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Swahili wisdom for shaping development evaluation practices

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Background: African people demand the reformation of current development evaluation practices because they are less democratic and marginalise their ways of knowing and valuing.

Objectives: This article examined wisdom in Swahili proverbs that could inspire and guide efforts to reform development evaluation practices to make them more democratic and transformative.

Method: A total of 45 Swahili proverbs were analysed to uncover their wisdom and guidance on framing meanings and purposes of evaluation and the rights and duties of participants in the evaluation process. The appropriateness and feasibility of the framed meanings, purposes, rights and duties were tested in a survey involving 61 Swahili-speaking evaluators.

Results: Based on the uncovered wisdom, development evaluations are social activities initiated by and involving people to systematically inquire and assess aspects of ongoing or completed development projects and programmes to: (1) determine performances in keeping promises made, (2) determine preventive and corrective measures for possible and actual implementation challenges and (3) co-learn and co-produce histories of the completed development projects and programmes. Insights in these three development evaluation practices adequately guide respecting people's rights and freedoms to initiate and lead the evaluations of their development projects and programmes and integrate their ways of knowing and valuing.

Conclusion: Swahili wisdom provides solid theoretical bases and numerous methodological strategies for supporting people in initiating, conducting and using evaluations.

Contribution: This research contributes to the proverb-based approach to developing African-rooted evaluation theories and methodologies by offering lessons on generating and applying proverbial wisdom to improve development evaluation practices.

Keywords: Swahili proverbs; African-rooted evaluation; people-centric evaluation; indigenous evaluation; development evaluation.

Introduction

Development evaluation refers to the systematic and objective assessment of ongoing or completed development programmes or projects (Morra-Imas & Rist 2009; OECD 1991). It comprises inquiries about the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability, and the generation of credible and valuable information to facilitate decision-making about aspects of implemented programmes or projects (Morra-Imas & Rist 2009; OECD 1991). The generated information facilitates making decisions 'about maintaining, institutionalizing and expanding successful programmes and modifying and abandoning unsuccessful ones' (Norris 2015:135).

Development evaluation practices must 'promote social betterment' and 'be responsive to the needs of the program, its participants, and potential future users' (Podems 2017:11). People directly affected by development projects or programmes must actively and meaningfully participate in evaluating those projects or programmes (Reineke 1991). Greene (1997:5) supports the involvement of legitimate stakeholders 'in all relevant decisions about a particular program's merit and worth' but insists that such support for stakeholders be rooted in the evaluator's roles, stances and value commitments (2005:10).

Note: Special Collection: Addressing Knowledge Asymmetries.

Development evaluation practices that embrace and adhere to democratic principles 'establish conditions that foster active participation of stakeholders in the evaluation process' (Reineke 1991) and create 'social conditions for organizational and institutional learning' (Norris 2015:137–138). In that regard, Reineke (1991) urges development evaluators to determine who should be involved, when involvement should occur, and how to meaningfully involve their legitimate stakeholders in evaluations.

Levine (2017) also supports the involvement of legitimate stakeholders in evaluations and emphasises that their perspectives:

> [B]e considered, deliberated on, and discussed in the process of developing evaluation questions; determining criteria for judging quality, progress or success; interpreting results; and determining what actions need to be taken. (p. 42)

Likewise, House and Howe (1998, 2000) support the involvement of legitimate stakeholders in dialogues about the evaluated projects or programmes to uncover and completely portray their interests, opinions and ideas.

Advantages associated with the democratising development evaluation practices include: (1) making an explicit link between evaluation, accountability and democracy, (2) contributing to building the evaluation capacities of local stakeholders and (3) the opportunity to utilise many forms of knowing and valuing of local stakeholders to inform the evaluation process (Townley & Wilks-Heeg 1999).

Notwithstanding the advantages and promises of democratising aforementioned development evaluation practices, there are concerns that current development evaluation practices in Africa are less democratic and less transformative (Podems 2017). Such development evaluation practices inadequately engage legitimate stakeholders, thus failing to comprehend their needs and interests and document their perspectives on the successes and challenges experienced during the project or programme implementation (Podems 2017).

The reported undemocratic development evaluation practices in Africa contrast sharply with the long-established democratic learning and collaborative deliberations practices of indigenous African people. Indigenous African people supported and engaged in democratic learning and collaborative deliberations through consensual democracy (Kabongo 1986; Wamala 2005; Wiredu 1995). They also embraced moral ideas, values and principles of their communitarian ethical framework, which inspired and guided them to protect and promote the interests and rights of individuals and communities (Mazigo 2021), and stirred up in individual community members the 'willingness to cooperate' and 'capability to cooperate' with other community members (Wieland 2001:82) to collaboratively redress human and societal challenges (García-Marzá 2013). Given these long-established collaborative learning and deliberation practices rooted in value systems and socio-

political practices of traditional African communities, one would not expect undemocratic development evaluation practices to surface and thrive in Africa.

Evidence suggests that development evaluation practices in Africa have embraced Western ways of knowing, methodologies and assessment criteria, on the one hand, and forsaken or marginalised ways of knowing and valuing of African people, on the other hand (Mbava & Chapman 2020). In doing so, African people have been denied rights and opportunities to meaningfully participate in evaluating development projects and programmes implemented to benefit them.

Concerns over the dominance of Western-rooted evaluation approaches and methods in development evaluation practices in Africa and the possibilities for development evaluation practices rooted in worldviews, value systems and ways of knowing of African people were powerfully articulated and supported by participants of the special stream of the Fourth Conference of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) held in Niamey in Niger on 18 January 2007 (AfrEA 2007). Participants debated and deliberated on 'making evaluation our own'. The AfrEA committed itself to promote Africa-rooted evaluations and ensuring that African values and worldviews inform, guide and shape the theory and practice of development evaluation in Africa (AfrEA 2007).

Since then, there have been attempts to develop African-rooted evaluation theories and methodologies. In that regard, for instance, Carroll (2008) devised an evaluation methodology and questions based on African world views; Muwanga-Zake (2009) designed an evaluation process based on the Afrocentric paradigm and ubuntu philosophy; Chilisa and Malunga (2012) and Easton (2012) generated conceptual and theoretical frameworks in evaluation basing on African proverbs and metaphors; and Chilisa and Malunga (2012) constructed relational evaluation approaches based on values and knowledge systems of indigenous people.

The aforementioned pioneering scholarly works in African-rooted evaluation and AfrEA's Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) research agenda inspired us to contribute to the MAE research agenda. Thus, in 2019, we responded to AfrEA's call for MAE research projects. Our research proposal on 'Examining Useful African Evaluative Insights and Moral Resources for Democratization of African Rooted Evaluations and Learning' was selected and funded through the AfrEA-United States Department of State (USDS) MAE Project. We implemented it from 2020 to 2022, focussing on uncovering the wisdom of indigenous people in Tanzania with the potential to invigorate development evaluation practices and inspire people to drive collaborative evaluation and learning processes.

We uncovered such collective wisdom in Swahili proverbs. These proverbs comprise long-established and shared wisdom, morals and traditional views of the world and people's participation in the social, economic and political

processes of the indigenous people of Tanzania. The proverbs were collected and translated into Kiswahili in the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, these translated proverbs have been taught and learned in formal and informal settings and used widely by competent Swahili speakers.

Our initial guide to studying Swahili proverbs was Easton's analytical approach to uncovering evaluative impulses and wisdom in Western African proverbs. Easton (2012) collected and analysed Western African proverbs to uncover their embedded evaluative impulses and wisdom on evaluation practice. He uncovered: (1) issues of measurement and comparative assessment, (2) methods of inquiry, careful analysis and discernment of truth and falsity, (3) means of promoting transparency, accountability and good governance in social and organisational life, (4) issues of stakeholder involvement, collective effort and political discretion, and (5) importance of planning, foresight and capacity building.

Because proverbs contain 'wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views' on specific issues (Mieder 1993:5), we believe their insights can inform, shape and guide development evaluation practices. We collected 45 Swahili proverbs from written sources and websites listed in the reference section (Kiswahili; swahiliproverbs; glcom; mwambao, swahilihub, msomibora). These proverbs focus on social processes and people's participation in social, economic, and political activities and events. Certain proverbs highlight the importance of involving people in social processes, others promote the rights and duties of people who participate in social processes, and wisdom in other proverbs guides people's engagement in social processes.

In this article, we present and discuss the meaning and application of the noted proverbial wisdom in development evaluation to answer the question: *What will development evaluation practice look like if it is informed, inspired and guided by the wisdom found in Swahili proverbs?* In doing so, we aim to show how wisdom in Swahili proverbs provides a solid theoretical basis and numerous methodological strategies for supporting people in initiating, conducting and using evaluations.

Theoretical framework and methodology

We followed a two-step methodology. Firstly, we analysed the meaning of Swahili proverbs and applied those meanings and wisdom to the thought and practice of development evaluation. Then, we conducted a quantitative survey with 61 Swahili-speaking evaluators to test the viability of incorporating the wisdom of the proverbs into development evaluation practices. The theoretical insights of Schwandt and Gates (2021) and Norris (2015) guided content analysis of the proverbs to uncover meanings and aspects of the evaluation practice they might promote.

Schwandt and Gates (2021) view evaluation as the process involving assessing and assigning values such as merit,

worth, significance and importance to a programme, project and policy. For them, valuation and valuing are essential aspects of the evaluation practice. Valuation involves estimating the worth of something, whereas valuing entails assigning values based on established criteria and standards (Schwandt & Gates 2021). For that reason, evaluation entails collecting credible information about development projects or programmes and making valid and defensible value claims about their merit, worth or significance based on established criteria and standards.

Norris (2015:135) views evaluation as 'the process of conceiving, obtaining and communicating information for the guidance of decision making about a specified programme or policy'. Norris (2015:135) perceives that the well-designed and conducted evaluation 'provides evidence to base decisions about maintaining, institutionalizing and expanding successful programmes and modifying and abandoning unsuccessful ones'. Based on Norris (2015), essential aspects of evaluation practice are: (1) awareness of information required in decision-making, (2) generating and communicating information needed for making decisions and (3) supporting or aiding evidence-based decision-making about implemented development projects and programmes.

Guided by the theoretical insights of Schwandt and Gates (2021) and Norris (2015), we conducted a content analysis of the 45 proverbs. We established wisdom that: (1) emphasises generating credible evidence, (2) underscores impartiality, objectivity and evidence-based judgements, (3) insists on paying attention to indicators and (4) underscores roles of competencies in inquiries, evidence generation, valuation and valuing. The wisdom guided the framing of the meanings and purposes of evaluation and the rights and duties of participants in the evaluation process.

We tested the conceptual tenability and practicability of the framed meanings and purposes of evaluation and the rights and duties of participants in the evaluation process through a self-administered survey questionnaire. In all, 61 practicing Swahili-speaking evaluators (15 females and 46 males) responded. The survey data were analysed and quantified to establish numbers and percentages for every tested aspect.

Ethical considerations
This article followed all ethical standards for research.

Results
Aspects of evaluation practice highlighted in Swahili proverbs

The 45 Swahili proverbs comprise wisdom that appreciates and promotes systematic inquiries, generation of credible evidence, evidence-based judgement, impartial and independent judgement, valuing, and determining merit and worth.

Conducting inquiries and gathering much information
Proverbs *Kuuliza si ujinga* [Asking is not foolish], *Asiyeuliza hanalo ajifunzalo* [He who does not ask, does not learn] and

Asiye na mengi hajui ajifunzalo [One with little information has not learned much] value and promote inquiries and the gathering of credible information. People invoke wisdom in *Kuuliza si ujinga* to encourage their fellows to ask questions to clarify issues. Wisdom in *Asiyeuliza halo ajifunzalo* and *Asiye na mengi hajui ajifunzalo* suggests difficulties in acquiring knowledge and understanding if one avoids inquiries.

Impartiality and objectivity in tasks implementation

Impartiality and objectivity are valued and encouraged. People invoke wisdom in *Mlenga jiwe kundini, hajui limpataye* [He who throws a stone in a crowd does not know whom it hits] to urge their fellow to remain impartial and objective in their inquiries and assessments. This wisdom usually reminds people to control and overcome biases and exercise impartial judgements.

On the other hand, the challenges of achieving impartiality and objectivity in decision-making are noted and covered in proverbs *Anayejipiga mwenyewe halii* [The person who hits himself does not cry] and *Nyani haoni kundule* [The ape does not see his buttocks]. Proverb *Anayejipiga mwenyewe halii* underscores the unlikeliness of a person badly hitting himself. Whoever tries to hit himself will only hit himself a little so he cannot cry. The wisdom of this proverb is usually invoked to challenge people who claim to be objective and impartial in handling matters that may negatively impact their welfare. Proverb *Nyani haoni kundule* highlights people's limitations in objectively assessing and communicating their weaknesses and failures. This wisdom highlights the difficulty of pointing fingers at oneself and revealing personal mistakes and failures. In turn, it urges them to consider seeking objective assessments of their situations from others.

Paying attention to indicators

The role of and the need to pay attention to indicators are underscored in several Swahili proverbs. Proverbs *Dalili ya mvua ni mawingu* [The sign of rain is clouds], *Panapofuka moshi pana moto* [Wherever smoke emits, there is a fire], *Msiba huanza na lele* [Mourning death starts with a cry], *Kwenye mzoga ndiyo wakusanyikapo tai* [Where there is a carcass, that is where fowls gather] and *Kunako matanga kumekufa mtu* [Where there is mourning, someone has died] point to some indicators or signs associated with rain, fire and death. People invoke the wisdom of these proverbs to invite their listeners to pay attention to established indicators or pointers to specific issues and to warn them about the likelihood of something happening or not happening, given the observable signs or indicators.

Determining worth and merit

Valuation, valuing and capabilities that facilitate valuation and valuing are implied in the proverb *Chanda chema huvikwa pete* [A pleasant finger gets honoured with a ring]. The proverb's original social context is people's endorsement of matrimonial partners. Usually, objective assessments are done before endorsing a matrimonial partner to establish their merit and worth in terms of general character and work ethic. Only when people are satisfied that they meet the set criteria and standards, they do endorse them as deserving partners. People use this proverb to express their satisfaction with the selection made or endorse deserving persons and achievements. Wisdom reminds people to properly assess and determine the worth and merit of people and things and confer them appropriately.

Suspending judgements and considering other alternatives

Proverb *Haramu yako halali kwa mwenzio* [If something is wrong for you, it could be good to others] underscores the need to overcome biases, suspend judgements and be open to alternatives to better learn and generate credible information. People invoke this wisdom to urge their fellows to suspend their unfounded claims, disregard their unsubstantiated evidence and consider evidence from other sources to make judgements and decisions. Therefore, judgements must be suspended until appropriate and adequate evidence has been established.

Generating credible evidence and avoiding fake evidence

Some proverbs indicate appreciation for credible evidence and disregard for fake evidence. The proverb *Umdhanie ndiye siye* [The one you suspect is, is not] draws listeners' attention to the possibility of erring in judgement and confusing wrong with right when one misses on relevant facts about an issue. People invoke the wisdom of this proverb to challenge weak evidence and demand that people provide adequate and credible evidence for their various claims. Given this wisdom, only credible evidence matters in judgements and decision-making.

The proverb *Maua hutokea kwanza kabla ya matunda* [Flowers bloom before fruits] underscores the sequencing of events and the preconditions for some events. People invoke wisdom in this proverb to demand credible evidence for their claims or judgements on issues.

Skills, positive attitudes and values facilitating effective inquiries and assessments

Several proverbs indicate effective inquiries and assessments are possible with knowledgeable and skilled people. For that reason, wisdom in such proverbs urges people to acquire knowledge and skills to engage in inquiries, evidence generation and impartial assessments and judgements.

The proverb *Aingiaye baharini kuogelea* [Whoever enters the sea must swim] emphasises mastering swimming skills before entering the sea to avoid drowning. People use this wisdom to warn their fellows about and demand that they acquire adequate knowledge and skills before embarking on specific activities. In the evaluation context, this wisdom emphasises mastery of technical and social competencies that facilitate inquiries, assessments and judgements.

People must demonstrate positive attitudes and values when interacting with others to succeed in their inquiries and gathering credible information. The values of perseverance and determination are emphasised in the proverb *Penye nia pana njia* [Where there is a will, there is a way]. Humility is promoted in the proverb *Msafiri maskini ajapokuwa Sultani* [A traveller is poor though he may be a sultan]. Being helpful to hosts and avoiding depriving them of their rightful and entitled opportunities are underscored in proverbs *Mgeni njoo mwenyeji apone* [Let the guest come so that the host gets well] and *Mgeni hachukui nyumba* [The guest does not take over the house].

Participants in the evaluation process

Other proverbs value and promote people's participation in social processes and offer practical guidance on selecting and engaging them. Proverbs *Shuguli ni watu* [Social activities and/or events need people], *Penye wengi hapaharibiki neno* [Where there are many people, nothing goes wrong] and *Penye wengi pana mengi* [Where there are many present, there is much said] rationalise and promote the involvement of capable, knowledgeable and experienced people. Proverbs *Vichwa viwili ni bora kuliko kimoja* [Two heads are better than one head], *Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa* [One finger does not kill lice] and *Pekee pekee hauwezi tunga historia* [One person cannot produce the history] underscore the roles of people in co-learning and co-producing contextual knowledge and history of a phenomenon.

In light of the wisdom in the above proverbs, the evaluation process requires people's participation. Eligible and competent people must be invited and facilitated to conduct inquiries, generate evidence, and assess and judge aspects of the ongoing or completed development project or programme.

Rationale and purposes of evaluation

Some proverbs embody wisdom that urges people to: (1) keep their promises, (2) take preventive and corrective measures against possible and actual challenges and failures, and (3) seek help in redressing experienced difficulties. The proverb *Ahadi ni deni* (A promise is like a debt one owes another) urges people never to break and forsake their promises. People make various promises when planning social events and activities. Some people promise to contribute needed material and financial resources, perform certain activities and deliver some goods and services. However, there are situations in which some people fail to deliver their promises, resulting in failures to realise planned goals. Thus, the wisdom in *Ahadi ni deni* is usually invoked: (1) to encourage people to keep their promises and (2) to warn people not to make promises they cannot keep. In the evaluation context, this wisdom would guide generating evidence about and assessing people's performance in keeping their various promises.

The proverb *Hila ya kikwapa kunuka pasipo kidonda* (Armpit's trick is smelling bad despite its being without sore) presents the facts associated with armpits and what is required from responsible people. By their very nature, armpits smell bad if not cleaned up. Given this, people must care for their armpits to prevent bad smells. The wisdom in *Hila ya kikwapa kunuka pasipo kidonda* points to possible challenges in implementing and managing social processes, activities and events, and eventual failures to realise valued outcomes. Accordingly, it is invoked to urge adequate monitoring and evaluation of the implemented social events and activities to determine and rectify possible and actual shortcomings. In the evaluation context, this wisdom would call for and inspire regular assessment of potential and actual failures in implemented development projects and devising appropriate preventive or corrective measures.

Proverb *Pekee pekee hauwezi tunga historia* underscores the importance of co-learning and co-producing contextual knowledge and history about a phenomenon. The wisdom urges learning with and from others and involving others in preparing a history of phenomena. In the evaluation context, this wisdom would call for collaborative learning, presentation and validation of project or programme events to produce a credible history.

The wisdom of various proverbs and their application in social processes highlighted in this article points to aspects of evaluation and three evaluation purposes: (1) conducting inquiries to generate evidence to support evidence-based judgements on performances in keeping promises made in development projects and programmes, (2) conducting inquiries to generate evidence to support the devising of measures to prevent failures and correct mistakes in implemented development projects and programmes, and (3) conducting inquiries to generate evidence to support collaborative learning and production of histories of completed development projects and programmes.

More importantly, proverbial wisdom points out that these evaluation practices are possible with people who have relevant knowledge, skills and experiences with ongoing or completed projects or programmes. Uncovered evaluation aspects and the three forms of evaluation practices prove that evaluative thinking and practices are not alien to the Swahili-speaking people and that the wisdom of various proverbs could inspire changes in the current practice of development evaluation. In the section 'Development evaluation practices based on Swahili wisdom', we explain the nature of the three forms of development evaluation practices and the rights, duties and competencies of people who would participate in them.

Development evaluation practices based on Swahili wisdom

Wisdom in several Swahili proverbs guided us to imagine development evaluation practices that involve people to: (1) determine performances in keeping promises made in development projects and programmes, (2) determine preventive and corrective measures in implementing development projects and programmes and (3) co-learn and co-produce the history of completed development projects and programmes.

Development evaluation practice focussed on performances in keeping promises made

In light of the wisdom in the proverb *Ahadi ni deni*, development evaluation is a people's activity involving inquiring and generating evidence about and assessing performances in keeping promises enshrined in the implemented development project or programme. We established in this article that in the designing and implementing of social events, people promise, for instance, to: (1) contribute material and financial resources, (2) perform some activities and actions and (3) deliver some goods and services. Likewise, viewing the implemented development project or programme as comprising several promises that must be fulfilled to bring intended changes makes sense. Promises to project or programme funders and beneficiaries cover the inputs, process and product dimensions. Project or programme managers and implementers deliver their promises when they adequately allocate and utilise the identified resources, effectively carry out specified activities and actions, and remain focussed on producing valued products or outcomes.

However, it is common knowledge that some people forsake their promises and fail to realise established goals. As such, wisdom in *Ahadi ni deni* inspires the adoption of an alternative rationale for evaluating development projects and programmes, namely determining performances in keeping promises made. Accordingly, the wisdom could powerfully inspire people to initiate evaluation processes to generate evidence on the satisfactory or unsatisfactory performance in delivering promises made in inputs, process and product dimensions, and to demand accountability in implementing development projects and programmes. The development evaluation practice of generating evidence about and assessing performance in keeping promises made can be a mid or end-line evaluation activity.

The quantitative survey inquired about the extent to which the development evaluation practice of assessing performances in keeping promises made in development projects or programmes is conceptually tenable and practical. The survey results indicate that 80.3% of respondents consider the practice of examining the extent of fulfilment of various promises made in the project or programme as *very important*; and that among respondents who had examined the fulfilment of promises made in projects and programmes in their previous evaluation assignments, 39.3% had done so *to a large extent* and the other 39.3% had done so *to a very large extent*.

The survey results indicate that promises embodying development projects and programmes can be examined and assessed. Furthermore, because some Swahili-speaking evaluators have assessed promises in projects or programmes, it is evident that the development evaluation practice of determining performances in fulfilling promises embodying projects and programmes is conceptually tenable and operationally possible. Thus, it could be adopted and practised successfully.

Development evaluation practice focussed on preventive and corrective measures

The 'armpit' metaphor and wisdom in the proverb *Hila ya kikwapa kunuka pasipo kidonda* inspire the framing of development evaluation practice as a people's activity involving generating evidence about challenges and problems facing implemented development projects or programmes, and determining appropriate preventive and corrective measures. Like the armpits, which need regular monitoring and care to prevent their potential foul odours, development projects and programmes must be monitored regularly and assessed to determine and rectify possible and actual shortcomings.

The need to identify and prevent possible and actual challenges and failures in implementing development projects and programmes is also echoed in the proverb *Mficha maradhi kifo kinamuumbua* [Someone who hides his illness, death exposes him]. The proverb *Mficha maradhi kifo kinamuumbua* warns people who conceal information about their sickness, leading to their failure to get proper treatment and eventual death. In social processes, the wisdom in *Mficha maradhi kifo kinamuumbua* warns social event implementers of the danger of concealing information about their possible and actual challenges. In turn, it encourages them to seek help from others. In the evaluation context, such wisdom encourages project and programme implementers to seek help solving challenges that impede successful project or programme implementations.

People embracing the wisdom in the above three proverbs feel duty-bound to solve challenges facing implemented development projects and programmes. Consequently, such wisdom could inspire mid- or end-line evaluation activities to generate evidence of possible and actual shortcomings and devise appropriate preventive and corrective measures.

The quantitative survey explored the extent to which the development evaluation practice of determining preventive and corrective measures for implemented development projects and programmes was conceptually tenable and operationally possible. It also explored the extent to which Swahili-speaking evaluators had examined conditions constraining projects or programmes from delivering expected results in their previous evaluation assignments.

The survey results indicate that all 61 respondents had examined the constraining conditions, with 62.3% and 64.0% considering the perspectives of beneficiaries and implementers, respectively. Respondents also indicated that, in their future evaluation assignments, they would *very likely* examine conditions constraining development projects and programmes from delivering expected results. However, only 72.1% will do so by considering beneficiaries' perspectives, and only 59.0% will do so by considering implementers' perspectives.

The survey results indicate that the development evaluation practice of generating evidence about and suggesting ways to prevent conditions likely to hinder development projects and programmes from delivering intended results is conceptually tenable and practicable. Hence, it could be embraced and practised successfully.

Development evaluation practice focussed on co-learning and co-producing history

Proverbial wisdom emphasising learning with and from others and involving others in making history inspires the framing of development evaluation as people's activity involving co-learning and co-producing the history of completed development projects or programmes. People can collaboratively learn about promises, challenges and shortcomings, results and impacts of completed development projects or programmes. They can also listen to critique and validate their fellows' stories, evidence and judgement of completed projects or programmes' context, input, process and outcomes. In addition, they can co-learn about and validate reported roles, activities, actions and inactions of implementers, the realised and unrealised goals, and the intended and unintended project or programme outcomes and impacts.

Considering the 'history-making' metaphor and wisdom in *Pekee pekee hauwezi tunga historia*, the development evaluation practice of this kind can only be an end-line evaluation activity. It must support diverse ways of knowing, assessing successes and failures, reporting events and sharing personal experiences about the completed development project or programme.

Considering the support and promotion of diverse ways of knowing, assessing and reporting events by various stakeholders implied in this third form of development evaluation practice, the survey inquired the extent to which, in their previous evaluation assignments, respondents: (1) examined local stakeholders' interpretations and valuation of indicators for project or programme results, (2) engaged local stakeholders in determining appropriate indicators for project or programme results, (3) chose indicators that local stakeholders considered essential pointers to the project or programme success or failure, (4) utilised forms of knowing and valuing of local stakeholders in determining evidence for project or programme results and (5) adapted local stakeholders' forms of presenting evidence for claimed project or programme results.

The survey results indicate that respondents had examined local stakeholders' interpretations and valuation of indicators, with 21.3% of respondents doing so to *a very large extent*, 37.7% of respondents doing so to *a large extent* and 32.8% of respondents doing so *to a moderate extent*. Respondents also reported that they had engaged local stakeholders in determining appropriate indicators for project or programme results, whereby 23.0% of respondents had engaged those local stakeholders to *a very large extent*, 32.8% of respondents had engaged them to *a large extent*, and the other 23.0% of respondents had engaged them to *a moderate extent*.

Respondents also adapted indicators that local stakeholders consider essential pointers to the success or failure of a project or programme. Of these respondents, 24.6% reported that they had to *a very large extent*, 21.3% had *to a large extent* and 32.8% had to *a moderate extent* chosen and used indicators suggested by local stakeholders. In addition, respondents reported that they had utilised forms of knowing and valuing of local stakeholders, with 23.0% of respondents utilising those forms of knowing and valuing to *a very large extent*, 31.1% of respondents utilising them *to a large extent* and 27.9% of respondents utilising them to *a moderate extent*.

Furthermore, respondents indicated awareness and appreciation of local stakeholders' diverse assessment criteria and ways of communicating their judgement about the project's or programme's merit, worthiness, success and failures. In fact, 27.9% of respondents said they had adopted the assessment criteria and reporting styles of local stakeholders to *a very large extent*. In comparison, the other 27.9% and 23.0% had done so *to a large extent* and *a moderate extent,* respectively.

The survey also inquired about the likelihood of respondents engaging local stakeholders in determining indicators, choosing and using local stakeholders' preferred indicators, and utilising forms of knowing and valuing of local stakeholders in their future evaluation assignments. The survey results show that 67.2% of respondents will *very likely* engage local stakeholders in determining indicators for various results of a project or programme, 63.9% of respondents will *very likely* choose and use indicators of local stakeholders and 67.2% of respondents will *very likely* use forms of knowing and valuing of local stakeholders.

The survey results confirm that development evaluation practice can provide participants with spaces to learn from each other, debate, critique, and corroborate stories and evidence of successful or unsuccessful development projects and programmes. Accordingly, this form of development evaluation could be adopted and practised successfully.

Rights and duties of participants in development evaluations

Several proverbs suggest two groups of people eligible to participate in inquiries, assessments and judging development projects or programmes. The first group comprises people with personal knowledge and experience with ongoing or completed development projects or programmes. They include project beneficiaries, implementers and funders. Proverbs *Matundu ya nyumba ayafahamu mwenye nyumba* [The house owner knows holes in the house], *Nyumba usiyolala ndani huijui hila yake* [You cannot know the defects of a house you have not slept in], *Adhabu ya kaburi aijua maiti* [The torture of the grave is known only to the dead] and *Kitanda usicho*

kilalia hujui kunguni wake [You cannot know the bugs of a bed that you have not lain on] emphasise the involvement of people who have experience with the phenomena being considered because they know better. Besides, the proverb *Jogoo wa shamba hawiki mjini* [A country rooster would not crow in town] warns about newcomers' inability to comprehend specific contextual issues and the need to engage people with knowledge of the local context, values and issues.

The second group comprises competent external evaluation experts who can facilitate systematic and objective inquiries, impartial assessments and judgements of aspects of ongoing or completed projects or programmes. They have no personal knowledge and experience with the project or programme but possess adequate knowledge and skills to facilitate collaborative inquiries, assessments and judgements of development projects and programmes.

Competent external evaluation experts have the right and duty to facilitate inquiries and evidence generation because they have mastered research and evaluation skills (Proverb [*Aingiaye baharini kuogelea*] Whoever enters the sea must swim). They are trusted partners to facilitate project or programme implementers to objectively assess their weaknesses and failures (Proverbs [*Nyani haoni kundule*] The ape does not see his backside) and devise measures to prevent foreseeable shortcomings and challenges ([*Hila ya Kikwapa kunuka pasipo kidonda*] The armpit's trick is smelling bad without a sore). They must work closely with the project or programme implementers and beneficiaries to better understand the project or programme (Proverb [*Matundu ya nyumba ayafahamu mwenye nyumba*] The holes in a house are known to the owner of the house) and production of a credible history (Proverb [*Pekee pekee hauwezi tunga historia*] One person cannot produce history).

Nevertheless, the external evaluation experts are like country roosters, with no or only limited knowledge of the project or programme (Proverb [*Jogoo wa shamba hawiki mjini*] A country rooster would not crow in town). Therefore, they must learn with or from the people who have experienced the phenomenon to know, assess and judge its aspects (Proverb [*Nyumba usiyolala ndani huijui hila yake*] You cannot know the defects of a house you have not slept in). As trusted guests, external evaluation experts must help project or programme implementers and beneficiaries (Proverb [*Mgeni njoo mwenyeji apone*] Let the guest come so that the host benefits or gets well) and avoid depriving them of their rightful and entitled opportunities ([*Mgeni hachukui nyumba*] The guest does not take over the house). They must ensure adequate and meaningful participation of project or programme implementers and beneficiaries in inquiries about, assessing and judging aspects of the project or programme.

Beneficiaries and implementers of the project or programme have the right and duty to participate in the evaluation because they know it better (Proverbs [*Matundu ya nyumba ayafahamu mwenye nyumba*] The holes in a house are known to the owner of the house; [*Nyumba usiyolala ndani huijui hila yake*] You

cannot know the defects of a house you have not slept in). They are also better placed to offer critique and complementary perspectives on success or failures associated with the evaluated project or programme and credible narratives to the history of the completed project or programme (Proverb [*Pekee pekee hauwezi tunga historia*] One person cannot produce history). Because they are also capable of doing valuation and valuing (Proverb [*Chanda chema huvikwa pete*] A pleasant finger gets honoured with a ring) and have some knowledge about and personal experience with the project or programme, they must interact with external evaluation experts creatively and responsibly to co-learn, co-generate and co-validate evidence of successful and unsuccessful aspects of the development project or programme.

In brief, wisdom in the above proverbs suggests the rights and duties of external evaluators and those of local stakeholders such as project implementers and beneficiaries as follows:

1. External evaluators have the right to facilitate inquiries, evidence generation, evidence-based judgements and valuation.
2. Local stakeholders have a right to participate in evaluating projects and programmes implemented to benefit them.
3. External evaluators must ensure the full participation of legitimate stakeholders in inquiries, assessments and judgements of a project or programme's merit and worth.
4. External evaluators should consider legitimate local stakeholders' perspectives when developing evaluation methodology.
5. External evaluators ought to utilise local stakeholders' forms of knowing and valuing to inform the evaluation process.
6. External evaluators must contribute to the betterment of local stakeholders.

In the survey questionnaire, we asked the 61 Swahili-speaking evaluators whether they agreed or disagreed with the above statements about local stakeholders' and external evaluators' rights and duties. According to the survey results, 98.4% of respondents acknowledge and support the position that local stakeholders have a right to participate in the evaluation of projects and programmes implemented to benefit them, and 95.1% of respondents agreed that external evaluators have to ensure full participation of local stakeholders in the evaluation process. About 93.4% of respondents agreed that external evaluators ought to consider the perspectives of legitimate local stakeholders when devising evaluation methodology; 95.0% of respondents agreed that external evaluators should utilise local stakeholders' forms of knowing and valuing; and 86.3% of respondents agreed that external evaluators must contribute to the betterment of local stakeholders.

The survey results reported in this article indicate that the rights and duties of evaluation stakeholders implied in Swahili proverbs are conceptually tenable and widely

acceptable. Therefore, such rights and duties could constitute the rights and duties of participants in development evaluations.

Promotion and respect for these rights and duties would likely inspire people to initiate and conduct systematic inquiries, objective assessments and impartial judgements of the state of keeping promises made in development projects and programmes, co-learn and devise measures to prevent and correct project or programme implementation challenges and failures, and co-learn and co-produce the credible history of completed development projects and programmes. In turn, such people would feel confident and duty-bound to initiate and conduct evaluations for various purposes. Accordingly, adequate protection of these rights and duties would guarantee people's meaningful participation in evaluation assignments and realise their dream of making evaluations their own.

Discussion and interpretation of results

Numerous wisdom uncovered from Swahili proverbs and applied to development evaluation practices offer theoretical insights and practical strategies for changing the undemocratic development evaluation practices. The application of Swahili wisdom to various aspects of development evaluation practices presented in the section 'The main results' should inspire development evaluators to: (1) search for and integrate people's ways of knowing and valuing, (2) facilitate people assess and judge projects and programmes implemented to benefit them and (3) solve problems and promote social betterment.

Integrating people's ways of knowing and valuing in development evaluation practices

The current development evaluation practices marginalise ways of knowing and valuing of African people (Mbava & Chapman 2020). This unfair practice is contrary to the tenets of democratic development evaluations that require evaluators to utilise diverse forms of knowing and valuing of local stakeholders (Townley & Wilks-Heeg 1999), and help them assess and judge development projects and programmes implemented in their communities (Molund & Schill 2004). We find it unfair to ignore or marginalise local people's knowledge and ways of assessing the merit and worth of implemented development projects and programmes.

Swahili wisdom supports and urges development evaluators to promote and utilise diverse ways of knowing, assessing and reporting evidence and events of implemented development projects or programmes. The proverbial wisdom inspired the framing of the duty to evaluators to integrate and use local stakeholders' forms of knowing and valuing. The survey results revealed that doing so enhances the credibility of the evaluations and the acceptability of results. The results also indicated prospects of development evaluators: (1) engaging with local stakeholders'

interpretations and valuation of indicators, (2) engaging with local stakeholders' preferred indicators, (3) utilising local stakeholders' ways of generating evidence and (4) adapting local stakeholders' forms and manners of presenting evidence.

The evidence of evaluative thinking and aspects of development evaluation practice uncovered in Swahili proverbs suggests that evaluation is not something alien to local people. In addition, it challenges the marginalisation of local people's ways of doing development evaluations. Consequently, marginalising local people's evaluative knowledge, assessment methods and techniques is unfair and a failure to value multiple ways of practising development evaluations. In turn, such marginalisation of some ways of doing development evaluations strangles the growth of the field of development evaluation. Therefore, development evaluators must overcome such marginalisation and work hard to identify and integrate local stakeholders' ways of knowing and valuing development projects and programmes.

Supporting people-driven and led development evaluations

Both evaluation experts and people affected by the development interventions must collaborate in evaluating development projects or programmes (Reineke 1991). The evaluation experts must help the affected people assess and judge development projects and programmes (Molund & Schill 2004). In contrast to these established tenets, current development evaluation practices have reduced the roles of affected people to responding to survey and interview questions. The assessment and judgement roles are left to evaluation experts because they have specialised skills to conduct objective inquiries and impartial assessments (Fitzpatrick et al. 2012). The exclusion or inadequate engagement of affected people in evaluations makes it difficult to comprehend their needs and perspectives on the successes and challenges experienced during the project or programme implementation (Podems 2017). These situations result in limited support for evaluations, limited use of evaluation findings and limited implementation of evaluation recommendations.

Swahili wisdom offers insights into redressing the exclusion of affected people and promoting their fair participation in project and programme evaluations. Proverbial evidence indicates people's appreciation of evaluations and readiness to initiate and participate in evaluations. Proverbial wisdom inspired people to initiate or participate in evaluating social events or activities they implemented to check on the extent of fulfilling promises and prevent possible shortcomings and failures. It also guided them to invite external experts to help them assess and solve challenges impeding the successful implementation of social activities. Evidence of people initiating and participating in the evaluation and seeking help from external experts suggests that they fully embrace their roles in evaluations and can 'make evaluations their own' (AfrEA 2007).

The framing of evaluation stakeholders' roles, rights and duties provides a robust conceptual foundation to support the interpretation and grounding of 'own' in 'making evaluation our own' (AfrEA 2007). In light of the proverbial wisdom that inspired the framing of roles, rights and duties in evaluations, project and programme implementers and beneficiaries must own and drive evaluations of their development projects and programmes. Such wisdom and framings empower project and programme implementers and beneficiaries to reclaim their evaluation ownership and leadership. They remind external evaluation experts of their facilitative roles and duty to help people assess and judge their projects and programmes (Molund & Schill 2004). People's ownership and driving of evaluations of their development projects and programmes would be protected and guaranteed when development evaluators respect the established roles, rights and duties of evaluation stakeholders.

Inspiring solving problems and promoting social betterment

Development evaluations must contribute towards solving problems (eds. Van Den Berg, Hawkins & Stame 2022) and promoting social betterment (Podems 2017). In other words, development evaluations must do no harm, tackle bad, and do good for people and communities (eds. Van Den Berg, Hawkins & Stame 2022). However, ethical frameworks guiding current development practices do little to enable 'evaluation's role in tackling bad and doing good' (Van Den Berg 2022:17). They adequately guide 'doing no harm' but inadequately guide 'tackling bad' and 'doing good' (Van Den Berg 2022). Given these ethical guidance limitations, development evaluators limitedly focus on tackling bad and doing good, and so, they contribute little to social betterment and solving problems. Adopting ethical guidance from Swahili proverbs and the evaluation rationale and purposes highlighted in the three forms of practising development evaluation could overcome the noted ethical guidance limitations.

Wisdom in *Mgeni njoo mwenyeji apone* (Let the guest come so that the host benefits or gets well) invites external evaluators whom local stakeholders trust to help or assist. This wisdom can inspire and guide the trusted external evaluators in tackling bad or doing good for the people and communities hosting or engaging them. Wisdom in *Mgeni hachukui nyumba* (The guest does not take over the house) warns and discourages the trusted external evaluators from performing actions with negative consequences to their hosts. This wisdom can inspire and guide external evaluators in not harming people and communities hosting or engaging them. We based on the wisdom in these proverbs to frame the duty of external evaluators to contribute to the betterment of local stakeholders, which the survey results confirmed as being in order. With insightful guidance from the aforementioned proverbial wisdom and embracing the established duty, development evaluators would be adequately guided to design and conduct evaluations that do no harm, tackle bad and do good to their evaluation stakeholders and communities (Van Den Berg 2022).

The wisdom of various proverbs and their application in development evaluation practices pointed to: (1) the importance of assessing performances in keeping promises made in development projects and programmes, (2) generating evidence to support the devising of measures to prevent failures and correct mistakes in implemented development projects and programmes and (3) generating evidence to support collaborative learning and production of histories of completed development projects and programmes. This framing of evaluation's rationale and purposes laid a solid foundation for evaluation focussed on solving problems and promoting the welfare of people and their communities. Assessing and recommending appropriate improvements in project and programme implementations could result in good outcomes and valued products; identifying and solving conditions constraining implemented projects and programmes could result in those projects and programmes delivering valued outcomes and impacts; and provision of adequate spaces for collaborative learning and sharing learned lessons could improve future programming and implementation of development interventions. Development evaluators who embrace insights in these three forms of practising development evaluations would be adequately guided in solving problems impeding projects and programmes and promoting societal welfare.

Conclusion

Content analysis of the 45 Swahili proverbs revealed numerous wisdom comprising important theoretical insights and methodological strategies that we could use to reform and shape current development evaluation practices. Some proverbial wisdom shows people's adequate grasp and appreciation of systematic inquiries, evidence generation, evidence-based judgement, values-based judgement and informed decision-making, which are essential aspects of development evaluation practice. Other proverbial wisdom recognises and supports the roles, rights and duties of diverse evaluation stakeholders, sufficiently rationalises the commissioning of evaluations and points out competencies, positive attitudes and values that facilitate respectful and productive interactions during collaborative inquiries, assessments and decision-making.

The uncovered wisdom inspired the framing of development evaluations as social activities initiated by and involving people to systematically inquire and assess aspects of ongoing or completed development projects and programmes to: (1) determine performances in keeping promises made, (2) determine preventive and corrective measures for possible and actual implementation challenges and (3) co-learn and co-produce histories of the completed development projects and programmes. Insights in the three forms of development evaluation practices could adequately guide development evaluators to: (1) search for and integrate people's ways of knowing and valuing, (2) facilitate people to assess and judge projects and programmes implemented to benefit them and (3) solve problems and promote social betterment. In that regard, these development evaluation practices would

guarantee the rights and freedoms of people to initiate and lead the evaluations of their development projects and programmes.

Disclaimer

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