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## Research Article

# Evaluation innovation in Africa: Towards indigenously responsive evaluation (IRE) philosophies, methods and practices in Ghana

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Evaluation within an indigenous society is a social activity. Thus, it requires both tangible and intangible or hidden factors such as cultural values, norms, communal relational structures, power dynamics, attitudes, consensus-building, community aspirations, empowerment and other practical knowledge to develop an inclusive evaluation framework. Utilizing a culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) approach, this study examined evaluative instincts rooted in indigenous values, relational patterns, knowledge systems and other cultural realities. Indigenous evaluation impulse exists in native ideas, social structures and other cultural realities but could these indigenous evaluative impulses augment and shape contemporary evaluation philosophies, approaches and practices in Ghana? The study observed that there are several tangible and intangible evaluative dimensions that are deeply-rooted in cultural values, maxims, norms and other social patterns within the indigenous communities. Consequently, comparable dimensions could be advanced and established in the present evaluation research to add further depth and rigour to the study in this field.

**Keywords:** culturally responsive evaluation, indigeneity, relational assessment, indigenous knowledge

## Introduction

Evaluation methods, theories, models, frameworks and philosophies in Africa are under enormous criticism and review for being ‘Euro-American’ centred (Chilisa and Malunga 2012; Chilisa et al. 2016). Several studies have argued that ‘Euro-American’ evaluation approaches are deeply-rooted in what is termed ‘donor-driven accountability-based’ evaluation (Jeng 2012; Chilisa et al. 2016; Sithole 2016; Boadu and Ile 2019) with little or no emphasis on indigenously-based approaches. Jeng (2012) asserts that these types of evaluation tend to overstate principles and assumptions and wrongly diagnose the evaluation outcomes.

Besides, evaluation activities in Ghana are mostly rooted in the ‘donor-driven’ conundrum (Boadu and Ile 2017, 2019; Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021) with little or no community-based viewpoints. Nonetheless, there is an increasing call for the integration of culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) or community-based evaluation (CBE) approaches into the mainstream evaluation theories, methods and practices (Boadu and Ile 2022). However, there has been limited study of CRE and CBE in Ghana. Moreover, there is inadequate knowledge with regard to how indigenous and other cultural evaluative impulses resonate with contemporary evaluation and development approaches (Tharakan 2015a; Chilisa et al. 2016; Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021). Thus, given the present inadequacy, an interrogation of the cultural/indigenous evaluative values to unravel the embedded evaluation instincts is timely. In addition, since Ghana is in the process of establishing a national or sub-national evaluation framework or guideline, it could be an opportune time to look critically at some cultural evaluation philosophies and how they could be integrated into the impending framework.

Easton (2012) asserts that there is a cultural evaluation impulse embedded in indigenous maxims or proverbs that Chilisa et al. (2016, 318) termed ‘relational evaluation’ which predates contemporary evaluation paradigms. There is evidence that indigenous monitoring and evaluation systems are practised in several indigenous communities through everyday relational patterns (Chilisa and Malunga 2012; Chilisa et al. 2016). Afrocentric evaluation concepts are deeply-rooted in social realities, proverbs, community spirit, ubuntu philosophies (relational knowledge systems), cooperation, consensus-building, co-ownership and other cultural veracities (Muwanga-Zake 2009, 2010; Tharakan 2015b; Chilisa et al. 2016; Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021; Boadu and Ile 2022).

There is a growing quest among indigenous evaluators to incorporate cultural philosophies into the practice of evaluation (Easton 2012; Chilisa 2015; Chilisa et al. 2016). The aim is not to conjure a new evaluation approach but rather to unravel the evaluative impulses embedded in indigenous values, ideas, norms, proverbs and other cultural realities (Easton 2012). Gaotlhogwe et al. (2018) reasoned that such integration has the potential to synthesize and promote the design of an indigenously-driven evaluation framework. Thus, this paper explored the evaluative impulses embedded in indigenous values and other cultural realities to shape and balance mainstream evaluation theories, methods and practices.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a succinct review of the indigenous evaluation literature. The section thereafter articulates the methodological design. This is followed by the section that looks critically at the evaluation instincts embedded in indigenous philosophies, theories and practices that are essential for community-based evaluation activities. The paper then ends with conclusions arguing

for the utility of indigenous evaluation. The core research questions which informed the research are as follows:

- (a) What cultural values, notions and philosophies guide the conceptualization of indigenous evaluation?
- (b) What structures underpin the indigenous evaluative philosophies?
- (c) What explains these evaluative impulses and social patterns in indigenous evaluation?

### **Literature review**

There is an increasing uncertainty surrounding the conceptualization of indigenously-driven evaluation in Africa. Thus, it is appropriate to have a broader understanding and knowledge of indigenous evaluation notions, methods and practices in Ghana and Africa at large as well as how they could be theorized to resonate with mainstream evaluation concepts. Consequently, it is apt to explore some of the indigenous philosophies and practices that could enhance or hinder indigenously-driven development and evaluation activities.

### ***Indigenous values, relational stakeholders and culturally responsive evaluation***

Evaluation is a communal activity (Hood, Hopson, and Kirkhart 2015) and indigenous societies have the best collective principles that are visible in cultural philosophies such as ‘ubuntu’. These collective values are rooted in indigenous societies and have the potential to advance relational evaluation activities (Hanberger 2010). However, non-indigenous evaluators tend to neglect the efficacy of cultural values (Hanberger 2010; Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021) which could undermine the relational evaluation activities. Indigenous evaluation ideas in a multicultural society are complex to conceptualize, with Hanberger (2010, 182) posing the following question: ‘How can an evaluation be designed to be accepted by different groups in a multicultural society?’

Cultural bias in contemporary evaluation methods, theories and practices has been interrogated in the literature. For instance, Chilisa et al. (2016, 314) argued that ‘is it possible that the methods and procedures employed in the (contemporary) evaluation are still culturally biased, racist, and still trapped in the historical moment dominated by global capitalism and its profit goals’. Besides, there are abundant Afrocentric values with deep-rooted evaluation and measurement activities which cannot be overlooked (Easton 2012; Goyena and Fallis 2014; Bowman and Lunaape 2018).

Contemporary evaluation scholars are espousing cultural philosophies in an attempt to reshape the present evaluation concepts, methods and practices (Goyena and Fallis 2014; Bowman and Lunaape 2018; Bremner and Bowman 2020). Moreover, Sengupta, Hopson, and Thompson-robinson (2004) have argued that other academic fields of studies have greatly integrated context-specific cultural values into their theories and practices except for evaluation. The authors further reasoned that social policies have a cultural dimension; thus, they need a culturally responsive approach when it comes to their implementation and evaluation. Easton (2012, 522–523) echoed some untapped evaluative cultural values such as

collective effort, mutual obligation, power, social accountability, stakeholder involvement, transparency and capacity-building, among others that are embedded in indigenous proverbs in West and East Africa.

Chilisa et al. (2016) have questioned the cultural biases in contemporary evaluation philosophies, approaches and practices. Thus, there is a need to interrogate the present evaluation models in Africa to determine whether they are ‘culturally neutral’ (Chilisa et al. 2016, 314). Afrocentric evaluation impulses, philosophies and structures are perceived to be anachronistic and are marginally utilized in contemporary evaluation frameworks. However, culturally responsive evaluation notions are embedded in African relational patterns and everyday cultural realities such as greetings and proverbs (Easton 2012; Chilisa et al. 2016).

Extensive studies have pointed out that when these key evaluation values are espoused through research, it could produce African context-specific evaluation strategies (Chilisa and Preece 2005; Jeng 2012; Chilisa et al. 2016; Boadu and Ile 2022). Besides, there are several Afrocentric evaluation and development philosophies which could complement contemporary evaluation and community development approaches (Reviere 2001; Mkabela 2005). Chilisa et al. (2016) reasoned that there are various moral paradigms, values and philosophies such as ‘ubuntu’ which could drive the African evaluation decolonizing process.

Chilisa et al. (2016) aver that the indigenous relational patterns encourage several indigenous stakeholders to participate in community-based development projects and evaluation activities. Bowman, Francis, and Tyndall (2015) maintained that stakeholder dialogues are crucial in indigenous evaluation activities. However, Chilisa et al. (2016) hastened to add that these relational evaluation networks delay consensus-building and decision-making. Boadu, Ile, and Oduro (2021) in their study in Ghana observed that relational stakeholders within the indigenous settings lean towards social networks that comprise youth groups, women associations, farmers’ cooperative networks, community-based development groups, ethnic groups, and other gender-based groupings. These indigenous relational networks tend to influence and control the development and evaluation activities.

Easton’s (2012, 523) study in West and East Africa also observed that the participation of local stakeholders in community-based evaluation activities is of great importance if either indigenous or non-indigenous evaluators are to avoid what the researcher termed a ‘political shipwreck’ in the evaluation process. Besides, the collective responsibilities and shared endeavours embedded in indigenous value systems make the indigenous relational stakeholder a key role player in the evaluation activities (Easton 2012; Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021). Extensive studies have also observed that stakeholder involvement and collective efforts with regard to community decision-making, implementation and evaluation aid to curb the power disparities between the indigenous hierarchical leadership structures and the local people (Easton 2012; Chilisa et al. 2016; Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021).

Mapitsa and Ngwato (2020) in their study in Africa argued that there is a ‘power-based relationships’ within the social networks that tend to influence the evaluation processes including stakeholder participation. Thus, the need for both indigenous and non-indigenous evaluators to embrace the indigenous relational power dynamics (Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021) tend to influence the extent to which the indigenous people participate in the evaluation activities. These power differential structures are some of the features embedded in indigenous communities in Ghana due to the hierarchical leadership structures (Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021). The authors observed that the relational leadership structure tends to encourage mutual obligation and shape social accountability within the relational evaluation activities.

Bowman, Francis, and Tyndall (2015) acknowledge that the actions of indigenous community members in evaluation activities are shaped by culture, complex social structures and power relations. The indigenous relational patterns are situated within complex cultural, social, religious and traditional governance arrangements. Holte-McKenzie, Forde, and Theobald (2006) in their study in Kenya observed that there are complex cultural factors that tend to influence and control the design of evaluation activities in community-based development initiatives. Chilisa and Malunga (2012) and Manyati (2014) argued that relational evaluation has several tenets such as consensus-building, collective learning, collaboration, collective knowledge acquisition and sharing of ideas which are essential in community-based development activities. Boadu, Ile, and Oduro (2021) argued that the comradeships within and among indigenous relational stakeholders tend to encourage collective decision-making, assessment and reporting.

Mapitsa and Ngwato (2020) assert that in the ethical evaluation process, there is very little or no consensus which is detrimental to the local stakeholders. The authors further argue that evaluation activities will suffer without active community participation and consensus-building between and among the various stakeholders. However, studies have observed that indigenous evaluation activities are rooted in context – specific ideals and beliefs such as mutual obligation, trustworthiness, camaraderie and consensus-building (Easton 2012; Goyena and Fallis 2014; Chilisa et al. 2016; Bowman and Lunaape 2018; Bremner and Bowman 2020).

### **Design and methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative empirical research approach (Charmaz 2017, 34) to generate information regarding indigenous evaluation systems, philosophies and practices. The researchers interviewed both indigenous or community people and local government officials within three traditional and local government areas in the Eastern Region of Ghana. For further analysis of the evaluation impulses within the indigenous context, the researchers interviewed traditional educationalists to elicit their views on the models, theories and practices of local assessment within the indigenous communities. The data were collected between February and August

2019, utilizing key informant interviews, semi-structured interviews and participant observation through a purposive sampling technique (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim 2016). The approach comparatively provided a flexible way for the selection of case study areas, recruiting respondents as well as gathering of data (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim 2016).

### **Data collection instruments and case study areas**

The study utilized a portfolio of data collection instruments including key informant interviews (19 respondents) (Kumar 1989), semi-structured interviews (14 respondents) (Adams 2015), participant observation (Campbell et al. 2020) and documentary reviews (Bowen 2009). The research participants comprised traditional leaders, local government officials, local community development members and educationalists. All the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis and interpretation. The field study took place in one of the sixteen regions in Ghana, the Eastern Region. The region is primarily inhabited by two out of the five (5) Akan indigenous groupings: the Akyem and Akwapim. It was purposively selected because of the study’s interest in the Akan traditional philosophies and other cultural realities regarding development decision-making and assessment activities. Table 1 shows the region and number of case study areas, number of respondents, and pseudo-variables utilized to ensure respondents’ anonymity. The three study sites were selected based on the existence of traditional areas (traditional territories with indigenous governance authorities headed by a chief or queen) within a local government administrative district, indigenous governance structures, reverence for indigenous knowledge systems, values, norms other cultural realities that encourages community development, local participation, cooperation, and assessment by and for the local people. The study obtained ethics approval with reference number HS18/6/17 from an independent ethics committee, the Humanities and Social Science Research Committee, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa.

The data collection methods were further supplemented by thorough participant observation (Sedano, Ralph, and Péraire 2017) and detailed notetaking and recording of interactions with indigenous community members and participating in traditional gatherings that were pertinent in this study. The approach also gave the researchers the opportunity to observe other indigenous and communal development activities in diverse local settings. Utilizing evidence synthesis and documentary analysis (Bowen 2009), pertinent documents were analyzed.

### **Case study areas and sites**

Ghana has sixteen (16) administrative regions. These regions are subdivided into 216 decentralized administrations (metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies) for the distribution of national resources and development. The Eastern Region has 26 districts and Akwapim South, Akwapim North and Suhum municipality were the three local government areas used as the case studies. Traditionally, the Akwapim South district is under the Okuapeman



**Table 1:** Table showing region, districts and traditional areas and types of respondents.

Region	Districts & traditional areas	Categories	Respondents ID	Number of respondents
Eastern Region	Akuapim North (AN), Akuapim Traditional Council (ATC) (ATCNA)	Traditional leaders (sub-divisional leaders, heads of clans)	ATC <sub>1&amp;2</sub>	2
		Community development leaders	CATC <sub>1-4</sub>	4
		Local government officials	AS <sub>1-4</sub>	4
	Akuapim South (AS) Okuapeman Traditional Council (OTC) (OTCAS)	Educationalist	EU <sub>1</sub>	1
		Traditional leaders (sub-divisional leaders, clan heads)	OTC <sub>1&amp;2</sub>	2
		Community development leaders	COTC <sub>1-4</sub>	4
		Local government officials	AN <sub>1-3</sub>	3
	Suhum Municipality (SU) (Akyem-Abuakwa Traditional Area) AATA (ATCSU)	Educationalist	EU <sub>2</sub>	1
		Traditional leaders (sub-divisional leaders, clan heads)	AATC <sub>1&amp;2</sub>	2
		Community development leaders	CAATC <sub>1-4</sub>	4
		Local government officials	SU <sub>1-3</sub>	3
		Educationalist	EU <sub>3</sub>	1
Total				32

*Source:* Field data, 2019.

Traditional Council while Akuapim North is situated within the Akwapem North traditional area. Suhum Municipality (SU) is in the Akyem-Abuakwa traditional area. These districts and municipalities are found in the Eastern Region of Ghana along with the three traditional areas used as the case studies. [Figure 1](#) depicts the case study districts, municipalities and their corresponding traditional areas in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

### Data analysis

The research data analysis was grounded in a qualitative analytical principle based on thematic analysis (Nowell et al. 2017). The sequential model of open, axial and selective coding was essential to establish the various relevant labels using the research objectives and questions. Utilizing the open coding technique, the researchers recurrently compared the data obtained from the field to develop other useful categories (Kenny and Fourie 2015). The relationship between the categories was of relevance to the study; thus, the axial coding aided the researcher to determine the evolving relationships between the various categories (Charmaz 2017). Several codes were initially generated, and themes were developed and defined using a qualitative data reduction software, ATLAS.ti (Hwang 2008). The researchers read and re-read the transcripts to find relevant patterns and themes. These patterns were juxtaposed with themes to address the research objectives. The thematic analysis approach (Nowell et al. 2017) was employed. The approach was appropriate for the data used and the researcher's quest to unravel the apparent differences and comparisons embedded in the data (Creswell 2017). Evidence synthesis analysis was also utilized (Briner and Denyer 2012). The approach allowed the researchers to integrate all relevant data on the basis of the research questions. Besides, a data triangulation approach (Bengtsson 2016) for both field interviews and documentary evidence was used to ascertain the indigenous evaluation philosophies within the case study areas. The data triangulation approach allowed for the integration of the different types of data during the analysis (Nowell et al. 2017).

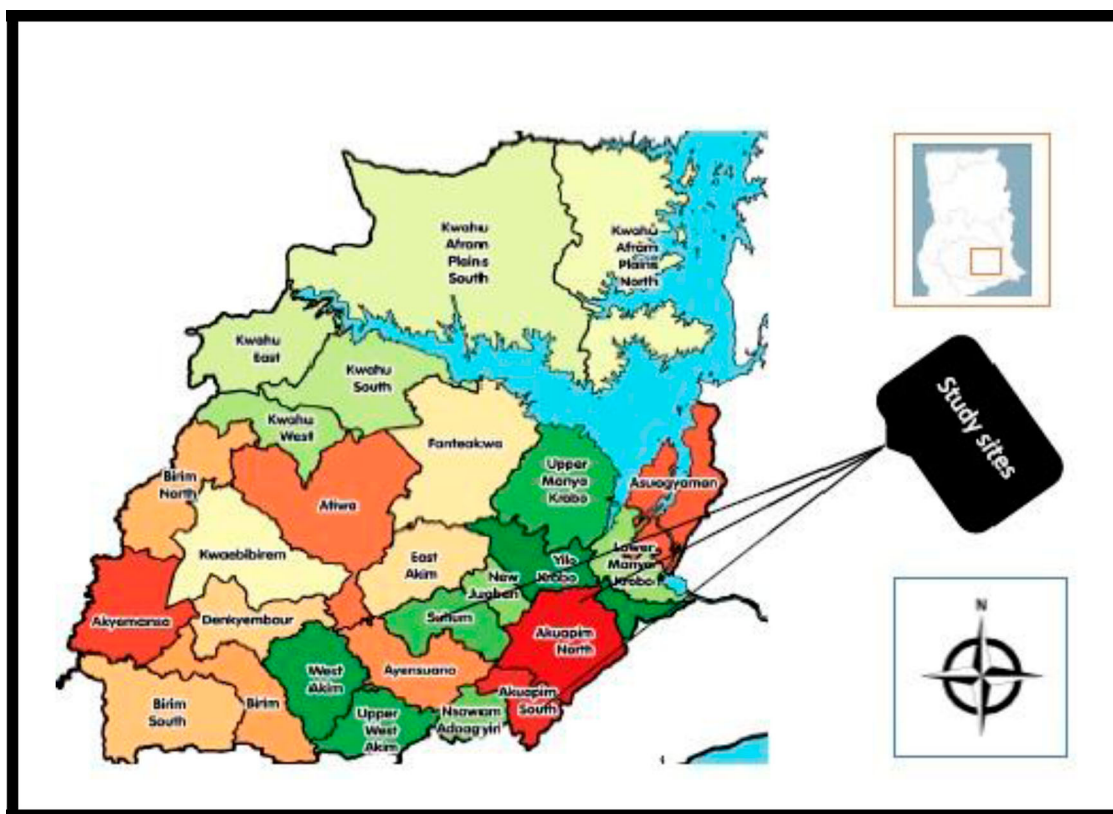
### Cultural values, norms and philosophies that guide indigenous evaluation

There is a growing quest among emerging and renowned African evaluators to conceptualized the 'Made in Africa' evaluation guidelines, frameworks and practices (Chilisa and Malunga 2012; Chilisa 2015). This effort is in line with the decolonization of evaluation processes in Africa (Chilisa and Malunga 2012). The necessity to integrate Afrocentric values, norms and philosophies into community-based development and evaluation activities continue to soar (Easton 2012; Chilisa et al. 2016). The attempt is to depart from the contemporary nostalgia that has entangled community-based development and evaluation activities and the need for a piece of 'new knowledge' or at least synergy between indigenous and contemporary evaluation ideas. Besides, the study observed that there are several cultural notions and philosophies that could facilitate the conceptualization of indigenous evaluation or enhance contemporary notions of evaluation. These notions are succinctly discussed below.

#### *The indigenous notion of contextual consensus-building and collectivism*

There are contextual realities of evaluation activities in Ghana which have also been observed in Africa by Mapitsa and Ngwato (2020). The analysis revealed that indigenously-driven evaluative activities are rooted in the traditional governance structures, relational networks, maxims and other cultural realities that encourage some degree of inquiry, explanatory assessment, openness, mutual trust, collective action, partnership, and social accountability. However, within the indigenous settings, these evaluative philosophies are not explicitly itemized but they are naturally rooted in cultural-specific relational networks and values as also pointed out by Chilisa et al. (2016). Besides, indigenous administrative structures and decision-making processes are also rooted in these cultural ideals and other relational structures as elaborated by one interviewee:

... within the indigenous context, communal decision-making regarding any development activities requires a better [community] self-organising, consensus-building



**Figure 1:** Map of Eastern Region, Ghana showing the study sites.

**Source:** Retrieved from <https://ghanaplacenames/database> on 24th August 2022

and proper communication between the indigenous authorities and all the relational stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>

This was further emphasized by a community development leader in an interview:

The consensus-building emanates from the various units within the traditional society. It may start from the authorities or from the individual/family level through the various relational channels and social networks that link each of these social groupings. Family heads meet with their leaders to deliberate on any matter of concern and it is passed onto the clan heads, subsequently to the sub-divisional heads and the traditional leader (Chiefs). Also, frequent neighbourhood and community meetings are exercised among these groupings.<sup>2</sup>

The study observed the comraderies among the several relational stakeholders in the three traditional communities used as a case study (see Figure 2). There is a contextual power relation between and among social networking groups and other relational stakeholders that requires consensus-building to ensure effective evaluation activities. Besides, community-based development and evaluation activities are grounded on collective decision-making as expressed by a community development leader:

... the community-driven intervention programmes are mostly designed, implemented, and monitored within multi-layered local ideals ... the indigenous community development programmes are designed to ensure the collective good of the community. The indigenous people are involved in the community development decision-making

through the relational patterns from the family level to the traditional authorities.<sup>3</sup>

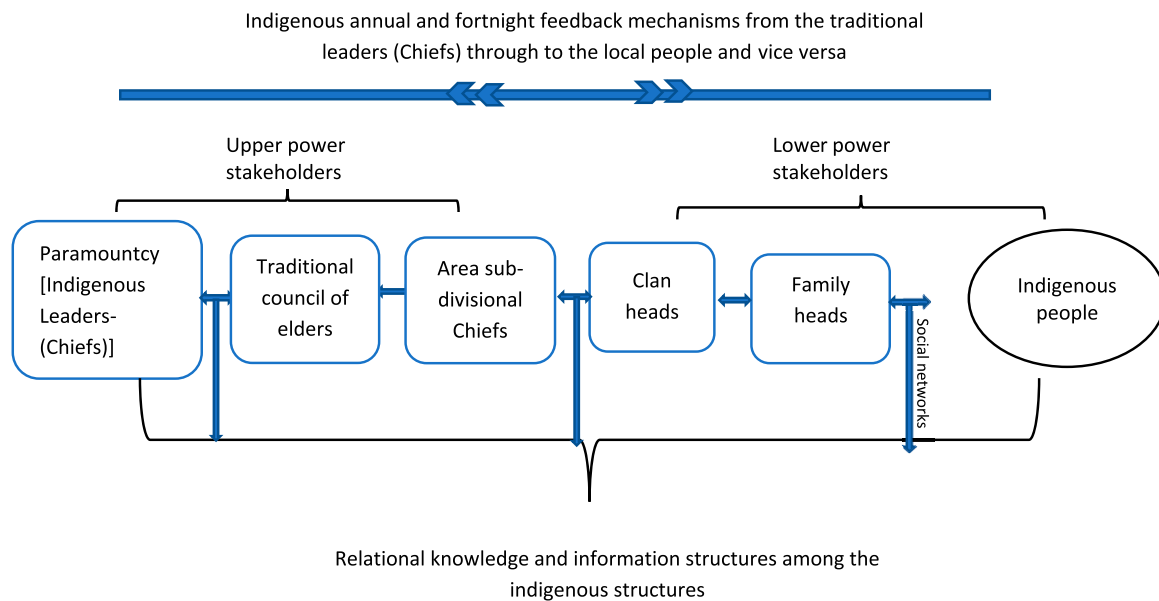
The collective decision-making power and comraderies among the relational stakeholders were further elaborated by a community development leader:

[Indigenous] decisions-making is influenced by the community members, cultural values, norms and principles of cohesion and togetherness. Community-based development programmes are implemented, monitored, and evaluated through these relational structures.<sup>4</sup>

The study realised that there are multilayered, multicultural and other contextual epitomes through which decisions regarding community development and evaluation activities are taken in the traditional societies as depicted in Figure 2. Chilisa et al. (2016) observed that the indigenous decision-making and evaluation approaches occur in an environment of consensus-building, informal collectives, relational assessment and self-organization. Thus, we argue that such an environment could generate unique and context-specific data for coherent development and evaluation of decision-making and activity.

#### ***The indigenous notion of relational stakeholders and empowerment***

Every evaluation activity includes several stakeholders (Bowman, Francis, and Tyndall 2015). The study realized that in the indigenous context, the notion of stakeholder empowerment and engagement is focused on inclusion. Thus, development neighbourhood committees are set up by the indigenous governance structures to monitor



**Figure 2:** Indigenous relational feedback pathway.  
**Source:** Authors' construct

and evaluate community-based development programmes. Nonetheless, in some situations, the entire community is fully involved in the evaluation activities. The study identified several indigenous relational stakeholders within the indigenous social network structures including youth groups, women groups, corporative committees, community clubs and farmers' associations as depicted in Figure 2. These community action groups (CANs) are allowed to participate actively in community development and evaluation decision-making as emphasized by a community development leader:

... indigenously-based development decision-making, implementation, and evaluation are achieved through 'people-people' relational and collective approach ... the evaluation of community development programme occurs in ordinary events [social activities] and relational patterns existing between the indigenous people and their [immediate]development leaders.<sup>5</sup>

We identified two forms of indigenous empowerment: (a) physical (indigenous members' active participation) and (b) values (the integration of indigenous ideals, values and philosophies) in the making of indigenous development decision-making and evaluation activities. The study outcome is consistent with other studies conducted in other parts of Africa where indigenous evaluative impulses were observed to be embedded in cultural values, maxims, relational patterns and other cultural realities (Easton 2012; Chilisa et al. 2016; Cloete 2016; Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021).

Evaluation within an indigenous context is like a social activity as the notions are based on social activities involving several relational stakeholders. These stakeholders facilitate the representation of all voices within the social structures, despite the hierarchical and power dynamics within the indigenous relational structures as illustrated in Figure 2. The self-organizing, interconnectedness, social networking and other relational patterns in the indigenous context reveal the

nature of empowerment, the form and approach of community decision-making and evaluation activities as articulated by a community development leader:

Community and individual empowerment within the indigenous societies is first rooted in participation and second respect for the indigenous cultural values. We [indigenous people] feel respected when we are made to participate in the development decision-making and evaluation activities and when our cultural values are also integrated into the decision-making process.<sup>6</sup>

From the quote above, it is evident that indigenous evaluation is the empowerment of indigenous people in deciding the approach, philosophy and practice of evaluation. Moreover, the study revealed that the relational pattern within the indigenous communal structures permits reporting and feedback from the various heads within the indigenous community. There is a chain of reporting and relational evaluation activities from the indigenous people to their heads; the individuals report to their family heads; family heads rely on the information from the clan heads; clan heads to sub-divisional leaders; through to the council of elders and the paramuncy (traditional leaders-Chiefs) for further decision-making. The feedback runs vice versa either from indigenous people to their traditional leaders or from the paramuncy to the people (see Figure 2).

Nonetheless, stakeholders who are culturally or economically vulnerable such as children and women do not actively participate in community development decision-making and evaluation activities. The explanation for this is consistent with the findings of a study conducted Mapitsa and Ngwato (2020, 402) where they argued that power disparities and different interests within and among the indigenous stakeholders tend to influence the 'ethical decision-making in evaluations'. Thus, to ensure that there is inclusiveness, evaluators need to identify the power dynamics and deal with them when designing an evaluation framework for indigenous communities.

### **The indigenous notion of illustrative maxims and evaluation**

Context-specific 'illustrative maxims' and 'wise sayings' have been essential development values including evaluation in several indigenous societies in Africa, Ghana being no exception (Easton 2012). Indigenous axioms are deeply-rooted in cultural knowledge, ethics, ideals, norms and beliefs that are used to buttress community development decision-making and evaluation activities. A community development leader pointed out that:

Indigenous proverbs and other traditional 'wise sayings' have several social ideals that encourage accountability, transparency, cooperation, togetherness, and consensus-building that predates the contemporary concepts.<sup>7</sup>

Indigenous relational evaluation thrives on community collaboration, cooperation, ubuntu ideals, commitment, community spirit as well as other cultural realities (Chilisa et al. 2016). The evaluative philosophies are embedded in indigenous maxims and wise sayings (Easton 2012). A community development leader echoed that the Akan proverb: '*Hu m'ani so ma me nti na atwe mmienu nam*' goes beyond the literal meaning 'blow my eyes, that's why two antelopes walk together'. The respondent noted that, culturally, it symbolizes collectiveness, support, 'ubuntu', harmony, collaboration and community-spirit which are essential in social activities such as evaluation. Moreover, the essence of the indigenous maxims was further elaborated by the community development leader:

... indigenous 'wise sayings', knowledge and other [cultural] values and norms orient the individual towards community obligation, self-organisation, learning, community-spirit, communal assessment, knowledge sharing and holding of leaders accountable.<sup>8</sup>

These social maxims, either explicitly or implicitly have been used by the indigenous people as a guide in community development decision-making, assessment, cohesion and social accountability (Easton 2012). A traditional leader pointed out that:

Many of our local adages are used by traditional authorities in their deliberation regarding matters of social and economic activities in their communities. The majority of these 'wise saying' and maxims articulate collaboration, communal thinking, and social networking but frown upon individualism.<sup>9</sup>

The existence of cooperation and interrelation between and among indigenous community actors is not in doubt judging from the immediate quote from the traditional leader. Besides, collaboration and social networking tend to encourage collective action and participatory thinking.

Evaluation in the indigenous community is a social activity (Chilisa and Malunga 2012). Thus, indigenous assessment and evaluation ideas are uncovered through natural inclinations rooted in language, practices, proverbs, traditions and folktales (Easton 2012; Chilisa et al. 2016). Rooted in these indigenous ideas is the evaluative instinct that encourages the assessment of social and development activities as emphasized by a traditional leader:

The indigenous wise saying, proverbs and folktales serve as the mode of knowing. They speak of unity, harmony,

cohesion, mutual trust, social accountability, collaboration, partnership, and self-organization. They encourage collective culture, community trust, teamwork and obligation within the society.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the indigenous proverbs offer such natural impulses since they encourage knowledge acquisition through indigenous interpretation and understanding of local narratives of values and identify relations within the indigenous community support evaluation activities as the study by Easton (2012) in West and East Africa revealed.

The Akan proverbs '*Woforo dua pa a na yepia wo*' and '*Ti koro nko agyina*' literally mean 'It is only when someone climbs a good tree that he or she gets a push' and 'A single head does not hold council'. A traditional leader interviewed from OTC explained that the first proverb goes beyond just the literal meaning of 'push to climb a tree' to epitomize social support and appreciation for those who pursue a just and good cause in societies. It further typifies that a person can receive social support and collaboration when that same individual is pursuing a good cause for society. The second proverb is rooted in social values such as 'ubuntu', oneness, togetherness, collaboration, dialogues, collective action, accountability and consensus-building. Chilisa et al. (2016) maintained that these indigenous philosophies when espoused properly could have great potential for designing an effective indigenously-driven evaluation activity.

### **Cultural structures underpinning indigenous evaluation**

#### *The indigenous moral dimensions of evaluation*

Boadu, Ile, and Oduro (2021) in their study in Ghana, observed that within indigenous settings, development activities including evaluation are performed through relational arrangements and other socio-cultural values. Besides, Mapitsa and Ngwato (2020) reiterated that indigenous and non-indigenous evaluators should pay particular attention to the social context and other cultural values when conducting an evaluation in such settings. This is to ensure that appropriate indigenous evaluation tenets are not neglected but rather integrated into the evaluation activities.

This study revealed that in the indigenous context, relational activities are deep-rooted in the communal culture of resilience and other spiritual values and norms. It was evident that the call for community collective action, mutual trust, social coherence, community responsibility, self-organization, social networks and social accountability were some of the key features in the case study areas. For instance, the tradition of pouring libations before and after communal events is rooted in religious beliefs, but in practice, the act promotes social accountability, transparency, and communal responsibility. These social and spiritual principles are vital within the indigenous settings when it comes to community-based development and evaluation activities as elaborated by a community development leader:

The social and spiritual values serve as a guide for those who have been trusted with headship to rule in truth,



honesty, and respect and are accountable to both the people and ancestors.<sup>11</sup>

It was evident that within the indigenous settings, symbols of mutual trust, integrity, honesty, social accountability, and collaboration are preserved in cultural norms, traditional deities, ancestors and taboos. These ethical values and norms are essentially fused into the indigenous social, political, religious and assessment activities as echoed by a traditional leader:

Our decision-making, arrangement and assessment activities are done through spiritual and practical everyday events after they [indigenous leaders] have consulted both the living and the dead through the pouring of libation. It is normally done to ask for direction and guidance from the ancestors and to build consensus within and among the people. To obtain approval from both the ancestor and the indigenous people.<sup>12</sup>

This is a point further elaborated by a community development leader in an interview:

We pour libation to begin and completed any community development activities. While it has very few mystical features, it also to ensure that those who are entrusted with the traditional leadership, rule in integrity and must be answerable to the dead, living, and unborn.<sup>13</sup>

The quote above is evidence that social accountability is rooted in piety, social conviction and mutual trust within the indigenous relational networks. A community development leader argued that indigenous belief systems work in tandem with community development activities within the traditional settings and they serve three purposes: first, to understand and appreciate the belief systems that serve both the ancestral spirits and the people; second, to recognize and apply the indigenous multicultural values, norms and philosophies for development and administration; and third, to highlight the pragmatic knowledge and insights that are routinely used from one generation to the other to ensure some level of community commitment, trustworthiness, camaraderie and cohesion. The study result is consistent with the work of Chilisa et al. (2016) who have argued that these indigenous social and spiritual patterns when espoused well could be developed into an effective relational evaluation framework.

#### *Indigenous evaluation knowledge possession*

Communal participation (both physical and knowledge) in the design of a community-driven programme and evaluation activities is key for development sustainability (Tengan and Aigbavboa 2017). The evaluator must have the necessary knowledge and abilities to design and implement an indigenously-responsive evaluation approach as well as practices that seek to incorporate cultural ideals and indigenous philosophies (Easton 2012; Chilisa et al. 2016). Community development member and traditional leader explained that:

... in the indigenous communities, knowledge is acquired through everyday activities, oral traditions, festivals, sharing of ideas through community gathering arrangements, social networks and other consensus-building settings.<sup>14</sup>

These indigenous everyday practices and other social features are vital for community decision-making and evaluation activities as a community development leader reiterated that the:

... indigenous people have the capacity to co-produce the development knowledge, identify social problems, develop social projects and evaluate them through a various communal pattern<sup>15</sup>

These various social patterns are depicted in Figure 2. Besides, the outcome of the study is consistent with Chilisa et al. (2016) and Shepherd and Graham's (2020) studies, where the authors observed that every indigenous community has unique cultural values, beliefs and other social realities that are tapped into, to generate knowledge for indigenous decision-making, accountability and assessment.

Moreover, the study revealed that within the indigenous communities, individual members, opinion leaders and other relational stakeholders are mostly consulted during the initial stage of any community-based development initiative because they possess an enormous amount of knowledge. One educationalist explained the utility of indigenous knowledge systems in an interview:

Indigenes within these traditional societies are endowed with rich knowledge to initiate, implement and evaluate community-based development projects. They are conscious of their social, political and economic challenges. Besides, it will interest you to note that, the indigenous people can outline socio-economic problems and match solutions within their various communities.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, the study revealed that the final decision-making pertaining to community-based development projects is entirely in the hands of the indigenous administrative authorities (chiefs and council of elders) to the detriment of the indigenous people. The indigenous institution (chieftaincy) plays a key role in the social, political and developmental issues in their respective territories and expressed as follows by one of the educationalists interviewed:

Traditional territories and institutions (chieftaincy) are key development players in Ghana. The institution is revered, and no one can do away with authority; thus, community-based development projects initiated by the central government or sub-national government should consider proper incorporation of these revered indigenous institutions as well as the people's ideas, values, beliefs and other culturally appropriate realities.<sup>17</sup>

Boadu, Ile, and Oduro (2021) maintain that indigenous communal leaders, opinion leaders and other local actors are key co-producers of knowledge within the indigenous settings. These indigenous stakeholders tend to constitute the indigenous development decision-makers and assessment initiators. They tend to have a mutual interest in community-based development and evaluation activities as pointed out by an educationalist in an interview:

... the local people are always willing to participate in every community-based development initiative within the traditional setting with or without an open invitation from the indigenous authorities or local government structures.<sup>18</sup>

The educationalist further expressed that:

... within the traditional communities, the indigenous people are directly or indirectly involved in the everyday life of society. The indigenous people tend to voluntarily assess and monitor indigenously-driven cultural, political and development projects or even local government-led development initiatives.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these actors' active participation, the extent to which their views are considered in the final decision-making, delivery of the projects and evaluation activities are usually inadequate as also observed by Boadu, Ile, and Oduro (2021) in their study in Ghana.

#### *Indigenous active collaboration and engagement*

The efficacy of collaborative community engagement between and among stakeholders within an indigenous community, especially when it comes to community-based development, implementation and evaluation activities has been documented (Chilisa, Major, and Khudu-Petersen 2017; Tengan and Aigbavboa 2017; Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021). A traditional leader explained that to design an effective and efficient indigenous community-based development project and evaluation activities, there is a need to create a reliable and cordial relationship between the indigenous hierarchical power structures and any other local groupings as illustrated in Figure 2. The leader further argued that there is a need to restructure the existing local government-led development and evaluation processes to engage properly with various indigenous relational stakeholders, from the initiation of the community-based development project to the evaluation activities.

A local government leader further emphasized that:

... local government development authorities work hand-in-hand with the indigenous traditional institutions and other local groupings when it comes to development initiation, implantation and evaluation. Local government development activities are executed by engaging traditional authorities and the local people for legitimacy.<sup>20</sup>

The quote above is evidence that community engagement and collaboration are essential whenever traditional authorities or local government agencies attempt to initiate a community-based development programme.

It was revealed that within the indigenous relational patterns, there is a degree of collaboration and engagement. The social networks between and among the various community groups tend to encourage community engagement and collaboration. The study discovered that the level of engagement and collaboration differs between the lower power stakeholders and upper power stakeholders as illustrated in Figure 2. Nonetheless, there is a vice versa flow of information and corresponding feedback from the indigenous authorities to the individual community members.

Despite the efficacy of the indigenous relational and social networking structures with respect to community engagements and collaboration, these structures are not without some hiccups as explained by a community development leader:

Community meetings and other social engagements are organized by the traditional head within the social grouping using native communication tools such 'gongon

beater' talking drum, town crier, and a word of mouth. It is a good social platform for consensus-building, dialogue, self-organization and community decision-making but also sometimes lengthens dialogue, delays community decision-making and reporting.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, despite these social platforms, the indigenous people have several festivals (occurring biweekly, every other traditional 40 days of the year, and once a year) and other community gatherings which tend to be some of the avenues where the upper power stakeholders engage with the lower power stakeholders. However, not everyone attends such traditional gatherings which implies that directly or indirectly some of the community members are left out of these forms of deliberation and engagement. Consequently

... we [indigenous community leaders] organized various festivals every year and other community gatherings (durbars) where the indigenous leaders directly addressed the people regarding any community-based initiatives. The people can access these initiatives to ensure that there is social accountability and transparency. Traditional heads within each of the relational structures also organize similar gatherings and meetings.<sup>22</sup>

The study revealed that these festivals and other community gatherings permit the indigenous people to assess the state of any of the community-based initiatives and to hold their leaders accountable. Besides, the study revealed that relational evaluation activities are distinctive within the indigenous settings used as a case study. Evaluation tends to be an everyday activity where people are assessing the performance of their leaders. Moreover, the quote above reveals that within the indigenous settings, there are several avenues for dialogue, consensus-building, collaboration, engagement, accountability and transparency which are crucial when developing an evaluation activity.

#### ***Indigenous relational patterns and evaluation impulses***

##### *The social patterns of reporting and feedback structures*

From a participatory point of view, a feedback loop(s) is an integral part of every development and evaluation activity (Jacobs, Barnett, and Ponsford 2010; Boadu and Ile 2019). Some scholars have argued that both the anticipated or unanticipated reporting and feedback mechanisms in every community development project are of great importance due to their ability to identify key areas that need alteration or improvement to ensure that community-owned or government-led development programmes are sustained (Boadu and Ile 2017; Mapitsa and Ngwato 2020; Boadu, Ile, and Oduro 2021). The study revealed that indigenous reporting and feedback relational systems have remained resolute despite the incorporation of contemporary information addressing systems (the stationary public address system and local government information vans).

Besides, the indigenous message transfer, reporting and feedback systems such as the community 'town-crier' and 'gongon' beating remain an integral part of the local community's information delivery. The indigenous social networks, feedback and reporting structures

were affirmed by a community development leader in the interview extract below:

... the social networks and relations in the indigenous society is such a great system to channel information between [and among] the indigenous authorities and community development member and the [Indigenous] people. The transfer of information works well using the communal patterns and networks [systems] from the individual to family heads, clan heads, and divisional chiefs, though to the traditional council within the indigenous community and vice versa.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, the development leader hastened to add that there is growing shift from indigenous information systems to contemporary ones:

... there is gradual shift from the indigenous [information delivery mechanisms] ‘town-crier’ and ‘gongon’ beating to contemporary [stationary] public addressing systems and information centres that has complemented the indigenous information generation, reporting and feedback networks.<sup>24</sup>

Parfitt (2004) in his study observed that despite the expertise of professional evaluators, they have always relied on local information and feedback systems in the gathering of data for effective community decision-making and evaluation activities. The quote above reveals the existence of an indigenous relational networking, reporting and feedback system. However, despite the apparent synergy between the indigenous and contemporary information systems, the indigenous feedback systems have some pitfalls due to the different social structures, hierarchies and power dynamics as depicted in Figure 2 and expressed as follows by a traditional development leader:

... the merging of the indigenous and contemporary information-gathering, reporting and feedback has made it quicker to obtain information that helps us in the design of any community development initiative and assessment but there are some inefficiencies in the information-gathering, delivery, feedback and reporting systems because they go through numerous channels ...<sup>25</sup>

The traditional development leader further elaborated how the systems delay decision-making:

... the community quest to actively involve everyone in the community development decision-making, implementation and evaluation activities are deferred sometimes due to the power struggles and several social layers.<sup>26</sup>

Besides, the relational paths tend to connect the various indigenous community structures and other social networking groupings from the individual level to the paramountcy and vice versa. The various stakeholders within each indigenous structure participate either implicitly or explicitly in the community development decision-making and evaluation activities through the relational knowledge and information structures that exist between and among the indigenous social network structures (Figure 2).

It was observed in the study that within the indigenous societies there is a contextual power dynamic and knowledge acquisition and distribution between each of the indigenous relational structures as indicated in Figure 2,

which could either enhance or hamper development decision-making and evaluation activities. These have also been observed by Mapitsa and Ngwato (2020) in their study in Africa where they argued that ‘ethical decision-making’ in evaluations is subject to ‘contextual knowledge’. We argued that this could create power dynamics between those who ‘possess’ the knowledge and those who are ‘inheritors’ of the knowledge.

#### *Indigenous relational leadership and power dynamics*

Multicultural societies such as the case study areas have different relational leaders and power dynamics that both indigenous and non-indigenous evaluators must first appreciate, understand and act with integrity towards during evaluation activities. Besides, culturally responsive evaluation and community-based development approaches are rooted in relational networks with several stakeholders and power disparities (Easton 2012; Chilisa et al. 2015; Boadu, Ile, and Odoro 2021; Boadu and Ile 2022) that could either enhance or hinder the evaluation activities. The indigenous relational structures and systems encourage several community interest groupings to participate actively in social activities. Despite the power dynamics and differing interests among the various social groupings, there is shared and distributive leadership at each of the social levels as observed by an interviewed community development leader:

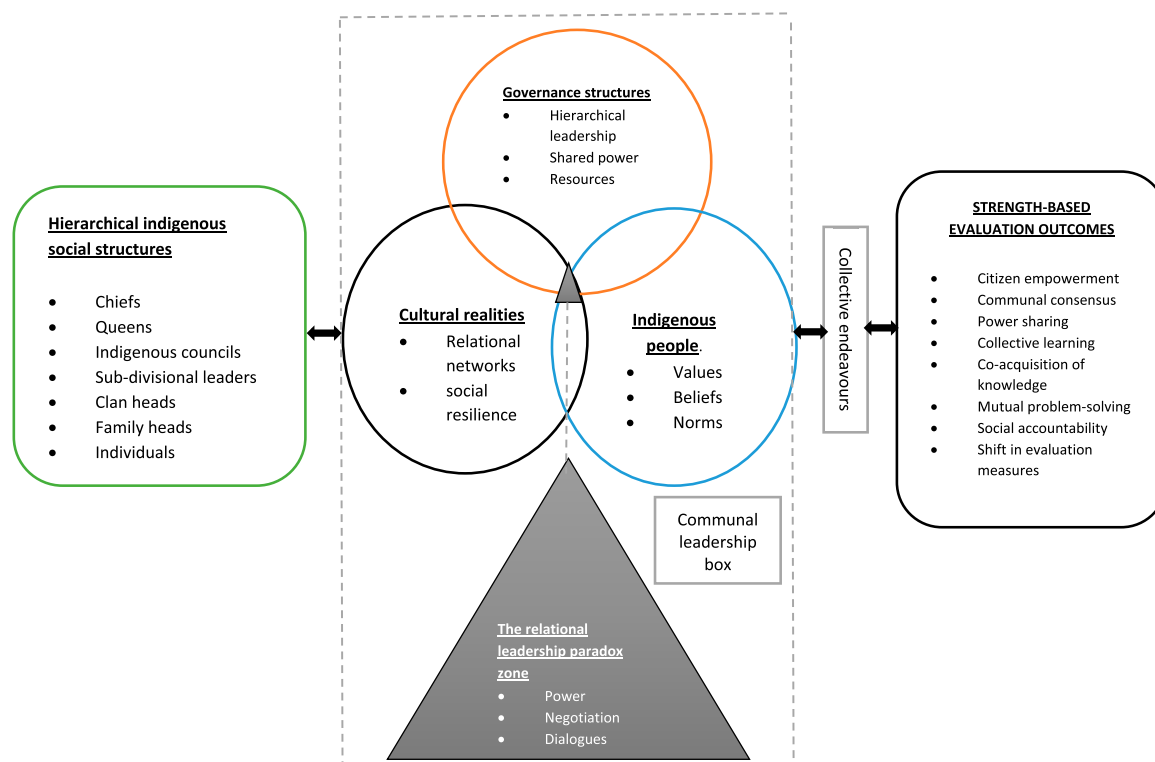
Engaging key community members within the social structure is of great importance because of their shared views and diverse values on matters concerning the society.<sup>27</sup>

The quote is evidence that there is some level of social coordination, collective leadership, engagement, cooperation and consensus-building in the indigenous settings that encourages collective decision-making. Despite the hierarchical leadership structure within the indigenous societies, the power disparities between the indigenous social structure are rooted in mutual respect which tends to enhance indigenous sharing and learning and encourages evaluation activities.

Besides, relational leadership is also rooted in shared endeavours and boundary-crossing within the complex communal leadership box as depicted in Figure 3. The social leadership structure with differing powers could encourage conflict; however, the intersection of the three – hierarchical leadership, peoples’ characteristics and cultural realities – tends to generate a degree of informal collectives, negotiations and dialogues. The subsequent upshots are the strength-based evaluation and collective outcomes as demonstrated in Figure 3. Besides, these indigenous notions are key when managing the socio-cultural affairs of the indigenous people and pursuing collective endeavours such as evaluation.

The study revealed that there is a great reverence given to the hierarchical relational leaderships and governance structures, thus, encouraging the indigenous people to participate actively in community initiatives as elaborated by the community development leader:

We have various layers of sharing and learning during any social activity. The layers are based on power and



**Figure 3:** The indigenous relational leadership and power dynamics paradox.

**Source:** Authors' construct

influence. Some people are selected to be part of every collective activity but the indigenous people could voluntarily assess any community development activity.<sup>28</sup>

Probing for further elaboration, a traditional leader explained that the power dynamics between the indigenous people and indigenous authorities tend to enhance or impede evaluation activities. This is consistent with Bowman, Francis, and Tyndall's (2015) study where the authors argued that the power structures in an indigenous settings tend to shape community devolution activities.

For instance, the analysis of the field study conducted revealed that there are some dormant participants within the indigenous societies such as children, women, and young people due to the hierarchal power relations. The power disparity tends to undermine their involvement in the community decision-making and evaluation activities. The result is consistent with Holte-McKenzie, Forde, and Theobald's (2006) study in Kenya where socio-cultural factors tend to affect the design of evaluation activities in community-based social initiatives. Nonetheless, in this study, the hierarchical leadership initiated, carried out, and evaluated a number of community-based social activities while drawing on cultural ideals and consulting the indigenous people as depicted in Figure 3.

### Conclusion

There are several cultural philosophies and other relational realities within the three indigenous case study areas that encourage the design and implementation of indigenous evaluation frameworks. Evaluative impulses embedded in indigenous relational structures, values and other cultural realities could provide the basis for the

design of indigenously/culturally responsive evaluation frameworks. Besides, the indigenous evaluative values, ethics and ideas are generated through social networks, community engagement, knowledge systems, hierarchal power relations and other cultural realities. Moreover, the relational evaluation activities are rooted in everyday activities of information-gathering, reporting and feedback arrangements that tend to flow through existing communal patterns from the individual to the indigenous authorities.

The cultural notions and values underpinning evaluation activities within the indigenous settings are rooted in citizen empowerment, communal consensus, power-sharing, collective learning, co-acquisition of knowledge, mutual trust, social accountability, collaboration, self-organizing, community spirit, consensus-building, obligation and community commitment. These notions provide a better understanding of the nature and form of indigenous evaluation activities. The hierarchical social structures between the traditional structures and the indigenous people show the power differential in community development decision-making but also encourage dialogues, negotiations and collective activities. These further influence the initial evaluation decision-making, the pointers to assess, the approaches to be used, and the philosophies that could inform the evaluation activities.

Despite the drawbacks in the indigenous information-gathering, reporting, delivery and feedback patterns, well-designed information-gathering systems with few hiccups from the family level to the traditional authorities and vice versa could enhance community engagements and proper social networking. Besides, a feedback loop between and among the various grouping



within the six relational indigenous patterns could further boost local participation in development initiatives, implementation and evaluation. The inclusion of indigenous people in the acquisition of evaluation knowledge has the potential to augment the design and integration of evaluation ideas that are rooted in indigenous epitomes.

Thus, finding ways to integrate the relational evaluation philosophies, approaches and practices could prove to be useful in the design of a community-based development project and evaluation activities. The indigenous evaluative instincts are rooted in most African socio-cultural norms, values and practices as observed by Easton (2012) in his study in West Africa. Hence, these cultural ideas should form the basis upon which future studies could be conducted to further unravel the indigenous evaluation tenets to complement the 'Made in Africa' evaluation guidelines.

## Notes

1. Interview with a community development leader from ATC.
2. Interview with a community development leader from AATA.
3. Interview with a community development leader from ATC.
4. Interview with a community development leader from OTC.
5. Interview with community development leader from AATA.
6. Interview with community development leader from OTC.
7. Interview with community development leader from OTC.
8. Interview with community development leader from OTC.
9. Interview with traditional leader from ATC.
10. Interview with Traditional leader from Okuapeman traditional area.
11. Interview with a development community member from ATC.
12. Interview with a traditional leader from ATC.
13. Interview with community development leader from OTC.
14. Interview with community development leader from AATA.
15. Interview with a community development leader from OTC.
16. Interview with Educationalist from AATA.
17. Interview with Educationalist from AATA.
18. Interview with Educationalist from AATA.
19. Ibid.
20. Interview with Local government leader from AATA.
21. Interview with community development leader from OTC.
22. Interview with Community Development Leader from OTC.
23. Interview with community development leader AATA.
24. Ibid.
25. Interview with Traditional Leader from the OTC.
26. Interview with Traditional Leader from the OTC.
27. Interview with community development leader AATA.
28. Interview with a community development leader from Okuapeman Traditional area.

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