms, means community, and the essence of being human.*

They also identified the following five interrelated principles of ubuntu that African societies according to them use as basis for their assessments of community/societal progress: Sharing and collective ownership of opportunities, responsibilities and challenges, the importance of people and relationships over things, participatory decision-making and leadership, reconciliation as the goal for conflict management and resolution, and loyalty.

The executive summary of the Bellagio Report summarised the thought leadership required to establish a more explicit recognition of the African context within which evaluations in Africa take place and a more explicit Africanisation of evaluation designs and methodologies as follows:

- i. *“understanding the role of changing and complex contexts in evaluation, and using systems thinking for holistic solutions,*
- ii. *the role of norms and values in development and in evaluation,*
- iii. *the need for Africa rooted and Africa led evaluation,*
- iv. *policy coherence from national to global levels, to be analyzed in tandem with the micro-macro disconnect,*
- v. *mutual accountability in development financing programs and in development interventions,*
- vi. *evaluation beyond an obsession with “impact”, to include a stronger focus on “managing for impact” (which includes ongoing monitoring for impact, learning and adaptive management); concepts such as vulnerability, sustainability and resilience; and a nuanced interpretation of “value for money”,*
- vii. *engaging with sensitive issues such as macro political trends, the often mindless rhetoric around concepts such as democracy and human rights, and the ongoing obscuring of truth in ‘evidence’, and their role in the effectiveness of development strategies,*
- viii. *searching for unintended consequences and unexpected impacts,*
- ix. *synthesis that produces useful knowledge, and*
- x. *evaluation in (self-determined) priority content areas” (2013:10).*

The Bellagio meeting resolved to pursue the following strategies to move towards an Africa-rooted evaluation culture (Bellagio Report 2013:14. See also Ofir 2013):

- *“Catalyzing ‘thought leadership’ on evaluation in Africa through credible, independent, not-for-profit actors, dynamic, continuous dialogues within a liberal thinking space, key frameworks, policies, strategies & aid relevant for Africa, belief- and value-laden nature of dev & eval theory and practice rooted in Africa, inform institutionalized, sustainable, effective innovative eval systems in government.*
- *There should also be a transparent, public repository of knowledge on African evaluation assisted by specialist universities, think tanks and evaluation projects...”*

At the 2014 Conference of AfrEA in Yaounde in Cameroon, the AEJ, which has been in the pipeline for a number of years, was launched while a formal mapping of key evaluation individuals, organisations, networks/coalitions and initiatives in Africa is in progress with the purpose to engage them in different ways to develop a broad-based consensus about the next steps to implement the Bellagio resolutions. These steps include follow-up forums to work out the details of implementation, to establish *“a network / community of practice of African evaluation “thought leaders” (on theory and practice) who are prepared to advance work on key concepts related to Africa-rooted and Africa-led evaluation”*, as well as a resource repository for this purpose (The Bellagio Report 2013:14).

It is clear that the Bellagio meeting has already made a considerable effort in attempting to identify ways to improve the application of current evaluation knowledge and practices more effectively in the African context. The report, however, just identifies a number of issues that should be addressed and changed for the African context. However, what exactly should be done, why, how, by whom, when and with what resources, are not yet clear. This refinement and expansion of the Bellagio Report is necessary for implementation purposes. The most cost-effective way to proceed from here is probably for AfrEA to establish a formal Project Steering Group to develop a

business plan with clear project management goals, resources, time frames and outcomes that can in a more concrete and measurable manner identify the different evaluation activities that need to be changed in order to develop over time a distinct African evaluation identity. I would like to suggest that the following conceptual framework could be useful in this regard:

## WHAT IS THE WESTERN EVALUATION APPROACH AND WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

The main questions that need to be concretely answered probably include *inter alia* the following:

1. Is it possible to identify Western, African, Asian and for that matter Latin-Caribbean evaluation approaches that differ fundamentally?
2. What, if anything, should change in the prevailing Western evaluation culture and practices for and in the African context?
3. How could an Africa-rooted evaluation approach improve current evaluation approach shortcomings for Africa? and
4. How should such a transition to a more Africa-rooted evaluation system be approached?

At the moment there are no clear-cut answers to these questions. I suggest that one would be able to consider the answers to these questions in better perspective by distinguishing systematically the possible differences between a Western and a more appropriate African approach that have been identified so far above, as well as possible additional differences, in the following specific evaluation activities<sup>2</sup>:

Evaluation Stage	Evaluation activity	Evaluation Activity Description	Western approach	African approach
<b>Planning and Design</b>	<b>Evaluation Values and Assumptions</b>	What are the main values and assumptions underlying the evaluation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donor and Government Accountability?</li> <li>• Efficiency?</li> <li>• Effectiveness?</li> <li>• Responsiveness?</li> <li>• Ethics?</li> <li>• Reductionism?</li> <li>• Pragmatism?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pleasing ancestors?</li> <li>• Dignity?</li> <li>• Self-esteem?</li> <li>• Respect?</li> <li>• Wellness?</li> <li>• Loyalty?</li> <li>• Ubuntu?</li> <li>• Solidarity</li> <li>• Relationships?</li> <li>• Holism?</li> <li>• Equity?</li> <li>• Ethics?</li> <li>• Participation?</li> <li>• Fairness?</li> <li>• Reflexivity?</li> <li>• Empowerment?</li> <li>• Development?</li> <li>• Vulnerability?</li> <li>• Sustainability?</li> <li>• Resilience?</li> <li>• Value for money?</li> <li>• Reconciliation?</li> </ul>

Evaluation Stage	Evaluation activity	Evaluation Activity Description	Western approach	African approach
Planning and Design	<b>Evaluation Purpose and Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the purpose of the evaluation?</li> <li>• What is the evaluation focus?</li> <li>• Why is this focus selected?</li> <li>• How is this focus selected?</li> <li>• Is the focus of the evaluation appropriate?</li> <li>• Evaluation Management standards?</li> <li>• Nature of evidence?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Externally-driven evaluations</li> <li>• Improvement in life quality/ happiness?</li> <li>• Impact?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internally-driven evaluations</li> <li>• Transformation in life quality/ happiness?</li> <li>• Basic services &amp; facilities?</li> <li>• AfrEA Evaluation Guidelines?</li> </ul>
	<b>Evaluation Design</b>	What is the most appropriate evaluation design?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bias towards Statistical Counterfactual?</li> <li>• RCTs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bias towards Rigorous Qualitative</li> <li>• Design?</li> <li>• Power relationships?</li> </ul>
Implementation and Use	<b>Data Collection</b>	What are the most appropriate evaluation data collection and monitoring strategies?	Rigorous statistical sampling?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culturally sensitive participatory processes?</li> <li>• Indigenous knowledge?</li> </ul>
	<b>Data Analysis</b>	What are the most appropriate data analysis Indicators and strategies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rigorous quantitative and qualitative analyses?</li> <li>• Causal Attribution?</li> <li>• Generic indicators?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rigorous Qualitative analyses?</li> <li>• Programme Contribution? SDG Indicators?</li> </ul>
	<b>Data Presentation and Communication</b>	What are the most appropriate data presentation and communication strategies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written and oral?</li> <li>• Existing mass media?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral &amp; visual emphasis?</li> <li>• Different communication channels?</li> </ul>
	<b>Evaluation Use</b>	What are the most appropriate ways in which evaluation findings and lessons can be used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education?</li> <li>• Improvement?</li> <li>• Accountability?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education?</li> <li>• Improvement?</li> <li>• Accountability?</li> <li>• Empowerment?</li> </ul>
	<b>Evaluation Policy and Regulatory Frameworks</b>	What are the most appropriate evaluation policy and regulatory frameworks?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-size-fits all?</li> <li>• Legislation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experimentation?</li> <li>• Context-sensitive customisation?</li> </ul>
	<b>Evaluation Capacity-building</b>	What are the most appropriate education and training approaches?	Generic M&E training?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context-sensitive content and facilitation?</li> </ul>

The envisaged AfrEA Steering Group on the Development of an Africa-rooted Evaluation Model should also have sub-groups to monitor the implementation of each of the above evaluation

activities further, and to develop its own explicit theory of change to comply with good evaluation practice. Unpacked in this way, it seems as if an *Africa-rooted* evaluation paradigm would not contain substantive differences from the prevailing *Western* evaluation paradigm, but its purpose, focus, design and implementation would probably just be more sensitive to African cultural contexts and practices in order to achieve the most accurate and valid results.

This is also the case with evaluation design and implementation in other cultural contexts (e.g. in the context of Native Americans, New Zealand Maoris, Australian Aborigines, South African Khoi-San, Brazilian, Indian and other indigenous cultural tribes and groups) (see AIHEC 2015). There is a very active thought leadership stream in the American Evaluation Association (AEA) that focuses on what they call 'Culturally Competent Evaluation' (LaFrance and Nichols 2010; Rog, Fitzpatrick and Conner 2012 and Gervin 2012).

## **ROLE OF SAMEA**

Before the establishment of SAMEA, South African evaluation scholars and practitioners were prominent in the development and consolidation of evaluation not only in South Africa but also in other African countries. Since the establishment of SAMEA, its members have continued to play active roles in this regard and also in the establishment and consolidation of AfrEA itself. SAMEA is at the moment one of the most active institutional VOPE members of AfrEA. SAMEA has the full support of the South African government in the form of the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency as well as of the Public Service Commission which has the mandate of evaluating the implementation by the government of the values in the South African Constitution. SAMEA is therefore strategically situated to play an important leading role in the development of an Africa-rooted evaluation culture and practice on this continent. I trust that the SAMEA Board of Directors will seriously consider prioritising this project among their other activities. I also trust that individual members of SAMEA will actively promote the development and consolidation of an Africa-rooted evaluation culture in their respective activities. SAMEA and its individual members can and should also become regionally and globally more active and visible as thought leaders to identify and promote more innovative thinking and practices in evaluation in Africa.

## **CONCLUSION**

The global consolidation of systematic evaluation as a distinct profession with its own distinct applied paradigms, theories and methodologies was very strongly influenced if not to a large extent dominated by developments, approaches, methodologies and practices in the USA, the UK and other Western countries. The establishment of systematic policy, programme and project evaluation in other parts of the globe only started relatively recently (virtually only since the beginning of the 1990s). Only recently have increasing voices been raised in non-Western contexts in favour of the development of culturally distinct approaches and practices that are more congruent with the local value systems in those regions.

There is a growing concern across the globe that a one-size-fits-all evaluation approach according to the Western evaluation model is not always appropriate in culturally and

developmentally different contexts. The history of evaluation in Africa is a case in point. However, one must ask the question to what extent this implies a totally new evaluation approach or ‘paradigm’ that can be regarded as different from a so-called Western evaluation paradigm or for that matter an Asian or Maori evaluation paradigm. It is generally accepted that ‘context matters’ (which was the theme of the 2013 AEA Conference in Washington DC), and that the so-called Western evaluation paradigm recognises different cultural differences that need to be taken into account in different evaluation activities. It is still an open question, though, what changes should be brought about for the prevailing Western model of evaluation to be more appropriate to Africa and how these differences should be dealt with. The table above might present a useful way of looking at the most salient issues in this regard.

The concept of a more appropriate Africa-rooted evaluation management model has been placed on the evaluation agenda in Africa. An influential response to this debate is contained in the Bellagio Report and other statements. This report is the most concrete input so far in this debate, but it needs to be concretised better in order to be implemented successfully. The proposals for a coherent and dedicated implementation plan for the Bellagio Report that have been summarised in this article, can fast-track the refinement of the prevailing Western model of evaluation in a different African context, and create more appropriate capacity for evaluation in Africa. It does not amount to a substitution of the prevailing model of evaluation, but rather amounts to a customisation of the model for the African continent. In this customisation process, it is crucial that African evaluators, both scholars and practitioners, obtain clarity about exactly what needs to change in the current evaluation model, and how to do it. For this purpose, a dedicated project management effort under the auspices of AfrEA and its member VOPE associations is necessary.

## NOTES

- 1 The Bellagio meeting was held on 14 – 17 November 2012. The participants were Prof Doha Abdel Hamid – Egypt, Dr Isaac Bekalo–(Moderator) Ethiopia, Prof Bagele Chilisa – Botswana, Dr Josiah Cobbah – Ghana, Prof Laila El Baradei – Egypt, Dr Sulley Gariba – Ghana, Irene Karanja – Kenya, Hajia Alima Mahama – Ghana, Dr Chiku Malunga – Malawi, Prof Robin Moore–South Africa, Dr Roa Muraguri-Mwololo – Kenya, Dr Zenda Ofir–South Africa, Mr Stephen Porter (CLEAR-AA) –Britain, Dr Sukai Prom-Jackson–The Gambia, Prof Akilagpa Sawyerr – Ghana, Debbie Serwadda – Uganda, Nermine Wally – Egypt, Prof Alaphia Wright–Sierra Leone, Kieron Crawley (CLEAR – AA Forum Project Manager) – Ireland.
- 2 These issues have emanated from the Bellagio discussions so far as well as from other investigations into culturally sensitive evaluations. I frame them in the form of open-ended questions to be answered or issues to be clarified rather than definitively different issues that are identified. Kwakami, Aton, Cram, Lai & Porima (2008) and AIHEC (2012) also suggest frameworks for ‘culturally competent’ evaluations that comprise similar elements.

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