

Reflexive Planning Guide

Practices For Decolonising and Indigenising Evaluation Methodologies

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Introduction

The evaluation of complex public health programmes and interventions in global public health has historically been shaped by Eurocentric approaches to the production of knowledge. This orientation has often assumed a certain universalism by treating ‘Western’¹ methodological approaches, philosophies, and perspectives as the standard and privileging them over other systems of knowledge, such as Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing. By following a traditional evaluation model, evaluators have perpetuated colonial structures that prioritise Western scientific understandings of the world and what counts as ‘valid’ evidence. What is termed ‘Western science’ has set the parameters for what ‘counts’ as science, although it does not usually acknowledge this. However, Indigenous knowledge should not be thought of as necessarily lesser or unscientific.

In this guide, we understand ‘Decolonising’ global health evaluation as a continuous and transformative process that seeks to address power imbalance within institutions, knowledge systems, and evaluation research and practice by intentionally undoing, unlearning, and dismantling unjust research practices, assumptions, and structures. Here, we understand ‘Indigenising’ evaluation as the process of reclaiming Indigenous ways of knowing (epistemologies) as the primary foundation for assessing the merit, worth, or impact of a programme. In this guide, we frame Indigenous and decolonial evaluation as a project that moves beyond simply incorporating diverse perspectives and instead works to foreground the knowledge, priorities, and worldviews of the oppressed, colonised and Indigenous communities where evaluation research is conducted. At its heart lies a commitment to epistemic justice, recognising

that diverse knowledge systems hold value, and ensuring that evaluation is driven by, and accountable to, the communities it is intended to serve. Such an approach also recognises that meaningful knowledge building requires a critical examination of the power relations that permeate the research process and their entanglement with colonial histories.

This reflexive planning guide serves as a starting point for collective reflection for those involved in evaluation at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the Centre for Evaluation (CfE), including our research partners and collaborators. This Guide is the result of a dedicated project led by members of the Centre for Evaluation (CfE) at LSHTM, funded by an LSHTM Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Small Grant. It is based on a scoping review of the academic and grey literature on decolonising and Indigenising evaluation methodologies. Notably, this guide does not aim to provide a rigid set of rules or guidelines to decolonise or Indigenise evaluation, but rather aims to foster reflexivity and discussion of current practice and how this can be improved by moving toward more justice-oriented approaches.

Decolonial & Equitable

1. Quotation marks indicate contested umbrella terms.

Rationale

The need for this guide emerges from two interconnected drivers: the global movement to decolonise and Indigenise evaluation practice; and LSHTM's own institutional responsibility to interrogate and dismantle practices stemming from its colonial origin.

Evaluation has been described as one of the 'worst instruments of epistemological imperialism' because it frequently reinforces uneven and biased power structures. Evaluators practice power when deciding the guiding theoretical/conceptual framework, the data to be collected, the methods considered valid for doing so, and the ways results are synthesised and reported. For example, the OECD-DAC Evaluation criteria (Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, Sustainability) while commonly used in global health and development, have been criticised for privileging Eurocentric, linear, and managerial logics that emphasise measurability and efficiency, thereby reinforcing accountability to donors and governments at the expense of relational processes, local priorities, and community-defined notions of value. As accountability and utilisation of evaluation findings are common evaluation objectives, evaluation findings often shape subsequent action and change in programmes decisions, which, typically, extend the power granted to evaluators.

A key dimension of this power can be epistemic power, where evaluation frameworks often reinforce systemic inequalities by privileging dominant epistemologies and methodologies that exclude or marginalise Indigenous and local knowledge and ways of knowing, and perpetuate a 'foreign gaze' in problem definition, setting of evaluation questions, methodological design,

analysis, interpretation and dissemination. This gaze is further reinforced through the field's preference for external evaluators², grounded in assumptions that equate distance with neutrality and objectivity. This practice can result in excluding evaluators with local knowledge or embedded experience of the intervention or programme being evaluated by casting them as biased, proximate, or insufficiently independent – assumptions that obscure how power, values, and interests shape forms of evaluation practice. Thus, decolonising evaluation requires shifting from externally imposed, extractive practices to decolonial and Indigenous approaches that are participatory, transformative, and community-led. This guide argues that failing to incorporate decolonial and Indigenous methodologies, where appropriate, introduces methodological and conceptual weaknesses in study design, data generation, and analytical approaches, and dissemination.

The institutional context for this guide is rooted in the colonial history of LSHTM. An archival history research report on the colonial history of the school has documented how from inception LSHTM was shaped by, and benefited from, colonisation and the British Empire. Moreover, it functioned as an institutional instrument that helped to sustain colonial domination. In the wake of Black Lives Matter, student activism, including the work of the FAIR network, called for an Independent review to address discrimination and racism at LSHTM. In response to this, and concerns raised by students and staff, LSHTM has committed to a wide-ranging programme of work to decolonise research and teaching. This guide builds on that moment of reckoning, extending focus to evaluation practice. It builds on LSHTM-wide efforts, including the work of

2. In this guide, we refer to external evaluators as those not embedded within, or accountable to the organisation or programme being evaluated, and is contracted from outside its governance and delivery structures to conduct the evaluation.

students, staff, and alumnus networks such as '[Decolonising Global Health \(DGH\)](#)' and '[Fighting Against Institutional Racism \(FAIR\)](#)', while also acknowledging that both initiatives are now discontinued, reflecting challenges related to continuation of funding, and uneven political will within academic institutions to sustain decolonial work. Other institutional initiatives, such as the work of the Equitable Partnerships Coordinating Group, Equitable Partnership Tool ([EquiPar](#)) and the Health in Humanitarian Crisis Centre's [Decolonising Humanitarian Health Charter](#) and [Implementation Guidance](#), aimed to embed decolonial thinking into practice, albeit with differing degrees of engagement with coloniality as a structural issue. While some of these initiatives adopt a broader equity-oriented framing, this guide is positioned more explicitly within decolonial scholarship, centering colonialism and its epistemic legacies as foundational to contemporary evaluation practices. In doing so, it seeks to complement rather than duplicate existing institutional efforts, by extending decolonial analysis into the specific domain of evaluation.

Intended use

Developed by the Centre for Evaluation (CfE), this guide is intended for all those engaged in evaluating public health policies, programmes and interventions, including CfE members, LSHTM staff, students, research partners, collaborators, and the wider evaluation communities. It is not a 'how to' guide. Instead it is intended to:

1

Facilitate critical reflexivity and conversation among CfE members, research teams, partner institutions, and the communities in which the evaluations take place, to encourage an ongoing, reflexive approach to decolonial praxis in evaluation.

2

Serve as a resource to stimulate reflexivity, and reflection throughout the evaluation process, from identifying to developing, implementing, piloting and evaluating public health interventions, by posing critical questions, highlighting key considerations and facilitating the sharing of practical narratives.

3

Signpost to resources on decolonial and Indigenous evaluation methods, providing links to relevant articles and resources to support evidence-informed practice.

4

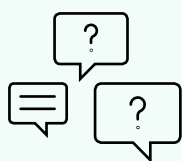
Act as a tool for advocacy, promoting alternative, decolonial, and Indigenous approaches to evaluation that challenge dominant paradigms and foster more contextually responsive and just practices.

Structure

This guide is structured around the health evaluation cycle, encompassing the following phases: idea development, project development, implementation, post-data generation and analysis, and project completion and review. While there are other ways to frame the evaluation stages, including the widely used MRC framework for developing and evaluating complex interventions, for the purpose of this guide, we have intentionally adopted a structure

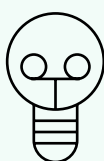
that allows interrogating pre-design and early planning phases and treats evaluation as a broader project cycle. This approach allows us to interrogate foundational aspects of traditional evaluation that are often assumed to be given, in more linear or intervention-focused models.

Each section is supported by a table organized into four distinct columns to facilitate practical application:



Reflexive questions

A set of reflexive prompts for evaluators to critically examine and/or validate their assumptions. Most questions are reflexive (designed to prompt critical examination of positionality, power, assumptions, and decision-making), while a smaller subset are explicitly reflexive questions, inviting more open-ended sense-making and learning from the evaluation process.



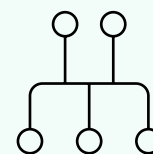
Story/wisdom

Illustrative case studies and evidence of best practices that demonstrate decolonial and Indigenous principles in action.



Resources

Signposts to relevant tools, frameworks, and literature to support further learning.



Considerations

Key factors related to evaluation design, methodologies, and context that require specific attention.

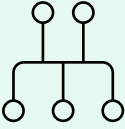
To support users to navigate the specific theoretical concepts and terminology used throughout these sections, a Glossary of Key Terms is provided in the [Appendix](#).

1. Idea development

The idea development phase is the foundational stage of an evaluation, where the rationale, scope, and objectives are critically examined. This phase should involve interrogation of the evaluation question—who defined it, why it is being asked now, and how it aligns with community needs and preferences.

Decolonial and Indigenous approaches centre design and utility of the evaluation to the communities where it is conducted, involving them in defining the problem, framing the questions, and ensuring that priorities reflect local rather than external goals and agendas. This phase also includes examining the institutional colonial heritage that may shape the questions asked, as well as community perceptions and historical experiences with evaluation, evaluators and particular methodologies—such as clinical trials—that may carry legacies of harm or mistrust. Additionally, it is crucial to consider whether the evaluation builds on existing partnerships and relationships with local evaluators and actors and whether its framing is genuinely driven by their needs and priorities, while recognising the heterogeneity of identities, interests, and needs within and among communities, and critically engaging with how representation, voice, and internal power hierarchies shape whose priorities and needs.

Table 1: Guiding reflexive questions and resources for the idea development phase

 Reflexive questions	 Story/wisdom	 Resources	 Considerations
- How has my understanding of the local context and communities been shaped? And by whom? - Where does my understanding of this place originate from? - Who is defined as a ‘local actor’ in this context, and how do their specific positionalities (e.g., gender, class, elite status) influence their views on priorities? - How can I learn more about local priorities? - Do I possess the necessary skills (e.g., language) and contextual knowledge for adequate interpretation of evaluation findings? - What is my positionality in relation to this community (e.g., insider, outsider, a mix), and how will I actively manage my perspective to centre and privilege local knowledge and expertise? - Does the timing of this research align with local priorities and needs? - Who defined the evaluation objectives and priorities? To what extent did communities identify the priorities or were consulted? - Are the chosen methodologies appropriate and relevant to local contexts? - Am I sufficiently informed about the histories of this place and its communities to conduct this evaluation? - How might the identities we carry – both as a team and as individuals – through our institutional connections evoke painful or troubling histories?	The Health in Humanitarian Crises Centre (HHCC) at LSHTM adopted its Decolonising Our Work Charter as a living compass for research, teaching and partnerships. Faced with the power asymmetries of academia in the Global North, the HHCC aimed to embed decolonial practice into the work conducted at the Centre, and challenge the colonial legacies that continue to impact efforts to improve health in humanitarian settings. In exploring how HHCC members used this Charter, they observed that some found it particularly instrumental during project ideation and inception. It provided an interrogative lens, prompting critical reflection on partner suitability and their precise integration within project scope, and foregrounding discussions around the origins of project concepts to inform grant applications. This active application transcended proposal writing beyond an instrumental funding exercise, transforming it into a profoundly reflexive practice that compelled teams to articulate precisely how their proposed work would genuinely redistribute resources, support meaningful participation, and actively confront power imbalances among partners.	The Foreign Gaze by Seye Abimbola (2024). We highly recommend reading chapter 2 ‘The Foreign Gaze’ and Chapter 3 ‘Evidence as Cliché’. These chapters are particularly relevant for the idea development phase as they provide a critical lens for examining how external perspectives can shape problem definition. NIHR Building Equitable Partnerships: This guidance addresses how to build equitable partnerships between LMICs and UK global health institutions. It addresses research leadership, decision-making, capacity strengthening, governance, appropriate fund distribution, among other topics. ARISE Consortium – Supporting Equitable Partnerships in Global Health: A Toolkit for Participatory Health Research Methods: This toolkit is designed for researchers, programme implementers, teachers, and students interested in applying Participatory Health Research methods to support equitable partnerships. Editverse – Collaborative Grant Writing: Strategies for Multi-Institutional Proposals: This article offers strategies for multi-institutional grant writing, including aligning goals and objectives, utilising effective communication and collaboration tools, developing realistic budgets, adhering to funder requirements, and managing project timelines.	- Based on your reflexivity on the questions, you may want to consider not going for this project or referring it to a colleague or partner institution that is better suited to design and implement this project. - You may want to consider redefining your role in the evaluation process. - You may choose different methodologies or redefine your research questions.

2. Evaluation project development

The evaluation project development phase shapes the methodological approach, ensuring it aligns with epistemological, ethical, and contextual priorities.

Taking a decolonial or Indigenous approach, this stage involves designing methods that reflect local knowledge systems and values rather than reinforcing dominant and extractive practices. Engaging with Indigenous theoretical frameworks—such as Made in Africa referenced in the table below—and other decolonial paradigms—can help ground the evaluation in locally relevant epistemologies.

Methodological choice

Methodological choices should be critically examined, including the language used in evaluation processes. This encompasses not only the terminology embedded in dominant evaluation discourse, such as ‘extraction’, ‘fieldwork’, ‘data collection’, or referring to the study participants as ‘subjects’, which carry colonial legacies – but also the linguistic appropriateness and accessibility of the evaluation methodology and materials. The use of local languages and culturally appropriate forms of knowledge production must be prioritised to ensure meaningful participation.

Additionally, it is essential to question what constitutes ‘evidence’ from the perspective of communities and partners, determining what evaluation outputs are most relevant, accessible, and beneficial to them.

This evaluation phase also involves selecting appropriate qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches while recognising their differing limitations and implications for participants and the findings produced. Rather than positioning qualitative and quantitative approaches in opposition in terms of decolonial practice, the literature emphasises that any methods may be extractive when imposed through colonial assumptions, and conversely transformative when grounded in local priorities, epistemologies, and systems of accountability. Standardised quantitative indicators, for instance, may obscure locally meaningful realities if detached from community-defined values, just as relational or narrative-based qualitative data may lose their integrity if stripped of their cultural or contextual grounding. Accordingly, caution is required to avoid the co-optation of decolonial language and Indigenous methods, whereby familiar academic tools are rebranded without honouring the wisdom and attending to the responsibilities, and relational commitments of decolonial and Indigenous scholarship. Simply renaming a focus group as a ‘story circle’, for example, without adherence to Indigenous ethical evaluation approach, risks superficial compliance rather than substantive transformation. The evaluation team must reflect on the suitability of different methodological approaches and their combination and ensure they do not impose external logics that obscure local knowledge and ways of knowing.

Theory of change

The use of Theory of Change (ToC) and logic models in decolonial evaluations have been contested. While often required by funders, these tools are frequently critiqued for rooting evaluation in Western, linear concepts of time and causality, which fail to capture the complexity of social change, especially if developed by external evaluators, or with limited local and community involvement. However, some Indigenous scholars and practitioners have reclaimed these tools to assert sovereignty, adapting them as a tool to centre local priorities.

Decolonial and Indigenous approaches insist that outcomes, indicators, and measures must be rooted in and owned by local communities and with proper involvement of the intended users and audiences. This requires shifting evaluative authority to communities, ensuring that priorities, aspirations, and definitions of success are co-created as community-owned indicators. It may also involve broadening established indicators to include relational, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of change, and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems alongside traditional evidence. Examples from practice include how practitioners have created an Indigenous visual logic model that links Cascadia region Indigenous values with environmental sustainability learning outcomes, emphasising centering Indigenous culture. Realist Evaluation (RE), a theory-driven approach focused on context-mechanism-outcome configurations, has the potential to contribute to decolonising evaluation when combined with participatory practices and when local stakeholders' assumptions (theories) are put on an equal footing with Western social science theories.

Evaluation team and power

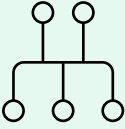
Beyond methodological design, this phase requires critical reflexivity on team composition, dynamics, and power relations-both internally and with external partners. Activities such as power analysis and community engagement

planning can help systematically address asymmetries and foster more equitable collaborations. The management and communication of the evaluation should also accommodate non-Western narratives and ways of working, ensuring transparency, co-ownership, and meaningful participation.

Data

Finally, decisions around data generation should address two components: what data are prioritised, and who facilitates their generation, particularly in terms of positionality and representation. Who collects the data, their background (including race/ethnicity, education, gender, nationality, discipline, institutional affiliation), and their relationships with the community, matter significantly. Involving local and Indigenous evaluators as co-researchers can be a valuable approach that must also be implemented ethically when used, to avoid exploitation. This requires fair training, adequate compensation, and structures that ensure local and Indigenous evaluators' voices are meaningfully heard, while also preventing additional burden, extractive work or emotional labour. Careful attention should be paid to the positionality and diversity of Indigenous and local evaluators involved. Prioritising only those with higher education, English fluency, or formal leadership roles risks marginalising grassroots voices. Also, their role as evaluation team members should be recognised as distinct from, rather than a substitute for, broader community participation in shaping the evaluation. Furthermore, a clear understanding of who is defined as 'Indigenous' in the specific study context is vital to avoid imposing external categorisations. Data generation should minimise the need for external researchers to travel unless their presence adds value beyond what can be achieved through local expertise. This ensures the evaluation remains accountable, contextually relevant, and aligned with principles of self-determination and epistemic justice.

Table 2: Guiding reflexive questions and resources for the project development phase

 Reflexive questions	 Story/wisdom	 Resources	 Considerations
- How will the team ensure ongoing reflexivity throughout the research process? - How is decision-making power and resource control distributed within the evaluation team and between the team and collaborators? - Am I distributing funding fairly and equitably? - How roles and responsibilities were assigned? - Do I actively foster feedback, remain open to it, and adapt the evaluation project to reflect local knowledge? - Whose criteria are we using to frame and measure change? - Will the evaluation design and data generation methods produce outputs that reflect local needs and priorities? - Are the theories, measures and methods contextually appropriate?	In a recent episode of Indigenous Insights: An Evaluation Podcast, Veronica LaJoie—an artist and evaluator from the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa—reflects on the evaluation development phase as a deeply relational and reciprocal encounter. She recounts using ribbon work alongside oral histories with cancer survivors, honouring their stories through art-based methods that centre Indigenous epistemologies rather than extracting data. Veronica emphasises that evaluation must be <i>‘rigorous, caring and reciprocal’</i> highlighting how community-defined evidence and culturally grounded storytelling shaped every methodological choice. You can listen to her story here: S03 E06: Community Stories in Indigenous Evaluation with Veronica LaJoie.	Made in Africa Evaluation Framework: Read Chilisa, B., & Mertens, D. M. (2021). Indigenous Made in Africa Evaluation Frameworks: Addressing Epistemic Violence and Contributing to Social Transformation. <i>The American Journal of Evaluation</i>, 42(2), 241-253. Chilisa’s work addresses how grounding evaluation in local epistemologies and ontological assumptions, such as Ubuntu, can challenge Eurocentric dominance in evaluations. EquiPar tool: focusing on broad equity principles rather than specific decolonial methodologies, this tool was developed by LSHTM to provide practical and pragmatic guidance for establishing and strengthening equitable partnerships. - If the evaluation includes a literature, scoping or systematic reviews, consider reading Chambers LA, Jackson R, Worthington C, et al. Decolonizing Scoping Review Methodologies for Literature With, for, and by Indigenous Peoples and the African Diaspora: Dialoguing With the Tensions. <i>Qualitative Health Research</i>. 2017;28(2):175-188. doi:10.1177/1049732317743237 Another important contribution is: Phillips-Beck, W., Bukich, B.L.J., Thiessen, K. et al. An Indigenous-informed scoping review study methodology: advancing the science of scoping reviews. <i>Syst Rev</i> 13, 181 (2024). - The DEPTH project developed a helpful visual graphic, for embedding <u>co-production</u> throughout the research cycle. While focused on broad engagement rather than decolonisation specifically, this visual helps map entry points for shifting power to partners, and avoiding centering colonial powers and structures.	‘Resist eloquency’: in decolonial literature, refers to a deliberate choice to prioritise authentic, often raw, language and diverse forms of expression over polished, conventional academic language. - Prioritise outputs that address local priorities over other research outputs. - Build in time and mechanisms for feedback and reflexivity as well as adapting the project to what you are learning.

3. Evaluation implementation

The evaluation implementation phase focuses on ensuring adaptability, ethical integrity, and responsiveness to changing contexts. This stage requires ongoing monitoring of team dynamics, partner relationships, and community participation, as a collective responsibility shared by all partners, irrespective of who leads the evaluation.

Adaptability and reflexivity

Given the colonial history, power and privilege often held by Global North institutions, it is incumbent upon these institutions to proactively engage in uncomfortable but necessary discussions. This joint responsibility and commitment should drive making necessary adjustments to uphold equity and inclusivity.

A key aspect of implementation is the iterative refinement of study design, methods participant recruitment, and approaches to data generation. Rigid adherence to predetermined protocols and methodologies can risk data quality (rather than ensure it) and undermine contextual relevance; therefore, evaluators should remain flexible to modifying strategies to better align with community needs, logistical realities, and emerging insights where this improves rigour. This may involve revising recruitment, sampling strategies, adjusting interview techniques or questionnaires, and/or incorporating alternative knowledge-sharing formats, such as oral narratives or participatory mapping, to ensure accessibility and cultural appropriateness.

Contextual and political considerations

The broader political and social landscape in which partners and communities operate must also be considered. Shifts in governance, policy changes, security concerns, or socio-economic disruptions may necessitate revising evaluation timelines, pausing activities, or reassessing participation strategies. Regular and transparent communication with stakeholders as an evaluator responsibility is essential to navigate these complexities, ensuring that the evaluation process remains both ethically sound and practically feasible.

Ethical and relational accountability

Data generation should prioritise ethical and relational accountability, with informed consent understood as a culturally grounded process rather than a procedural action. Decolonial and Indigenous evaluation frameworks replace the transactional, individualistic Western concept of ‘informed consent’ with a dynamic, relationship-based process centered on respect, reciprocity, and accountability to the community as a collective. In some African contexts, this has been framed within the relational concept of *Ubuntu* (*I am because we are*), where evaluators are expected to build genuine communal relationships before seeking knowledge. In indigenous tribal contexts, research or evaluation cannot proceed without explicit collective approval, often granted through a community or tribal gathering. In other Indigenous settings, culturally informed consent may require consultation with Elders or traditional teachers who uphold cultural protocols. In some communities, gift-giving practices are perceived to be an integral part of community safeguard and a culturally appropriate consent process. This pluralistic ethical orientation echoes Oyinloye’s (2021) proposition of an *Qmólúàbí* code of research ethics, which seeks to integrate Indigenous virtue ethics with Western research norms through a situated, participant-centred framework that privileges relational accountability and moral character in engagements with marginalised populations.

Data governance and indigenous sovereignty

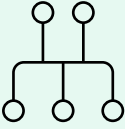
Data governance and ownership in decolonising and Indigenous evaluation represent a core assertion of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. In Indigenous contexts, data are viewed as collective intellectual property and sacred knowledge, encompassing statistical data, cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and other community-held resources. Indigenous data sovereignty is considered a priority for

data governance. Practical mechanisms of governance include principles such as OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession), which guide First Nations in managing data collection, storage, interpretation, and sharing. Tribal Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) serve as formal gatekeepers, asserting sovereignty over research and evaluation processes, though capacities vary across communities. Governance is further reinforced through formal agreements, including data-sharing protocols, memoranda of understanding, and informal ‘good relations’ agreements, which collectively protect intellectual and cultural property.

Data and power

Throughout implementation, evaluators must remain reflexive about power asymmetries, questioning whose voices are prioritised and how decision-making unfolds. Language considerations remain critical. Data generation should be conducted in the preferred languages of participants and be collected and analysed by first language speakers. Where absolutely essential, interpreters and translators must be carefully selected to prevent distortion of meaning. Ongoing team reflexivity, through debriefings, reflexive journaling, or participatory feedback mechanisms, can help identify biases, challenges, and opportunities for more equitable participation. By maintaining a flexible, contextually responsive, and ethically grounded approach, the implementation phase ensures that data generation remains rigorous, inclusive, and aligned with decolonial and community-driven principles.

Table 3: Guiding reflexive questions and resources for the implementation phase

 Reflexive questions	 Story/wisdom	 Resources	 Considerations
• Am I staying engaged with local priorities, which may shift over time, as well as with local knowledge and collaborators? • Am I remaining flexible and adapting to what I learn from the data and local collaborators? • Am I critically reflecting on how my presence—due to my identity or institutional affiliation—is evoking painful or troubling histories? • How are decisions made about ongoing changes in evaluation management, budget and/or methods? • Who holds ownership of the data, and how can it be managed in a way that prioritises local communities? • Do I need to reconsider timelines to account for the evolving political situation?	In her blog post ‘Why Participatory Evaluation? Reflections from a Global Northerner’ Ann Marie Castleman recounts her shift from standardised Western evaluation to genuinely co-creative fieldwork in rural Nicaragua. She describes how, during implementation, the team adopted PhotoVoice, Most Significant Change, and appreciative inquiry, then critically maintained the maxim ‘data collected from the community stays in the community’. Rather than exporting findings, they held analysis sessions locally so residents could interpret results and design their own responses, fostering data ownership, reflexivity, contextual relevance, and shared decision-making throughout the process. Read more about her journey here.	• Thirusha Naidu, Gareth Gingell & Zareen Zaidi (2024), ‘<u>Decolonial framework for applying reflexivity and positionality in global health research</u>’ Global Health Promotion. Presents a practical, macro-micro framework emphasising reflexivity, researcher positionality, and ethics-in-practice, offering direct guidance on managing power asymmetries and contextually responsive methods during implementation. • ‘<u>Advice from local/site evaluators: How to manage ‘up’ within a large-scale initiative</u>’ (2022). It explores how embedding national-level partners directly within local evaluation teams enhances contextual understanding and strengthens evaluation quality. Local evaluators emphasised the ethical and practical benefits of having national team members embedded ‘on the ground’ to support data generation, contextual interpretation, and burden-sharing.	• Ensure that you continue to make time for participant/community feedback and reflexivity as well as adapting the project to what you are learning. • Prioritise collection of data that will support outputs that align with local priorities and not only to serve academic goals. • Maintain the flexibility to adapt the evaluation plan in response to evolving circumstances (e.g., social, political, or environmental shifts) to ensure the work remains relevant, safe, and ethically sound. • Create clear and safe channels for participants and communities to provide ongoing feedback about the evaluation process itself, not just ‘within’ it.

4. Post-data generation and analysis phase

The post-data generation and analysis phase is integral to ensuring the integrity, relevance, and ethical grounding of evaluation findings.

It demands a critical and reflexive approach to how data are analysed, interpreted, and presented, with particular attention to the methods employed and the processes of knowledge production. Whether employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, the analysis must be contextualised, participatory, and inclusive, ensuring that findings contribute meaningfully to local knowledge systems and priorities.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative data analysis focuses on understanding complex, context-specific narratives and meanings. Methods such as participatory coding, thematic analysis, and grounded theory are commonly used in global public health evaluations and research, with a strong emphasis on community-led interpretation. Participatory coding involves the direct involvement of local and/or Indigenous

evaluators in the coding process, ensuring that their lived experiences and knowledge systems shape how data is categorised and understood. As discussed earlier, practices that support data governance and indigenous data sovereignty are particularly important in this phase, ensuring that communities have the right to govern their own data and can make informed decisions regarding its use, dissemination, and ownership.

Quantitative analysis

Quantitative data analysis involves analysing quantitative data to assess intervention, implementation, effects and impacts. In this phase, it is important to critically examine the categories used in the analysis, ensuring they are not based on assumptions that exclude local contextual knowledge or reinforce external biases. Standard statistical methods such as descriptive statistics or regression models may be used, but with sensitivity to the local context and the ways in which data are framed. The analysis should also question the composition of the dataset itself, considering who may have been systematically excluded or invisible through the chosen sampling strategies, recruitment methods, or analysis categories.

This process involves reflecting on how quantitative measures, such as health indicators or categories, are constructed and presented, ensuring they resonate with local understandings of well-being. As a key step, evaluation teams

should present preliminary findings, including quantitative, to communities and partners for a process of co-interpretation, a reflexive practice that should extend to most methods. This creates an opportunity to discuss the resonance of the results with lived experience, identify potential harms in how data are framed, and ensure the final narrative is contextually grounded and meaningful across the entire analytic process.

Mixed methods analysis

Mixed methods analysis integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches, providing a more holistic understanding of the data. This approach requires careful consideration of how the two methods complement one another and how they can be combined to create a deeper understanding of intervention implementation and outcomes. However, taking a decolonial approach, mixed methods must be applied with caution to the intended use and intentionality, to ensure that one method does not dominate the interpretation of findings.

The process of data integration in analysis, which can include but is not limited to data triangulation, should focus on uncovering tensions, contradictions, and alternative interpretations. Evaluators need to find the most acceptable ways to involve stakeholders in the data analysis and interpretation process to ensure that the findings reflect the diverse perspectives and priorities of those involved, and that these contributions are meaningfully documented and incorporated into the final outputs.

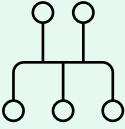
Ongoing involvement in knowledge production

The analysis process should extend beyond a single point of involvement with partners, recognising that knowledge production is an ongoing, dynamic process, whenever possible. Evaluators must ask critical questions about the role of partners in data coding, interpretation and the broader knowledge production process. This phase includes the translation

of findings into practice and actionable co-created recommendations that reflects the priorities of local communities and partners. This process also involves considering how local knowledge production platforms—such as community journals, where possible or networks with a wide readership in the study context—can be used to disseminate findings and foster continued dialogue.

Acknowledging the contributions of team members and partners to knowledge production throughout the evaluation process demonstrates the legitimacy and relevance of the findings. It is also crucial to consider the recognition of local contributions through peer-reviewed papers and representation at national and international conferences. Giving due credit to local researchers and partners in the production of knowledge fosters a more equitable approach to dissemination and increases the visibility of their work in global discussions. Additionally, transparent discussions should be held with donors and funders to prioritise how findings are communicated, ensuring that these are accessible, useful, and actionable, while remaining faithful to the community-centred ethos. For instance, this may involve producing study findings in local languages and formats for community use prior to their presentation in global or policy forums.

Table 4: Guiding reflexive questions and resources for the post-data generation and analysis phase

 Reflexive questions	 Story/wisdom	 Resources	 Considerations
• Am I staying close to local priorities in what I am trying to learn and how I’m planning on using the findings? • Whose voices are prioritised in data interpretation? • Have I invited and enabled the relevant stakeholders to join in the analysis, validation and/or sensemaking? • Have I trained or equipped the team and/or partners to contribute to coding, analysis and interpretation of data? • Who has access to data and control over it?	Although not explicitly designed as a decolonial methodology, a study by Zreik et al. examining mental health and psychosocial support across Lebanon and the UK employed collaborative coding to centre local expertise and promote equitable knowledge production. Local researchers, many of whom were new to formal qualitative analysis, participated in blind, bilateral coding alongside more experienced team members using Dedoose. Regular reflexive meetings allowed for critical dialogue on coding decisions, language, and meaning, creating space for local interpretations to shape analytical frameworks. This approach disrupted extractive tendencies in cross-national research by embedding contextual insight into the core of the analysis process and fostering shared authorship and accountability. Read more: Zreik T. et al. <u>Collaborative coding in multi-national teams: Benefits, challenges and experiences promoting equitable research</u>, Qualitative Inquiry, 2023.	• Gillborn and colleagues wrote a paper on ‘QuantCrit: education, policy, ‘Big Data’ and principles for a critical race theory of statistics’ (2016). It offers good insights into applying justice-oriented theories to quantitative analysis. • Read Thambinathan, V., & Kinsella, E. A. (2021). Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Creating Spaces for Transformative Praxis. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20(1), 1-13. It addresses the practical application of decolonial principles within qualitative research methodologies, offering guidance on critical reflexivity, reciprocity, embracing ‘Other(ed)’ ways of knowing, and embodying a transformative praxis.	• Work with research assistants, local evaluators, partners and participants on data analysis • Schedule regular check-ins with local collaborators that will allow for more feedback and to hear their reflexive insights.

5. Project completion and review

The project completion and review phase mark the culmination of the evaluation process, where findings are shared, and the overall approach is critically reviewed.

This phase involves not only drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations based on the analysis, but also reflecting on the methodology and evaluating the impact of the evaluation, ensuring it is both rigorous and responsive to the communities involved.

Dissemination and reporting

Decolonial and Indigenous principles should guide the presentation of these findings, ensuring they reflect the context and local knowledge systems. The results should not only inform academic and policy debates but also be actionable for those directly impacted by the evaluation. Dissemination strategies should be developed with local community members, stakeholders, and partners and ensure that the findings are presented locally before being disseminated more widely. This strategy should prioritise local or regional knowledge platforms,

as well as peer-reviewed journals with a wide readership in the study context, and relevant conferences or seminars. This ensures that the findings are not only accessible to academic audiences but also to the communities involved in the evaluation and addressing local issues.

The findings should be communicated through multiple channels, including accessible formats, and languages for participants, community members, local organisations, and other relevant stakeholders. This can include community-based publications, video and audio outputs, and use of social media platforms and informal networks to ensure widespread reach and relevance. Academic outputs such as peer-reviewed papers and conference presentations are also critical, but these should be framed with an emphasis on recognising the contributions of local partners and publication in journals with an appropriate audience (for example, in regional journals or professional magazines) to maximise impact.

Equally important is returning the findings to the participants who contributed to the evaluation. Consideration should be given to how the findings will be shared with the community – whether through community meetings, written reports, or multimedia presentations – and include a reflection on whether these methods were appropriate and effective in fostering involvement and reflection. Ensuring the feedback loop is inclusive, transparent, and culturally appropriate is vital for sustaining trust and accountability. Ultimately, this process

should lead to the co-production of contextually appropriate recommendations, ensuring the findings are translated into meaningful action for policy and practice.

Reflection and critical review

The project completion phase offers a space for critical reflection on the entire evaluation process. This includes assessing the effectiveness of the evaluation design, methods, participation strategies, and the evaluation's overall impact. Reflexivity should guide this review, with the evaluation team considering how they pivoted throughout the process and adapted methods to better align with community needs and evolving contexts. Reflection should also focus on whether the final results truly addressed the priorities of the targeted community and how those results materialised in ways that were meaningful to them.

This phase also involves evaluating who benefited from the evaluation results. Were the community members who participated directly involved in the dissemination process? Were their voices adequately represented? Did the final findings reflect their experiences and needs? It is crucial to examine who presented the findings and whose voices were prioritised in the dissemination. This reflection should also consider whether the evaluation had the desired impact on those it aimed to serve and how the results are being used to influence change.

Indigenous and decolonial approaches also emphasise closing evaluation project as an accountable relationship rather than a discrete deliverable, including community-defined processes for returning results, acknowledging contributions, and agreeing stewardship, access, and future use of data and outputs. Follow-up should be co-governed with community partners, with transparent commitments, resourcing where appropriate, and mechanisms for ongoing learning and redress.

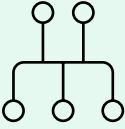
Sustainability and follow-up

The sustainability of the evaluation's impact is another key consideration. The findings should be integrated into ongoing activities with community partners, ensuring that they contribute to long-term improvements. This may involve recommendations for follow-up actions or collaborations to support the implementation of the findings. It is important that the evaluation results do not remain isolated but continue to inform practice and policy moving forward, including where interventions are found to be ineffective.

Accountability

Accountability is also vital in this phase. Did the evaluation team return the findings to the participants in a meaningful way? Were community members provided with opportunities to reflect on and respond to the findings? Transparency and accountability in how results are shared and used can help reinforce the evaluation's value and ensure it leads (where appropriate) to sustainable change.

Table 5: Guiding reflexive questions and resources for the project completion and review phase

 Reflexive questions	 Story/wisdom	 Resources	 Considerations
- How do I report the findings in a way that does not compromise the safety and well-being of the research participants and their communities? - What is our approach for tailoring the format, language, and dissemination channels of the different outputs, for local relevance and accessibility? - Have I focused on outputs that are accessible to and benefit research participants and their communities? - What are the consequences for the research participants and their communities? - What happened to the evaluation team after the evaluation ended? including their progression, professional development, and ability to secure future funding? - Who is credited for the research? - Has everyone involved in the project and affected by it been made aware of the findings? - How will you and the evaluation team close the project responsibly?	- In early 2025, abrupt cuts to USAID funding led to the suspension of multiple clinical trials and global health programme evaluations focused on diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria, particularly in countries like Rwanda, Uganda, and Lesotho. These interruptions left participants without the continuation of promised treatments and support, raising urgent ethical concerns regarding participant welfare, informed consent, and the responsible conclusion of research activities. One researcher described the cessation as both indiscriminate and wasteful, highlighting the distress caused by the sudden withdrawal of care and the lack of closure for affected communities. In response, evaluation teams sought to mitigate harm by organising community debriefings, facilitating referrals to alternative care providers, and developing phased closure plans designed to uphold ethical obligations and preserve trust. To read more: Researchers face impossible decisions as U.S. aid freeze halts clinical trials and Indiscriminate, Cruel, and Wasteful: Abandoning USAID clinical trials. - Between 2019-2022, LSHTM evaluation project of Malaria transmission interventions across ten villages in the Upper River Region of The Gambia suggested a gap between community participation and meaningful understanding of research purpose, processes, and benefits. Despite high initial enthusiasm to participate in the evaluation, particularly as the study included free healthcare for children, there may be gaps in fully comprehending the purposes or results of the research, the benefit to them and the wider community, echoing patterns in Malaria research more broadly which involve multiple rounds of collection of blood to evaluate disease incidence during which survey coverage drops, potentially affecting downstream trust and future research participation. In response, the post-study public engagement project Yewterreh for Malaria! (2023) was co-designed with local artists and community members, and used Forum Theatre, dance and village festivals to report on the findings of the Malaria project in culturally resonant ways, alongside co-produced, picture-based results briefs that remained within the communities, thereby reframing dissemination as a relational, collective, and locally meaningful process.	- As part of the ‘Gender-responsive evaluation for a sustainable future for all’, there is a dedicated tool on ‘Dissemination of evaluation findings and follow-up actions’ that can help evaluators disseminate findings through diverse channels and for different audience. - Cook, J. et al. (2023). ‘Planning for Dissemination for Participatory Community-Engaged Research’: A Dissemination Curriculum and Planning Protocol, Journal of Participatory Research Methods. This structured protocol offers a dissemination planning template covering goals, audiences, mediums, timelines, and metrics. - Read Ligaga (2022) ‘Holding space at the margins: a decolonial approach to academic publishing in Africa’ considers the recommendations suggested by the author.	- Consider publishing in regional or national journals (where possible) that are not Eurocentric. - Consider dissemination in multiple formats (e.g., not just written)

Appendix: Glossary

Epistemic violence	Within the context of decolonising evaluation and research, refers to the systemic actions and practices that suppress, exclude, and invalidate the knowledge and voices of marginalised, colonised/formerly colonised, and Indigenous peoples.
Epistemic justice	Epistemic justice refers to fair treatment of individuals in how knowledge is produced, shared, valued and recognised. In this context, it refers to the process of actively working to redress the historical acts of <u>epistemic injustice</u> perpetrated against the epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies of marginalised, colonised, and minoritised peoples. It aims to foster inclusive knowledge systems that recognise and validate diverse perspectives.
Relational epistemology	Draws attention to relational forms of knowing as opposed to Euro-Western theories that emphasise individuality and individual ownership of knowledge. Knowledge is socially constructed through relationships and connections between people, the environment, and the spirits of the ancestors, including the living and the non-living.
Indigenous data sovereignty	Articulates the <u>inherent legal and political right of nations</u> to govern the collection, ownership, and use of their data, ensuring that it reflects community values and priorities.
Decolonisation	A process through which the colonised liberate themselves materially, politically and psychologically from colonial rule. It requires active <u>dismantling of colonial structures</u> and cannot be reduced to a theoretical concept or synonym for a social justice project.
Decoloniality	An ongoing epistemic and cultural project challenging the enduring coloniality of power and knowledge that persists post formal decolonisation.
Ubuntu	An African philosophy that captures the essence of being human. It is rooted in a relational ontology, captured in the <i>'I am because we are'</i> .
Relational accountability	The principle of Indigenous methodology defined as the process of honoring and being accountable to one's relations, including maintaining accountability in relationships to the earth and to one another.
Participatory feedback mechanisms	These are structured processes through which community members, programme participants, or stakeholders actively contribute their perspectives, experiences, and evaluations to inform decision-making, evaluation adaptation, and accountability.

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