Call for Submissions: African Evaluation Journal

Addressing Knowledge Asymmetries: A Special Issue in memory of Dr Sulley Gariba

“He understood that deep-seated asymmetries of power and knowledge prevented universal access to affordable basic services including education, food security and the rule of law – and a better life for all. Over a remarkable, nearly 40-year career as a diplomat, philanthropy executive, policy adviser, evaluator, and entrepreneur, Gariba sought to equalize power and knowledge to shatter these asymmetries and replace them with reciprocal partnerships of respect and mutual benefit” – Prof Edward Jackson, Carleton University, Canada

More than 15 years ago at the 2007 AfrEA conference in Niamey, Niger, Dr Sulley Gariba challenged those gathered to ‘make evaluation our own’. This was going beyond the sharing of information and building evaluation capacity, it was about promoting evaluation both as a discipline and profession.

There was a recognition that evaluation on the continent was largely driven by international actors – aid agencies, large non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and evaluators based elsewhere. Several initiatives were launched to initiate specific Africa-rooted approaches to evaluation. Some of these are summarised in the 2013 Bellagio Report which provides a very well-articulated view of the concept of evaluation that is driven by, and rooted in Africa.

The Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) approach or label has since been used to present a decolonial perspective of the development trajectories for Africa; to deconstruct the inherited structures of domination; and to deal with the many paradoxes and contradictions that can and should inform African-rooted evaluation theories and practices. The MAE challenge is one that realises that decolonisation is not an end point or a point of arrival but a space to address unequal power relations, to problematise historical and traditional approaches and to surface the beneficial attributes of indigenous knowledge systems and practices.

The MAE Special Collection of the African Evaluation Journal (2022) recognised that M&E practice and theory in Africa had evolved through Western thought, philosophy, practices, values and experiences. The key argument of that issue was that the African M&E profession needed to adapt and be rooted in the African context, acknowledging the historical background, governance systems, inequalities and nuances of gender and culture. It adequately answered the ‘why the need for MAE’.

In memory of Dr Sulley Bamidele Gariba, the purpose of this edition is to build on the why question and develop the content for the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of Made in Africa evaluation and similar indigenous evaluation approaches. It will elaborate on what the similarities are of localised evaluation approaches with other regions in the Global South and how this could translate into a coherent perspective on decolonized evaluation approaches. Drawing on the work, the words, and the wisdom of Dr Sulley Gariba as a thought leader, advisor, practitioner, academic and interlocutor on the integrated nature of politics, governance and evaluation, this edition fills a much needed void.

Background to memorial issue: EvalPartners with support from the UN World Food Programme conceptualised the Sulley Gariba memorial lecture series shortly after his passing in April 2021 in honour of his contribution to the global evaluation community. It is a collaborative project in partnership with regional Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) in the Global South. With the aim of fostering greater collaboration and coordination between the evaluation community in the Global South and Global North, the lecture series critically explores the progress of indigenous evaluation approaches in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America & the Caribbean, the Asia Pacific, and the Middle East & North Africa regions. The AEW memorial Issue builds on the lecture series delivered at regional evaluation conferences organised by VOPES (AfrEA and ReLAC were held in 2022, while APEA and EvalMENA is forthcoming).

Themes to be addressed in the memorial Issue include concepts that Sulley Gariba supported throughout his career: local innovation; indigenous knowledge; local voices in evaluation; transformation; strengthening evaluation in the Global South; involving civil society, parliamentarians and emerging evaluators in the evaluation profession; and building evaluation capacity through stronger national M&E systems, aligning with a new United Nations General Assembly resolution, led by the Government of Nigeria, and co-sponsored by 24 member states, placing emphasis on evaluation to be country-led.

Submission guidelines: Submit your abstract of no more than 300 words to express your interest and commitment to this edition to editor@aejonline.org. Full papers are due 23 October 2023 and should be submitted to editor@aejonline.org. Look out for our webinar on Thursday, 31 August 2023 where editors will share expectations! More detail will follow. According to the African Evaluation Journal policy, papers will be accepted in English and French only.