

The People, Environment, Place and Space, and Time Framework: Changing Mindsets and Building Futures

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Background: There is a call to strengthen African-led development by empowering the communities, practitioners, and policy makers to design, monitor, and evaluate projects in ways that promote community participation, ownership, and sustainability of projects. Innovative, transformative African-rooted project design and evaluation frameworks that center African world views, philosophies, and values in evaluation theory and practice are not visible in the global literature on evaluation.

Purpose: In this article, we demonstrate a step-by-step application of PEPST, an evaluation framework grounded on the African philosophy of Ubuntu, to project design and evaluation.

Setting: The framework was tested on the Campaign for Female Education in Malawi and Zambia, and on the Ripple Effect Program in Uganda.

Intervention: Not applicable.

Research Design: Conversations were held with project designers, implementers, project participants, and community leaders to test the applicability, usability, and the value added by the framework.

Data Collection: Data was collected using video and voice recording, photographs, and drawings and analyzed thematically

Findings: PEPST is an Ubuntu-based, multidimensional, culturally and context-responsive evaluation framework that can guide evaluators and project designs to include, among impact indicators, strategies for changing mindsets, building relationships, community adaptive and innovative strategies, and a vision for the future.

Keywords: *culturally and context responsive; Indigenous paradigms; future-oriented judgment; Indigenous knowledge.*

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While evaluation reports largely tell stories of success, on the ground there is minimal change, communities remain impoverished, interventions cause harm to the environment and evaluations allow that to happen. (Chilisa & Bowman, 2023, p. 8)

Scholars (Hassnain, 2023; Puije & Satzinger, 2025) maintain that universalization of evaluation frameworks and methodologies developed in the North contributes to the tendency of funders, commissioners, and evaluators to entrench practices that undervalue communities' knowledge systems, values, and practices. This has led to decontextualized evaluation practice whose evaluation findings do not always report on project success indicators valued by communities. In response to these concerns, the International Evaluation Academy (IEAc), in collaboration with *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation (JMDE)*, published a special issue, *Decolonizing Evaluation: Towards a Fifth Paradigm*. The conclusion drawn from the published articles in that special issue is that evaluation should open space and recognize Indigenous paradigms as a distinct branch of thought in the metaphorical evaluation tree. Indigenous paradigms are characterized by common beliefs about a relational coexistence. They value relationships between people and the environment and among people, and they hold a distinct meaning of context and its role in evaluation (Chilisa, 2024). Indigenous paradigms prioritize people's need for self-determination and sovereignty and the need to revitalize Indigenous philosophies, values, and methodologies as a means toward ensuring the rigor validity, and trustworthiness of evaluation studies.

The next collaboration between the IEAc and *JMDE* is this special issue, *Evaluation for the Transformational Imperative*. This is grounded on work that emerged from futures work led by the IEAc using a Three Horizons approach, the Three Horizons Evaluation Initiative (3HEI), which has explored how evaluation should be addressing the polycrisis. This is discussed in depth by Ofir and colleagues in this issue. Some areas that emerge as important from this work include amplifying power for communities and local stakeholders, addressing the rights of nature and Indigenous people, and addressing the complexity of context.

In this article, we demonstrate through the people, environment, place and space, and time (PEPST) framework the value of making community participation in an intervention an

outcome to measure in impact evaluation. We discuss how PEPST, a culturally and context-responsive evaluation framework, grounded in Ubuntu and Indigenous worldviews, contributes to debates concerned with transformation, relationality, and context. We present PEPST as a conceptual framework with four elements that operate as a set of relational and contextual domains that inform evaluative judgment across program cycles. We report on the applicability of PEPST in evaluation pilots conducted in Zambia, Malawi, and Uganda. The pilot material serves to support our claims that relationship building, changing mindsets, addressing power relations, and envisioning the future contribute to meaningful and sustainable projects. We conclude with a discussion of the usability and the capacity of the framework to surface relational, contextual, and future-oriented judgment. We present PEPST as a framework that can be applied more widely and adapted across cultures.

The Why and What of PEPST

A systematic review of Indigenous evaluation frameworks in Africa (Chilisa et al., 2024) revealed that evaluation practice in Africa continues to be decontextualized, with a tendency to rely on tried and tested frameworks from the Global North. The review revealed that Made in Africa evaluation (MAE) approaches have not changed funders' and commissioners' approaches to funding evaluations, and that there was a need for frameworks with step-by-step guidelines that facilitate community participation and integration of African worldviews, cultures, and values in impact evaluation. The PEPST Context-Responsive Framework is an African-rooted, people-centered, context-first evaluation tool that promotes a holistic approach to contextualizing planning and evaluation of interventions to improve the rigor and validity of impact evaluation findings. It has four elements to guide the planning and evaluation process, namely, people and relational power, the environment, place and space, and time. The interconnectedness of these four elements underscores the importance of adopting a holistic, context-first planning and evaluation practice.

A growing number of scholars, such as Mertens and Wilson (2019) and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF; 2004), have argued that impact evaluation should define "intervention

outcome” broadly to include increased civic engagement and participation, the authority and responsibility of community structures, institutions, and groups and the extent of collaboration among and within them. The PEPST context-responsive framework looks at “outcome” broadly to include community participation and involvement as an important outcome to measure in its own right. Cottrell and colleagues (2015), in their systematic review of stakeholder engagement, reported its benefits and some of the measures in the literature. It is therefore not new thinking to require measurement of community participation as a well-defined outcome in impact evaluation. We argue that when outcome is measured at a systems-wide level (Mertens & Wilson, 2019), evaluation should include measurement of (1) strategies for changing mindsets, (2) building relationships, (3) community adaptive and innovative strategies, (4) addressing power asymmetries, and (5) envisioning the future. This process is critical for people-centered solutions to societal challenges, shifting mindsets, strengthening relationships, incorporating community resilience and innovativeness, redressing power imbalances, and co-imagining the future, and should be assessed for a holistic judgment of how the intervention worked and how it can be improved given the context within which it is implemented.

Situating PEPST in the Evaluation Discourse

A postcolonial paradigm grounded on an Ubuntu philosophy informs the epistemological, ethical foundation and organizing logic for evaluation reasoning in the PEPST framework. A relational ontology based on Ubuntu embraces the interconnectedness of all creation (Goduka, 2000). Ubuntu assumes that reality is relational, communal, and interdependent rather than individualistic (Chilisa, 2020). Ubuntu relational ontological evaluation is based on the idea that the community, ancestors, and the environment exist together as one social whole. It sees context, culture, and relationships as central to understanding how effective a program is (Gaotlhobogwe et al., 2018). An Ubuntu philosophy expresses an ontology that addresses relations among people, relations among the living and the nonliving, and a spiritual existence that promotes love and harmony among peoples and communities (Chilisa, 2005, 2012). An Ubuntu relational epistemology posits that

knowledge is generated through shared lived experiences and cocreated by the community. Knowledge is a community property and does not belong to an individual. It is relational and is passed on from one generation to another through songs, stories, poems, proverbs, folktales, and other forms of cultural expression (Gaotlhobogwe et al., 2018). Knowledge is something that is socially constructed through relationships and connections among people, with the environment, the spirits of ancestors, and both the living and the nonliving. In evaluation, it emphasizes local, Indigenous, and experiential knowledge and advances participatory approaches in which evaluators and community members have equal voice, positioning community members as co-evaluators rather than mere respondents. Ubuntu values emphasize respect, human dignity, and reciprocity. Relational axiology in Ubuntu holds that ethical values arise from relationships among people, the community, ancestors, and the environment. In this approach, evaluation is carried out *with* the community rather than *for* or *on* them, and community values and ethics guide how the process is conducted (Seehawer, 2023).

In most African communities and among Indigenous communities in Canada, Australia, and the USA, all aspects of life are deeply connected. People, the environment, place, space, and time are not separable. Land or place, for example, is not simply the location for hosting an activity. Doing no harm to the environment is a valued outcome (DeLancey, 2023). In this context, evaluation is a knowledge-building process that requires an engagement with communities, valorizing local Indigenous knowledge, building relationships, accommodating diversity, and changing mindsets to engage in future thinking. It is in this context that we discuss PEPST, its theoretical base and principles, and how its application to evaluation can contribute to building relationships, changing mindsets, impactful outcomes, and better futures. The questions raised through the PEPST framework, we believe, can be adapted across cultures.

The PEPST framework falls within the culturally responsive evaluation frameworks. There are several culturally responsive evaluation approaches, for example, the Indigenous evaluation model based on the worldviews and Indigenous knowledge of the American Indian communities (LaFrance et al., 2012); a conceptual framework for the Indigenous framework from Hawaii and Aotearoa (Kawakami, 2007); and a

blended culturally responsive Indigenous evaluation framework (Bowman et al., 2015). The PEPST shares attributes with Indigenous culturally responsive frameworks in that evaluation practices are informed by postcolonial Indigenous paradigms (Chilisa, 2024), prioritizing stakeholder engagement and building relationships, community empowerment, contextual understanding of the intervention, and the use of culturally appropriate protocols and methods for data collection. It extends the Indigenous culturally responsive evaluation to include responsibility for cultivating a culture that embraces criticism, changes mindsets, and shifts behavior through dialogue, learning, and continuous growth. In addition, PEPST embraces futuristic evaluation, allowing communities to look back into the past, assess the present, and anticipate the future.

Similar to the context, input, process, product (CIPP) framework (Stufflebeam, 2007), it has four components: people, environment, place and space, and time (PEPST). Each component describes an outcome to be evaluated. In the CIPP framework, the component of “context” paints a picture into which an intervention fits (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). It, for example, looks at the community and organizational factors that have the greatest impact on the success or failure of an intervention. The CIPP is, however, primarily a decision-oriented, stage-based model. The PEPST, in contrast, operates as a set of relational and contextual domains that inform judgment across all stages, rather than as a procedural model. In that context, it functions less like a stage-based evaluation and more like a multidimensional value approach.

The PEPST elements thus function as domains or lenses of attention in a way comparable to multidimensional value frameworks (Luyen et al., 2022), in that the framework allows simultaneous evaluation of interventions across its multiple distinct and interdependent criteria. Thus, the four elements can be applied simultaneously during the project cycle to provide the primary learning and change logic.

Development of the Framework

PEPST is the product of a Mastercard Foundation-funded project aimed at growing

Afrocentric bodies of knowledge by cocreating frameworks and methods rooted in African values, culture, worldviews, ways of knowing, and ways of perceiving reality that can contribute to the rigor and validity of impact and outcome evaluation. The Foundation contracted with the University of Botswana, led by Bagele Chilisa, to conduct the study. The University of Botswana, in partnership with the University of Ghana, Africa Nazarene University, the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), Tiymele Consultants, and Data Innovators, initiated a systematic review to identify trends, leading thinkers, implementers, and funders in Indigenous evaluation, Indigenous knowledge systems, and how African ways of perceiving reality, knowledge, and values inform evaluation. In addition, a SenseMaker² narrative survey was conducted to establish how evaluation practitioners, implementers, and academics perceive African ways of knowing, reality, and values, and how they apply this perspective in evaluation practice. One hundred and one stories were collected from 25 countries across Africa. Findings from the systematic review and the SenseMaker narrative survey informed ideas on African-rooted evaluation frameworks. The ideas were further developed at a three-day cocreation and codesign workshop facilitated by GRID, a thinking design entity, (GRID Impact, n.d.).

The workshop was attended by 48 participants, including African think tanks, evaluation experts from across the globe, funders and commissioners, government representatives, development partners, leading implementers of African-rooted evaluation, graduate students, university academics, and civil society. Five different frameworks, namely PEPST, the Pamoja Safarini Theory of Practice (PSTP), Ngwanake Youth Empowerment framework, the Engagement, Participation, Involvement and Ownership (EPIO) framework, and the Community Language framework, were cocreated during the workshop. The frameworks were later reviewed for content validity by one of the leading scholars in research and evaluation. Following the review, the frameworks were revised and pilot-tested in Malawi, Zambia, and Uganda to assess their applicability to evaluation, usability, and value-add.

² <https://thecynefin.co/sensemaker-for-monitoring-evaluation-learning->

[impact/?srsltid=AfmBOorAYdREXw_E8AQ3OM_GB595lm2nptD81sJ_zIcP3fjp3SW8g2mD](https://thecynefin.co/sensemaker-for-monitoring-evaluation-learning-impact/?srsltid=AfmBOorAYdREXw_E8AQ3OM_GB595lm2nptD81sJ_zIcP3fjp3SW8g2mD)

The Pilot Test Methodology

The pilot test identified challenges and gaps in applying the frameworks and tools, which were used to modify the frameworks. During the pilot exercise, each component or element of the frameworks was applied. We pilot tested all the frameworks but report only on PEPST. We applied the frameworks on the four main stages of the project cycle: initiation, design, implementation, and impact evaluation. The use of a project cycle provided a helpful organizing structure against which PEPST can be applied, rather than constituting the framework itself. The project cycle serves as a learning and adaptation logic that links context, judgment, and outcomes over time. The pilot served to ground, exemplify, and make legible the framework's logic, values, and evaluative sensibility.

The following general aims guided the pilot exercise.

1. Test the applicability, usability and adaptability of each component of the different frameworks in making evaluative judgments on the initiation, design, implementation and impact evaluation of development interventions.
2. Assess if each one of the five frameworks can be used to measure the impact of the development interventions on the intended recipients, whether, for example, PEPST can mediate success, community ownership, and sustainability of interventions, and whether context matters in the real world.
3. Assess the value added by the frameworks when compared to mainstream evaluation frameworks.
Simulate parts of—or all aspects of—these frameworks,—for example, the four elements of PEPST—to have firsthand experience in real-life situational application of the frameworks.

The pilot testing was conducted in three countries: Malawi, Zambia, and Uganda. These locations were selected by the Mastercard

Foundation, which has ongoing programs in these countries. In Zambia and Malawi, the framework was tested on the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) program, with a focus on the climate-smart agriculture projects. In Malawi the pilot test was conducted in the Mulanje district, while in Zambia, the pilot test was in Mumbwa. In Uganda the framework was tested on the Ripple Effect program's Youth Inclusive Dairy Market System intervention in Mbarara district.

Approach to Pilot Testing

The team tested its instruments on three main groups of participants: project designers, project implementers, and project participants. Each group responded to questions directed toward them. The evaluation questions focused on three main areas:

1. Project designers' experiences with the initiation and design of the project that was aimed at measuring the applicability and usability of the frameworks to the initiation of the project.
2. Implementers' experiences with the delivery of the projects aimed at measuring the applicability and usability of tools to the implementation process.
3. Project participants' views on project success and impact aimed at applying the tools to measuring success and impact.

Sampling

A two-stage sampling strategy was adopted. The first stage was a convenience sampling of a district that was approximate for travel from the main cities, Lusaka in Zambia, Lilongwe in Malawi, and Kampala in Uganda. The second stage was a purposeful recruitment of three main groups of participants: project designers, project implementers, and project recipients. See Table 1 for the number of participants recruited by type.

Table 1. Participants by Country and Type

Country	Project designers	Implementers	Project participants
Zambia	5	13	19
Malawi	6	18	9
Uganda	4	8	41

Data Collection

Our data collection started with an elicitation survey answered by all participants, administered through a WhatsApp chat group. The pilot was conducted through 1-day workshops, lasting not more than 6 hours. A 1-hour conversation was held with each group of participants. Conversations were held in local languages, and local research assistants served as interpreters. Observations, audio and video recordings, photography, and social media methods were also used to collect data.

Data Analysis

We adopted a narrative analysis method suitable for analyzing data to interpret the stories shared by participants about their experiences. Similarly, discourse analysis was also applied to examine the use of songs, proverbs, and folklore as ways to express communities' beliefs and attitudes and the social meaning of their participation in the projects. Several meetings were held to generate initial codes and reflect on their meaning. There were several revisions of the codes to assess whether they highlight how the PEPST framework can be applicable to real-world program planning and evaluation, its usefulness, and the value it adds to evaluation theory and practice. What follows is a discussion of the PEPST and how it was applied in the pilot tests in Malawi, Zambia, and Uganda.

Description of each PEPST Element and Application to the Field

People

Derived from Ubuntu, the principle of relationality, collective responsibility, and respect for one another and for the environment, this element alludes to the involvement and engagement of communities as an important outcome to measure and collective planning and evaluation by all stakeholders, with emphasis on building and nurturing positive relationships and maintaining connections based on mutual respect. There is emphasis on the importance of interactions and conversations among project commissioners, designers, implementers, relevant stakeholders, and intended project recipients and people affected by the intervention who may not necessarily be project recipients. These initial conversations must recognize that

people bring their unique cultural practices, beliefs, and values, which can significantly influence how they understand the problem to be addressed by the project, how it will be implemented, and what its success indicators should be.

What Surfaced. The conversation with the designers revealed that in both Zambia and Malawi, community leaders were not involved in the planning phase of the project but were engaged and involved at the implementation stage. The CAMFED association guides work with stakeholders from agriculture, youth, environment, and gender ministries to support women and girls to grow their farms into profitable businesses, supplying more nutritious food for local communities and creating jobs (Agriculture Guide Companion, 2021). The absence of community leaders at the planning/design stage had negative consequences on the project. In the district of Mumba in Zambia, it was reported that certain cultural practices and beliefs prohibit girls from growing crops and vegetables such as cabbage, butternuts, and mushrooms. Some girls chose to grow cabbage but experienced losses because community members refused to buy their produce. Participants expressed the view that, had project designers involved community leaders and local knowledge holders from the onset, they could have found culturally appropriate ways to navigate differing perspectives and identify crops that were acceptable and viable within the local context. Participants noted that they used songs, idioms, proverbs, and folklore to build mutual respect, foster connectedness, navigate tensions, and build healthy relationships among stakeholders. Each gathering started with a song, and proverbs were used throughout the conversations.

Community leaders' involvement during the implementation of the project led to multidirectional borrowing and lending of knowledge among project participants, community leaders, and knowledge holders, leading to strong partnerships among all those involved. In Zambia, for instance, multiple layers of village structures were involved in the implementation of the project, and holding regular conversations between important role players was reported as a key contribution to the success of the project. The *Agricultural Guide Companion* for the smart agriculture projects (CAMFED, 2021) emphasizes respect for communities and adapting local Indigenous agriculture practices to inform implementation.

The project participants and agricultural guides were found to have maintained strong relationships with community leaders. The agricultural guides shared information on climate-smart agriculture with the project participants, who, in turn, passed the knowledge on to the broader community. The relationship has grown so close that the community now actively supports and takes ownership of the projects. Because of this strong relationship, the community is open to learning from the girls, while the girls also continue to value traditional knowledge shared by elders. The girls shared a story in which they came together to grow tomatoes, a vegetable they were traditionally forbidden to cultivate. They then invited the community to visit their tomato garden. Upon seeing the thriving vegetable plots and the impressive yield, community members changed their perceptions. They became convinced that girls could grow tomatoes just as successfully as boys. The story demonstrates change of mindsets.

In Uganda, participants were asked to role-play the application of the PEPST framework and compare it with their practices. They observed that the limited diversity among stakeholders restricted the project's ability to adapt and foster growth. For example, it was noted that while churning ghee was a popular business among young women, it was limited to selling at local markets and failed to reach commercial markets that require branding. Participants also observed that having representatives from licensing departments, the Bureau of Standards, and other government entities regulating food handling and marketing could have enhanced the project's success. They noted the need for a diverse stakeholder committee with defined roles to aid the growth and success of the project. The main role of the stakeholder committee should be problem-solving and continuously adapting the objectives and implementation strategies of the project to respond to the realities on the ground. This committee should have scheduled meeting times and a memorandum of understanding with partners. Participants were of the view that where local people are involved or have contributed to the project from its initial stage, there is some level of growth in such projects. Local involvement is likely to contribute to the sustainability of projects because local people have their own way of looking at their problems and are more inclined to commit to such projects where they are accountable.

Under "people," what surfaced is that all stakeholders, including the communities, should be engaged from the initiation of the intervention

and throughout its life cycle. Strategies to navigate differences in perspectives and build relationships emerged as essential for the success of the project. Community language and forms of expression such as proverbs, idioms, and metaphors emerged as important strategies for building relationships and promoting collective responsibility, community trust, resilience, and local ownership of projects. Using the community language and associated forms of expression has the power to anchor the project in the values of the community, ensuring its success and sustainability.

How It Can Be Used. The "people" component of the framework guides the evaluator to identify the stakeholders; their roles and responsibilities; strategies that facilitate communication, engagement, and relationship building among stakeholders; and strategies that address changes of mindset where stakeholders have different perspectives. The evaluator, together with stakeholders, can create a qualitative or quantitative tool to measure community participation guided by the following questions:

1. Who are the stakeholders, and what are their roles and responsibilities?
2. What are the objectives and outcomes of the intervention, and how will they be measured?
3. Are there strategies to facilitate communication, engagement, and relationship building among stakeholders, and how do these impact the success of the intervention?
4. Are there strategies to address changes of mindset where stakeholders have different perspectives, and how does this impact the success of the intervention?
5. How has community participation influenced the success of the intervention?

Environment

This relates to the ecosystems as well as the enabling environment necessary for the success of the project. An enabling environment includes government policies, gender policies, sociocultural norms, beliefs that can inform collective understanding of the problem to be addressed, environmental responsibility, and the use of technology. Environmental responsibility requires an ethical obligation by project designers and project participants to make conscious efforts to minimize harm and ideally help regenerate the environment, in line with the

Ubuntu principle of respect for one another and for the environment. The focus of this component of the framework is on the activities and the implementation process, environmental impediments to project outcomes and impact, and project activities that might either hurt the environment or be transformed to be regenerative.

What Surfaced. In Malawi and Zambia, land and seeds for crops and vegetables are important resources for the smart agriculture projects. Accessing land and choosing which crops or vegetables to grow are important issues that can affect project impact. Questions of whose land and which seeds can only be addressed within the environmental context. The “people” component revealed the tensions around what society allowed the girls to grow, what the project prescribed for the girls, and how the tensions were resolved to bridge knowledge systems, change mindsets, and build stronger relationships among stakeholders. Under the “environment” component, the challenges girls faced with accessing land and how they were resolved were revealed. In Zambia, it was revealed that even though there were policies that promoted gender equality, cultural practices affected the success of projects. In Zambia, young women, unlike their brothers, are not allocated land, and this affects women’s participation. The girls related a story of how they got together to approach the village chief to allocate them land for their projects. They were successful because the project had become a community project and the Chief felt responsible for its success.

The challenges reflect projects that ignore cultural practices and gender norms. The environmental component of PEPST goes beyond cultural practices and gender norms to include people’s relationship with the ecosystem. In Malawi, it was shown that agricultural practices are governed by the rhythm of the ecosystem and that there has been integration of local Indigenous knowledge with climate-smart agricultural practices that come through agricultural guides. Agriculture is linked to nature. Many farmers observe the moon to predict rainfall. When the moon looks large, good rains are expected. A small moon means no rain. The appearance of red ants is a sign of impending drought and hunger ahead, prompting the storage of food for the future. Some farmers are guided by the rhythm of the ecosystem and go ahead to cultivate the land even before the rains come.

Agriculture guides and project recipients worked with community members to change some practices and mindsets. This was achieved through a process where the agricultural guides, who are implementers, and the project recipients borrowed local Indigenous practices from the communities and acknowledged the value of the practices. In response to the respect and valorization of their knowledge, they, in turn, learned from agricultural guides. This multidirectional borrowing and lending of knowledge facilitated the integration of knowledge, ensuring project success. The tool revealed that change came when communities were listened to and respected and there was space for all knowledge systems. In Malawi the young women agri-entrepreneurs were conscious of their responsibilities over the environment. They related how they were choosing organic manure over chemical fertilizers. They narrated how the use of fertilizers had left the land barren.

From applying the environment component, what surfaced is that the integration of local Indigenous knowledge with expert knowledge is an important strategy toward building healthy and sustainable relationships among stakeholders. In addition, cultural practices proved resistant to government policies. A government policy on gender equality, for example, does not necessarily mean the policy is practiced in the communities.

How It Is Used. When this component of PEPST is applied in evaluation, evaluators judge how cultural practices, gender norms, and government policies affect the implementation, output, and outcome of projects and activities that address mindsets for optimal project outcomes, continuity, and sustainability. It makes a judgment on the adaptation of the project to environmental contexts and the resultant outcomes. For example, in Uganda local herbs and traditional preservation methods were integrated with modern technology to produce organic ghee. Quality control regulations, however, limited large-scale production and sales beyond the district. The evaluator could make a judgment on impediments to large-scale ghee production and support for cultural innovative products.

Based on the pilot, quantitative and qualitative tools can be designed to address the following:

1. Cultural practices that impacted the implementation, output, and outcome.

2. Gender norms that impacted the implementation, output, and outcome.
3. Policies that affected implementation.
4. Activities that addressed mindsets for optimal outcomes, continuity, and sustainability of outcomes of the intervention.
5. Activities that have the potential to damage the environment or community relations, or the illusion of separation.
6. Overall implementation success and impact on project outcomes.

Place and Space

Place relates to historical and cultural contexts and how these shape the purpose and understanding of the intervention. Every place has a local history and culture that binds the people together and informs their daily interactions. This history is stored in folklore, stories, sayings, and songs. Space includes beliefs about the physical space of project activities that may have a positive or negative impact on the intervention. People have connections with their land and space, and there may be areas or spaces where it would be against community practice to locate a project. This component elicits information on how context, as defined by the place, that is, country or district or village, where the intervention is located, and the space within that place, contributes to the success of implementation, the outputs and outcomes.

What Surfaced. In Uganda in Mbarara the cow is the symbol of community identity, livelihoods, and survival. The project Save a Cow has many cow-related entrepreneurship businesses—for example, an intervention to address the need for sandals and the opportunity to utilize locally available materials. Participants mentioned its importance and benefits.

In Malawi and Zambia, participants talked about sacred places that included rivers, forests, and graveyards. Although these places are on fertile ground that could have been used for the smart agriculture project, no one is allowed to use that land for agriculture because these areas are sacred. In Malawi, there are certain rivers called Malande that don't dry out. The areas around these rivers are restricted, and communities are not allowed to collect water from such rivers. Communities use most of these as sacred places of worship. However, under the component "people," it was clear that communities are open

to dialogue with possibilities that some of the sacred areas could be made available for use.

The "place and space" element revealed the importance of evaluators considering cultural beliefs about place and space and how these can inform location, type, and choice of project and the implementation process. It is important to consider community resources and assets that the projects can leverage and the general project responsiveness to community needs. Outcome and impact evaluation can benefit from an analysis of how place and space affect project implementation and therefore output, outcome, and impact.

How It Is Used. This element involves identifying areas where there were changes or improvements in project implementation and/or outcomes in response to the place and location of the project, the cultural practices of the people, and their needs and priorities. The main evaluation question is on the extent to which the project resources are in synergy with the project place and space and the adaptations in design and implementation in response to place, space, and the future. Under "place and space," the evaluator moves away from the practice that interventions must be implemented as planned, instead accommodating adaptation of the project to the context and community needs and community participation. The focus is on adaptation and improvement of design and implementation as the project progresses. Based on the pilot, quantitative and qualitative tools can be used to gather data with the following questions as a guide:

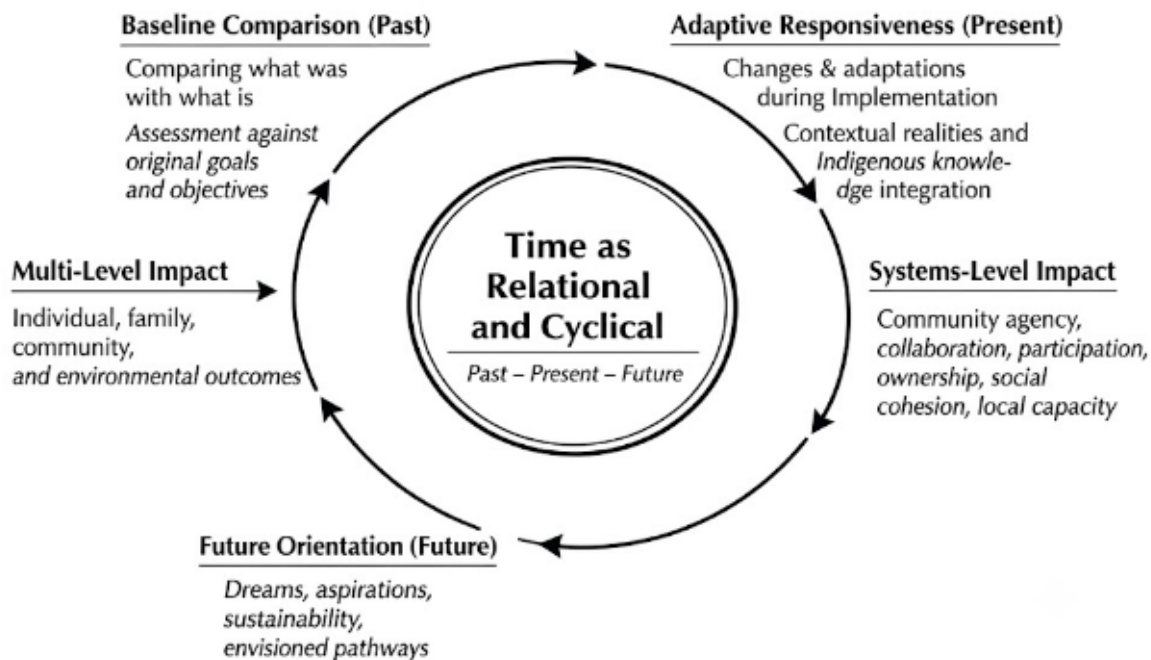
1. What is the history of the place that informs the location and choice of the intervention?
2. What information on the place and space can facilitate or hinder the implementation success, and outcome of the intervention?
3. What are the community resources and assets that the interventions can build on?
4. How does the intervention build on community Indigenous science, resources, and assets to inform design and implementation?
5. How does the intervention respond to community context and needs?
6. What are the community's indicators of success?
7. What are the community's strategies for the sustainability of outcomes?

Time

“Time” is related to looking back to the past, engaging in the present, and looking forward to the future. The success of project activities is measured against observed time patterns. “Time” focuses on understanding the rituals, beliefs, and symbolism associated with time and project activities, and thinking about how the past has informed the present and a vision for the future. The time of the year, month, and day can inform routine activities; ultimately, outcomes and

impact are assessed by comparing the past with the present and envisioning the future. In alignment with relationality, outcomes are assessed as a whole system at the individual, family, and community level, including care for the environment. Figure 1 illustrates time as a relational and cyclical process linking past experience, present adaptation, and future-oriented meaning-making across individual, community, environmental, and system levels.

Figure 1. The Time Component in PEPST



What Surfaced. In Malawi, time meant looking back to the past, engaging in the present, and looking forward to the future. One participant commented, “The Future is Bright, the future is Youth. The Future is Local.” Participants envisioned a future where the youth can produce enough to feed the whole nation, to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, and even sell to other countries. They envisioned a future rooted in borrowing cultural practices of agriculture that are relevant and useful, for example, growing manure the traditional way instead of relying on chemical fertilizers that, according to them, have damaged the soil. For example, project recipients used *Mbeya* manure (compost manure or organic

fertilizer made from decomposed plant materials and animal waste) to improve the soil in a low-cost way, and also solar panels to run irrigation systems that help crops grow. Furthermore, they use *Chitetezo Mbawla*—simple stoves made from local materials that save fuel, reduce smoke, and help protect forests. Participants discussed how young people are forming cooperatives, reviving local practices, and standing up for education and financial sustainability. For the participants, the past, the now, and the future are dependent on how communities are listened to, respected, and trusted.

In Uganda, time meant reflecting on the past to value what is important, assessing the present,

and planning for the future. One common business was the production of ghee. Some businesses made ghee the traditional way because there was a market for traditional, organic ghee. However, they could not produce it in large quantities or brand it due to regulatory requirements. Their goal was to grow the business for large-scale and international sales. The original project had no forecasts and strategies for growth beyond its initial goals and objectives. We conclude that cultural practices associated with time can affect project implementation, project success, and outcome. Communities judge their success against past experiences and always envision possibilities for the future. Individual success, family, community, environmental care, and plans contribute toward the meaning of success.

How It Is Used. This last component is ideal for summative evaluation and the diagnostic stage prior to designing the intervention. It also is a judgment on outcomes using the concept of time in a worldview where people, the environment, place, and space evolve around time. It can also be used for midterm reviews. It combines implementation measures under “environment” and “place and space” and makes a judgment on how they affected outcomes. It makes judgment on the value added to the community by judging community participation and project impact on the environment and at the individual, family, and community level. It addresses sustainability not as a separate exercise conducted after 2 to 5 years but as an important indicator of success. It further looks at the potential regeneration of the environment with the goal to build resilient, self-sustaining systems. Thus, assessment for success includes future thinking capabilities and adaptability in the project/intervention. For example, in an intervention to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS in adolescents (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014), at the end of the intervention, adolescents stated their future goals and what they needed to accomplish their goals. Similarly, evaluators should judge impact by assessing project visions for the future and the availability of resources to accomplish the vision.

In the “time” component based on the pilot, the evaluation measures outcomes and impacts by considering the following:

1. Comparing what was at the start with what is now. Here, evaluators may assess progress using the intervention’s planned goals and objectives.

2. Responsiveness to the changing environment: measures changes, improvements, adaptations that were made during implementation, the strategies, and outcomes. Specific places, communities, and cultural practices may have required adaptation. Local Indigenous science may have been integrated in the design for innovative implementation and outcomes. The assumption is that how the intervention was implemented may not necessarily be the same as planned.
3. Impact on the individual, the family, the community, and the environment
4. Measures of systems-level impacts, for example, community agency, collaborative partnership, local participation and ownership, social cohesion, and strengthening of local capacity.
5. Evaluation of vision and dreams for the future.

Discussion

Applicability of the Framework

The pilot demonstrated the feasibility, usability, and capacity of the framework to surface relational, contextual, and future-oriented dimensions often missed in conventional evaluation. The pilots of PEPST in Zambia, Malawi, and Uganda show how evaluation can support community engagement and create a dialogue among diverse worldviews, including those who have been historically marginalized, helping to build relationships, change mindsets, and contribute to future thinking. There was cocreation of project objectives and outcomes and the implementation process and co-deconstruction of practices that did not serve the interest of the community: For example, girls demonstrated that they could grow tomatoes, a practice traditionally forbidden, and the community conceded. In Malawi, communities referenced past agricultural practices before fertilizers were introduced and assessed the effect on the land, convincing the girls to use organic manure to preserve the land. The pilot also revealed a community project cycle that does not align with the progressive stages of initiation, design, implementation, and evaluation but is rather a circle featuring initiation, implementation, adaptation, envisioned future, and impact evaluation. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Community Project Circle



Note. From *Framework Pilot Report, African-Rooted Frameworks and Tools* [Report submitted to the Mastercard Foundation], by B. Chilisa, T. Major, M. Ramasobana, W. Nderitu, S. Koloi-Keaikitse, F. Mwaijande, J. Govender, B. Koyabe, M. Gaotlhobogwe, R. Nabbumba, M. Frehiwot, B. Pheko, S. Molosiwa, & C. Akligo, 2025.

The framework thus supports a transformative project cycle that begins with planning led by a diverse group of stakeholders who inform their planning by engaging in ecosystem mapping and diagnosis defining strategies to build relationships, changing mindsets and mobilizing community resources that can leverage success. The implementation process is a problem-solving endeavor where the strategies and objectives, are adapted to respond to the realities on the ground for continuous adaptation. Responding to the flow of time, the implementation process captures and forecasts the future, leading to continuous adaptation that speaks to sustainability of the intervention. Impact evaluation eventually looks at how the intervention is being implemented and adapted, the vision for the future, outcomes, and success/impact as defined by multiple stakeholders, including the communities.

Evaluative Judgment in PEPST

Evaluative judgment in PEPST, in line with Ubuntu philosophy, is relational, negotiated, and contextually situated, emerging through patterns observed across the PEPST elements and over time, rather than through standardized indicators or single-point measures. Thus, for example, community agency, collaborative partnerships, local participation, social cohesion, and strengthening of local capacity are equally important in measuring intervention success. Evaluative judgment is made through a community-driven, relational process that privileges local knowledge, cultural protocols, and shared collective understanding. It highlights community strengths and assets and revitalizes valued community local knowledge. Hence, adaptation and responsiveness to the environment, place, and space are as important to measure as technocratic external measures of

success. The tool shifts community participation from being transactional to extract information, to recognition that effective local agency and action is an important impact in itself. Clearly, then, to bring about transformative change, evaluation should incorporate opportunities to measure strategies for changing mindsets, building relationships, community adaptive and innovative strategies, and a vision for the future. In this way, Ubuntu-based context-responsive evaluation yields results that are a measure of impactful, transformative, and sustainable outcomes.

Contribution to Evaluation and the Transformational Imperative

The picture emerging from the Three Horizons Evaluation Initiative (3HEI) suggests that currently, evaluation is not effective in addressing the deepening polycrisis and the transformation required. Frameworks, methods, and ideologies from the Global North govern how evaluation should measure performance, impact, and success, notably in the Global South. These universal applications of Global North evaluation models perpetuate colonial power structures that impose foreign values while ignoring local contexts. The practice weakens communities' participation and evaluation response to the complexities of context. PEPST supports evaluative judgment where development interventions prioritize people's needs and aspirations and their ability to find solutions to their problems. In these contexts, contested values shape what evaluation can reasonably claim and do, thus the value of a multidimensional value approach as illustrated through PEPST. It addresses some key issues emerging from 3HEI, including the importance of local voices and the rights of marginalized communities, changing international and local power imbalances, recognizing the rights of Nature, and the need for regenerative context and place-based responses.

PEPST can be applied globally across existing program/project cycles while still remaining grounded in Ubuntu relational ontologies, epistemologies, and values. PEPST does not replace context models such as the CIPP but complements them by shaping what is attended to, valued, and negotiated with each stage of evaluation. It contributes to a wider movement

within evaluation that seeks to rebalance dominant efficiency or finance-centered logistics by foregrounding relational, social, ecological, and temporal dimensions of value while remaining firmly rooted in Ubuntu relational ways of perceiving reality, ways of knowing, and values.

Conclusion

The PEPST framework discussion contributes to debates on the universalization of evaluation from the Global North and argues for creating space for philosophies, worldviews and Indigenous knowledge from the Global South³ in framing evaluation practice and understanding the role of context in evaluation. The PEPST framework adds substantial practical utility for evaluators, practitioners, funders, and commissioners working in contextually complex settings globally. Its strength lies in its conceptual grounding on an Ubuntu philosophy and Indigenous worldviews that emphasize relational coexistence, ways of knowing, and values, and Indigenous knowledge. The step-by-step structure and emphasis on relationality, adaptability, and futuristic evaluative thinking makes it particularly valuable for practice. The framework appeals to a system-wide shift that requires broad engagement with communities and diverse stakeholders that include governments, funders, and commissioners, with a commitment to build relationships, shift mindsets, and engage in futuristic evaluative thinking.

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³ Including Indigenous knowledge systems from the Global North.

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