




Towards equitable evaluation through the use of the African Evaluation Principles



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Background: Evaluation has often been associated with Northern paradigms in its formulation and practice. It is extractive in nature and often a top-down approach that implies that those who receive aid or interventions have no voice and no rights. The African Evaluation Principles (AEPs) are aimed at addressing power asymmetries that exist within the evaluation ecosystem in Africa while giving agency, voice and power to Africans.

Objectives: The article explores the role that colonisation has played and continues to influence how development is carried out and therefore, how and when evaluations are carried out and who performs the evaluation. Specifically, it explores the AEPs and how they could be used to contribute to addressing inequalities and power asymmetries.

Methods: The article reviews secondary data and uses one's own experiences on the continent and observation.

Results: The article discusses how the AEPs could contribute to making the concept of equitable evaluation more relevant and applicable in the practice of evaluations in Africa. The article highlights the role of African indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, values and traditions to inform what equitable evaluation could look like from an African perspective.

Conclusion: The article concludes that there is much work and commitment needed to ensure the use of the AEPs to contribute towards the practice of true equitable evaluation where this is genuinely practiced with the aim of addressing power asymmetries and inequalities. This requires a change of mindsets, challenging one's own biases as well as the power imbalances.

Contribution: This article contributes to better understanding of AEPs and how they could be used to achieve equitable evaluation.

Keywords: African Evaluation Principles; decolonisation; equitable evaluation; *Ubuntu*; power asymmetry; inequalities.

Introduction

In 2017, the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) agreed to revise its guidelines that were first developed in 2002 and revised in 2007 (AfrEA 2021). One of the major reasons for the review of the guidelines was to align them with Africa's development contexts and cultures, ensuring that they are fully indigenised. A major purpose among others of the African Evaluation Principles (AEPs) 'was to protect and advance African societies in unity with the natural ecosystems on which life depends on' (AfrEA 2021). The AEPs were also intended to address power asymmetries and inequalities within the evaluation ecosystem and this aligned to the growing interest in equitable evaluation with many funders and development agencies calling for the evaluation practice to address the power asymmetries and inequalities that have riddled the evaluation process as whole (Stein, Andreotti & Suša 2019). The power asymmetries and inequalities that exist within the evaluation field and indeed in development as a whole are a result of colonialism, which undermined Africans and their culture and sought to destroy their very humanity (Sibanda & Ofir 2021). Unfortunately, equitable evaluation has been used as a metaphor or a buzzword that is aimed at window dressing similar to the way that the term decolonisation has become popular yet there is very little being done to address it (Tuck & Yang 2012). Equitable evaluation has been practiced superficially while maintaining the status quo. The 'metaphorisation' of equitable evaluation is a form of appeasement that allows for a sense of innocence by those perpetuating the power asymmetries and inequalities in the evaluation field (Tuck & Yang 2012). This article discusses what is true equitable evaluation and why it is necessary. It reviews the cause of power asymmetries and inequalities in development and the field of evaluation, specifically, how this has perpetuated the position and condition of the people of Africa. To fully practice equitable evaluation, there is need to challenge the Northern paradigms that have

determined how evaluations are conducted. Evaluations on the continent continue to follow standards and norms that do not take into the context where these interventions and programmes are being implemented. It is necessary to confront the dominance of the North in determining who evaluates and whose values guide the evaluation. It is critical to dismantle the mindsets that have since maintained the status quo. Shifting mindsets and attitudes require a conscious effort of unlearning and learning beliefs, values and thought processes that have guided both individuals and organisations globally and in the development agenda. It is crucial to identify and understand the structural barriers that exist in order to confront the ways in which evaluation has perpetuated these power asymmetries and inequalities (Dean-Coffey, Casey & Caldwell 2014). The article reviews two key principles among the five AEPs that are discussed in Table 1.

The two principles that this article will review and are most aligned to the idea of equitable evaluation are: Powerful for Africans and Ethically sound. Powerful for Africans focuses on the following: 'conduct an appropriate and empowering process; encourage reciprocity, including mutual accountability; enable learning for useful insights and value and strengthen domestic capacities' (AfrEA 2021). Very often, evaluations are one sided, where evaluators mainly from the North, come in to 'educate and be overbearing' to local communities and local evaluators. The AEP requires this to change and ensure that everyone is valued and that they have power in the evaluation process.

The principle on:

Ethically sound promotes sensitivity to stakeholders and relationships; protecting the rights of people; safeguard diversity and inclusion; address inequalities and power asymmetries; evaluation that is free from vested interests and evaluation that considers trade-offs. (AfrEA 2021:9)

Meaning and relevance of equitable evaluation

Equitable evaluation addresses historical practices and dynamics that have demeaned the knowledge, expertise, voice, agency, lived realities and ways of knowing of evaluation actors and communities from the Global South

(Stein et al. 2019). It should be emphasised that equitable evaluation should permeate the whole evaluation process including design, conduct, use and findings. It aims to confront evaluation and assessment processes, resources and strategies using an equity lens (Dean-Coffey et al. 2014). Equitable evaluation is vital for those historically marginalised; hence, necessitating the need to engage this imperative subject in light of the colonisation and decolonisation debate, while drawing lessons from post-colonial thinkers from the Global South. It is crucial to give agency and voice through addressing power asymmetries and inequalities to ensure credible, relevant evaluation processes and results. Equity is also pivotal to eliminate poverty in all its forms particularly monetary poverty. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals highlight the principle of leaving no one behind that is important to ensure all the Agenda 2030 goals are met (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2015). Equally so, the Agenda 2063, which preceded Agenda 2030 and is less quoted, emphasises broad-based inclusive participatory and systems approaches (African Union 2015). The fact that Agenda 2063 is less quoted than the Agenda 2030 emphasises the power asymmetries that exist within the development discourse. Agenda 2063 that is relevant to Africa's development agenda should be the dominant agenda within the continent to ensure ownership, legitimacy and relevance to Africa's needs. However, this article will not focus on the development architecture, although informed by it, discussions will be limited to the evaluation ecosystem.

Colonialism and its role in creating and perpetuating power asymmetries and inequality in evaluation

Colonisation and post-colonial thought are heavily intertwined. Colonisation is defined as the occupying of a nation that is not of one's origin with the aim of amassing wealth for one's mother country, which is often characterised by the scramble for Africa in the late 19th century into the 20th century where European nations went about dividing Africa into portions at the Berlin Conference that in essence belonged to each nation and was to be used at the discretion of each nation

TABLE 1: Summary of the five African Evaluation Principles.

P. Powerful for Africans	T. Technically robust	E. Ethically sound	A. Africa centric yet open	C. Connected with the world
P1. Conduct an appropriate, empowering process	T1. Be systematic & analytical	E1. Be sensitive to stakeholders and relationships	A1. Engage with issues that matter in Africa	C1. Acknowledge interdependence and interconnectedness
P2. Encourage reciprocity, including mutual accountability	T2. Be transparent & clear	E2. Protect the rights of people	A2. Consider framings and methods from Africa	C2. Foster the evaluation of sustainability in keeping with key international agreements, and with the stewardship of nature
P3. Enable learning for useful insights	T3. Be aware of dispositions	E3. Safeguard diversity and inclusion	A3. Learn and adapt from the Global South, indigenous communities, and other contexts	C3. Strive to contribute to the urgent need for sustainable and transformative change
P4. Value and strengthen domestic capacities	T4. Ensure a feasible evaluation	E4. Address inequalities and power asymmetries	-	-
-	T5. Be efficient	E5. Be free from vested interests	-	-
-	T6. Be culturally responsive	E6. Consider tradeoffs	-	-

Source: African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), 2021, *The African evaluation principles*

(Michalopoulos & Papaioannou 2016). Colonisation made it so the 'development' that was experienced by the oppressed indigenous people of Africa would be unsustainable in the absence of the colonial government. This was done through reducing access that the indigenous people had to education and resources to limit how far they could progress without relying on the colonisers and their skills (Macquarrie 1960). Similarly, there was limiting of indigenous involvement in the day-to-day affairs resulting in them being bound to positions where manual labour was the only skill that was demanded from the indigenous. After the colonisers physically left or handed over power to the indigenous peoples, the oppression through coloniality continued. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) describes coloniality:

[A]s long standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism and these are being experienced today. They shape the experiences of the majority of African nations, if not all of them that experienced colonisation. Coloniality, defines culture, labour, and knowledge production beyond the colonial administrations. (p 487)

It is coloniality, which is the remnant of colonialism that is contended with today and shapes capital and development. The way evaluations are conducted bears a great resemblance to colonial practices as often when evaluations take place in a former colonised nation the methodology and approaches as well as paradigms governing the evaluation are Western conceived and are often not suited for the population or the continent they are evaluating (Chilisa 2015). For example, the paradigms or lens that are used in such evaluations take a positivist or post-positivist approach instead of employing African paradigms such Relational African Paradigms as espoused by Chilisa (2015). In addition, such evaluations that are conceived from a Western perspective do not consider the cultures, values and ways of knowing of the different communities where the evaluations are conducted. Frehiwot (2019) notes that 'most evaluation in the Global South is rooted in dominant Western approaches. Western evaluation methods and approaches, when used in Africa, may in fact lack validity, leading to low-quality evaluations, wrong conclusions and bad development outcomes. Western evaluation approaches may encourage subjugation of African culture through neo-imperialism and the "colonisation of the mind". This often leads to inaccuracies in recording of results where some systems that are in place may be considered inefficient or redundant by Western standards while in the local contexts, the systems are seen to be suited to the culture and the context of the Indigenous peoples who consider the results successful'.

Inequality is further seen in the use of evaluators from the West, who have little to no understanding of the cultural context of the region they are evaluating, so the reality that exists and traditions that may be practiced that are of significant value to the indigenous peoples are dismissed because they are not understood (Sibanda & Ofir 2021). This may also be an expression of unconscious bias against the indigenous peoples who are usually subjects of evaluation,

the lack of understanding of systems in place may lead to a 'white saviour complex' in which the evaluators of the West believe it is for them to ensure the Africans adopt Western practices in their daily lives as they are viewed as the 'correct' way of doing things, which may not be the case. While the use of African evaluators is pertinent, it is also important to interrogate the influence that Western education may have had on African evaluators, which may require them to shift their mindsets or worldviews in order to be attuned to the practical realities of the local contexts and cultures if they are not already embedded in this worldview. Agency as an issue within evaluation needs to be looked at through the contextual lens of what indigenous people had previously been exposed to. Fanon (1952) speaks about decolonisation as reclaiming of the indigenous peoples' dignity, which increases their sense of agency and once again become 'respectable members of the World Community', (Ranuga 1986) and take charge of their own development priorities and get involved in determining what is measured and what success looks like (Sibanda & Ofir 2021).

Post-colonial thinkers and scholars have been calling for the decolonisation of all sectors, starting with the decolonisation of the mind. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) calls for the dismantling of the epistemological and political in spaces that experienced colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism and underdevelopment. He calls this process decoloniality, for the sake of clarity, in this article decolonisation will be used to embrace decoloniality. Decolonisation as a process should be embraced to systematically address the power asymmetries and inequalities in the evaluation field. The structures and subjectivity that define unequal power relations would need to be addressed if equitable evaluation is to become a reality. The systems of values and beliefs as well as naturalised inequalities that assume that Northern ideas, people and institutions have greater value than those of the Global South need to be challenged and addressed (Sibanda & Ofir 2021).

Post-colonial thinking and influence on agency

Post-colonial thought can contribute to inform how evaluations can be more equitable because it outlines the subjugation and inequalities that the indigenous peoples grappled with and still exist today. There is a need to acknowledge the legacy of colonialism and how it limited the agency of the indigenous people of Africa and reduced them effectively to second-class citizens in their own countries of origin while colonisers looted their resources with a singular aim of furthering their own wealth through the exploitation of a nation's natural resources (Wilderson 2008). In addition, there is need to employ the use of post-colonial thought to structure the evaluation process including frameworks to avoid disempowering the indigenous people and once again strip them of their agency and dignity. There is urgent need to find solutions that do not alienate indigenous cultural practices but complement them, and this needs to be the centre for equitable evaluation.

Principles of equitable evaluation

It is widely believed that the idea of equitable evaluations was influenced by Bamberger and Segone's (2011) ideas on equity-focused evaluations. They observe the following key aspects of equity-focused evaluations: focus on the worst off (difficult to reach socially marginalised), context specific, complex social processes, attitudes and behavioural change (Bamberger & Segone 2011). Equity-focused evaluation requires design, analysis and interpretation processes that are objective, rigorous and systematic in order to be relevant and meet the concerns of the historically marginalised (Bamberger & Segone 2011). They stress that the conduct of equity-focused evaluations is similar to conventional evaluations but with a focus on equity, that is using the same methods and approaches that have been used in the past. This is a departure from equitable evaluations that challenge the methods and approaches of conventional evaluations. Other scholars such as Dean-Coffey et al. (2014) believe that equitable evaluations emanated from culturally responsive evaluations. Culturally responsive evaluations emphasise the need for inclusivity, cultural competency, mixed methods, context-specific and relationship building (Stern et al. 2019). Hood, Hopson and Kirkhart (2015) give an understanding of the key tenets of culturally responsive evaluations describing it as multidimensional, upholding contextual characteristics of culture, warns against 'evaluating down', which is a deficit perspective, encouraging a focus on culturally specific knowledge. Trust, respect, confronting power issues and social justice, inclusivity, use of appropriate language, reflexivity, upholding values of the communities and use of culturally appropriate protocols are some of the key characteristics of culturally responsive evaluations (Hood et al. 2015). Chouinard and Cram (2019) outline central themes in culturally responsive evaluations as follows: use of collaborative approaches; development of culturally specific measures; broader conceptualisation of culture; focus on the evaluator and stakeholder relationships and their role, emphasising 'authentic relationships'; identification of cultural translators and methods and instruments that are adapted to the cultural context.

The key tenets of equitable evaluations include cultural competence, consideration of cultural diversity, contextual relevance, ownership by stakeholders, reflection on inequities, contextualising of quantitative data; inclusion of perspectives of the stakeholders – inclusivity and participant engagement and self-reflection (Stern et al. 2019). The Center for Evaluation Innovation (2017) identifies three key principles of equitable evaluations, which are proposed for foundations to adhere to and these are:

[E]valuation and evaluative work in service of equity meaning that all work must aim to advance progress towards equity; evaluative work should be designed and implemented commensurate with the values underlying equity work – multiculturally valid and oriented towards participant ownership and lastly evaluative work can and should answer critical questions relating to how historical and structural decisions have contributed to the conditions to be addressed;

effects on different populations on underlying systemic drivers of inequity and also address ways in which cultural context permeates in both structural and change initiative. (Centre for Evaluation Innovation 2017:1).

The focus on how historical and structural decisions have affected the conditions that the different populations find themselves in is a point of departure from equity-focused evaluations, which seem neutral in their approach to challenging the historical injustices. Similarly, this stance is shared by Hood et al. (2015) where they reference confronting power issues and social justice, which are core issues affecting many countries in the Global South. Very often evaluations pay a blind eye to the historical injustices and fail to explain why the stakeholders find themselves in the condition and position they are.

How can *Ubuntu* inform equitable evaluation?

As discussed earlier, the development of the AEPs was informed by the concept of *Ubuntu* and its principles that are common to many sub-Saharan countries can shade more light on how equitable evaluations could be authentically implemented in Africa. The team that developed the AEP represented different cultures on the African continent and identified with the concept of *Ubuntu* as it is practiced in the different parts of Africa. It is important to understand *Ubuntu* principles and their relevance to evaluations in Africa and specifically equitable evaluation. The *Ubuntu* principles that have governed the African people, focused on the well-being of the people as a collective as opposed to as individuals remain central (Modiri 2021).

Ubuntu is a Zulu term that means 'I am what I am because of who we all are'. It describes the communal nature of the African reality and way of being, the extended family, immediate family and the community are the basis through which individuals understand their own being (Chuwu 2014; Van Niekerk 2013). Ramose (1999) observes that individuals are defined and find meaning in the community and inversely for the community, it is defined by individuals; therefore the community and the individual cannot be separated in understanding African societies. Nabudere (2005) asserts that *Ubuntu* enhances the African people's self-concept and a sense of identity. Maposa (2018) emphasises the role of the elders as sages (whose knowledge is often unwritten and shared orally) whose knowledge they impart to the young people. The acknowledgement of the elders is very important particularly in the age where the indigenous custodians of culture and knowledge have been ignored or 'cancelled'. The Western paradigms espouse the saying that 'if it is not written it does not exist', which then negates the rich and valuable knowledge that is on the continent. In the conduct of evaluations, it is important to be cognisant of the unwritten nature of knowledge within the African tradition and find ways of tapping into this rich knowledge through elders and sages.

Ubuntu (Uvanhu in Shona) is based on a set of explicit values that includes caring, sharing, reciprocity, cooperation, compassion and empathy – recognising that for human beings to develop, flourish and reach their full potential, they need to conduct their relationships in a manner that promotes the well-being of others and the environment (Mawere & Van Stam 2016). The values championed in *Ubuntu* have in the past informed and in the majority of cases continued to shape African cultural, social, political and ethical thought and action.

Key to understanding the African culture is to be cognisant of the communalism tradition, the role of elders as sages and therefore the importance of indigenous knowledge systems that provide valuable wisdom in understanding the African realities and ways of knowing. It is critical to understand that the unwritten wealth of knowledge provides for a deeper understanding of the intricacies of the condition and position of the African people and their culture and the way interventions may impact both negatively and positively on these. The use of local evaluators who are ‘cultural translators’ (Hood et al. 2015) and are knowledgeable about the history and social structures is one way to address this. They are able to interrogate deeper power asymmetries because they have lived under the same subjugation as the stakeholders where the interventions are taking place.

The *Ubuntu* principles of caring, sharing, reciprocity, cooperation, compassion and empathy (Mawere & Van Stam 2016) are critical in building equitable partnerships, relations with stakeholders, following due process during evaluations as well as analysis and feedback. In the next section, we discuss how the AEPs could be applied within the context of equitable evaluations in Africa.

Using the African Evaluation Principles to inform equitable evaluations in the African context

All evaluations should be informed by the AEPs. The AEPs are based on the context and realities of Africa, bearing in mind the historical and structural power asymmetries and inequalities that still exist on the continent. In addition, it is important to also remember that the dominant evaluation paradigms are inherently Western and not suitable. Different aspects and stages of evaluation are discussed in the next section to give examples of how the AEPs could be applied to ensure equitable evaluation in Africa.

Powerful for Africans

Many funders, UN agencies and evaluation companies are implementing some form of equitable partnerships, but the question is, is it practised as a form of tokenism to be seen as ‘good institutions’? The current practice of window-dressing equitable partnerships in evaluation needs to radically change. For example, the hiring of evaluators from Africa as mere research assistants without fair remuneration

(Sibanda & Ofir 2021), partnering with African firms and only to give them a pittance as their fees while they do all the work while using their knowledge of the culture and the context to shape the evaluation process and to conduct all the rituals that go with navigating African communities. Evaluations should be appropriate and an empowering process for Africans, and this requires the current process to be reversed, ensuring that the evaluations are powerful for Africans.

Evaluations need to encourage reciprocity and not a one-way process and should acknowledge the capacities that exist on the continent as well as build those capacities where needed. Evaluations that empower Africans need to ensure, respect, sharing and cooperation in navigating and constituting the relationships between and among evaluation partners. Evaluations should promote sensitivity to stakeholders and relationships, protecting the rights of people and safeguarding diversity and inclusion, and this requires sharing of leadership and equitable distribution of financial resources, specifically the professional fees. In most cases, the local firms never get to see the budget, which is strictly held confidential by the Global North institution who is usually the direct contact with the funders and commissioners. This means that what gets to the African institutions is very small compared with what the Western institution makes out of the evaluation process. The argument used to justify this, is that the African institutions have no capacity and the Western institutions have experience and know the evaluation processes required by the donor, this has to stop! The call to action is to let the African institutions lead evaluations that are conducted in Africa, let the African evaluators manage the budget and then hire Western institutions to support evaluations in Africa. Instead of coming with ready-made templates that may not be relevant to the context, it is important to allow the African institutions to infuse their own methodologies, ways of knowing, culture and values to ensure that evaluations are contextually relevant. It is well known and documented that the majority of the evaluations are funded and conceived by the Global North, using Western paradigms (Chilisa 2015; Sibanda & Ofir 2021), so this article calls for transformation in the way partnerships are currently conceived in the evaluation space in Africa.

Terms of reference

The way terms of reference are designed and distributed, including requirements set for the evaluation institutions to be eligible reflect the biases of the funders and the evaluation commissioners that are aimed at ensuring that only Western-based institutions are eligible. It is important for commissioners and funders to be self-reflective on their own biases and examine their own privileges that influence their perceptions and therefore their expectations. Reflexivity is important to reflect on one’s biases and acknowledge them, then do something about it! The design of the terms of reference should reflect mutual accountability. It is important

to reflect on what the stakeholders and communities would like out of the evaluation and not only the funders and commissioners. The distribution of terms of reference should be broadened to include African institutions that may not be known to the commissioners but are actively implementing evaluations on behalf of Western-based institutions.

Evaluation design

The paradigms used in framing the evaluations should reflect the context, reality and culture of where the evaluation is taking place. If evaluations are to answer questions relating to how historical and structural decisions have contributed to the conditions to be addressed (The Center for Evaluation Innovation 2017), the evaluation design has to change, including the paradigms that frame the evaluation. Paradigms that are informed by *Ubuntu* values such as African Relational paradigm espoused by Chilisa (2015), rooted in African philosophical assumptions of relational ontology, axiology, epistemology and methodology should be used to frame the evaluation design. The paradigm articulates African practices of the spirit of collectivism, communalism, and cooperation, as opposed to an emphasis on individualism and competition (Chilisa 2015). Such a paradigm is powerful in that it gives ownership, voice and agency to the participants and also questions the underlying inequalities and power asymmetries and underlying systemic drivers of inequities and acknowledge cultural contexts. Such a paradigm not only recognises the historical and structural power asymmetries but also incorporates the values that shape African communities and therefore is relevant to bring understanding of how the communities experienced the intervention and the contribution or a lack of it to the social fabric that impacts the methods and results.

It is important for the funders, commissioners and evaluators to be aware of the values of the communities, what they want from the evaluation and what they perceive as success. Such understanding can help shape the evaluation so that it is as beneficial to the communities as it is to the funders.

Evaluation methods

It is important to ensure that evaluations are free from vested interests and evaluations that consider trade-offs. It is important to shift mindsets as well as acknowledge that there are other ways of knowing and embrace indigenous methodologies, allowing these trade-offs may be more productive than to come in with set ways of doing evaluations. African indigenous narratives are powerful as a way of data collection and allow the Africans to tell their own story in ways they have done, since time immemorial. In the past, folklores were an important part of literature, they were used for education, passing on information, values of society and transmitting important cultural information from one generation to another and social life (Bourdillon 1976). The folklores were usually told by elders who knew the history

and culture of the society. As narrators, elders have life experiences rich in wisdom. Folklore also firmly strengthens the relationship between the young people with their elders because it is where they gain knowledge and experience (Msimang 1990). Folklores carry the themes of humanness, respect, caring, communalism, social values and environmental education that are very similar to some of the AEPs. This is a form of storytelling that can be so powerfully used in collecting data; this allows the African people to start from what they know, building relationships, describing their culture and experiences, giving meaning to the evaluation process and helping to understand the context. It is a way of sharing lessons learnt, identify challenges and giving voice and agency to the communities. Evaluators must safeguard diversity and be inclusive and ensure they incorporate African cultures, languages, values, different ways of knowing and knowledge systems (Chilisa 2015). Other methods that could be used for data collection could be inspired by Lekgotla a Setswana word meaning a meeting or gathering usually conducted for village assemblies or Imbizo a Zulu that refers to a gathering that is called to discuss topical issues and concerns of the community (Chilisa 2015). These are methods that are familiar to communities and are built around their own traditions and therefore are not threatening and allows them to play on level playing field based on what they already know.

Evaluation implementation process

The evaluation implementation process should promote sensitivity to stakeholders and relationships; protect the rights of people and safeguard diversity and inclusion, caring, reciprocal, cognitive of the communal nature of the African communities and how they value relationships. Evaluation teams need to allow time for building rapport and those relationships and recognise the custodians of culture that are the gatekeepers of culture and which 'gates' need to be opened by the custodian of culture, the sages and the traditional leaders. It is imperative to recognise the diversity of cultures from one community to the other and being empathetic to those differences and seriously cooperating with the different communities to ensure that the differences are acknowledged and respected. The importance of indigenous knowledge systems should be upheld, while acknowledging the centrality of indigenous knowledge, it is important to ensure that there is no 'cultural misappropriation' of knowledge and that it has a value and should not be exported without being negotiated and agreed on. In addition, the evaluations should create room for the active participation of all stakeholders and not just as providers of information but as creators of knowledge. In practical terms, this means the participation of communities and stakeholders in all stages of the evaluation.

Compiling evaluation findings and feedback

Evaluation findings should be compiled in such a way that they are free from vested interests and reflect mutual

accountability. They should be easily accessible and are meaningful to not only the funders and commissioners but also to communities as well. It is important to be aware of what the community expects out of the evaluation, what measurements are meaningful to them and what does success look like for them. Very often, there is an assumption that communities do not know what they want and have no knowledge of what development looks like. This then shapes the exclusion of communities from all stages of the evaluation, including sharing of the evaluation findings. The communities are more concerned about their own and others well-being as well as that of the environment that they live off than what is portrayed by those who fund the development interventions. There are countless complaints about extractive evaluations that do not consider communities as stakeholders and therefore do not feel obliged to share the evaluation findings with the communities. This brings in the values of caring, cooperation and reciprocity as espoused in *Ubuntu*, it is always important to keep in mind the communities and their expectations throughout the evaluation process. The packaging and feedback mechanisms become very important, the feedback mechanisms should be built into the evaluation design and be conducted using methods that do not alienate the communities but promote cooperation and participation.

Conclusion

There remains much work and commitment to ensure the use of the AEPs to contribute towards the practice of true equitable evaluation where this is genuinely practiced with the aim of addressing power asymmetries and inequalities. It requires change of mindsets, challenging one's own biases as well as the power imbalances. Evaluations on the African continent should be guided by the AEPs that direct commissioners, funders and evaluators to address inequalities and power asymmetries. Consideration should be given to incorporate indigenous peoples' interests, knowledge, and experiences: 'religions, cultural traditions, norms, language, metaphors, indigenous knowledge systems, community stories, legends, folklores, social problems, rapid social changes, or the studies culture' (Chilisa 2015). It is necessary for funders, commissioners and practitioners to hold each other accountable to assess themselves to check if they are conducting 'evaluations in service of equity' (The Center for Evaluation Innovation 2017). There is need of a cadre of committed funders, commissioners and practitioners who can continue to set the bar on what it means for true equitable evaluation, there are institutions, funders and practitioners who are starting to get this, but these are not enough to influence the practice within the evaluation ecosystem, but more work is needed. Future research should explore case studies from funders and commissioners who have committed to implement true equitable evaluations, guided by the AEPs, this will allow cross learning and possibly influence other funders and commissioners to consider changing the status quo.

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A.S. performed the conceptualisation of the article; A.S. and T.D.S. contributed to the research synthesis; T.D.S. and T.N.S. wrote the article; A.S. and T.N.S. reviewed the article.

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