Decolonizing Evaluation: Truth, Power, and the Global Evaluation Knowledge Base

Hur Hassnain

International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS)

Background: Evaluations are a great source of knowledge especially in the international development sphere. Decolonizing evaluation theory and practice is increasingly being recognized as a key responsibility of evaluators to help foster equality and knowledge management, and ultimately the utilization of evaluation. While some discussions and guidance exist, overall, there is limited research on how to decolonize evaluation practice and facilitate power sharing.

Purpose: This paper unpacks the relation between evaluation and decolonization and discusses some of the ways in which evaluation practice can address some of the key challenges in evaluation design, conduct, dissemination, and utility to help it become part of the global knowledge system.

Setting: Application of decolonization of evaluation work in evaluating all policies, and programs in the spheres of international development and humanitarian interventions.

Intervention: Not applicable.

Research Design: The study included a search of multiple sources to identify documents that included content concerning decolonizing evaluation. A detailed screening process was followed for the inclusion or exclusion of each source using predetermined criteria.

Data Collection and Analysis: Not applicable.

Findings: The findings suggest that a detailed discussion on decolonizing evaluation is the need of the time., Identifying better ways to decolonize evaluation theory and practice has the power to transform evaluations of international development policies and programs. It suggests that effectively generating and sharing evaluation knowledge locally has the potential to make people change-makers rather than just the recipients of assistance designed by others.

Keywords: decolonizing evaluation; development; results; learning; accountability

Introduction

What Do We Mean by Colonization, Colonialism and Coloniality?

The term "colonization" is usually used to describe a specific period between the 15th and 20th centuries when European and Western nations exercised power to establish their own settlements in non-Western countries across the world. The term recalls the practices which were unique to colonizers who arrived in a foreign land, gained territorial control (often through violent means) and proceeded to dominate political, social, economic, and cultural spheres of influence within the country for an extended period of time (Bell, 1991).

Both "colonialism" and "coloniality" can be considered as repercussions of the process of colonization. Whilst the physical process of conquering new territory may have ended, colonialism continues in the form of complex power structures originally established to enable colonizers to exercise control and influence over groups of people. These structures can transform the way in which a society operates and thus transform people's everyday lives.

"Coloniality" refers to the colonial relations resulting from these power structures, which continue to shape current political, economic, social, and knowledge systems.

According to Quijano (2000), coloniality is evident through the global articulation of the Western domination predicated on a naturalized inferiorization of places, human beings, knowledges, and subjectivities, coupled with natural-resource extraction and the exploitation of the labor force under the logic of the expanding reproduction of capital.

What do we mean by decolonization? Decolonization seeks to reverse the changes brought about by colonization, colonialism and coloniality. It involves the reclaiming of power and control, the assertion of rights and values and the "de-powering" or "breakdown" of the structures and systems put in place by previous colonizers. Those who advocate for decolonization often argue that these structures and systems continue the economic, political, cultural, and epistemic violence associated with colonization. These systems and structures are often entrenched with racism, patriarchy, and economic extraction, which only increases existing inequalities within society.

Decolonizing or breaking down these systems encompasses various political, economic, cultural, and social dimensions both in the periphery and in the metropole (Klose, 2014). It requires the reshaping of structures, norms, and values at the societal level as well as the individual level to avoid reproducing systems of coloniality.

What Is International Development?

International development (development aid) is a broad concept denoting the idea that societies and countries have differing levels of economic or human development on an international scale (Gregory et al., 2009). It is the basis for international classifications such as "developed country," "developing country," and "least developed country," and for a field of practice and research that engages in various ways with international development processes. There are many schools of thought and conventions regarding which are the exact features constituting the "development" of a country.

Development aid is closely aligned with the security concerns of the great powers, for whom infrastructure and development projects were ideological tools for conquering hearts and minds around the globe, from Europe and Africa to Asia and Latin America (Lorenzini, 2019).

International development mainly arose after the Second World War, with a focus on economic growth, alleviating poverty, and improving living conditions in previously colonized countries. The international community has codified development aims in, for instance, the millennium development goals [1] (2000 to 2015) and the sustainable development goals [2] (2015 to 2030). Many bilateral and multilateral aid agencies have designed interventions to help the developing world meet the success indicators related to these goals. However, it is not clear how the aid agendas of these donor agencies are set, whether they are problem driven in the recipient countries or based on the theories and assumptions of the donor community. Regardless, they often create an unbalanced power relationship by bringing in their Western thinking and methods. This often results in relegating the local country evaluators, who have in-depth country, community, and cultural knowledge, to relatively minor roles in the development process and in evaluating the results of international development interventions.

---

[1] https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

[2] https://sdgs.un.org/goals

What Is Decolonization in Relation to Development Evaluation?

The way in which decolonization is applied to evaluation practice has been evolving over the years. There has been growing recognition of the need to reduce the dependency on Western evaluation methods, tools, and approaches, which have seemingly dominated global evaluation practice. Acknowledgment that non-Western or Indigenous evaluation methods and tools have their own particular elements of sophistication and usefulness which can add value to the evaluation process is becoming more widespread and leading to important discussions around how we can collectively make changes to decolonize evaluation processes and outcomes. Who is collecting the story? What are they measuring? How is the truth being established, and who is sharing the facts? These are just some of the critical questions that should be considered when designing an evaluation.

Understanding the context and designing the evaluation framework, questions, and the dissemination and utilization plans are crucial to all evaluations. There are several ways in which we can begin to tackle the issue of decolonization within evaluation practice. For example, creating more space for the promotion of Indigenous methodologies, bringing more local and Indigenous perspectives to the evaluation analysis and interpretation processes, and allowing the control of evaluation processes to be shared rather than top-down. Increasing local participation by working together with Indigenous evaluators, community members, and religious leaders in gathering, understanding, and reporting the data can also be helpful starting points. (Hassnain et al., 2021).

This paper refers to the inherent power which comes from the use of evaluation models which are underpinned by an ideological perspective that does not take into consideration the local context, including political, social, and economic conditions or local knowledge.

Ban Ki-moon, the secretary-general of the United Nations during the International Year of Evaluation (2015) mentioned that evaluation is crucial for promoting accountability and for understanding what we are doing right and what we may be getting wrong. He stated that evaluation everywhere, and at every level, will play a key role in implementing the new development agenda (UNEG, 2016, p. 4). Although awareness around development interventions has increased in the past few years, a locally led, problem-driven evaluation is still a milestone yet to be achieved. For example, the evaluation questions included in a terms of reference for an evaluation are often drafted in the Global North and respond to the donors' own requirements. This may mean approaches to answer the evaluation questions are better found in the Western literature and may not fit well in a developing or humanitarian context.

Decolonizing evaluation starts from the point an evaluation is budgeted for and conceptualized within an intervention, and then should be reviewed throughout the evaluation cycle. Aronsson and Hassnain (2021a), in their chapter, "Evaluation and Ethics in Contexts of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence," in the book *Ethics for Evaluation*, discuss that it is crucial to design an ethical evaluation from the very start of the process. This is of particular importance within contexts that are rapidly changing, unpredictable, and volatile. This includes understanding and gathering knowledge of the context(s), norms, behaviors, and values of the communities in which the intervention(s) take place, as well as any potential conflict scenarios as a result of evaluation activities. In these complex scenarios, understanding power is crucial.

Decolonizing evaluation may also mean the independence of evaluators from the influence and control of the aid agencies and the entities responsible for managing the evaluation. An evaluator working in a development context may need extra competencies to understand the power dynamics and identify the power brokers who may be influencing the evaluation aims and objectives, criteria, and questions.

The methodology or the way an evaluation is approached is also a critical part of the evaluation process which needs to be adapted to ensure that we move away from colonized ways of thinking. However, this can only happen if the funder and power broker is willing to accept alternate methods and approaches. There is always the risk that Indigenous methods may be seen as less legitimate and be less valued in an evidence hierarchy.

Before embarking on evaluation, we need to question the values at play, including the assumptions and presumptions which are embedded in different evaluation approaches. Evaluators need to reflect on how they see the world in relation to the evaluation subject and reflect on their own cultural position, age, gender, ethnicity, etc., which could potentially affect the evaluation process. This is even more complicated in contexts that are fragile, and conflict-affected contexts, which are not "business as usual," most recently evidenced by the COVID-19 crisis. Aronsson and Hassnain discuss some cases of how things can go

wrong in an evaluation in such fluid and sometime violent contexts, if the exercise is not planned and carried out with extra care, no matter whether the evaluation is carried out from a distance or not (Aronsson & Hassnain, 2021b).

A great example of a rather Western or linear way of claiming the truth in a development or a humanitarian context are randomized controlled trials (RCTs), which set a gold standard in evaluation practice for a while, until there was a realization by some that a reliance on RCTs had given rise to a new way of thinking and storytelling that ignored history and the bigger picture (Kabeer, 2020). Zenda Ofir (2018) has written widely on the subject of investing in more contextual tools and methods in her blog posts on Made in Africa evaluation.

Building on the work of Frehiwot (2019), this paper presents four steps to decolonizing evaluation practice and theory:

- Decolonize evaluation and evaluators—abandon preconceived notions of evaluation;
- Critically evaluate existing models—primarily Western models;
- Conduct research into country-specific evaluation models and traditional approaches;
- Develop country and contextually specific models using information from the steps above—in partnership; with local community members and other relevant stakeholders.

The paper describes the need to ensure transparency and access across all aspects of evaluation. Ensuring that evaluation knowledge is shared appropriately, contributing to the global knowledge base, is the key to ensuring that truth and power are as inclusive as possible. Over the years, the practice of disseminating evaluation results on a wider scale has been demonstrated more, particularly by intergovernmental organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations. In parallel to efforts to decolonize evaluation theory and practice, efforts also need to be taken to ensure that evaluation knowledge that is shared amongst the evaluation community incorporates a broader, universal perspective. This involves making stronger efforts to increase the awareness of local and traditional evaluation methods and tools, as well as those which are context specific.

As described in the conclusion of this paper, decolonizing evaluation goes beyond just measuring results. Regardless of which methods and tools are utilized and whom it benefits,

evaluation is not just about extracting information for the sake of it, but about gaining a better and collective understanding of what change is, how it happens, and under which circumstances in development contexts, all in rather participatory ways. If data points, success criteria, performance measures, and the facts are established and shared by outsiders without understanding community perspectives and engaging them, then that truth cannot represent them well. A bottom-up approach may also help the local and Indigenous people within a community to speak truth to power, calling upon a rather systemic and transformative change.

Decolonizing Evaluation and Evaluators

The Need for Decolonizing Evaluation and Evaluators

Admitting a need for "decolonization" in evaluation means admitting that it has formerly been colonized to some degree. In other words, evaluation models, ideas, and knowledge have been shaped in part by complex political, economic, social, cultural, and historical factors. To move forward, increased ownership and investment may be required in more innovative evaluation methods and tools that are well grounded, respectful, and able to contextualize and understand different important granularities within a context, especially if they are rather fluid, complex, or volatile.

"At the centre of decoloniality is the idea of remaking the world such that the enslaved, colonized, and exploited peoples can regain their ontological density, voice, land, history, knowledge and power" (Ndlovu-Gatesheni, 2013, p. 23).

Evaluation decolonization is primarily a project which attempts to rid evaluation and institutional behaviour of influences that may impact knowledge and truth differently. It can be seen as a rejection of the idea of objectivity, which assumes that evaluators can separate their own experiences, values, and assumptions from what they hear and interpret, an idea which is considered to stem from colonial ways of thinking. It can also be considered as a means of identifying and confronting white supremacy culture in evaluation, encouraging participatory approaches, trauma-informed evaluation practices, anti-racist practice, or equitable evaluation approaches (Beriont, 2020).

Acknowledging that some methodologies value numbers over social narratives allows us to be more mindful of whether an evaluation is likely to be well-rounded, encompassing a diverse range of contextual factors. A randomized controlled trial,

for example, is a rather linear but easier way to answer an evaluation question than the more time-consuming story-based models, such as the most significant change approach (Davies & Dart, 2005). If we consider that truth and facts are local, or that what is expressed in one place may be inapplicable in another, we might come to the realization that story-based models or evaluation models which include participatory approaches can bring to light important factors which strengthen an evaluation based on numbers alone.

Truth and Power

According to Foucault "power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere" (1998, p. 63). In this sense, power is neither an agency nor a structure. Instead, it is a kind of "meta power" or "regime of truth" that permeates society, and is constantly changing. Foucault uses the term "power/knowledge" to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding, and "truth" (Foucault, 1991, 1998; Rabinow, 1991).

Evaluations are often commissioned by donors and development organizations belonging to the Global North. For this reason, evaluators frequently use evaluation knowledge and practices developed outside of a specific country context. This also applies to most of the evaluation criteria that determine the scope of an evaluation, and the evaluation questions that set the foundation of the evaluation. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee sets six evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability) and two principles for their use. These criteria provide a normative framework used to determine the merit or worth of an intervention (policy, strategy, programme, project, or activity). They serve as the basis upon which evaluative judgments are made (OECD, 2020). The majority of OECD members are high-income economies with very high [Human Development Index](#) (HDI) scores and are regarded as developed countries (International Monetary Fund, 2018). The argument is not that criteria set by the donor states should not be used, but rather that they could be used in a way that suits the context best, adapted to context, as well as what local countries define as good or effective or valued.

To maximize the potential of evaluation to make a difference, in country and across borders, there is a need to share evaluation knowledge and learning beyond the evaluation commissioners, managers, and elites in the capital cities of a country. The failure to share the knowledge and learning with local communities and stakeholders can be viewed as counterproductive, as it limits the degree of shared understanding about the results and lessons learnt. Furthermore, an overreliance on external knowledge can exclude local and traditional knowledge which has the ability to strengthen the evaluation process. Disregarding participatory approaches and knowledge sharing can exacerbate power imbalances between the evaluation commissioners, the evaluators, and the community. To avoid this risk, evaluation must challenge the very nature of the power relationship in the field of monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Critical Decolonization

Critical decolonization builds space for *local* and traditional knowledge and seeks an explanation for the differences which are apparent in various country contexts (Broadbent, 2017). Such efforts can support the rejection of universal truths and make it clearer to evaluators how they can adapt their evaluation models according to the context in which they are working (or develop their own).

The process of decolonization means considering whether local, traditional, and Indigenous knowledge systems could hold truths that have not yet been accessed. On the other hand, it could also involve analyzing such knowledge systems and accepting that in some cases they might be wrong or need developing. Decolonizing evaluation may mean that a lot of formerly unvoiced and unheard ideas may come to light. The process of critical scrutiny is therefore essential to the success of this type of project (Broadbent, 2017).

Catalyzing Evaluation Decolonization

Building on the steps outlined by Frehiwot (2019), which refer to decolonizing evaluation in Africa, below are four steps to decolonize evaluation practice and theory on a global scale:

The decolonization project is historically rooted in efforts to return cultural, psychological, and economic freedom to communities who have experienced slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. The decolonization process is essentially a means to acknowledge the agency of local communities and local knowledge and traditions. It is also about local communities and countries reclaiming power, asserting control over the evaluation. It should ideally include the following elements:

- Deconstruction and reconstruction. A thorough review of the conceptual underpinnings of current evaluation practices and knowledge, all of which should be gathered and critically examined to identify their benefits and weaknesses to local communities around the world. The deconstruction process can be followed by the reconstruction of the ideology and philosophy of evaluators and institutions based on the data gathered and the new understanding which comes to light.
- Self-determination and social justice. Here we can ask ourselves how global evaluation work is currently supporting or obstructing the right for self-determination. How is the evaluation process impacting the individuals the intervention aims to serve? As evaluators does our cultural position affect our relationship with self-determination and social justice?
- Acknowledgment of Indigenous knowledge. This is vital to the decolonization process. Indigenous knowledge must be recognized as an equal in the global knowledge production conversation. Simply acknowledging the presence of Indigenous knowledge or positioning it as an add-on to internationally recognized practices is not enough.
- Universalization of Indigenous experiences. This is an important part of the decolonization process as it demonstrates how local experiences can influence the current world. The way in which the experiences of people living, working, and residing in the Global South are communicated and shared affects how they are viewed at the global level. These local experiences must not be compared to a Western analysis of development, but rather contextualized and situated in the cultural, political, geographical, historical, and economic conditions of the people.

The decolonization of evaluation is viewed as a modification of evaluation theory and practice based on local conditions and cultural nuances. However, it could also be viewed as a means to reorganize the power dynamics in the global production and implementation of evaluation (Chilisa et al., 2016).

The steps mentioned above question the nature of monitoring and evaluation and the role of monitoring and evaluation institutions that have the power to finance local, national, and international development initiatives. How do such organizations decolonize their assessments, opinions, approaches, and beliefs while still meeting their core mandates?

Critically Evaluate Existing (Primarily Western) Evaluation Models

An assessment of the current and dominant evaluation models needs to be carried out to critically examine their origin and potential nuances. As indicated by Chilisa:

> Evaluation in the least indigenised approach is dominated by Western evaluation theory and practice. There is, for instance, emphasis on translating evaluation instruments to local languages and Indigenizing techniques of gathering data without addressing fundamental questions on worldviews that can inform evaluation theory and practice. (2015, p 17)

Monitoring and evaluation research and models generally appear to be dominated by methods and theory produced in the Global North. The expertise of researchers, academics, professionals, institutions, and legislation produced in the Global North also dominates the global evaluation field. Naturally these theories and methods will carry a specific ideology that may or may not be effective in different contexts. In general, M&E policies promote a universal and nonpolitical approach to evaluating international projects, national evaluation efforts, and local development projects. The evaluation of M&E programs and models must cross-examine the purpose of the intervention under evaluation, and therefore the power of the evaluation process tends to extend beyond the administration of the evaluation. "Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an activity, policy, or programme. An assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of a planned, on-going, or completed development intervention" (OECD, 2022, p. 12). The OECD glossary also describes that evaluation, in some instances, involves the definition of appropriate standards, the examination of performance against those standards, an assessment of actual and expected results, and the identification of relevant lessons (OECD, 2013).

The objective of the evaluation process impacts the main outcomes of the actual evaluation. The content of an evaluation usually depends on key actors or on the requirements of donor agencies; however, it can be used to improve understanding of the community landscape and to question the values and beliefs of the organizations under evaluation. Most development projects make it compulsory to include budget allocations to cover

the financial costs of M&E. While it is important to monitor and evaluate programs to ensure that they are reaching the intended target, it should also be asked whether donors obstruct the objectivity of the final evaluation product when they request the mainstreaming of M&E. Although some international donors consider the recipients of their funding as partners, there are still power dynamics at play. A need for increased funding or a fear of funding being cut may lead to certain elaboration in evaluation reports. This critical factor needs to be inspected when conducting research on contemporary development models. The following questions can be a helpful guide:

- Who are the main actors? International financial institutions, government bodies, independent national or international evaluators, or evaluation organizations?
- What ideology does the evaluator / evaluation body follow?
- How does this ideology impact their lens?
- What benefits or consequences will the body face based on the evaluators' report?
- How do theory and methods determine the implementation of the evaluation process?
- Are theory and methods rooted in evaluation thought from certain geographies?

Conduct Research into Country-Specific Evaluation Models and Traditional Approaches

As mentioned, much of the evaluation practice around the world uses guidelines and theory mostly produced in the Global North. While it can be useful to acknowledge the history of the current monitoring and evaluation thinking, it would be incorrect to claim that evaluation only ever existed in the Global North. One must question the root of monitoring and evaluation as it is currently practiced and whether monitoring and evaluation existed in communities around the world prior to the introduction of M&E in its current form. The IDEAS book *Evaluation in Contexts of Fragility, Conflict and Violence*, published in 2021, emphasized strongly the need to focus on and understand the context for all evaluations, and this is a strong argument for decolonizing evaluation, too. In complex environments, the need to understand the cultural, socioeconomic, and political context as well as drivers of violence and key actors is critical, given the inherent complexities of such contexts (Hassnain et al., 2021).

Monitoring and evaluation can be used as a tool to probe governments, organizations, and individuals and to better understand different cultures. The cross-examination of non-conventional evaluation models around the world can serve as the basis for authentic, historically and culturally relevant evaluation models. The contextualization of evaluation models in different local contexts requires a clear understanding of any context-specific philosophy. For example, in Africa, the concept of Ubuntu is well recognized; it means "a person is a person through their relationship to others" (Swanson, 2007, p. 55). Swanson recognizes Ubuntu as the African philosophy of humanism, linking the individual to the collective and making a fundamental contribution to Indigenous ways of knowing and being It integrates the notion of both individual and collective responsibility for governance, development, democracy, education, and much more (Gnaka, 2009). The use of the country-specific philosophies to facilitate the creation of evaluation models will respond to the following critical question: Whose philosophy and ideology will underpin the evaluation process and tools?

Case Study 1. Waawiyeyaa Evaluation Tool

Johnston Research have developed over 200 Indigenous evaluation frameworks based upon Indigenous teachings that individuals can apply to their own selves. They also provide tools that enable individuals to participate in self-evaluation, whereby the activity of the intervention as a whole is considered, as well as the promotion of good health and self-healing. Indigenous evaluation frameworks involve evaluation with a decolonized lens, allowing for more input from the community than traditional Western evaluation methods.

They have developed the Waawiyeyaa Evaluation Tool (Johnston Research, n.d.), which uses storytelling as a means for data collection. It frames the storytelling within a culture-based model. The data collected can be mapped onto the cultural model, allowing evaluators and/or program staff the opportunity to gather systematic data over time that demonstrates incremental growth and development. The tool is a ten-minute video with two Indigenous teachings (one regarding mind, body, spirit, and emotion, and the other about the tree of life). After watching the video, participants are invited to fill out a storyboard and document their experiences in relation to the intervention being evaluated.

This data collection method provides further insights into participant growth that expand current standard notions of outcomes:

- It starts at *crisis* and demonstrates four stages of growth and progress within crisis.
- It then expands to *awareness*, where again four stages of growth include recognizing needs, planning and willingness to move forward, putting plans into action, and outcomes of the actions.
- The ensuing stages are *ownership*, *releasing / letting go*, *building on strengths*, and *standing tall*.
-

The tool moves beyond capturing only physical results (for example, job status), which are common features of Westernized evaluation methods. Indigenous evaluation frameworks such as this encourage collaboration and engagement. Participants have full ownership, control, access, and possession, which reduces the power imbalance between evaluators and community members. The way in which individuals are asked to participate enables them to understand the information being processed and apply it to their own lives.

Develop Country-Specific, Decolonized Evaluation Models

The concepts of producing country-specific evaluation models and/or the decolonization of knowledge production are not new. Well established and professional evaluators and researchers have laid the foundation for the current debates surrounding evaluation in different parts of the world. For example, The African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) is one of the leading voices in the struggle to ensure that evaluation in Africa reflects the culture, history, and peoples of Africa.

Similarly, there are other evaluation associations striving to do the same in other regions of the world, such as the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA), the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization (ReLAC) and the Monitoring & Evaluation Network of Latin America and the Caribbean (REDLACME). At a broader level, the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS), the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), and most recently the Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI) are all working with a global remit.

Made in Africa Evaluation (Supported by AfrEA) "emphasises that context, culture, history, and beliefs shape the nature of evaluations, specifically in the diverse, often complex African reality."

"AfrEA's objective is to promote and adapt to an African evaluation framework—an approach initiated from inside the continent, and overwhelming supported from outside Africa." (AfrEA, 2022, para. 1–2)

The process of creating country-specific evaluation models is a stage which will likely evolve over time. It will involve developing innovative and

transformative approaches which reflect on past practice and learning. Evaluation models will likely have different features and practices depending on

the community in which the model is operating; however, they will be underpinned by decolonized thinking, philosophy, and practice. Evaluators, institutions, and communities can use their research and review existing models to construct authentic, holistic, and community-specific models that can be replicated where needed. The evaluation models should include most of the following elements, qualities, and considerations:

- Indigenous knowledge systems (IKSs) and traditional culture. However, it is not necessary to use components which are not positively impacting the community. Here it is worth bearing in mind the ever-changing dynamics of local culture due to technology, politics, the economy, and the relationships between humanity and the environment.
- Localized and led by local actors. Ensuring that evaluations are led by local actors may seem impossible, due to evaluations being mandated by funding agencies and/or service providers. However, this approach will truly reflect its impact on the recipients.
- Class dynamics of the evaluators. The cultural position of evaluators, institutions, and those

being served must be critically examined. For example, individuals benefitting from a development intervention will generally find themselves in the "lower" economic class, while those providing services will by virtue of their position be in the "middle/upper" economic class. Variances between economic classes can influence (and views from each side can influence) interactions.

- Development projects based on mutual respect. This reinforces the notion of citizen participation in the evaluation process.

The process of decolonizing evaluation models and developing improved models alongside community members and other relevant stakeholders can ensure that both evaluation theory and practice are inclusive and participatory. Revised evaluation models can take country-specific knowledge and experience into consideration, including values, principles, and culture. In addition, the revised models can take into consideration the country context analysis, including the political, social, and economic conditions.

Table 1. Understanding evaluation decolonisation

Colonized	Decolonized	Evaluation application
Either/or thinking	Both/and thinking	• Move beyond pre-established themes and trends, mostly from outside the working contexts. • Explore where there are tensions and contradictions in the data and information. • Use evaluation for learning and growth instead of just for accountability or as a pass/fail report.
Fear of open conflict	Conflict as healthy	• Set up time for appropriate feedback; for example, use tools like The Management Center's 2x2 feedback. • Regularly gather partner feedback during the evaluation, research, or monitoring exercises.
Perfectionism	High quality	• Regular brief (ongoing) reports and regular check-ins as opposed to long end-of-project reports • Reframe mistakes as opportunities for learning
Quantity over quality	Quality over quantity	• Use a mixed-methods evaluation approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data • Expand collection beyond vanity metrics such as participant numbers. • Build in time in the budget to pivot evaluation based on community feedback and to close the evaluation learning loop with the participants (Hassnain, 2018).

Progress is bigger, more	Progress is more just, increasing well-being	• Consider positive evaluation outcomes that don't only demonstrate growth.
Objectivity	Strong objectivity	• Have multiple individuals, preferably from different thematic backgrounds, analyze the same data set. • Actively discuss how bias plays a role in evaluation. • Involve participants of the evaluation, staff of all stakeholders involved, and community members in data analysis, interpretation, and reporting.
Right to comfort	Engage in discomfort	• Practice feeling uncomfortable. • Use the risk/learning zone as a model for individual and organizational growth.
Worship of the written word	Communicate impact in multiple mediums	• Move away from lengthy written reports. • Include more visual representations and reports with images and diagrams. • Expand data collection beyond surveys, and use the tools that are most appropriate in the given context, as established through a thorough context analysis. • Make reports available in national and local languages.
Sense of urgency	Go slow to go fast	• Design realistic workplans. Distinguish between realistic short-term and long-term outcomes. • Invest in relationship building with the community voice at the outset. • Measure potential risks and limitations of the evaluation for different stakeholders in the longer run.

Note. Adapted from *Decolonizing Evaluation*, by L. Beriont, 2020 (https://www.emergencecollective.org/post/decolonizing-evaluation). Copyright 2020 by Lauren Beriont.

Table 1 mostly describes the reflections of the Emergence Collective team who carried out a group exercise after read *Dismantling Racism*, an online workbook created by Jones and Okun (n.d.). The workbook guides the identification of characteristics of white supremacy culture, including perfectionism, sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, paternalism, either/or thinking, fear of open conflict, individualism, worship of unlimited growth, objectivity, and avoidance over discomfort. The Emergence Collective team contemplated their own evaluation practice and selected certain behaviors which could be revised to reflect decolonized ways of thinking.

EvalIndigenous is a multi-stakeholder partnership which, through the recognition of different world views and valuing the strengths of Indigenous evaluation practices will advance the contribution of Indigenous evaluation to global evaluation practice.

EvalIndigenous will promote the use of different evaluation approaches and methods to ensure evaluations are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and are tools in the improvement of community well-being including the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development of individuals, families, and communities.

EvalIndigenous will attempt to inform individuals engaged in evaluation with Indigenous communities through a) documenting the evaluation and research protocols developed by Indigenous communities and organizations; b) facilitating learning and sharing of experiences c) promoting innovation in approaches and methods used in Indigenous evaluation and, d) disseminating information regarding 'lessons learned'. (EvalPartners, n.d., para. 1–3)

A Global Evaluation Knowledge Base

Evaluation knowledge should and can be available for all. If we are to truly move toward decolonized evaluation knowledge and practice, we need to ensure that knowledge generation, which contributes to the truth and power recognized worldwide, is generated from all geographical regions of the world.

There has been a gradual increase in the number of initiatives aiming to put the spotlight on evaluation work conducted in the Global South. Similarly, there have been efforts to raise the voices of local evaluators who have experience in particular country contexts and create awareness of traditional and Indigenous evaluation practices. We saw this more and more during the first years of the COVID-19 pandemic, when international travel in particular was not possible and there was a strong need for national evaluators and organizations to come forward so that international actors could gather data (European Commission, 2020).

To ensure that knowledge of local, Indigenous, and traditional evaluation approaches, tools and experiences is shared appropriately, various means of communication need to be applied. Regional and country-specific evaluation associations can play an instrumental role in pushing forward evaluation knowledge exchange via their various network platforms. They can also help to promote the work of groups/networks that, like EvalIndigenous, are striving to bridge the gap between dominant evaluation practice and Indigenous evaluation practices. EvalIndigenous sometimes funds national voluntary organizations for professional evaluation (VOPEs) to carry out small studies to

assess the situation of or current challenges faced by local and national evaluators. For example, in 2020, EvalIndigenous funded the Pakistan Evaluation Association (PEA) to carry out a survey using Sprockler,[3] a story-based evaluation tool and method, to find out about the current challenges faced by the evaluation practitioners in Pakistan. PEA found that many evaluators face difficulties understanding the evaluation principles, methods, tools and criteria in foreign languages, in this case English. With the key finding of this survey in mind, Pakistan Evaluation Association, in partnership with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), launched an initiative to translate the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria into the Urdu language. The translated criteria were subsequently launched nationwide in partnership with government agencies, United Nations bodies operating in the country, civil society, and academia. The translated criteria have also been published online for those who are interested.[4]

In parallel to efforts to decolonize evaluation practice and knowledge generation, there needs to be more effort to communicate in an inclusive and participatory to share evaluation knowledge and the outcomes of an evaluation, including recommendations. This would make results more useful to the local people, and hence used by those to whom "change" matters the most. Not all evaluation reports can be translated into all languages, but simple communicative materials could be produced, or at the very least, the results could be shared back to the respondents in small gatherings to close the evaluation learning gap (Hassnain, 2022). Failure to do so means that evaluation practice is contributing to the global gap

---

[3] www.sprockler.com

[4] www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/Evaluation-Criteria-OECD%20DAC-Urdu%20-%20Final.pdf

in evaluation knowledge. In addition, whilst ensuring evaluation resources and knowledge are available online, we must acknowledge the global digital divide and the communities who do not have the luxury of unlimited internet access. The tendency to only produce a written report following the completion of an evaluation is gradually phasing out. Numerous organizations are now making efforts to ensure that evaluation findings are communicated in more inclusive ways, i.e., visually and orally through video, podcasts, graphical mediums, presentations, performance, and radio. For example, in 2020, the European Commission Directorate-General for International Partnerships and its evaluation support service prepared how-to guidelines on evaluation dissemination (Capacity4dev, 2020). They provide guidance for evaluation managers and colleagues on how to present evaluation results in creative ways.

The use of visual and oral means of communication reflects the way we live our lives as human beings. As well as being more inclusive for the communities in which interventions take place, the learning that can result from such forms of communication can lead to more action-orientated responses. Ensuring that communities fully understand evaluation results and lessons learnt can lead to more transformative change at the local level, since individuals can reflect on differences they can make in their own lives. A gradual change in attitudes and behaviors at the individual level could then have a ripple effect on actions at the wider community level.

Conclusion

This paper addressed the question of how current evaluation practice is able to move toward adopting methodology that encompasses decolonized ways of thinking. Whilst there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach for evaluators to use, it seems clear that there is a strong need for us to cross-examine the truths being established by evaluation processes and the inherent power balance between actors involved, which can impact the outcomes of the evaluation.

The process for decolonizing evaluation starts with addressing the theory and paradigms which underpin the practice as a whole. In the sphere of international development, the conceptualization of an evaluation, including its scope, criteria, and questions, is often set by aid agencies (key power holders in this context) based in the Global North, pushed in by power brokers (often evaluation managers) who are often not technical experts on

evaluation. This gives very little room for evaluators, during the inception phase of an evaluation, to identify and voice their views of ways to acquire answers to the evaluation questions. The evaluation methodology that is developed based on the evaluation scope and its key questions impacts the outcome of an evaluation. We argue that evaluators need to question any ideologies and assumptions that are embedded in the approaches used. Moreover, it is helpful for evaluators to reflect on their personal cultural position, how this can influence how they see the world in relation to the evaluation subject, and how this can consequently have an influence on the overall evaluation process.

Four steps have been described which can be used as a means to decolonize evaluation practice and theory. These include decolonizing evaluation and evaluators; critically evaluating existing models; conducting research into country-specific evaluation models and traditional approaches; and developing country-specific models that consider local and Indigenous knowledge as well as the country context (i.e., political, social, and economic conditions). Whilst it may take time to reach the final step, the result will be the formation of evaluation models underpinned by decolonized thinking, philosophy, and practice that can then be replicated where needed.

The paper describes the need to move to ensure that evaluation learning becomes part of the global evaluation knowledge base. Ensuring that evaluation knowledge is generated and shared appropriately is the key to ensuring that truth and power are as inclusive as possible. In addition, it requires making stronger efforts to increase the awareness of knowledge from multiple sources, including local, traditional, and Indigenous approaches and, most importantly, ensuring that the evaluation knowledge that is shared amongst the evaluation community incorporates as much of a universal perspective as possible.

The process of decolonizing evaluation practice and theory refers to much more than the overall evaluation results. It requires evaluators to reflect on the methods being utilized, who benefits from the evaluation, and how the ideologies of key stakeholders can influence the process. Participatory approaches at the community level, as well as a strong focus on Indigenous, traditional, and local knowledge, can improve the understanding of community perspectives. Furthermore, holistic and community-based approaches can help to verify the truths that are shared.

We have included some examples of organizations that have attempted to use decolonized ways of working. We have also

mentioned that some national, regional, and global evaluation associations can play an instrumental role in pushing forward decolonized evaluation models in their respective contexts. We have not, in this paper, described the full extent of tools and procedures available to guide the development of decolonized evaluation, nor have we explored whether any organization has utilized a combination of universal evaluation practices and local/Indigenous tools. Further study of these topics could help to enhance our understanding of both the existing tools and whether any good practice can be replicated rather than reinventing the wheel.

References

African Evaluation Association. (2022). *Made in Africa Evaluation*. https://afrea.org/made-in-africa-evaluation/

Aronsson, I.-L., & Hassnain, H. (2021a). Evaluation and ethics in contexts of fragility, conflict, and violence. In R. van den Berg, P. Hawkins, & N. Stame (Eds.), *Ethics for evaluation: Beyond "doing no harm" to "tackling bad" and "doing good."* Routledge.

Aronsson, I.-L., & Hassnain, H. (2021b). Ethics in evaluation in resettlement related interventions. In R. van den Berg, P. Hawkins, & N. Stame (Eds.), *Ethics for evaluation: Beyond "doing no harm" to "tackling bad" and "doing good."* Routledge.

Beriont, L. (2020, May 4). Decolonizing evaluation. *Emergence Collective*. https://www.emergencecollective.org/post/decolonizing-evaluation

Bell, A. (1991). The Politics of English in New Zealand. In G. McGregor & M. Williams (Eds.), Dirty Silence: Aspects of Language and Literature in New Zealand. University of Waikato Winter Lecture Series of 1990. Auckland: Oxford University Press.

Broadbent, A. (2017, June 1). It will take critical, thorough scrutiny to truly decolonise knowledge. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/it-will-take-critical-thorough-scrutiny-to-truly-decolonise-knowledge-78477

Capacity4dev. (2020). Disseminating evaluations: Creative communications for evaluation dissemination. https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/evaluation_guidelines/wiki/disseminating-evaluations

Chilisa, B. (2015). *A Synthesis Paper on the Made in Africa Evaluation Concept*. African Evaluation Association (AfrEA).

Chilisa, B., Major, T. E., Gaotlhobogwe, M., & Mokgolodi, H. (2016). Decolonizing and Indigenizing evaluation practice in Africa: Toward African relational evaluation approaches. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, *30*(3), 313–328.

Davies R., & Dart J. (2005). *The "most significant change" technique: A guide to its use*. https://www.mande.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2005/MSCGuide.pdf

European Commission DEVCO / Evaluation Support Service. (2020). Oscar Garcia – Smarter use of resources (No. 3) [Audio podcast episode]. In *#EVALCRISIS*. Available at: https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/devco-ess/wiki/03-oscar-garcia-smarter-use-resources

EvalPartners. (n.d.) EvalIndigenous. https://evalpartners.org/evalnetworks/evalindigenous/

Foucault, M. (1991). Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison. London, Penguin.

Foucault, Michel (1998) *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, London, Penguin.

Frehiwot, M. (2019, September). Decolonizing evaluation in Africa. *eVALUation Matters: A Quarterly Knowledge Publication on Development Evaluation*, *2019*(3), 22–31. http://idev.afdb.org/sites/default/files/Evaluations/2020-03/article%203%20Decolonizing%20evaluation%20in%20Africa.pdf

Gnaka, Gervais (2009), Discourse on Regional Economic Integration: Towards a Theory of PanAfrican Authentic Development.

Gregory, D., Johnston, R., Pratt, G., Watts, M., & Whatmore S. (2009). Development. In D. Gregory (Ed.), *Dictionary of human geography* (5th ed., pp. 155–56). Wiley-Blackwell.

Hassnain, H. (2022). Closing learning and feedback gaps in evaluation: How to extend ownership of an evaluation's findings to project participants. *eVALUation Matters: A Quarterly Knowledge Publication on Development Evaluation*, *2022*(3), 54–62. http://idev.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/Article%206-

Closing%20learning%20and%20feedback%20gaps%20in%20evaluations.pdf

Hassnain, H., Kelly, L., & Somma, S., (Eds.). (2021). *Evaluation in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence: Guidance from global evaluation practitioners*. IDEAS. https://ideas-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/EvalFCV-Guide-web-A4-HR.pdf

Hassnain, H. (2018, May 23). *Closing the learning loop – How to extend the ownership of evaluation findings to project beneficiaries?* [Article]. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/closing-learning-loop-how-extend-ownership-evaluation-hur-hassnain/

International Monetary Fund. (2018). *Report for selected country groups and subjects (PPP valuation of country GDP)*.

Johnston Research. *The Waawiyeyaa Evaluation Tool: A data collection system led by Indigenous traditions*. https://www.johnstonresearch.ca/the-waawiyeyaa-evaluation-tool/

Jones, K., & Okun, T. (n.d.). *Dismantling Racism*. https://www.dismantlingracism.org/

Kabeer, N. (2020). 'Misbehaving' RCTs: The confounding problem of human agency. *World Development*, *127*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104809

Klose, F. (2014, July 25). Decolonization and revolution in European history. *European History Online*. http://www.ieg-ego.eu/klosef-2014-en

Lorenzini, S. (2019). *Global development: A cold war history*. Princeton University Press.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2013). The entrapment of Africa within the global colonial matrices of power: Eurocentrism, coloniality, and deimperialization in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Developing Societies*, *29*(4), 331–353. https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X13503195.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Network on Development Evaluation. (2020). *Better criteria for better evaluation: Revised and updated evaluation criteria* [Flyer]. https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/evaluation-criteria-flyer-2020.pdf

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2022). Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management. Pairs. France. Available online at: https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC/EV(2022)2/en/pdf

Ofir, Zenda. (2018, August 21). Made in Africa Evaluation 3. Africa-led evaluation. *Evaluation for Transformation*. https://zendaofir.com/made-in-africa-evaluation-part-3/

Quijano, A., & Ennis, M. (2000). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views From South*, *1*(3).

Rabinow, Paul (editor) (1991) *The Foulcault Reader: An introduction to Foulcault's thought,* London, Penguin.

Swanson, Dalene M. (2007). Ubuntu: An African contribution to (re)search for/with a 'humble togetherness', published in Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education. Univesrity of Alberta. Available online at: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/19538073.pdf

United Nations Evaluation Group. (2016). *United Nations Evaluation Group - Norms and Standards for Evaluation*. New York, USA. Available online at: http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914