

EVALUATIONS CONNECTIONS

Zenda Ofir, Michele Tarsilla Guest editors. Tereza Zvolská Editorial Assistant.

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PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

Dear EES members and friends,

This special issue of Connections invites us to focus on culture and evaluation. I warmly welcome the selection of this challenging topic. The writers offer us a stimulating update of the current discourse, and the history. Many of the articles analyse international cooperation and development evaluation. In this field attempts to address culture have long been made even if not always systematically. In today’s Europe learning from the successes and failures of these different approaches is highly relevant because our continent is rapidly becoming multicultural: capacity to address culture is critically important when evaluating EU and national policies.

Culture is an important perspective when decisions are made regarding the conduct of evaluations. Inclusion and participatory approaches are often adopted to ensure cultural sensitivity. But there is a more fundamental question that is sometimes forgotten: who defines evaluation? Who is the principal when criteria to assess value are set? The writers

shed light on both perspectives: addressing both aspects is imperative to legitimise evaluation.

Demanding challenges arise at the intersection of culture and evaluation. In particular, power asymmetries can lead to oppression of stakeholders’ needs and concerns. Conversely, culture represents a rich source of energy and inspiration. This latter dimension is all too often neglected by evaluators.

When writing Presidential messages for Connections I have over and over again been impressed by the increasingly rapid changes in the operating environment, and the challenges that this poses for evaluation. Here too the idea of culture emerges as a dynamic phenomenon as highlighted in several of the articles included in this special issue. This confirms that managing change is at the core of good evaluation practice.

Riitta Oksanen

President

CULTURE MATTERS: AN EDITORIAL

Zenda Ofir and Michele Tarsilla

It is widely held that culture matters in evaluation. However, as simple and uncontroversial as such statement may seem, a closer examination of the contemporary evaluation scene and practice illustrates that the link between culture and evaluation is not as strong as it should be.

The evaluation discourse, articulated in peer-reviewed evaluation articles as well as in publications sponsored by professional evaluation associations, has certainly acknowledged the influence of culture on the interaction between evaluators and evaluands as well as on their respective behaviour and perception of reality. The introduction of such concepts as cultural competence (Sen Gupta, Hopson & Thompson-Robinson, 2004), cultural responsiveness (Stake, 1980) and cultural validity (Kirkhart, 1995) has helped establish cultural sensitivity as a basic capability for evaluators. This is implicit in Hall's contribution to this special issue of *Connections*. It traces the historical evolution of culture-related evaluation approaches. Equally noteworthy have been the diverse efforts made to embed cultural sensitivity as a relevant professional competency (e.g., the 2011 *AEA Public Statement on Cultural Competence in Evaluation*, and the introduction of cultural sensitivity in the 2015 *EES Evaluation Capabilities Framework*).

By contrast, evaluation practice has lagged behind. Cultural relevance is largely absent as a focus in evaluation criteria and it rarely figures in evaluation terms of reference. Except for allusions to "context", quality assurance guidelines also tend to ignore culture. Nor do systematic reviews and meta-evaluation analyses often refer to culture. More often than not evaluation commissioners, managers and practitioners – due to ignorance, indifference or insufficient technical know-how – still treat culture as an intangible, somewhat operationally irrelevant construct. All this in spite of increasingly forceful appeals from social scientists and evaluators around the world that culture should be recognized as having a pivotal role in everyday practice (UNESCO,

"... [C]ulture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, ... it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs."

UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001)

2009; Bellagio Forum, 2012; Hood et al, 2015; CJPE, 2016).

Given this tension between discourse and practice, the articles included in this special issue attempt to explore the intersection between culture and evaluation through the eyes of practitioners who have had pertinent evaluation experience in cross-cultural settings. We hope that these offerings adequately highlight and illustrate the fundamental imperative of working systematically to take account of the numerous interconnections between culture and evaluation. Our intent as co-editors has also been to build as much as possible on existing literature that critically assesses the nexus between culture and evaluation.

Thus Chilisa's article echoes Ernest House's 1993 definition of culture as an intensely cultural practice rooted in Western views of the world, and argues that a radically new paradigm ought to be used in the way culture is conceptualized and addressed in evaluation (Bellagio Forum, 2012; Carden, 2013). Likewise, Chouinard and Hopson's contribution, based on a systematic review of how culture has been positioned within the current development evaluation literature, links with prior work aimed at "decolonizing" the way evaluation is conceptualised, applied and promoted around the world (Hood et al, 2015; Chouinard, 2016).

Four key messages emerge from the collection of articles selected for this special issue. They aim to sensitize the readers to the need

for concerted, urgent and effective action to acknowledge the role of culture in evaluation in order to improve the quality of evaluation practice as well as the outcomes of development interventions around the world.

First, as suggested by Shiva Kumar and by Salinas-Mulder and Amariles, existing frameworks and concepts (e.g. gender, human development and power asymmetry) can be used as entry points for discussing culture and including it in evaluation. *Second*, Oanh and Braun's experiences in Vietnam illustrate that evaluation is differently perceived and practiced in different cultural contexts. Practitioners working together across cultures should therefore be sensitive to and respect each other and they should adapt their technical approaches and behaviors accordingly. *Third*, as stressed by Ofir as well as Oliveira and Gussi, culture should be integrated into macro-level work. *Fourth*, incorporating cultural considerations into evaluation should allow for a more contextualized interpretation of findings and actionable recommendations, as well as for the design of more culturally acceptable development programs (Bamberger, Tarsilla & Hesse-Biber, 2016).

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EVALUATION IN THE US: AN EVOLVING RESPONSE TO CONTEXT AND CULTURE¹

Melvin E. Hall

Since the 1950s, program evaluation in the US has featured increased attention to the intertwined constructs of context and culture. While context had been central to the conceptualization of evaluation throughout its history, culture was previously perceived as “noise in the system” – tightly controlled if not suppressed or ignored. Yet an appreciation of cultural orientations holds important keys to understanding policy interventions and the individual and group actions that they trigger.

A greater recognition of the pivotal role that culture should play in evaluation was brought about by a gradual acknowledgement that context matters. Increasingly, evaluation practitioners and theorists have recognised the centrality of culture as a factor in the design (the *why*), implementation (the *how*) and the outcomes (the *so what*) of social interventions. And since evaluation is itself a social intervention, such evaluation thinkers as Ernest House reconsidered the traditional logic underlying evaluative inquiry by noting that “scientifically based” evaluation often falls short of compelling human action so that evaluators should strive to incorporate

elements of culturally sensitive persuasiveness to deliver results. This is because persuasion is achieved less through strict application of currently fashionable methods than through judicious shaping of evaluation messages in ways that appeal to target audiences. From this perspective the cultural context is not only the location of program action, but a key determinant of social and evaluative outcomes.

Equity considerations from the 1960s onwards prompted a shift in perspectives on social issues, building on the struggle for civil rights and equal representation, critical race theory, feminist discourses, postcolonial research and growing concerns regarding evaluation capture by vested interests. Changes in communication technology, improved access to information and the rise of rapid dissemination of visual images, factored into this development as well. Many theorists began to argue that the results of program evaluations are dependent upon situational or contextual factors so that the function of the evaluator, much like the historian’s, is most effective when displaying narratives that

are not only analytically robust, but also emotionally engaging. At the same time the writings of Robert Stake, Ernest House, Michael Scriven – as well those of such European theorists as Ray Pawson, Nick Tilley and Barry MacDonald – began to reflect broader stakeholder and context-sensitive strategies. These approaches were responsive to democratic ideals and sought to reflect the lived experiences of stakeholder groups.

The 1980s brought attention to shifting demographic realities, signalling a dramatic rebalancing among racial and ethnic groups within the US society. Trends in birth rates and immigration resulted in a displacement of citizens of European descent as the majority group. This brought a new focus on social issues and cultural factors. The irony of increased attention to shifting demographics without inclusion of the perspectives of emerging ethnic groups gave rise to more inclusive evaluation strategies. Without respecting the cultural context and acknowledging the perspectives and experiences of huge portions of the population, evaluation findings suddenly lacked legitimacy. Recognition

of the lived experiences of all parties in the assessment of social interventions became a social and ethical imperative. In turn, value pluralism replaced monolithic evaluative stances.

Just as in counselling, health care and social work, competency models were re-interpreted to lay stress on the importance of culture as part of context. In 2011, the American Evaluation Association (AEA) developed a statement that framed cultural sensitivity as a desirable orientation. It encouraged evaluators to recognise the centrality of culture and the importance of developing related personal awareness and skills. The AEA statement recognised the complexity (if not the intersectionality) of culture and context. However, the statement did so by promotion of cultural respect as a stance rather than as a competency, in contrast to the inclusion of cultural sensitivity as a distinct capability on the other side of the Atlantic. This statement aligned with similar pronouncements of the American Psychological Association and other groups.

The rise of culturally responsive evaluation

A dominant theme on the significance of culture in evaluation in US literature has been termed 'culturally responsive' evaluation (Hood, Hopson & Kirkhart, 2015). Setting aside competence, culturally responsive evaluation urges a more proactive stance leading to 'responsiveness' in the conceptualisation of evaluation. In culturally responsive evaluation, merely recognising cultural context is insufficient; evaluation must aspire to effectively respond to and honour the cultural perspectives of stakeholders. Culturally responsive evaluation repositions cultural difference from pathology to a positive strengths-based appreciation for the role of different cultures. With this shift came a broadening of definitions and expectations for inclusiveness in evaluation in ways intended to fundamentally alter practice in the field.

The origins of culturally responsive evaluation began with education movements in culturally responsive pedagogy, curriculum and teaching. Parallel developments in assessment also predate the interest in applying culturally responsive constructs in evaluation. Stafford Hood was the first to extend thinking from culturally responsive pedagogy to culturally responsive assessment, and subsequently to culturally responsive evaluation.

As in the related educational movements, a foundational element of culturally responsive evaluation is concern for validity. Karen Kirkhart's 1995 presidential address to AEA and subsequent work provided a conceptualisation and articulation of multicultural validity, which became a critical link with Hood's extension of the work in education. Both Hood and Kirkhart point to the influence of Samuel Messick's articulation of a consequential basis of validity as a point of departure for their work. The melding of Hood and Kirkhart's work gave culturally responsive evaluation significant momentum and a robust intellectual foundation.

Culturally responsive evaluation does not promote unique practices to distinguish it from other evaluation approaches; the conduct of culturally responsive evaluation lies in how implementation actually occurs. Culturally responsive evaluation connotes evaluation done in ways that create accurate, valid, and culturally grounded understanding of the evaluand.

Continuing development of culture and context in evaluation

In 2015, the three leading voices in culturally responsive evaluation combined to provide an overview of its development (Hood, Hopson & Kirkhart, 2015). They reported, among others, that this stance was aligned with other emerging efforts to address issues of context in evaluation. A defining characteristic

of culturally responsive evaluation is that it comprises research and evaluation that focus on identifying and dismantling the influence of hegemonic power and privilege in various ways.

The intersection of culture and context make evaluation both more complicated, but also more reflective of the complex realities of lived experiences. Attention to culture in US evaluation carries an implicit understanding of, and advocacy for examining the power and privilege relationships embedded in the social fabric. It acknowledges that the evaluator has power even when it is not sought; and produces work that can influence communities in ways that are both fundamental and long lasting. These are gripping realities, for in evaluation it is not only a question of whether the work will privilege some set of values, but also whose perspectives are privileged (Greene, 1997). Throughout continued development of evaluation in the US and beyond, culture and cultural context are certain to remain inextricably enmeshed, as they are in the political, economic, social, and psychological underpinnings of society.

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1 The author is deeply indebted to Jennifer Greene, Karen Kirkhart, Rodney Hopson, Stafford Hood, Veronica Thomas and Thomas Schwandt who provided substantive comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this essay.

CULTURE AND EVALUATION IN SOUTH ASIA: A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

A.K. Shiva Kumar

Adopting a human development perspective has several advantages while conducting development evaluations. Assessing the extent to which there has been an enhancement of people's capabilities and an assurance of human rights gives it a universal appeal. At the same time, the human development perspective is particularly relevant to resource-poor countries as it evaluates progress not in terms of an expansion of incomes, but as an expansion of freedoms and opportunities¹. Inherent to this evaluation perspective is a strong focus on human dignity and equity. This is particularly important because evaluations should consciously factor in contextual features including widespread deprivations, the relative instability of institutions, and the vulnerability of the poor. The human development perspective also provides a useful way of linking the outcomes to "higher levels" of the change logic (theory of change) by acknowledging the importance of contexts and cultures.² This requires evaluations to factor in various features of developing countries, including the many complexities, unpredictability of outcomes, institutional weaknesses, resource constraints, and the influence of unequal power structures in society.

Equally significant, a human development perspective underscores the need to understand the role of culture especially when evaluating the impacts of social policy on development. Many cultural influences – individual, organisational or societal – are critical to social and economic success. These would include, for instance, the role of work ethics, the spirit of entrepreneurship and risk-taking behaviour, levels of public commitment and accountability, mutual trust and social norms, and even attitudes towards corruption. Development evaluation from a human development perspective therefore requires more consciously factoring in such culture influences which affect the efficacy of policies intended to improve the lives of people.

The pervasive influence of culture

There are many examples of areas where evaluators need to recognise the pervasive

influence of culture. Culture can influence the extent to which people, and women in particular, participate in political and public activities. A strong tradition of patriarchy in South Asia, for instance, has tended to discourage and deny women several freedoms. On the other hand, a tradition of open discussion, free from fear of political and social oppression, has enabled many societies to change negative social norms and address many violations of human rights.

Similarly, evaluators should be more than aware that culture influences responses to questions. To cite a well-known example, respondents in the famous Khanna Study in India³, had taken the contraceptive tablets, although they had not used them. A local resident during a follow-up study explained why in an incomprehensibly 'unique' Indian way: "...someday you'll understand. It is sometimes better to lie. It stops you from hurting people, does you no harm, and might even help them." Undoubtedly, evaluators should realize that the statistical robustness of many a well-designed survey could well be hanging by a rather thin cultural thread.

Seeing culture in perspective

Amartya Sen calls for placing culture in 'an adequately capacious framework.'⁴ What are the implications for development evaluation?

One, while culture is important, it should not be seen as uniquely shaping the lives of people. Depending on the context, other factors such as class, race, and gender can be equally, if not more, significant. For example, when it comes to fertility rates, income and education seem to matter much more than belonging to a particular religion, often associated with cultural influences. Muslims in India reported a total fertility rate (TFR) of 3.09, the highest among religious groups, but the TFR was higher (3.55) among women who had had no education and even higher (3.89) among those belonging to the lowest wealth quintile.⁵

Two, evaluators should refrain from viewing culture as a homogeneous attribute. There

are typically many variations and heterogeneity within "one" distinct culture. For instance, to talk of a unique Indian culture makes little sense given that India is the birthplace of Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism, and is home to millions of Christians and Muslims. There are large variations in the behaviours of Indians belonging to the different religions. For example, the proportion of men age 15–49 years who drank alcohol varied from 11 percent among Muslims and 13 percent among Jains to 34 percent among Hindus, 38 percent among Buddhists, 42 percent among Sikhs and 46 percent among Christians.

Three, evaluators should recognise that culture is not homogeneous, and neither is it static over time. To argue, for example, that Hindus across India will behave in a particular manner is completely wrong because the category of Hindus itself is not homogeneous within India. To illustrate, more than two-thirds (66 percent) of Hindu women age 15–49 in the state of Kerala (a relatively high income state with high female literacy) agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one specific reason as against only 33 percent of Hindu women in the state of Chhattisgarh (a relatively low income state with low female literacy). Clearly, while social norms might dictate responses and behaviour, there is nothing like a uniform culture that binds all Hindus, let alone all Indians.

To conclude, understanding social phenomena requires multiple perspectives. That culture matters, and therefore should become integral to the evaluation function is incontestable. The challenge before evaluators is to figure out more systematically how culture matters, and integrate the learnings into evaluation. This is fundamental to strengthening the practice of evaluation.

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1 For a detailed discussion, see Ofir and Shiva Kumar (2013).

2 See Ofir (2016).

3 The goals of the Khanna study conducted between 1954 to 1960 and financed by the Government of India and the Rockefeller Foundation were to (1) determine the effectiveness of a recognized method of contraception in limiting the numbers of people, when applied to whole populations of rural (village) communities in a highly populated area; (2) determine the effect of a program of family planning when offered to all members of a village community, as judged by numbers of births and deaths in that population; and (3) determine the effect of population control on health and social status. It was the first birth control program to have a control as well as a test population. [It is interesting to note how insensitively the term birth control was used in those days!].

4 See Sen (2004).

5 All data cited are from International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International. 2007. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005–06: India: Volume I*. Mumbai: IIPS.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND POWER DYNAMICS IN EVALUATION: REFLECTIONS FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Silvia Salinas Mulder and Fabiola Amariles

Have you ever conducted or managed an evaluation in culturally diverse settings characterised by strong inequalities among their members? If the answer is yes, the ideas expressed in this article, which capture many years of evaluation experience in Latin America – a region with over 800 indigenous groups and with ten percent of the population concentrating 71 percent of the region’s wealth – are likely to resonate with you and foster some further reflection on your own practice. If the answer is no, you might still find it interesting to continue reading and discover some fresh perspectives to rethink your previous experiences or address future evaluation challenges wherever life might take you.

In Latin America ‘cultural respect’ is part of the prevailing discourse and the claims of historically excluded groups. However, it frequently becomes a “dialogue of the

deaf”, since the notion of “cultural respect” embraces different assumptions that range from cultural fundamentalism to dynamic intercultural relationships. These assumptions influence how cultural competence is perceived and operationalised in evaluation policies, designs and implementation.

This is particularly relevant for evaluations that apply a gender transformative and social equity lens. Cultural assumptions often hide, underestimate or legitimate culturally determined gender hierarchical power relations and inequalities. As we have noted from our conversations with evaluators from other regions over the years, this is a worldwide phenomenon.

Based on our experience as evaluators in different countries of South and Central America, we have identified a list of frequent “culturally protective” but “gender blind”

ways of knowing, acting and doing things during different phases of the evaluation process. These include:

- I. **Generalisation and homogenisation:** Managers, evaluators and funders generally approach communities as homogeneous and isolated groups. This is a simplistic approach that ignores internal diversity, dynamism and exchanges with the outer world (e.g., migration).
- II. **Fundamentalism and idealisation:** This refers to an ahistorical approach that overvalues traditions and rejects transformations due to modernity. Frequently communities and some evaluators attribute changes, problems and conflicts to Western influence.
- III. **Invisibility of gender, race, age and other inequalities and their**

intersections: Key evaluation stakeholders ignore, negate or justify internal inequalities, as well as the interaction between two or more forms of discrimination, for example, the intersection of gender, race, age and ethnicity.

IV. Paternalism: Evaluators often show an unreflective, even “naive” trust in the community and its representatives vs. distrust and certain “guilt” over one’s questioning and analytical role. This frequently implies a non-critical, automatic acceptance of what the community members say.

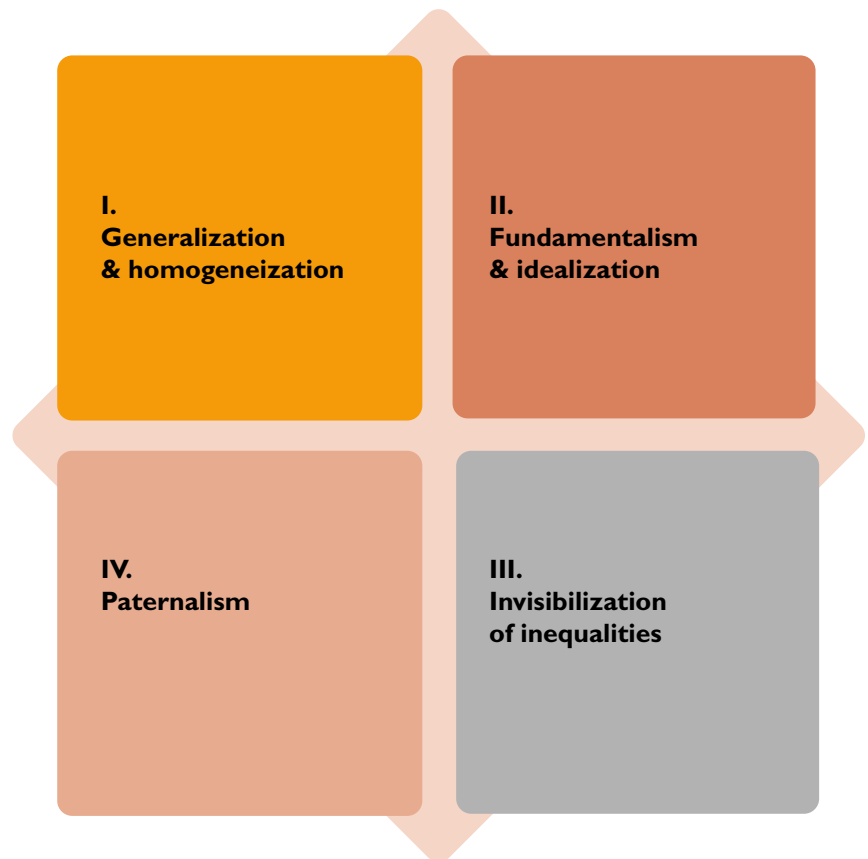
Given that the four aforementioned approaches of dealing with “otherness” reproduce gender bias, exclude women and inhibit the transformational potential of an evaluation towards gender equality, a serious reflection is needed on the links between gender and culture. In this vein, the next paragraph includes some points that could guide us in this self-reflection exercise:

(i) We see and evaluate through the eyes of our own history and environment; (ii) our view of reality is always partial and slanted; (iii) we as evaluators represent power structures and relationships, that can be expressed in subtle manners; (iv) gender expertise does not necessarily challenge machismo, patriarchal and colonial attitudes; and (v) evaluator competencies seldom include self-reflection and awareness around power issues.

We rely on these reflections to propose a set of “warnings” and tips to build a bridge between cultural and gender competences in evaluation:

Culture “vs” intercultural relations: Evaluations should be addressed as a process of learning and exchange with other cultures, not only “understanding” them. The use of cultural brokers as members of the evaluation team may be valuable to “bridge, link or mediate between groups of persons of different cultural backgrounds for the purpose of producing change” (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004).

There is no such thing as gender neutrality: As evaluators we need to be aware of the cultural context and some unexpected though predictable culturally-related power



“Culturally protective” approaches that may hide gender inequalities in evaluation.

issues during the evaluation process that may show gender inequalities and affect the results of the evaluation, e.g. if participation in the evaluation is limited to recognised leaders and authorities, usually male, who are considered to “represent” the community.

Not everything that shines is gold: Beware of counter-hegemonic evaluation paradigms that ignore gender inequalities and cultural complexity, and be sceptical about success measurements that do not clearly express gender transformations. For example, an indicator about credit allocation for women can hide cultural barriers, distortions and even violations to women rights to comply with the targets.

From powerful evaluator to empowering change actor: Transformational issues in evaluation require exploring new thinking about the role of evaluators as agents of social change. In turn, evaluators who wish to

go beyond their traditional technical role to an advocacy-oriented and empowering role need to get involved and interact with the culture of the communities where interventions being evaluated are operating. They also need to review their own beliefs and attitudes about power relations.

Geert Hofstede, a social, cultural and organisational researcher gives some advice on how different aspects of national cultures may differ from region to region that may contribute to this self-reflection. Among other tools, Hofstede built the “Power Distance Index”¹ that contributes to the understanding of power issues and may orient evaluation processes to be at a “same level playing field” in terms of cultural and gender equality issues.

Based on this analysis, we emphasise the importance of “gender responsive cultural competence” in evaluation. This implies that

evaluators need to be competent in preventing gender bias and assertively handle cultural resistance regarding gender equality, including myths, traditional patriarchal hierarchies and other culturally-supported women exclusion mechanisms. Furthermore, evaluators can play a key political and influential role in providing evidence to support culturally sensitive gender transformations.

Among the key qualities of a culturally and gender sensitive evaluator we could mention: context-knowledge, self-awareness and reflexivity, flexibility, strategic vision, lateral thinking, proactivity, active listening and an open mind. These dispositions need more emphasis in evaluator competences profiles, since they are as important as knowledge and practice criteria. They are strongly linked to evaluators' *ways of being* and *ways*

of seeing. They shape perceptions about the evaluator's role in relation to gender equality and social equity. It is up to the evaluation community to build the strategies needed to induce such attitudes among evaluation commissioners and practitioners ...and it is up to each reader to reflect on his/her own experience and stance in relation to gender and culture... both in theory and in practice.

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1 Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) measures the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) **accept and expect** that power is distributed unequally.

A "MADE IN AFRICA" APPROACH TO EVALUATION

Bagele Chilisa

Over the past five years the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) has sought to promote an initiative popularly known as *Made in Africa Evaluation*, defined as "high quality evaluation led by, and rooted in Africa". The initiative followed calls from both within and outside Africa (AfrEA, 2007; Bellagio Centre, 2012; Carden & Alkin, 2012) for evaluators in the Global South to pursue evaluation theories and practices that originate from within their own countries.

Although many in the African evaluation community continue to grapple with, and even question the concept, a recent study by the author indicates a growing consensus that *Made in Africa Evaluation* requires the development and use of evaluation models, conceptual frameworks and methodologies that arise from the histories, experiences,

indigenous knowledge systems and multiple worldviews of African peoples¹. Both development and evaluation are greatly influenced by what is valued by whom under what circumstances. Values also underpin who and what is evaluated, and the criteria, measures and practices used to inform evaluative learning and judgment. All of these depend on individuals' and societies' lived realities, which in turn greatly influence what they consider as valuable knowledge and development outcomes.

A *Made in Africa Evaluation* approach therefore inevitably raises fundamental questions about the paradigms in Africa that underlie both the development experience and the evaluation of development interventions. It implies that evaluators working in Africa have to be much more aware of, and explicit about

African societies' values and beliefs about development, and about the definition and nature of 'development success' in the contexts in which their evaluations take place. And while recognizing the great diversity of cultures that span the continent, it is necessary – and possible – to identify and build on those common core values and elements of culture that make us 'African'.²

The *Made in Africa Evaluation* continuum

A *Made in Africa Evaluation* approach can be designed to fit somewhere on a continuum from the least to the most 'indigenised', where the latter means being predominantly Africa-centred and informed by African worldviews. The **least indigenised approach** relates to technicalities in the evaluation methods,

dominated by a focus on the adaptation of 'tools' to local conditions and languages. An adaptive or **integrative approach** to 'indigenising' evaluation combines evaluation approaches, methods and standards that originated in the West with African-based local practices, cultural frameworks and indigenous knowledge. The approach is dominated by a focus on ensuring such integration. In what can be called an **African-relational evaluation approach**, African evaluators are encouraged to think out of the box and to imagine what evaluation would have looked like if it had originated as a concept in Africa, by Africans, for Africa. It requires the development of completely new evaluation theories and practices from within the continent that can also inform the evolution of evaluation in the rest of the world.

Developing an African-relational evaluation approach

The emerging notion of an African-relational evaluation approach is informed by post-colonial indigenous paradigms (Chilisa, 2012), African worldviews (Carroll, 2008), and Afrocentric worldviews and the Ubuntu philosophy (Asante, 1990; Muwanga-Zake, 2009). It combines the integrative approach noted above with evaluation methodologies driven by African worldviews in general and, importantly, by African worldviews of development. There is a strong focus on participants' realities, knowledge systems and value systems, and on the use of evaluation results by the participants in both the evaluation and the evaluand, as well as by the commissioners of the evaluation. The evaluator is guided by questions that encourage the development of an evaluation methodology, strategy and methods that are unique to an African world view.

Core elements towards *Made in Africa Evaluation*

A *Made in Africa Evaluation* approach informed by relational-based evaluation inquiry will therefore have a number of core elements. The following provides examples:

1. The evaluation agenda will focus on using evaluation as a tool for development that contributes to the well-being of individuals, their relatives and others with valued relationships, as well as the environment to which they are all connected.

2. The evaluation agenda will highlight that Africans have to be responsible for solving their own problems.
3. The evaluation methodology will be informed by ethno philosophy, Afrocentric paradigms, African paradigms, and their philosophical assumptions about the nature of relational ontologies, epistemologies and values.
4. A holistic construction of evaluation knowledge will be used to produce evidence.
5. Attention will be paid to local languages and local metaphors that relate to the evaluation.
6. Community and cultural knowledge will be valued and used as a basis for further improvement of the intervention, and for sustaining the intervention and/or its positive impacts.
7. Where relevant, the integrative approach will promote integration between evaluation approaches, methods and standards of stakeholders from both the West (e.g. aid donors) and from Africa.
8. A focus on values will inform the evaluation intent, motive and methodology, and emphasize belonging, togetherness, interdependence, relationships, collectiveness and harmony.
9. Core values based on relationships will be prominent, and include among others fairness and reflexivity based on relationships, while showing respect by treating the community as knowers and evaluators.
10. Evaluators and funding agents will establish long-lasting relationships.

The conceptualisation of the *Made in Africa Evaluation* approach is still evolving; its application is in its infancy. But it has triggered important discussions about the need to embrace resistance to the blind borrowing of Western values, approaches and standards in the evaluation of development interventions in Africa. It seeks to stamp out decontextualized evaluation and create new Africa informed evaluation theories, strategies and practices. Irrespective of who sponsors, conducts or contributes to evaluations in Africa, a *Made in Africa Evaluation* agenda should be pursued, with evaluations that involve Africans from the beginning, are inclusive of all relevant knowledge systems, and place African worldviews and philosophies at the centre of both evaluation and development theory and practice.

Examples of questions that may guide assessment of a relational-based evaluation inquiry

Reference to questions initially posed by Carroll (2008) for research informed by an African worldview helps to illustrate the different approach that relational-based evaluation inquiry brings to evaluation practice.

- To what extent does the evaluation inquiry reflect the interdependent and interconnected nature of the universe?
- To what extent does the evaluation inquiry compensate for the spiritual and material nature of reality?
- To what extent does the evaluation inquiry access non-material reality?
- To what extent does the evaluation inquiry reflect the communal nature of African societies?
- To what extent does the evaluation inquiry advance the interests of African society?
- To what extent does the evaluation inquiry contribute to the liberation of the African people?

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1 For related arguments, see the articles of Ofir and Kumar respectively in this special edition.

2 The still unpublished study on the conceptualisation of *Made in Africa Evaluation* was commissioned by AfrEA and supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Its findings are based on a literature study, discussions at the Fourth and Sixth AfrEA Conferences held in 2007 in Niamey and in 2012 in Accra respectively, an *African Thought Leaders Forum* held in Bellagio in 2012, and a series of interviews with prominent African and international evaluators.

BUILDING VIETNAM'S RESEARCH EVALUATION SYSTEM: A CROSS-CULTURAL JOURNEY

Nguyen Thi Thu Oanh and Michael Braun

From post-war society to knowledge economy

Since the end of the war in 1975, Vietnam has transformed itself from a rural post-war economy to one of the world's fastest growing economies. Being on the verge of becoming a middle income country, Vietnam must now make the next development step from a 'resource and cheap labour driven' economy towards a 'technology and innovation driven' economy with higher value added and productivity. This requires a drastically enhanced level of scientific and technological competencies and capacities.

The Government of Vietnam recognised the importance of science and technology (S&T) early on and allocated the highest priority to their development. The economic reform process *Đổi mới*, launched in 1986, paved the way for the development of rapidly growing research capacities and an increasingly comprehensive legal and administrative S&T framework. Yet despite this progress, Vietnam's S&T is still work in progress. Research output is still low, and technology transfer and science-industry interactions need improvement to reap the benefits of S&T for economy and society.

Evaluation as new policy instrument

Around 2000, policy makers realised that they had insufficient information to allocate scarce S&T resources efficiently and continuously to improve research and its outputs. This situation called for a new instrument. But at that time evaluation was not used for research policy making in Vietnam, and had no legal status until the first formal request for evaluating S&T tasks and results was formulated in 2000 in the Law on Science and Technology, later further expanded in the 2013 version of the Law. This triggered the first experimental efforts to apply evaluation tools in project evaluation. At the same time studies with foreign partners confirmed the need for evaluation and led to the conclusion that Vietnam needed its own dedicated evaluation competencies and capacities, yet lacked the necessary knowledge, experience and trained experts to build these on its own.

The first step towards a dedicated capacity building strategy was to establish in 2006 the Vietnam Centre for Science and Technology Evaluation (VISTEC) as a national competency centre spearheading the development

of S&T evaluation, with the initial tasks of building a critical mass of evaluation competencies and capacities, and to prove the feasibility and value of evaluation of scientific and technological activities. Knowledge transfer from other countries was chosen as tool to accelerate this process. Partners from South Korea, China and Germany provided first training initiatives and methodologies, and helped to test these in pilot evaluations.

Cross-cultural collaboration towards evidence based policy-making

Lessons learned from these first cross-cultural efforts made it clear that a simple 'copy and paste' approach to transferring evaluation concepts from the West does not work well in a country like Vietnam.

First, in emerging countries with no tradition of modern S&T management, a lack of understanding of, and experience with evaluation creates significant barriers to its acceptance. Researchers and knowledge workers adopt a defensive attitude because they perceive evaluations as a threat – a tool geared to penalise poor performers – rather than as a learning mechanism designed to

identify weaknesses and improve organizational performance.

Second, evaluation approaches and methodologies from other countries cannot be applied in Vietnam without considerable adjustment to accommodate underlying cultural norms, distinctive administrative and political processes, frequent absence of data and other cultural and technical hurdles.

For example, evaluation approaches designed in the West rely on open debates and constructive criticism to identify weaknesses and opportunities for improvement; this is generally accepted as basis for collaborative assessment and consensus-based solutions. This attitude is much less common in many Asian societies, where actors often tend to shy away from open criticism to protect themselves and avoid offending others, losing face or making others lose face. Junior staff also refrain from criticising their superiors publicly. This explains in part why evaluation results tend to be overly influenced by the opinions of leaders or why they often capture an uncritical majority consensus that reflects a 'least common denominator' of views.

The use of questionnaires provides another example: When asking participants to rate performance, improvement needs, and so forth on a scale (for example, from 1 = poor to 7 = excellent), Western respondents may not hesitate to assign extreme grades. Vietnamese respondents tend to avoid these and to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction through minor deviations from the 'neutral' average.

Third, evaluations do not have sustainable impact if they are not embedded in policy-making processes. Western countries tend to favour analytical decision-making styles that produce immediate results for what can often be considered as fairly narrow issues under consideration. Thus policy-making often relies on evidence that is perceived to be 'objective' and is provided by instruments like evaluations. Evaluation results are

usually publicly available and intended for use in policy processes.

By contrast, countries with a cultural background heavily influenced by for example Confucianism, tend to favour holistic decision-making styles which emphasise the 'big picture' and take into account issues such as the relations between actors, implications for the community, and system stability versus short-term change. This type of decision-making thus places more weight on sources other than science-based evidence, which is seen as tending to address more directly issues of more immediate concern. Overcoming this barrier for the use of evaluation results requires reconciliation between the (issue driven) benefits of conventional Western evaluation approaches, and evidence informed policy-making based on more holistically-oriented local decision-making styles.

Collaborative 'learning by doing' with international partners: key to efficient knowledge transfer

VISTEC's first experiences showed that isolated training and coaching initiatives were not sufficient to drive the development of its competencies and capacities. In 2010 it switched to an integrated 'learning by doing' approach through a joint Vietnamese-German project named *EvaCap* (Evaluation Capacity Building). In several pilot projects, VISTEC staff worked side-by-side with German partner institutions to evaluate key elements of Vietnam's research system. As complement to these 'external' partnerships, an experienced senior German specialist was embedded as VISTEC staff member ('Integrated Expert') during and after *EvaCap*.

This approach proved to be a particularly efficient mechanism for sustainable knowledge transfer and capacity building. The project partners provided the initial (German based) evaluation concepts and experience as the basis for conceptual work; the task of the VISTEC team was to adapt these for use in

Vietnam's specific context. The Integrated Expert helped to bridge the German and Vietnamese perceptions, and supported the VISTEC team in its everyday work. After *EvaCap*'s completion, VISTEC has been working to consolidate its evaluation competencies, and continues to prove, apply and broaden them.

This experience showed the benefits as well as the limitations of North-South knowledge transfer. Western partners have to be willing to learn about those aspects of the host country's conditions and cultures that influence among others decision-making, dialogue, stakeholder involvement and transparency. They have to adjust their own concepts and behaviour – as 'proven' as they might be in their home country. A 'missionary approach' – "*This is how we do it; you must do it the same way*" – poisons the process of engagement.

In turn, the Vietnamese partners have to be willing to challenge their traditional thinking and behavioural patterns while step-by-step assuming responsibility for each evaluation. They also have to make the cross-cultural adjustments necessary to relate to the global S&T and evaluation communities. Thus the Integrated Expert has the challenge of becoming part of the local team and culture while at the same time maintaining the critical distance of an 'expert' to facilitate translation of evaluation concepts and build bridges of cross-cultural understanding.

The cross-cultural collaboration on *EvaCap* between Germany and Vietnam confirmed that building a research evaluation system with the help of other countries can accelerate institutional learning. But this requires much more than just transferring evaluation methods, competencies and capacities. While appropriate methodological skills and implementation experience are essential, cultural sensitivity and cultural change – and the appropriate interpersonal skills to enable and support these – are crucial contributors to success. ■

THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATIONS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

Alcides F. Gussi and Breyner R. Oliveira

This article intends to expand the theoretical and methodological horizons of the evaluation field by considering culture an interpretative dimension in public policy evaluation. In doing so, we use Geertz's definition of culture (1973) according to which: 'man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun and [...] culture can be considered to be those webs, and its analysis is not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretative in search of meaning'. Consistent with our approach, we then reject the 'functional' definition of culture, according to which culture is merely a technical organizational attribute, that is, a set of tools primarily aimed to glue values and practices within any group of professionals (Wright, 1994).

Based on the understanding of evaluation as a socio-political and cultural process in which culture is not a bounded or static variable but a dynamic and fluid context, we argue that cultural competence in public policy evaluations could be greatly enhanced by the use of an ethnographical approach ('institutional or political ethnography').

With that awareness, we put forward some principles that can assist evaluators in making sense of the data collected and analysed during their policy evaluation fieldwork. In doing so, we assume that evaluators should be aware of, and refine further their 'anthropological perspective' based on two fundamental assumptions (Cardoso de Oliveira, 1996):

- i. **The unbiased stance of the evaluator:** individuals conceive public policies, and understand their results and impacts based on their own existing cultural references. Evaluators should understand and assess the merit, worth and significance of policies, not only through their own eyes, but also through the eyes of all policy stakeholders, without giving special priority to any individual perspective.
- ii. **The relevance of participant observation as a contextually responsive**

evaluation method: as public policy evaluators are embedded within a specific political context, they should ensure that their evaluations represent as many in-depth perspectives as possible, in line with the so-called "ethnography of experiences" methodology (Lejano, 2006). The evaluator is supposed to analyze how the policy flows (its empirical experience) in different cultural contexts by doing ethnography of the policy experience.

Key factors to take into account during public policy evaluations

Conducting a culturally competent public policy evaluation entails consideration of an accurate analysis of the following: (i) the content of the policy under scrutiny; (ii) the context of its formulation; (iii) its temporal and geographical scope; and (iv) the related "institutional trajectories".

Grasping the notion of institutional trajectories is fundamental to a better understand of the new evaluative approach that this article advocates. In order to understand an institutional trajectory and discuss it exhaustively in an evaluation report, an evaluator needs to collect data on multiple (explicit and implicit) cultural variables at different levels: (a) the way public institutions work (e.g., the institutional division of roles and responsibilities and the type of existing policy-making processes); and (b) the type and quality of knowledge and attitudes towards the policy in question among individuals, both inside and outside policy institutions, that affect the policy making processes.

That said, there are factors that could assist evaluators in this endeavour. *First*, evaluators should be aware that their own understanding of the policy (i.e., their own understanding of the policy is partial, and not representative of the society's perspective as a whole). *Second*, evaluators should describe the perceptions and understanding of the policy among as many actors as possible within the system where the policy is developed and

implemented. *Third*, evaluators should clearly explain in their reports how they have developed the evaluation methodology used to assess the public policy in question, and also clarify the interpretive paradigms that guide their analysis.

Key questions in culturally competent public policy evaluations

We propose four groups of evaluative questions to assist evaluators in their effort to make their public policy evaluations more culturally relevant and competent in the future:

1. **Questions about actors and institutions involved in the development and implementation of public policies based on the cultural meanings that they assign to the policies and their results**
 - Who are the institutional actors involved in the development of the policy, and how are they related to each other? Considering their institutional positions, how do they characterize and perceive policies?
 - Were the expected beneficiaries taken into account during the institutional processes? To what extent were their cultural values considered?
2. **Questions about "institutional trajectories"**
 - What are the different types of institutional change and turnover observed during the formulation and implementation paths of the policy?
 - To what extent were/are such institutional trajectories modified by both institutional actors and the general public?
 - How was the policy agenda set and how was it adapted to different cultural contexts?
3. **Questions about the policy outcomes and its cultural contexts**

- To what extent do different cultural local contexts influence the policy results?
- Are there unintended consequences resulting from policy implementation?

4. Questions about the evaluator's contributions to the (re) formulation of policy and the development of recommendations for policy improvements

- Based on the local cultural context and institutional trajectories, how could evaluators contribute to the reformulation of the policy framework?

- Do evaluators' recommendations bring all cultural perspectives together when developing his/her findings?
- Do evaluators understand possible values, insights and contextual factors and make recommendations based on the interpretation of their findings?

In putting forward these questions, we ascribe to the vision that all public policies are developed and implemented in a specific cultural context. Therefore, in order to evaluate public policies effectively, relying on the ethnographic approach suggested herein will allow the incorporation of the perspectives and interpretations of all stakeholders.

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LOCATIONS OF CULTURE IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION: AN EXPLORATION OF THE EMPIRICAL LANDSCAPE¹

Jill Anne Chouinard and Rodney Hopson

Despite the recognition that evaluation is an intensely cultural practice influenced by Western approaches to social inquiry, there is little discussion about the implications of these practices, especially in the context of international development evaluation (Chouinard & Cousins, 2015). This is a significant omission given the long history of Western colonialism in the Global South.

In the research on which this article is based, we did a comprehensive review of 71 peer-reviewed articles on evaluation in international development contexts in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and the Caribbean, published over the past 18 years by evaluators located principally in Western contexts. Our search was limited to studies that focused on empirical observation through reflections on case studies and prior experiences in the field and on evaluations located in international development contexts. We searched databases that would provide the broadest selection of studies in journals related to evaluation, development/international studies, education and health. We also did a thorough search through international databases and followed

up related bibliographies to augment our sample. The majority of our 71 studies come from peer-reviewed journals and from two edited volumes. We identified five broad themes, all of which help situate the multiple, dynamic and often conflicting expressions of culture in evaluation practice in the Global South. What follows is a brief description of key points in each identified theme.

Expressions of culture along a continuum from explicit to implicit. Twenty-four of the studies gave culture explicit attention in their evaluation design, process and implementation. Many of these studies also identified evaluation as a Western construct based on a modernist agenda, highlighting potential cultural incompatibility with local and indigenous knowledge systems. The other seventy percent of studies, while in many instances addressing local complexities, did not explicitly discuss culture or the cultural implications of their evaluation work. Our cultural continuum, from explicit mention of culture to implicit mention, reflects the complexity of evaluation practice in international development contexts, and the challenges of

modifying (however slightly) Western methodologies in non-Western cultural contexts.

A cultural critique of participatory practice in international development. Ninety-two percent of the studies adopted participatory approaches, either alone or in combination with other impact-oriented approaches. We also identified over 30 distinct approaches to participatory practice distinguishable by rationale, context, programmatic emphasis and political orientation – a proliferation of practice that likely reflects the cultural diversity and complexity of programme and community contexts. A dominant theme throughout was the notion of *balance* between two conflicting or distinct constructs, either at the level of politics, knowledge construction, culture or methodology. For some, resolution of these tensions was focused on finding technical solutions to provide the 'right' combination of methods, techniques and approaches. For others, these tensions were part of a much larger development discourse framed by the social, historical, political and cultural relations that prevail between donor and recipient nations (Ebbutt, 1998). While

the mixing of methods and approaches may provide a way of embracing the plurality of perspectives and engaging with difference (Greene, 2007), we also noted the emphasis on finding a technical solution to what we consider a much broader socio-political and cultural challenge. Understanding these dynamics shifts the focus from participation as a technique, to participation as an inherently political process.

The limits of social constructivist knowledge and representations of voice. Participatory evaluation is considered a relational process where stakeholders and evaluators become active partners and collaborators, together co-producing evaluative knowledge. Despite the use of collaborative approaches in culturally complex ecological settings, the co-construction of knowledge and meaning is not uncontested, as one cannot discount the burden of colonial history or the power asymmetry that characterizes donor – recipient relationships. In culturally complex settings, social constructivist approaches to knowledge construction are problematic, as questions of authority, representation, voice and power persist. The notion of negotiated consensus amidst such confounding diversity and power imbalance is problematic – a political rather than a methodological issue (Kushner, 1999).

Situating evaluation as a cultural practice. As a “Child of America” (Bhola, 2003, p. 403), evaluation continues to reflect Western perspectives, norms and values, what for many is considered “reductionist, linear, objective, hierarchical, empirical, static, temporal, singular, specialized and written” (Smylie et al., 2003, p. 141). Despite this, only a few studies in our sample identified tension between localised conceptions and the notion

of evaluation as a Western concept. To be culturally relevant, however, requires significant sensitivity to other ways of knowing and an awareness of the cultural implications of prevailing methodological practices.

Cultural engagement and the multifaceted role of the evaluator. Our findings suggest that the concept of role takes on particular significance in culturally and socio-politically complex environments, as evaluators must assume multiple, often conflicting and competing roles as the evaluation unfolds, from juggler, conciliator, cultural translator, tight-rope walker, conflict manager and negotiator. Our study sample identifies the need for evaluators to manage competing and conflicting agendas, and juggle multiple evaluation approaches to address issues of inclusion and diversity, while addressing ongoing issues of conflict and power between diverse stakeholders and interest groups. Our findings point to a dynamic of evaluation very much tied to the situational and cultural complexity of the context, in continuous evolution through interaction with others.

The five themes cover a very broad cultural and geographic canvas. They also highlight some of the key cultural assumptions behind development evaluation as it is practiced today in international settings. We were particularly struck by the incredible diversity of programme and community contexts, the range and combination of evaluation approaches and methods used, the large number and diversity of stakeholders involved across programmes, the tension between the notion of evaluation as a technocratic, accountability based mechanism and evaluation seen as a leverage for community change and empowerment without adequate consideration

of culture or its implications for evaluation practice. Our core argument is that this gap should be filled to ensure that evaluation does not serve as a means of compliance with oppressive policies. This is because evaluation in international development contexts cannot remain immune from the realities, exigencies and politics of the development cooperation agenda.

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EVALUATION AND THE NATION STATE: WHERE CULTURE, CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT MEET

Zenda Ofir

Discussions about culture have shaped the evaluation discipline since the 1960s. By now, the cultural dimensions to which evaluation should attend have been well articulated, especially for individual interventions – e.g. in rural or urban communities, or within a single group such as an indigenous tribe. Recognition that culture matters has spawned use of a variety of participatory methodologies. But these have not always engaged with the *deepest underlying* beliefs, assumptions, attitudes and values that, while manifesting themselves in and through memes, rituals and symbols (or sometimes ‘heroes’), also reflect some of the most deeply rooted elements that shape the psyche of societies and hence their main patterns of behaviour. It is inevitable that these would influence development success.

The challenge is especially demanding when development interventions are at macro – i.e., national, regional or global – level, thus in a multi-cultural society or where a large intervention cuts across swathes of distinctly different societal (sub)cultures. In such cases in-depth work with each is seldom possible and, except for an occasional focus on gender, social justice and the like, a culturally sensitive lens on the intervention has been absent. While the holistic 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development confirmed the important influence of “context”, it did not explicitly acknowledge the pervasive role of culture.

Local development planners and evaluators committed to “country-owned” interventions and evaluations are also not necessarily sensitive to issues of culture. In a globalised world where evaluators work across national boundaries, imported models and perspectives often dominate.

Māori and other indigenous peoples’ thoughtful engagement with evaluation has brought to light the pivotal importance of these core dimensions of culture in how both interventions and evaluations are conceptualized and done. Thus in the *Kaupapa Māori* paradigm, evaluations are conducted primarily through



Figure 1: Elements of the culture-context co-evolution that shapes the psyche of a society and its patterns of behaviour.

the lens of genealogy and relationships (or kinship) (Cram et al, 2015). This distinct emphasis on relationships and communal harmony is shared by many societies across the East and Africa, yet contrasts with the individualism favoured by Western evaluators.

Deeply rooted ways of perception, beliefs, attitudes and values bind diverse societies together into broader identities. Africa has more than 3,000 tribes and 2,000 languages, yet many African scholars hold that “being African” is about much more than geography – what Etounga-Manguelle (2000) calls “a foundation of shared values, attitudes and institutions that bind together nations south of the Sahara” This “foundation” enables a person to be “African” while belonging to one of many “subcultures” that flourish on the continent. Where marked differences have developed, for example between the “city” and the “village” – shared values persist, even in contexts where they appear invisible (Danner, 2012).

If development planners and evaluators neglect consideration of such dimensions of culture, sustained development success cannot be assured. For example, in deeply hierarchical societies, if youth-focused or gender interventions are planned and implemented without due consideration of their impact on the privileged position of leaders, the elderly or another gender, the societal fabric might tear in a manner not immediately visible, yet that might deeply affect that society over time. Planners and evaluators have to consider both positive and negative consequences of such interventions, and possible trade-offs, for that society.

Three main premises underlie this article. First, as implied by Figure 1, a societal culture is not static; its co-evolution with context over time shapes the *psyche* of the society, or its *disposition*, i.e., its *tendency to think or act in a particular way*. Individuals’ disposition, shaped *i.a.* by shared experiences, influences patterns of thinking and behaviour

Hofstede's Five Dimensions of Value	Triandis' Cultural Syndromes	Trompenaar's Seven Dimensions of Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualism vs Collectivism • Large vs Small Power Distance • Strong vs Weak Uncertainty avoidance • Masculinity vs Femininity • Long vs Short Term Orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Complexity • Tight and Loose Cultures • Individualism and Collectivism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universalism vs Particularism • Individualism vs Communitarianism • Specific vs Diffuse • Neutral vs Emotional • Achievement vs Ascription • Sequential Time vs Synchronous Time • Internal Direction vs Outer Direction

Table 1. Examples of prominent typologies of culture.

during a particular phase in the development of a society. Such influence is particularly salient if an intervention challenges the status quo and ignores the most enduring, deeply rooted (core) dimensions of the prevailing societal culture.

Second, policy-makers, development planners and evaluators working at macro level should identify and work with such core dimensions of a culture when conceptualizing, designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions and their impact on development.

Third, evaluators should become familiar with, and use some of the existing typologies of culture (examples in Table 1) when applying methodologies for this purpose.

In a recent paper, Michael Quinn Patton (2016) argues that nation-states are constrained by artificial national boundaries and imposed cultural identities. He proposes a mind-shift from nation-state based evaluation to global systems thinking consistent with the notion of

a universal civilization. In the same paper, Kate McKegg is quoted as arguing for preserving and revitalizing cultural diversity while thinking globally. In this article I argue that there are cultural limits to “belonging”, and that a truly transcultural approach should be cognisant of the core dimensions of culture that shape both nation-states and the broadest common cultural identity with which people feel comfortable associating themselves, such as being “Western” or “African”. Only then can we provide a nuanced assessment of the influence of culture on development, and the ways it affects a society or nation’s psyche, patterns of behaviour and disposition to change.

It is therefore imperative to harness our power as evaluators to respect and bridge, rather than ignore the differences between nations and larger groupings. In all our work, culture matters.

The voyage has only started. We still have to discover how within our countries and

communities we can best engage systematically and respectfully with culture from this macro perspective. Local citizens and experts are best placed to position the country and/or the locality within a legitimate cultural framework. And we need not only frameworks, methodologies and toolkits that explain concepts, options and methods, but the construction of national and evaluator capacities that ensure that culturally sensitive evaluation move from rhetoric to effective practice. It will be essential to experiment, and this will have to be a collective, concerted effort.

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THE AUTHORS

Fabiola Amariles



is a Colombian economist with graduate studies in Strategic Management and specialized training in organizational development and quantitative/qualitative research and evaluation. She specialized in gender equity/equality issues and empowerment of women in international development, while working for many years for CIAT, one of the 15 centers of the global agricultural research partnership CGIAR. In 2006 she founded and at present owns the consulting firm Learning for Impact, Corp., with offices in USA and Colombia. Currently member of the Management Group of EvalGender+, the global partnership to promote Equity Focused and Gender Responsive Evaluations.

Michael Braun



heads currently the Department of Technology Transfer and Industrial Relations of the Vietnamese-German University in Hanoi. Before this, he worked for four years with VISTEC, Vietnam's Ministry of Science and Technology and other stakeholders on S&T policies, evaluation and implementation in Vietnam. This work is based on over 20 years of experience in research, technology and innovation management for European consulting companies, in which Michael held different leadership positions in major consulting companies.

Bagele Chilisa



is a Professor at the University of Botswana, where she teaches research and evaluation to graduate students. She is author of *Indigenous Research Methodologies* published by SAGE. The book is used as a textbook across disciplines and has been adopted as a primary or supplementary textbook in

universities in the USA, Canada and Africa. She has received numerous grants to carry out culturally appropriate evaluation on HIV/AIDS, gender and education programs, and to conduct workshops on indigenous research and evaluation methodologies. She has also organized sessions in international conferences to advocate for indigenous research and evaluation methodologies, and African rooted research and evaluation.

Jill Anne Chouinard



is an Assistant Professor in Educational Research Methodology, School of Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Her main interests are in cross-cultural/culturally responsive approaches to research and evaluation, and participatory research and evaluation. Given her interest in utilizing evaluation as a leverage for social change, her research also focuses on the relationship between evaluation and public policy. She also has extensive experience working on evaluations at the community level in the areas of education and training, social services, health, and organizational learning and change.

Alcides Gussi



is a Brazilian Anthropologist with a PhD in Education from the University of Campinas. Professor in the Masters in Public Policy Evaluation program at the Federal University of Ceará, he is currently a visiting scholar at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Member of the Executive Committee of the Latin American and Caribbean Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization Network (ReLac), he also served as Director of Brazilian Monitoring and Evaluation Network and as member of the editorial board of *Brazilian Monitoring and Evaluation Review*.

Rodney Hopson



is a professor of education policy and evaluation, College of Education and Human Development, George Mason University. His main interests in evaluation focus on developing critical, cultural, and ecological approaches, frameworks, and theories that reposition communities and groups that are underserved and under-represented in international and cross-cultural contexts.

Nguyen Thi Thu Oanh



is a senior executive of Vietnam's Ministry of Science and Technology and Vice Director of the World Bank-funded project *Fostering Innovation through Research, Science and Technology (FIRST)*, which supports science, technology and innovation (STI) in Vietnam by designing and piloting of STI policies, enhancing the effectiveness of project-aided research and development institutions, and encouraging the development of innovative technology enterprises. Prior to this, she was Vice Director of the Vietnam Centre for Science and Technology Evaluation VISTEC. In this role, she has shaped the development of research evaluation in Vietnam since its beginnings and managed key endeavors like the described *EvaCap* project.

Zenda Ofir



is a South African scientist and evaluation specialist, co-founder of the newly established International Center for Evaluation and Development (ICED) in Nairobi, and Honorary Professor at the School for Public Leadership in Stellenbosch University, South Africa. She has conducted evaluation and knowledge management assignments in nearly 40 countries across Africa and Asia. She works from local to global level across

many fields and sectors, and provides strategic and practical support and advice on evaluation for development to multi-lateral and other international organisations across the world. She is a former President of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), former Vice-President of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE) and former Board member of the American Evaluation Association (AEA). Zenda has a PhD in Chemistry and currently resides near Geneva in Switzerland.

Breyner Oliviera



is an Economist and Public Policy Specialist with a Ph.D. in Education. He both conducts research and teaches as a Professor in two Master Programs (Education and Applied Economics) offered by the Federal University in Ouro Preto (State of Minas Gerais, Brazil). He is currently serving as the Director of the Brazilian Monitoring and Evaluation Network.

Silvia Salinas Mulder



is a Bolivian anthropologist, with a specialisation in Andean Studies and a Master's degree in Decentralization and Public Administration. Senior consultant, researcher and evaluator in the social development sector, linked to international, governmental and civil society organisations. Recognised for her specialised though systemic and creative approaches to key poverty, development and exclusion topics, like gender, violence, rights, sexual and reproductive health, aging and adolescents. Internationally known as speaker and human rights activist. Author of a vast number of publications, she is currently president of the Bolivian Monitoring and Evaluation Network (REDMEBOL) and strongly linked to EvalGender+.

A. K. Shiva Kumar



works on issues related to human development –poverty, health, nutrition, basic education, and the rights of women and children. He co-Chairs the Know Violence in Childhood (a global learning initiative) and is a senior policy advisor to UNICEF India. He has served as the Director of the International Centre for Human Development in New

Delhi and was a founding board member of the International Development Evaluation Association. He is a regular contributor to UNDP's Human Development Reports and a Visiting Professor at the Ashoka University and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Shiva Kumar has a Ph.D in Political Economy and Government, both from Harvard University.

Michele Tarsilla



is an independent evaluator and capacity development specialist with a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Evaluation. A former Fulbright Scholar with a keen interest in fieldwork within international and cross-cultural settings, he has worked for many multilateral organizations, foreign governments and NGOs in 40 countries. He continuously strives to serve the global evaluation community and contribute to the enhancement of both its practices and theoretical discourse. A prolific blogger and keynote speaker, he is currently a Board member of IDEAS (International Development Evaluation Association). Currently based between Washington DC and Paris, Michele speaks six languages, including French, Spanish and Portuguese.

GUIDANCE TO CONTRIBUTORS

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Website: United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2007, May 4). Climate Change. Retrieved 12 June 2014 from the Environmental Protection Agency website: <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange>.

In-text reference: (United States Environmental, 2007).

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