

Documentation of the VENRO-DEval-Workshop 2024 “Partner Orientation and Decolonization in Evaluations”

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Guest speakers:

Diana Castillo Murrele (Evaluator), Edem Agbe (Managing Director, PDA), Sophie Kang’oma (Director of Monitoring and Evaluation, Government of Malawi)

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Thursday, 10th October, 10:00 – 17:00

Friday, 11th October, 09:00 – 13:00 pm

DEval, Fritz-Schäffer-Straße 26, 53113 Bonn



Please note: This summary aims to give an overview of keynotes, discussions, and group work without a claim for completeness.

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TIME	SESSION
Day 1	
10:00	Welcome speeches (Martin Bruder, DEval; Angela Bähr, VENRO e.V.) and introduction (Vaclav Prusa, World Vision; Mira Fey, DEval)
11:20	Keynote 1: African-Led evaluation in the context of competing interests in international development practice (Edem Agbe, PDA and University of Lincoln)
11:50	Reflections on keynote 1
12:30	<i>Lunch</i>
13:30	Presentation and group work: Community approaches in the decolonial evaluative perspective (Diana Castillo Murrele, Evaluator)
15:00	<i>Tea Break</i>
15:20	Plenary discussion on group work reflections and findings
16:20	Wrap-Up Day 1 (Vaclav Prusa)
Day 2	
09:00	Recap Day 1 and Introduction Day 2 (Carolin Wicke, DEval; Sebastian Schuster, Welthungerhilfe)
09:30	Keynote 2: Country-Led Evaluation: Experience from a Least Developed Country (Sophie Kang'oma, Director for Monitoring and Evaluation at the Malawi Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development)
09:50	Reflections on keynote 2
10:30	<i>Tea Break</i>
10:50	How to overcome challenges in a decolonised evaluation practice? Shared reflections on next steps (fishbowl exercise)
11:30	Learnings (Creative poster session, plenary wrap-up) (Carolin Wicke and Sebastian Schuster)
13:00	End of Workshop

Day 1: 10th October 2024

Moderation of Day 1:

Mira Fey, Wiebke Stein (DEval), and Vaclav Prusa (World Vision)

Introduction to the workshop

The goal of the annual DEval-VENRO workshop is mutual learning through a self-reflective approach. It includes both formal parts such as keynotes and plenary discussion as well as informal elements like group work and discussions in the breaks designed to foster open, collaborative engagement. This year's workshop focused on *Partner orientation and decolonization in evaluations*, a challenging topic eliciting strong opinions and emotions that was explored with openness to both successes and potential missteps in navigating it.

Martin Bruder's words of welcome

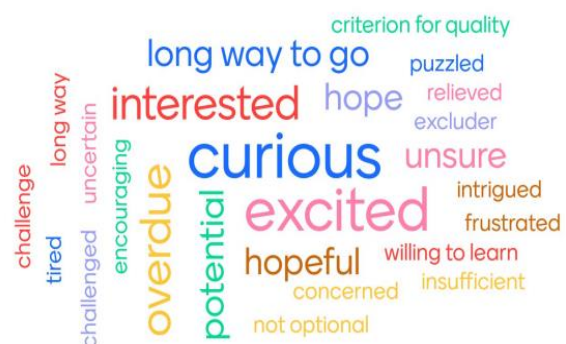
Martin Bruder, Head of the Civil Society and Human Rights Department at DEval, expressed his delight about external experts Edem Agbe, a leading voice in African-Led evaluations, Sophie Kang'oma, Director for Monitoring and Evaluation at the Malawi Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, and Diana Castillo Murrele, an independent evaluator with decades of experience focused on gender and migration in the Latin American context. Martin highlighted the multi-layered challenges of decolonizing evaluation frameworks, stressing aspects such as data ownership, partnership dynamics, and the varying meanings of partnership to different stakeholders. He briefly recapped the history of the event, which first took place in 2016 and has since been organised annually, even during the COVID-9 pandemic (albeit virtually). He noted that the workshop themes have always addressed challenging topics and that the format has consistently been interactive. In 2022, for the first time, external presenters were invited to give keynote speeches.

bridge perspectives between North and South in setting evaluation guidelines and ensuring alignment with national discourses.

Mira Fey provided essential logistics information, among others, etiquette, photographs, and the “parking lot”, a designated space to note ideas that could not be discussed at length in plenary discussions. Mira Fey and Vaclav Prusa outlined the workshop schedule for both days. As a final part of the workshop introduction and to initiate engagement and explore initial perceptions, a Mentimeter poll with two questions was conducted. The first question aimed at gathering perspectives on decolonial evaluation, responses are displayed in the word cloud below:

Angela noted the value of the diverse perspectives represented at the workshop through the participating experts from Colombia, Ghana, and Malawi. She underscored the importance of decolonizing evaluation as a key topic for both the German teams working in development politics and their partners in the Global South. Especially given the need for empowerment within the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) space. While accountability remains a core element of M&E within global frameworks, there is increasing pressure to reconcile Eurocentric perspectives with those from the Global South. *She highlighted the necessity to*

The second question captured emotions and sentiments associated with the process of decolonizing evaluations. The responses in the word cloud show quite a range:



Keynote 1: African-Led Evaluation in the Context of Competing Interests in International Development Practice

Presenter: Edem Agbe, Managing Director at Participatory Development Associates, Ghana, and PhD Candidate at the School of Social Policy and Political Science, University of Lincoln

Key Aspects

- Decolonizing evaluation practices
- Equity as a driver for policy change
- Intentional integration of community perspectives within evaluation design, data collection and analysis, and dissemination

Overview

Edem Agbe expressed his gratitude for the invitation and for the support with the complicated process of obtaining a Schengen visa. His goal for the keynote was an interactive session instead of a traditional academic presentation to not forget the individuals behind the data in the evaluation processes. Edem advocated for embracing diverse approaches and partnerships, especially considering the emergence of a new generation of evaluators in Africa. By employing inclusive approaches, he underscored the importance of co-leadership and collaboration, which fosters meaningful conversations in communities across Ghana and beyond.

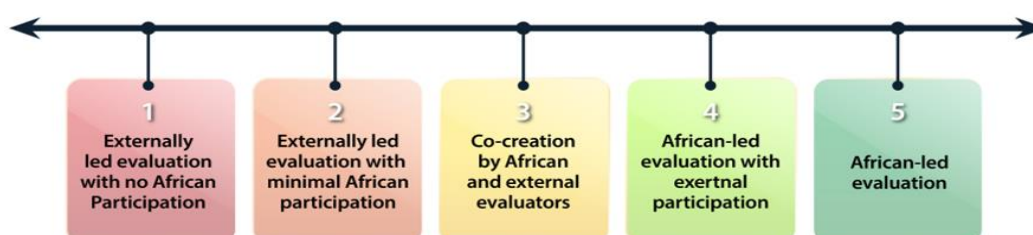
The speaker emphasized the necessity of centring community needs in design and

data collection. Specifically, he stressed the importance of generating evidence at the community level and tailoring evaluations to align with the diverse forms of local engagement.

He argued that conventional evaluation tools often constrain practitioners and diminish their autonomy. Instead, the aim should be to develop evaluations that are entirely locally driven and ensure that all stakeholders, including local communities, are meaningfully integrated at every stage of the process. While upholding high standards are important, relying on Western reference points can prevent the applicability and understanding for local stakeholders, ultimately limiting the utility of evaluations within the local context. *Edem raised a crucial question: “How can we ensure that the voices of these individuals are included in the evaluation process?”*

Edem presented the theoretical spectrum of local involvement in evaluations in Africa (see below and in the related article [here](#)). He explained that in stage 2, the main design of the evaluation is developed externally, which foregoes local input. Local evaluators might only be integrated as data collectors, not even for data analysis. Co-created evaluations, represented by stage 3, consist of a collaborative process between external and African evaluators who integrate local approaches and perspectives into the evaluation from design to data collection and analysis. Stage 4 includes the beneficiaries/rightsholders at the heart of

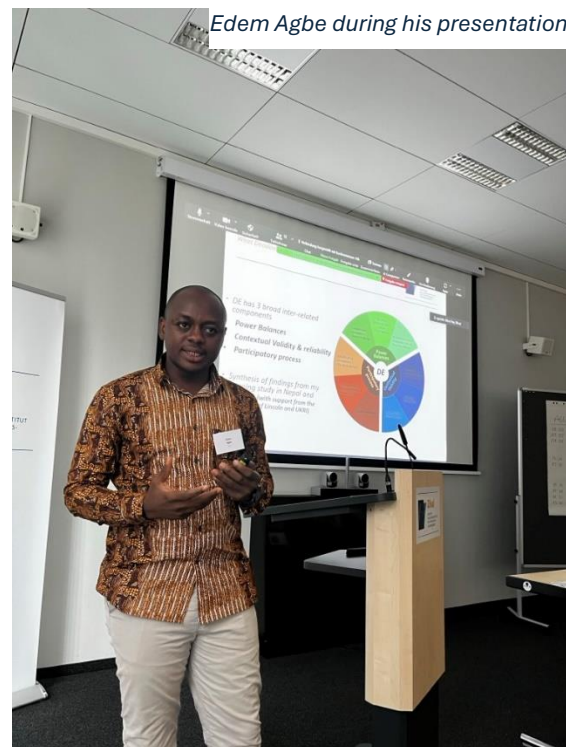
The spectrum of local involvement in the evaluation practice in Africa



the intervention that is evaluated (i.e., local community members). Edem advocated for a local evaluator to lead the process rather than relying on external facilitators. It is crucial for the lead evaluator to be familiar with local customs and contexts, as well as languages and communities, which ensures that their respective perspectives and needs are integrated into the evaluation. In stage 5, all components of the evaluation would be conducted by Africans with knowledge of the local context and related methodologies to ensure that these are respected and utilized. This is aimed at creating an evaluation that is fully developed, conducted, analysed, reported, and disseminated by local evaluators, thereby assuring that the evaluation results benefit the local communities participating in data collection processes.

Edem called for a re-assessment of evaluation practices to better achieve the desired outcomes and critiques the dependence on standard evaluation frameworks that are widely used globally, pointing out that strict adherence to these standards does not necessarily lead to meaningful change for local communities or at the national level. The expert outlined the *essential elements of decolonized evaluation*, emphasizing the importance of *balancing power*, ensuring the *validity of the evaluation for the local context*, and creating a *participatory process*.

To conclude, he asked the audience: *How do we move towards the centre of the spectrum? How do we ensure that our evaluation processes in international development reflect features of decolonial evaluation? What are the structural, cultural, and operational constraints that you foresee in the desire to decolonize evaluation practice? What are some opportunities and facilitators that can trigger a positive decolonized evaluation?*



After Edem Agbe's presentation, Vaclav Prusa led a Q&A session with diverse questions from in-person and online participants from different participating NGO and DEval representatives. The discussion centred around the meaning of “African-led” evaluations, the feasibility of participatory methods within the tight timeframes of evaluations, the potentially inherent coloniality in conventional evaluation methods and potential alternatives, and the need for open discussion fora such as this workshop between different partners, both external and local evaluators, to move forward together. The session emphasized the complexities and dynamic nature of decolonizing evaluation in development.

Lunch Break

Presentation and group work: Community Approaches in the Decolonial Evaluative Perspective

Presenter: Diana Castillo Murrele, Evaluator

Key Aspects

- Decolonizing evaluation by integrating indigenous and local knowledge
- *Communitarian feminism* as a framework for resilience and inclusivity
- Critique of conventional methods for perpetuating inequalities
- Community-driven approaches using narrative-based methods and tools like rituals, ceremonies, and storytelling to authentically reflect their experiences
- Emphasizing innovation in methodology and inclusive spaces for authentic local engagement

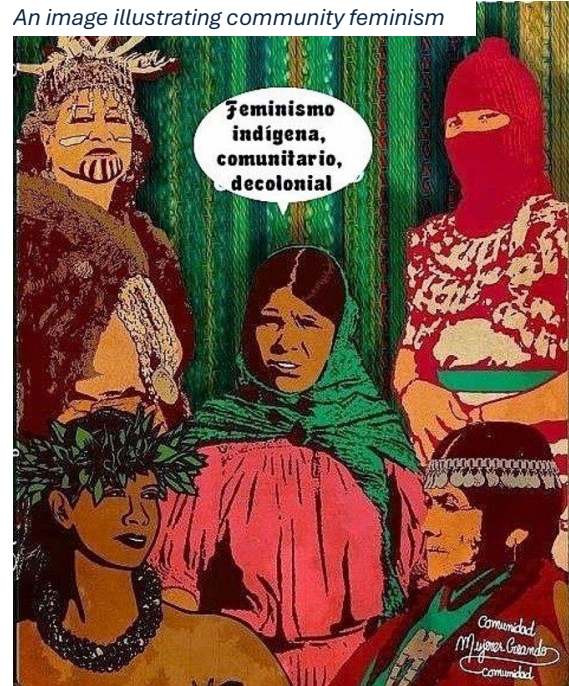
Overview

Diana introduced the concept of decolonial evaluation through a community-centred lens, focusing on integrating indigenous and local knowledge systems into evaluation processes. Accordingly, decolonial evaluation challenges conventional approaches by promoting inclusion of and respect for diverse ways of knowing, moving away from rigid, binary models often associated with Western perspectives. Binary worldviews, deeply rooted in Western thinking, can limit our understanding of different communities.

Diana also explored the intersection of feminism with decolonial evaluation, specifically discussing *communitarian feminism*. This framework transcends binary models, which tends to offer stronger resilience and survival strategies unique to each community compared to more Western feminist models. This emphasis on

community feminism aligns with the broader goals of decolonial evaluation, which seeks to centre local knowledge and lived experience.

An image illustrating community feminism



Critiquing conventional evaluation methods, Diana argued that they are often externally defined and rooted in quantitative data, which risks disconnecting them from the lived realities of marginalized groups, particularly women. *Acknowledging the perspectives, emotions, and unique experiences of those involved in the evaluation process is crucial.* Moreover, conventional evaluations often perpetuate inequalities by imposing external knowledge frameworks without truly understanding or integrating the contexts of local communities, which fails to capture the richness and validity of the narratives that emerge from community-driven knowledge.

To address these shortcomings, *Diana proposed a focus on creating respectful and inclusive spaces for both rural and urban communities.* Narrative-based methods and the use of audiovisual documentation, such as video diaries, can be used to authentically capture community experiences, and rituals, ceremonies, and traditional storytelling should be central tools in gathering and

reflecting on project outcomes, as these methods are deeply embedded in many indigenous cultures and offer unique insights into community perspectives.

Diana concluded her presentation by showing the video of the song "[Alma Mestiza](#)" by Rebeca Lane. The lyrics reflect the key points discussed throughout her talk, reinforcing the themes of embracing local knowledge, inclusion, and decolonial methodologies in evaluation.

After the presentation, a short Q&A session followed before the participants worked in groups. The Q&A session centred around bringing the needs and insights of the community to the forefront of evaluations without replicating internal power structures, addressed issues with standardisation in evaluations, and questions whether criteria in and of themselves are not inherently colonial.

Group Discussion

Using examples from recently conducted evaluations using OECD-DAC criteria, participants were asked to reflect on several key questions regarding the effectiveness and inclusivity of these models in capturing the complexity of local contexts:

1. *What aspects of the evaluation reflect a decolonized, community-orientes approach?*
2. *What could have been done differently to make the evaluation more decolonized?*
3. *What lessons can we take from this case for our own evaluation practice?*
4. *What obstacles are commonly encounters when attempting a decolonized evaluation, and how can these obstacles be overcome?*

In five in-person groups and one online group, participants were invited to *explore how decolonial evaluation can empower local voices by incorporating traditional and narrative methods, while also respecting community-defined identities and uniqueness.*

Group work



Following the group discussions, participants reconvened for a plenary session to share their insights and reflect on the key findings from their group work. One group raised *challenges associated with donor dependencies and expectations rooted in a colonial mindset*, including issues related to language, hierarchical structures, class divisions, and standardized metrics.

Another group highlighted how close collaboration with local communities to gain a nuanced understanding of their perspectives led to the enthusiastic involvement of the youth and to early adjustments of the project, ultimately improving the overall outcomes and impact.

The third group pointed out the obstacles posed by existing power structures in donor-led evaluations, noting that some partners may still hold on to colonial perspectives while also *warning against the risk of romanticizing indigenous knowledge without recognizing the diversity and complexity within partner countries.*



Presentation of group results

The fourth group examined the complexities surrounding a project with limited openness to decolonial approaches. They emphasized that *without favourable conditions, implementing a decolonial framework becomes particularly challenging*. The group underscored the importance of changing mindsets and developing specific skills, noting that language proficiency alone does not equate to a deeper cultural understanding.

The fifth group presented an evaluation with a strong community focus and participatory methodology, including creative strategies, such as painting Easter eggs, to foster storytelling and engagement. *Participants expressed a sense of empowerment as they shared their experiences, which contributed to a more inclusive evaluation process*. The group suggested that incorporating mixed methods could further enhance evaluations by balancing quantitative data with participatory elements, enriching the overall assessment.

The final group proposed organizing evaluations along a spectrum to illustrate the varying degrees of decolonization. *The group emphasized the need for a mindset shift to foster a more holistic understanding of decolonial perspectives*.

key area of inquiry is the development of criteria to standardize decolonized evaluations (DE), as many questions in this area are still unanswered.

Conclusion of Day 1

Wrap-Up Reflections

To finish off the first day of the workshop, Vaclav summarised Edem and Diana's main talking points, the group discussions, and overall learnings. He stressed that *building trust is foundational to a successful decolonial approach and highlights the need to connect these conversations to both academia and community participation*. Several open questions remained regarding the integration of community voices in evaluations. Decolonized approaches will require additional capacities, including financial resources and knowledge, which will incur costs that we need to prepare for. A

Day 2: Friday, 11th of October 2024

Moderation of Day 2:

Carolin Wicke (DEval), Sebastian Schuster (Welthungerhilfe)

Recap and Agenda

To start, participants were invited to pair up to discuss key learnings from Day 1. Sebastian introduced the session by reflecting on Edem's framing of decolonialization in evaluation. He emphasized the importance of considering the political environment, balancing competing interests, and recognizing the risks associated with power shifts. Beyond mere participation, Sebastian highlighted the need to *focus on meaningful engagement, effective techniques, and ensuring that evaluation processes have utility for all stakeholders, with a strong emphasis on trust and accountability*. He highlighted remaining question regarding the next steps and on engagement strategies, techniques for fostering change, and addressing risks within power dynamics.

Keynote 2: Country-Led Evaluation – Experience from a Least Developed Country

Presenter: Sophie Kang'oma, Director for Monitoring and Evaluation at the Malawi Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

Key Aspects

- Local authority involvement in monitoring and planning
- Understanding decision-maker knowledge as crucial for effective evaluations
- Engaging local communities throughout the evaluation process
- Complexity of monitoring and evaluation requiring planning and institutional support

Overview

Sophie drew on her experiences as Director for Monitoring and Evaluation at the Malawi Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. She shared insights into the evaluation system in Malawi, emphasizing the role of the government's planning unit. In this system, local authorities at both the village and district levels assume responsibilities for monitoring and planning. For Sophie and her team, it is crucial to understand how much decision-makers know about evaluation, as this significantly influences the effectiveness of the evaluation process. The current policy framework requires funding requests from the ministry, which leads to the need for evaluations to be framed in a way that secures government support, thus constraining the scope of decolonized evaluation.

The expert discussed the evaluation of the COVID-19 intervention conducted in 2021. It



The audience during keynote 2



Some of the audience

was fully funded by the government with support from the World Bank and a local Malawian bank and implemented with substantial participation from local communities. Engaging local communities proved challenging, especially if this is done not just for the data collection process, but throughout the entire evaluation.

Sophie emphasized the complexity of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes across African countries, which require careful planning, coordination, and institutional support. She identified challenges, including limited capacities, lacking financial resources, and the absence of a central information system, stressing the need for governmental prioritization of evidence-based decision-making. Furthermore, she underscored that community engagement and capacity building are crucial for improving outcomes.

In concluding her keynote, Sophie reiterated that decolonizing evaluation is an evolving process and poses a vital question: *How can we effectively implement it and gather the necessary evidence to support our efforts?*

After Sophie Kang'oma's presentation, Carolin Wicke led a Q&A session with questions from both in-person and online

participants. The discussion revolved around concrete evaluation practices in Malawi, such as the Malawi National Information (MNI) system, *the use of evidence generated through evaluations by policymakers, and the need for international evaluators to share their results with national governments*. It also touched upon the question whether country-led evaluations are necessarily decolonial evaluations, and whether the OECD-DAC criteria are the most suitable way for such evaluations.

Tea Break



Catering by Jovent

Fishbowl session: How to overcome challenges in a decolonised evaluation practice?

During the fishbowl session, participants are invited to come forward to sit on one of five chairs in the centre and engage in shared reflections on the next steps for overcoming challenges in a decolonized evaluation practice. Throughout the discussion, participants rotate in and out of the circle, allowing for diverse perspectives and ideas to be shared as the conversation progresses.

Key Points Discussed

The discussion started off around practical issues such as *language barriers* that might exist between international and local evaluators or communities. Here, AI was suggested as a potential solution, with a participant sharing a Congolese example where citizens report corruption in their native languages. However, risks associated with digitalization include the potential exclusion of certain groups. Face-to-face interactions can often be more effective, and technology should meet the diverse needs of all stakeholders. Participants suggest engaging communities through *technology*, including AI, software, and translations. Additionally, they recommend utilizing techniques such as standing up when speaking which is useful for people with visual impairments, but also others. Evaluators should be open to embracing new methodologies and challenging rigid frameworks. Subsequently, *expanding the pool of experts* involved in evaluations was suggested as a means of including diverse perspectives.

In discussing power dynamics and changing structures, a participant highlighted the necessity of *mindset shifts in evaluation*, questioning the growing trend of instrumentalizing every aspect of the process. These discussions on mindset

changes and the involvement of stakeholders should be institutionalised. To address these issues, several *recommendations* emerged: first, there should be a *concerted effort to share more power in evaluations and actively involve civil society*. Second, it is essential to focus on *deconstructing existing power structures that may hinder progress*. Third, *including a broader range of stakeholders in the evaluation process and fostering long-term relationships enhances the effectiveness of evaluations*. Fourth, encouraging flexibility and creativity, such as incorporating art or music into evaluations, can lead to *more innovative and engaging evaluation practices*. Finally, the plenary recommended *shifting the focus from solely economic utility to encompass the overall value of evaluations* and suggested piloting flexible approaches that broaden the boundaries of evaluation practices without strictly adhering to donor requirements.



Fishbowl discussion

Creative group work and gallery walk

The learnings from the group work were centred around a creative task. The participants were asked to envision a "partner orientation paradise" and represent it through a creative picture, such as a mind map. After completing their visual representations, the groups hung them up and presented their ideas to the rest of the participants.

In **Group 1**, participants defined partnership as diverse and inclusive, with everyone working under the same sun of trust and respect. They identified the challenge of protecting this paradise from misuse of power and mistrust.



Group 1

Group 2 emphasized the importance of community-led evaluations, where feedback is returned to the community. They focused on a "goal-free" evaluation process shaped by the needs of the community.

Group 3 stressed the significance of setting goals together and used the metaphor of "fishing for methods" to highlight the need for choice and options in evaluation approaches.



Group 3

In **Group 4**, participants identified elements that belong to the paradise concept by using red and green dots to visualize ideas such as flexibility and participation.



Group 4



Group 2

Mentimeter Poll

[illegible]

hopeful

sceptical

inspired

motivated

excited

disappointed

frustrated

confused

puzzled

still confused

creative

still intrigued

anxious

elusive

community

insufficient

communication

open mind

more confused

interested

unusual

oriented

supportive

on a journey

possibilities

good promoter

more conversations

ambitious but powerless

baby steps

In the general round of feedback, participants expressed their appreciation for the diversity of perspectives present in the workshop and the open, judgment-free discussions. Many enjoyed the working groups and felt hopeful for future collaboration, while others admitted to initially being sceptical but ultimately found the networking and learning experience rewarding. While some participants appreciated the non-judgmental atmosphere, others suggested that a better wrap-up after the first keynote and more time for reflection would have enhanced the experience. Additionally, there were

In his final remarks, Edem expressed his happiness with the prevailing sense of hopefulness among participants, acknowledging the need to shift boundaries and structures within the evaluation process. He emphasized the importance of providing space for diverse voices in evaluations, recognizing that inclusivity is crucial for meaningful outcomes. Edem also conveyed his gratitude for the opportunity to attend the workshop, despite having faced challenges related to obtaining a visa.

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