

Evalpreneurship in Africa: Exploring the Landscape of Supply and Demand

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Abstract

In recent decades, the role of evaluation in shaping African development strategies has undergone a significant transformation, emerging as a powerful tool for evidence-based decision-making, accountability, and learning. Concurrently, Africa's dynamic entrepreneurial landscape, guided by innovation hubs and a resilient informal sector, plays a pivotal role in tackling challenges like unemployment and poverty while fostering robust economic growth.

Despite recognizing the vital roles of evaluation and entrepreneurship, their intersection remains largely unexplored in scholarly discourse. Exploring this intersection yields insights into the intricate integration of entrepreneurial practices into evaluation work, as evidenced by Sabarre's dissertation study on evalpreneurship in the USA (2021). Building on Lemire, Nielsen, and Christie's foundational work (2018), Sabarre's research explored the structural aspects of the evaluation marketplace, particularly the influence exerted by evaluation entrepreneurs. However, these discussions predominantly focus on the global north, necessitating a similar scrutiny in the African context.

This paper aims to bridge this gap by contributing to the existing literature. It investigates the supply and demand landscape of the African evaluation marketplace. Using a literature review methodology, the paper draws on diverse sources, including research articles, policy documents, and reports spanning two decades. Employing the "emergent evaluation market framework" as a structured lens, the study provides insights into buyer-seller interactions and the exchange of evaluation services within Africa.

The findings illuminate the current and historical context of evaluation commissioning in Africa, emphasizing the roles and contributions of key players in the supply chain. Additionally, the paper explores external factors acting as enablers or barriers to the influence of entrepreneurs on the supply and demand of evaluations in Africa. The research underscores the transformative potential of evalpreneurship in driving the decolonization of evaluation and dismantling white supremacy in the continent's development. In advocating for contextually relevant, culturally responsive, and Made in Africa evaluation practices, the paper calls for further research on Africa-based evaluation entrepreneurs to understand their evolving roles in shaping evaluation supply and demand.

Keywords: *Evalpreneurship; Africa; Evaluation marketplace; Supply and demand of evaluation; Decolonization; emergent evaluation market framework, White supremacy; Made in Africa evaluation (MAE).*

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of program evaluation in Africa, commonly referred to as "Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)," the discipline has undergone rapid expansion, firmly establishing itself as a flourishing profession and a significant industry within the market landscape (Abrahams 2015; Basheka & Byamugisha 2015). Evaluation serves a dual purpose as both governance tools and methods to assess and monitor development programs (Bamberger, 2000), becoming integral components of African development and policy-making processes. Concurrently, entrepreneurial endeavors, including start-ups, social enterprises, and grassroots innovations, are playing pivotal roles in reshaping and propelling Africa's socio-economic development (Dana, Ratten, & Honyenuga, 2018)

Despite the increasing recognition of the intersection between evaluation and entrepreneurship, this relationship remains relatively unexplored. The evaluation of market dynamics and business facets, often overlooked in scholarly discussions, adds complexity to understanding this intersection (Nielsen, Lemire, & Christie, 2018). Similarly, the interconnections between evaluation practices and entrepreneurial endeavors in Africa remain largely untapped, awaiting thorough investigation. Recent studies have initiated empirical analyses of the evaluation marketplace, delving into its intricate dynamics (Lemire, Nielsen, & Christie 2018; Blaser Mapitsa, Tirivanhu, & Pophiwa 2019). Moreover, research has started to probe into the role of entrepreneurship in shaping the commercial forces of supply and demand in the evaluation marketplace (Sabarre 2021).

Recognizing the pressing need for deeper exploration, this paper delves into the existing literature on the African evaluation market. Its primary objective is to provide empirical insights into the mechanisms governing the exchange of evaluation services, unraveling how buyers and sellers engage and the underlying dynamics of supply and demand (Lemire et al. 2018). Through this comprehensive exploration, the paper aims to: (1) explore the landscape of supply and demand of the African evaluation marketplace; (2) Explore the external factors shaping the supply and demand of evaluation in Africa and (3) Examine the challenges and opportunities facing evaluation entrepreneurs in Africa.

Methodology

This research employed a literature review methodology, encompassing a diverse range of sources. These sources included research articles, policy documents, and reports spanning from 2000 to 2021, meticulously selected from respected peer-reviewed journals in the fields of Monitoring and Evaluation, entrepreneurship, and business management, all tailored to the African context. The review process also incorporated relevant literature on Monitoring and Evaluation in Africa, curated from repositories such as Google Scholar, Virginia Tech University library, the African M&E Hub at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa, and resources available through The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA). This approach ensured an in-depth exploration of the subject matter, laying a

solid foundation for a comprehensive analysis of the African evaluation landscape and the entrepreneurial dynamics at play.

Research questions

To achieve the research objectives, the research was guided by the following questions.

1. Evaluation demand in Africa
 - *Historical Context*: What is the historical context of evaluation commissioning in Africa?
 - *Current Landscape*: What is the contemporary scenario of evaluation demand in Africa? Which entities currently commission evaluations, and for what purposes?
2. Evaluation supply in Africa:
 - *Primary Actors*: Who are the key players conducting evaluations in Africa? What are their roles, and how do they contribute to the supply chain?
3. Entrepreneurial Influence:
 - *External Factors*: How do external elements such as policies, procurement regulations, and cultural norms affect the capacity of entrepreneurs to impact the supply and demand dynamics in Africa's evaluation market?
 - *External factors influencing entrepreneurship*: What external factors act as enablers or barriers affecting the influence of entrepreneurs on the supply and demand of evaluations in Africa?
4. What are the challenges and opportunities facing evaluation entrepreneurs in Africa?

Conceptual Framework used to understand the African Evaluation Marketplace

Conceptually, the paper employed key terms and framework that can be useful in understanding the supply and demand within the African Evaluation Marketplace.

The evaluation market and the evaluation practice.

Following Nielsen et al. (2018), the evaluation market can be defined as "a domain where buyers and sellers engage in transactions involving evaluation products and services, influenced by the interplay of supply and demand forces. The evaluation market focuses on the economic dynamics of buying and selling evaluation services, while "evaluation practice" encompasses the practical aspects of conducting evaluations, including the actual activities, methods, and processes involved. However, in the literature, the terms "evaluation practice" and "evaluation market" are frequently used interchangeably to mean the meeting point between supply and demand in the context of evaluation services (Blaser Mapista et al. 2019). Throughout this paper, I prefer to use the term 'evaluation market' to describe the environment where suppliers of evaluation products and services (those who conduct evaluations or evaluators) meet the demand from commissioners of evaluations (organizations or clients seeking evaluation services).

The Emerging Evaluation market framework.

The "emergent evaluation market framework," as applied by Lemire et al. (2018) and Nielsen et al. (2018) in their study of the evaluation marketplace and industry in the United States, presents a promising model for comprehending the dynamics of buyer-seller interactions and the exchange of evaluation services. This framework offers valuable insights into the functioning of supply and demand forces within the African context. This framework provides a structured approach to grasp the various layers of the evaluation market context. It delineates three essential components: the overall market context, the composition of the market, and the dynamic interactions within the market, as illustrated in the figure below (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. The Emergent Evaluation Market Framework.

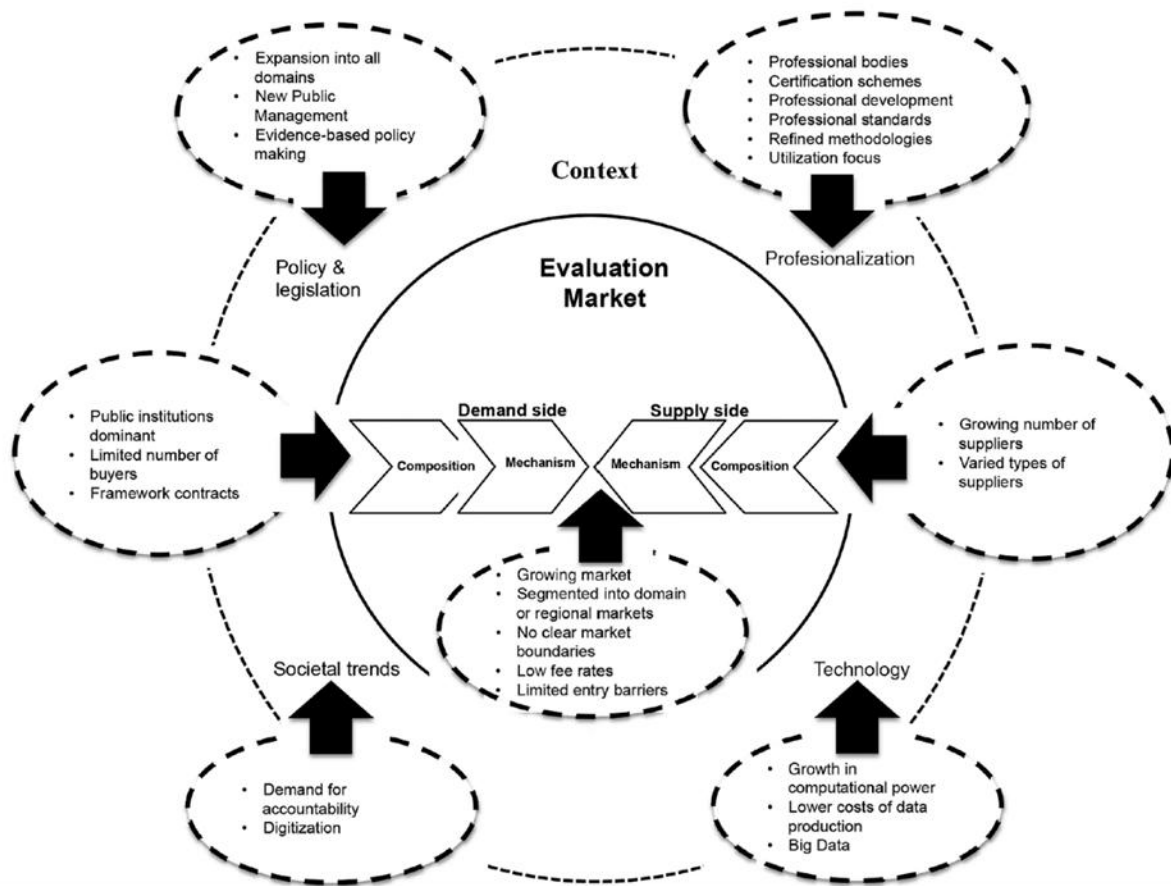


Fig 1.1. The emergent evaluation market framework: a conceptual structure to understand the evaluation market in Africa. Source: (Lemire et al. 2018; Nielsen et al. 2018)

As emphasized by Lemire et al. (2018), the market context delves into historical influences and developments that, either individually or collectively, have played a pivotal role in shaping the evaluation market. These factors include policy and legislation changes, the increasing professionalization of the evaluation field, technological advancements, and the evolving societal demand for accountability and digitization. The market dynamic revolves around the complex interaction between the demand (evaluation commissioners or those who

purchase evaluation services) and the supply (evaluation providers or those who design and/or deliver evaluation products and services) (Nielsen et al. 2018). This interaction involves the exchange of evaluation services, and it unfolds within the context of the give-and-take between supply and demand market forces. These market forces are in turn connected to the market composition, which encompasses factors such as the size and quantity of evaluation commissioners, providers, and the array of services offered. In terms of market composition, the evaluation market is delineated into a demand side and a supply side.

In the upcoming sections, the paper discusses in-depth the demand and supply for evaluation in Africa, the external factors shaping the supply and demand of evaluation in Africa as well as challenges facing African evaluation entrepreneurs and opportunities in the African evaluation marketplace. The paper concludes with recommendations and implications for future research.

Demand for Evaluation in Africa

Historical Context: Exploring the history of commissioning evaluations in Africa

The literature emphasizes the crucial role of national evaluation systems, stakeholder involvement, and country ownership in shaping the supply and demand dynamics of evaluations in Africa (Smith & Morkel 2018). The historical context of commissioning evaluations in Africa reflects the continent's evolution toward evidence-based development. From the early post-colonial years to the current emphasis on good governance, evaluations have profoundly influenced policies and development initiatives. Notably, there is a transformative shift occurring on the demand side of evaluations in Africa. This transformation is marked by a shift from historically donor-driven evaluations toward approaches grounded in local ownership and contextual relevance. This shift is exemplified by the establishment of national evaluation systems in various African countries, including South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Benin, and Uganda (Chirau, Blaser Mapitsa, Amisi, Masilela, & Dlakavu 2020).

Moreover, the historical context has deeply shaped the evaluation landscape in Africa, impacting fundamental aspects such as how knowledge is generated (epistemology), the understanding of reality (ontological framing), values (axiology), and worldviews that inform methodologies and professional practices in African evaluation (Chilisa, Major, Gaotlhobogwe & Mokgolodi 2015). As an illustration, the prevalent positivist paradigm in Africa-based evaluations has favored quantitative methodologies over qualitative ones, with occasional utilization of mixed methods approaches (Blaser Mapista et al. 2019). This preference manifests in donor-commissioned evaluations, where randomized control trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental designs are predominant. In contrast, government-commissioned evaluations lean towards mid-term reviews, implementation evaluations, functional reviews, and performance

audits, that focus on appraising the advancement of policies, programs, and projects (Smith & Morkel 2018).

Throughout history, evaluation in Africa has primarily centered on development programs, defined by Bamberger (2000) as "social and economic initiatives in developing countries funded by multilateral and bilateral development agencies or international non-government organizations (NGOs)." This emphasis on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices in Africa is deeply rooted in historical legacies tied to international donor initiatives, often reflecting the remnants of neo-colonial development models (Khumalo 2022). This trend highlights existing power imbalances in donor-commissioned evaluations, as demonstrated by Ngwabi and Wildschut's research (2019), which reveals that many evaluations are outsourced from Africa.

Key agencies, institutions, and organizations that commission evaluation in Africa

On the demand side of the evaluation market, there exist both large and small-scale commissioners of evaluation services who actively seek and contract evaluation services, either for their organizations or on behalf of others. These commissioners predominantly are either funded/ contracted by national or international NGOs or state or local government. National consulting firms and universities are also significant contractors of evaluation work (Blaser Mapista, et al. 2019). Porter & Feinstein (2013) identified that the demand side of evaluation typically includes principals such as the executive, legislature, civil society organizations, and development partners. Government agents, comprising the central government and Line ministries, primarily engage with the supply side by commissioning evaluations, although they may also express demands for evaluations.

Purposes for which evaluations are commissioned in Africa

There are two primary purposes of evaluation in Africa: decision-making (summative intent) and improving practices (formative intent). However, there is a limited pool of individuals equipped to conduct evaluations to gain general knowledge. Blaser Mapista and Tsotsotso (2019) assessed whether evaluations were primarily monitoring progress towards predetermined targets or if they were utilized for decision-making and promoting a learning agenda. Insights from a 2016 survey of 564 evaluators in Africa, as presented in the Africa evaluation landscape report by Blaser Mapitsa et al. (2019), indicated that the majority (94%) employed evaluations for decision-making, with an emphasis on improving practice. Notably, accountability and compliance were the least common objectives, with only 24% of respondents reporting no use of evaluations for these purposes.

Evaluation Supply in Africa

Evaluation Practitioners: those who primarily conduct evaluations in Africa

The supply side of the evaluation market in Africa includes “evaluator(s)” who primarily conducts evaluations in Africa. These evaluators range from individual practitioners to larger entities, all of whom are engaged with the design and/or implementation of evaluation products and/or services. From a global perspective, these evaluators can be categorized as outlined in Nielsen et al. (2018):

- (i) Evaluation consultants: Consultants with another source of income than evaluation services;
- (ii) Standalone evaluation consultants: consultants whose sole income source stems from evaluation services;
- (iii) Independent evaluation consulting: delivered by sole proprietors, partnerships, and small consulting firms;
- (iv) Big evaluation businesses /firms;
- (v) Coalitions or networks of collaborative relations with other evaluation providers.

In the African context, evaluators engaged in coalitions or networks often hail from organizations such as Volunteer Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPE) and various evaluation associations and networks, including national evaluation associations affiliated with the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA). This categorization aligns with recent research that explores supply and demand dynamics in specific African countries, classifying these suppliers as "evaluation agents". They encompass evaluators from universities, public and private research institutions, Think Tanks, and various Evaluation associations and networks (Porter & Feinstein 2013). Additionally, another classification identifies international development professionals, independent consultants, and evaluators (Junge & Negroustoueva 2019).

Roles of evaluation practitioners in Africa

Despite the above classifications, the 2018 Twende Mbele study of the evaluation supply in South Africa revealed that the categorization of evaluation consultants remains unclear, hindering the understanding of their roles and the accurate measurement of the market size for evaluation services (Phillips 2018). The study further noted that individuals engaged in evaluation work often have diverse roles, including additional research and consulting tasks. Their involvement in evaluations varies, with some participating regularly and others sporadically. Furthermore, evaluation suppliers in Africa tend to form collaborations with qualified individuals rather than maintaining full-time evaluation teams (Maack & Upton 2006). This collaborative approach is influenced by commissioners' criteria and has resulted in a collective of individuals, including evaluation experts and sector specialists, available for engagement by consulting firms. The availability of these professionals varies across sectors, with stronger bases in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) observed in sectors like healthcare,

governance, and education compared to fields like agriculture and entrepreneurship (Blaser Mapista & Tsotsotso 2019). Additionally, suppliers may opt to engage in evaluations based on factors such as the client's management history, clarity of project instructions, and the allocated budget. These factors collectively contribute to the complex landscape of evaluation supply in Africa.

Professional identity of African Evaluators: The rising of evaluation entrepreneurs

The perception that the African evaluation market is predominantly influenced by Western evaluators and donors, with limited engagement of Africa-based evaluators, has been common among researchers (Cloete 2016; Blaser Mapista et al. 2019). However, the 2016 AfrED survey conducted by CLEAR-AA challenges this notion. The survey, which included 564 evaluators in Africa, revealed a diverse and substantial presence of Africa-based evaluators involved in evaluations. Out of the respondents, a significant majority (500 out of 564) were based in Africa, with only 64 born outside of the continent, indicating a more diverse and extensive participation of Africa-based evaluators than previously assumed.

Tirivanhu and Blaser Mapitsa (2019) conducted a detailed analysis of the AfrED survey, focusing on the 'epistemological identity of evaluation practitioners.' Their examination encompassed factors like professional identity, country of residence, evaluation field, specialized training, and experience. It's worth noting that their study did not extensively explore African evaluators as evaluation consultants, entrepreneurs, or owners of evaluation firms. Nonetheless, it's essential to recognize that the evaluation supply in Africa also includes what can be described as 'evaluation entrepreneurs' or 'evalpreneurs' – evaluators with advanced evaluation skills and the business expertise to manage and operate evaluation firms.

The concept of "Evaluation entrepreneurship" was pioneered and extensively studied in scientific literature by Dr. Nina Sabarre in her 2021 dissertation, which focused on the role of entrepreneurship in the Evaluation marketplace in the U.S. According to Sabarre's definition, Evaluation entrepreneurship refers to "the capacity and willingness to develop, organize, manage, and assume the risk of a business that sells products and services related to the process of systematic inquiry to determine the merit, value, or worth of something" (Sabarre 2021). This definition implies that evaluation entrepreneurs possess skills beyond conducting evaluations; they have the willingness to operate a business and the emotional resilience to take risks. Hence, as I elaborate further in the following section, evalpreneurs are a notable presence in Africa. They lead and/or own evaluation firms, organizations, and consultancies that provide evaluation services across the continent.

Evaluation firms, organizations, and consultancies supplying evaluation services

A comprehensive analysis of 142 evaluations conducted in Africa between 2005 and 2016, funded by three Scandinavian donors - the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), revealed specific trends in their choice of suppliers of evaluation services in Africa (Ngwabi & Wildschut 2019). The study showed that DANIDA and NORAD exclusively engaged evaluation firms, while Sida exhibited a more diverse approach by involving evaluation companies in 81% of the cases and independent consultants in the remaining 19%. Notably, the research found that a significant majority of these evaluations were carried out by consultancy firms from mainly Scandinavia, Europe, the United States, and Canada. Surprisingly, only seven of the evaluation companies were Africa-based, with an overwhelming six of them being commissioned by Sida.

This trend reflects the findings of Phillips (2018) concerning prominent donors of development initiatives in Africa, including the British government's Department for International Development (DFID), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union (EU), and the German development agency (GIZ). These major donors often tend to award evaluation contracts to firms based in their home countries or internationally, which can impact the localization and contextual relevance of evaluation efforts in Africa. Frequently, these donor-contracted firms, recognized for their significant capacity, opt to subcontract local experts and small evaluation firms to tap into their local knowledge and contextual expertise (Levine & Pul 2023). The availability of subcontracts could be a contributing factor to the high proportion of professional evaluators in Africa, as revealed by the AfrED survey. However, as discussed later in the challenges section, this setup might result in decreased compensation and recognition for local evaluation consultants and firms.

Factors enabling or hindering the influence of entrepreneurs

The African evaluation marketplace is shaped by a complex interplay of factors that can enable and hinder the influence of the establishment and growth of evaluation businesses in the region. This section discusses some of these factors, including but not limited to the contextual, regulatory, structural, and global factors. One significant driving force is the pressing development challenges in Africa, including poverty, healthcare disparities, and educational gaps, which amplify the demand for evaluation services (Blaser Mapista et al. 2019). These challenges necessitate rigorous assessments of the effectiveness of development programs, providing entrepreneurs with ample opportunities to contribute meaningfully.

Additionally, increased donor funding in the region further intensifies the demand for evaluation entrepreneurs. Donors often require stringent accountability measures, propelling evaluation entrepreneurs into pivotal roles, conducting impact assessments, and ensuring transparent fund utilization. However, the evaluation entrepreneurship in Africa encounters several hurdles. Varying regulatory frameworks across Sub-Saharan African countries can pose

challenges for entrepreneurs, particularly in terms of business registration, taxation, and licensing requirements. This diversity can hinder the ease of setting up and operating evaluation businesses in the region. Additionally, the presence of established evaluation consulting firms and international organizations creates a competitive environment for new entrants. Nevertheless, as the demand for evaluation services continues to grow, there is also room for niche evaluation entrepreneurship to flourish, with opportunities to focus on specific sectors or unique methodologies.

Evaluation entrepreneurs in Africa operate within a broader global evaluation and development landscape, where the legacy of colonialism, white supremacy, and historical factors continue to exert their influence (Shallwani & Dossa 2023). Shallwani and Dossa's research, conducted in 2023, delves into how these deep-rooted elements perpetuate power imbalances, particularly in the realm of international development and evaluation. Their work highlights a concerning trend where evaluations tend to spotlight issues within marginalized communities, reinforcing the narrative that interventions from the global north are essential and effective, thereby perpetuating white supremacy and saviorism. Shallwani and Dossa emphasize the urgency of adopting more equitable and culturally sensitive approaches to evaluation within the context of global development.

To challenge the status quo and dismantle the entrenched systems of white supremacy in Africa's evaluation marketplace, this study draws inspiration from Sabarre's dissertation study on entrepreneurship in 2021. Their study posits that evaluation entrepreneurship can catalyze disrupting the traditional norms prevalent in the evaluation industry. By offering an alternative approach, evaluation entrepreneurship becomes a liberating path for evaluators whose contributions have historically been overlooked and marginalized. By fostering inclusivity and diverse perspectives, evaluation entrepreneurship emerges as a catalyst for dismantling white supremacy, contributing to a more equitable and just evaluation landscape in Africa. Through innovative and culturally sensitive practices, evaluation entrepreneurs can pave the way for a more representative and impactful evaluation field in the continent.

Culture is an important factor that affect the capacity of entrepreneurs to impact the supply and demand in Africa's evaluation market. It is defined as a cumulative body of learned and shared behavior, values, customs and beliefs common to a particular group or society (Henrich & McElreath 2003). Framework that includes the centrality of culture, such as "culturally responsive evaluation (CRE)" have been used in the theory and practice of evaluation (Chouinard & Hopson 2015; Chouinard & Cram 2019). In Africa, Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) represents a distinctive culturally responsive evaluation approach for that is guided by the AfrEA standards and tailored to the African context (Omosa et al 2021). As defined by Omosa et al 2021 based on African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) standards, MAE is "evaluation conducted using localized methods or approaches with the aim of aligning all evaluations to the lifestyles and needs of affected African peoples whilst also promoting African

values” (Omosa et al 2021). MAE's primary goal is to align evaluations with the diverse lifestyles and needs of Africa's populations, integrating African values and emphasizing cultural sensitivity, local relevance, and inclusivity (Chilisa & Mertens 2021). This approach signifies a paradigm shift, moving away from standardized, externally driven methods to those rooted in the African context, empowering and engaging the communities under evaluation. Initiatives like MAE are vital for understanding power dynamics, history, and the African context in evidence generation and use, aligning with AfrEA's agenda for an African-centered approach that recognizes culture's pivotal role (Chilisa, 2015; Blaser Mapista et al., 2019; Chilisa & Mertens, 2021). Rooted in Ubuntu, MAE resists blind adoption of Western standards, adapting tools from local cultures while embracing global perspectives to address the marginalization of diverse knowledge systems (Chilisa, 2015, 2020; Billman, 2019). Therefore, the increasing demand for MAE underscores the need for more engagement of local evaluation actors, including evalpreneurs, who can play a crucial role in shaping marketplace dynamics addressing power imbalances, and designing culturally relevant evaluations (Sabarre 2021).

External Factors Shaping the Supply and Demand of Evaluation in Africa

Government policies and regulations on the evaluation supply and demand.

Recent studies in five Sub-Saharan African countries have examined the evaluation supply and demand dynamics and explored the interplay between political economy and its impact on the evaluation process and practice within these countries (Porter & Feinstein 2013). Conducted under the auspices of the Regional Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA), these studies involved different authors and were undertaken in Ghana (Feinstein, Taabazuing, Amoatey & Adams, 2013), Ethiopia (Alemu & Latib, 2013), Malawi (Kumwenda, 2013), Rwanda (Porter & Gasana 2013), and Zambia (Porter & Mulenga 2013). The evidence from these five case studies underscores the significant influence of political economy, social dynamics, and power relations on shaping the demand and supply of evaluation in Africa and their interactions (Porter & Feinstein 2013). These factors can either facilitate or hinder the local ownership and utilization of evaluations.

These case studies further noted that when there is a robust demand for evaluation, paired with a supply that considers the complexities of the political economy, it results in the effective conduct and utilization of evaluations. To thoroughly analyze the demand for evaluation, it is imperative to develop a deep understanding of the overall political economy within a specific country. This entails assessing both the formal and informal factors that influence the decision-making process. This is because when the impetus for evaluation originates from within a country's political economy, rather than being externally imposed by entities like donors, it results in a higher degree of ownership over the evaluation process (Porter & Feinstein 2013). This ownership is a crucial element in ensuring that the evaluation is effectively utilized.

A noteworthy example of this can be observed in Rwanda, where the demand for evaluation is not contingent on the preferences of development partners (Porter & Feinstein 2013). Instead, it is predominantly driven by the government's intrinsic need to employ evaluation as a tool to support their development objectives and enhance accountability, though sometimes it is at the expense of learning (Tsotsotso 2019). Evaluations in Rwanda often serve the dual purpose of supporting management decisions and offering insights to politicians or, in some cases, investigating poor performance (Porter & Gasana 2013). This underscores the significance of the local political economy in shaping the demand for and utilization of evaluations.

Procurement Procedures and Requirements

Procurement procedures and requirements significantly shape the supply and demand of evaluation in Africa. For example, specific procurement policies by the state or organization may dictate who conducts evaluations, impacting the supply side. On the demand side, these policies affect evaluation quality and relevance. Donors' specific evaluation requirements may not align with local contexts, leading to a mismatch between demand and supply. Additionally, bureaucratic procurement processes can delay evaluations, affecting their timeliness and utility. Drawing from the most recent evidence featuring the lived experiences of an Africa-based evaluator from Ghana (Levine & Pul 2023), contract management policies by commissioners often exclude small and solo evaluation firms, mainly due to the limited time to go through the contracting procedures. These authors revealed that the bureaucratic processes in evaluation assignments create financial strain for small and solo local evaluation firms, and this creates a struggle to cover the costs of unpaid administrative work during bidding and onboarding. On the contrary, larger firms manage these processes better due to their resources and ongoing projects. This imbalance significantly impacts the financial stability of smaller firms, posing a substantial opportunity cost for them.

Capacity Development Initiatives

Despite ongoing efforts to professionalize Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in Africa, formal qualifications in the field don't always determine the selection of skilled evaluators by donors. Research, exemplified has shown that merely possessing formal M&E qualifications doesn't guarantee effective evaluation (Blaser Mapista, et al. 2019). The success of evaluation practice depends on a myriad of factors that extend beyond formal education. Similarly, the development of evaluation consultants and entrepreneurs' capacities involves a combination of both formal and non-formal education and training programs. To excel in their roles, these individuals require a specific skill set, which includes marketing, management, personal attributes, entrepreneurial skills, and consulting expertise (Barrington 2011; Martínez-Rubin 2019). While existing African literature does not specifically outline the extent of these skills among African evaluation consultants and entrepreneurs, it is paramount for their success.

Challenges and opportunities of Africa-based evaluation entrepreneurs: A case analysis.

While this subject of study is relatively novel within the African context, there is a scarcity of empirical evidence to draw upon. However, I came across a compelling case study that delves into the challenges, strengths, and opportunities of small and solo local evaluation firms in Africa. This case study revolves around an American and an African evaluator based in Ghana who co-authored an open letter addressing funders on equity in contracting and funding practices (Levine & Pul 2023). Their article sheds light on prevalent challenges and provides insightful solutions that I will be referencing in this section.

Challenges facing solo and local evaluation firms in Africa

1. They lack adequate funding and overhead funds to sustain their operations. Their minimal overhead costs enable them to provide cost-effective services, but their limited resources and lack of dedicated staff for business development lead to challenges in balancing existing contracts and pursuing new funding opportunities, especially when faced with tight proposal deadlines.
2. They operate with streamlined administrative and financial management systems. They utilize systems for recordkeeping and accountability but lack the budget for elaborate management systems like specific accounting software, often required by donors for accountability purposes.
3. They often do not have sufficient visibility. Their limited visibility in influential circles, where they could attract the attention of funders and major evaluation funding agencies, hampers their capacity to make a significant impact.
4. They must prioritize, within short timeframes, which assignments to pursue. They require clear budget limits and selection criteria to make efficient use of their time and resources.
5. They often have limited time and resources to participate in unpaid but lengthy contract negotiation processes. Negotiating contracts demands significant time and represents a substantial opportunity cost, diverting attention from other essential tasks.
6. No upfront payments and delayed payments for services affect them negatively. They have limited funding sources means, as they depend on a few projects to cover expenses, causing delays in assignments due to insufficient resources until funds are released.

Opportunities for growth and innovation

Opportunities for growth and innovation in evaluation firms, as identified by Levine & Pul (2023), encompass suggestions for contracting and funding evaluation work that are universally applicable to firms of all sizes. These strengths include:

- 1) *Locally rooted with a deep understanding of cultural context:* Lead evaluators, due to their close ties with communities, have deep cultural understanding and social insights.

This rapport allows quick trust-building and access within communities, enhancing the relevance of evaluation results.

- 2) *Highly networked*: They can form consortia when necessary, simplifying client administrative tasks by leveraging local expertise, and ensuring high-quality service delivery.
- 3) *Quick and easy access*: Lead evaluators have access to a diverse pool of local evaluators, including those from marginalized groups. This enables them to quickly engage local evaluators, enhancing data quantity and quality. Local evaluators, trusted by the community, design effective data collection methods, ask pertinent questions, and accurately interpret responses.
- 4) *Relevant experience*: Their extensive experience with funders and the communities they serve equips them to pose pertinent questions and delve deeper into community responses during evaluations.
- 5) *Innovative*: Their deep contextual understanding ensures that innovations are culturally appropriate and relevant.
- 6) *Responsive*: They operate with less bureaucracy, enabling quicker access to diverse resources through broad networks. Utilizing local connections, they can promptly engage with pertinent authorities and communities, which is crucial for effective partnerships.

Conclusion

Summary of key findings

Recognizing the pressing need for deeper exploration, this paper explored literature on the African evaluation market to provide empirical insights into the mechanisms governing the exchange of evaluation services, unraveling how buyers and sellers engage and the underlying dynamics of supply and demand (Lemire et al. 2018). Through this comprehensive exploration, the paper aims to enrich our understanding of the supply and demand landscape in the African evaluation marketplace, offering invaluable insights for practitioners and policymakers alike.

As an emerging field, exploring the presence and implications of evalpreneurship in Africa is necessary. As hypothesized by Sabarre (2021), evalpreneurship holds the potential to act as a catalyst for decolonizing evaluation and challenging prevailing paradigms of white supremacy and saviorism in the evaluation and development landscape of Africa (Shallwani & Dossa, 2023). As highlighted by Shallwani and Dossa, this research calls for a fundamental reevaluation of practices and approaches. Evaluation entrepreneurship emerges as a dynamic force for change, fostering inclusivity and cultural sensitivity, thereby contributing to the transformation of evaluation practices in Africa.

Implications for policy, practice, and research

Within Africa's multifaceted development arena, a distinctive and dynamic trend is emerging known as "Evaluation Entrepreneurship," often referred to as "Evalpreneurship" (Sabarre 2021). This phenomenon holds significant promise for addressing issues related to decolonizing evaluation and challenging prevalent concepts of white supremacy and white saviorism within the field of development (Shallwani & Dossa 2023). Therefore, future research should consider investigating further the concept of Evalpreneurship in Africa, to unveil the entrepreneurial identities, practices, challenges, and opportunities of Africa-based evaluation entrepreneurs. This study should examine the emerging roles of evaluation entrepreneurs in influencing the supply and demand of evaluations in the continent. This study calls for further studies and initiatives to support evaluation entrepreneurship in the African evaluation marketplace.

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