EVALUATION ON WHOSE TERMS?

Evaluation Undressed: Citizen's Demand for Transparency and Good Faith in the
Context of Accountability and Democracy.

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Introduction

When I received the invitation to attend this conference, I wondered what it was about the conference theme that kept coming back to my mind in the interceding months before I responded that I would attend this event and make a presentation.

It turned out that the issue was the word "terms" in the title "Evaluation on whose terms?" As such I decided to dig deeper into this concept, and true enough I soon began to put my fingers on it.

I found that the concept "terms" refers to status with respect to the relations between people or groups. It is a relation that provides the foundation for something – in the way for example we can say "they were on a friendly footing". But "terms" also refers to the fundamental assumptions from which something is begun or developed or calculated or explained. In this instance, it is the lowest support of a structure; a hypothesis that is taken for granted.

I therefore decided to come and share with you a few of my thoughts – always a work-in-progress – on evaluation within the framework of unequal power relations. It is my position that the effectiveness of citizen's claims and rights to knowledge generally, and to interrogate the conclusions from research and evaluation generated about them depends to a very large extent to the degree to which the kind of popular force that enabled the hinges of scientific doors to become loosened in the past two decades can also be introduced with regards to the use and abuse of knowledge in the context of unequal power relations.

It is also a similar type of pressure that is gradually being brought to bear on corporations through such initiatives such as Ethical Global Initiative which is casting light on issues of corporate social responsibility and ethical conduct.

My terrain of focus is of course Africa, and my basic premise is that the question of "Evaluation on whose terms" needs to be asked within a framework of accountability as a right, and as citizenship competency in the context of democracy and the imperative to transparency.

I would like to posit that in the name of democracy, human rights, accountability and good governance; we need expose the games of surveillance and power that is played on the vulnerable especially through conditionalities, but also through the related knowledge production processes and mechanisms such as agency funded evaluations.

The politics of evaluation

Perhaps it is useful here to clarify how I understand evaluation itself. To me, evaluation has several distinguishing characteristics relating to focus, methodology, and function. In general, evaluation assesses the effectiveness of an ongoing program in achieving its objectives.

As a practice or set of practices evaluations consist mainly of management information and data incorporated into regular program management information systems to allow managers to monitor and assess the progress being made in each program toward its goals and objectives.

Evaluations are conducted by teams who plan and conduct the exercise: i.e. work out the evaluation design, develop data collection instruments, collect and analyse the data, and write the report.

This is per se, not a problem. The problem sets in once you ask in the context of Africa, who is conducting the evaluation, about whom, why, and under what conditions. It is here that you can immediately discern evaluation as part of an elaborate system of surveillance, and a tool in what Michel Foucault referred to as the great "panopticon".

Panopticon is about invisible power and control that mutates into voluntarism on the part of the victim of subject of the control. Thomas Wright states that individual or groups that find themselves under an uncertain but invisible panoptic gaze exhibit a kind of anticipatory conformity with the rules, which becomes eventually internalised. One acts, and then adjusts one's background set of beliefs to conform to one's actions. Foucault also saw in the Panopticon more than an efficient use of space.

French philosopher Michel Foucault saw in the Panopticon a potent metaphor for what he most despised about modern society: the transition from brutal "sovereign" power, which featured dramatic and violent punishments, to "disciplinary" power, which features humane and rational punishments, meted out automatically and invisibly. It is Foucault's analysis that enables us to recognize "panopticism" as a general paradigm for the functioning of modern power.

The essential aspects of panoptic power are therefore that:
1. It is embedded or pervasively present in even the smallest of micro-relations -- every action a prisoner takes in his glass cell is visible and potentially observed.
2. It is asymmetric; while the prisoner is completely visible, the inspector is completely invisible in the tower. Panopticon captures precisely this power of inspection that depends on the constant visibility of the prisoner.
3. It isolates and atomises the inspected; the prisoner is alone in his cell - even given his own private bathroom to reinforce his solitude.

4. It is automatic and ubiquitous; the inspector need do nothing for the prisoner to act in perfect conformity with even the smallest behavioural adjustment.
5. It is self-policing; the prisoner is the bearer of his own subjection. It is impersonal, depending on abstract classifications of individuals: prisoner, student, and worker.
6. It is capital, not labour, intensive.
7. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is uncertain; the prisoner does not know whether he is being watched from one moment to the next. Hence he must constantly comply - if he does not for an instant, that [moment] may be the only instant upon which he is judged.

As a symbol of manipulation, it crystallizes the sinister side of modern "dataveillance," that vague aspect of the Information Age that makes us uneasy without knowing exactly why. Wright further warns us that because the Panopticon functions as a useful regulatory dystopia, it is a future to be avoided as carefully and systematically as Orwell's apocalyptic totalitarian vision in 1984.

Various dictionaries describe dystopia is an abnormal position, also called mal-position; a state in which the condition of life is extremely bad as from deprivation or oppression or terror.

Escape from the Panopticon is possible, but only if we target our technology and law directly at panoptic forms of power (Wright 1998).

Further clarifications: distinguishing between power and control

According to Messina & Messina, power is maintaining influence over the behaviour, attitudes and feelings of others. Control is maintaining a check on the behaviour, attitudes and feelings of one's self or of others. Power is exerting control over others. It is the expression of commands, demands, directives, orders, and requests as to how others are to act, think, behave, feel, and believe. Control is the expression of commands, demands, directives, orders, and requests as to how I am to act, think, behave, feel, and believe.

Power is the attitude of strength, ``one up,'' ``on top,'' ``number one,'' or ``leader'' projected to others in order to direct how they live their lives. Control is the application of this attitude of being strong, being on top of it, and being in control.

Power is a vehicle by which people can become exempt from revealing personal feelings. They have risen to the top and the people below are refused entry into the ``power type's "emotional life". Like control, this is a defence mechanism to avoid full emotional involvement.

Power is often exerted by people who believe they have the ``answers'' but lack the patience for others in their lives to come to a consensus or agreement on what an appropriate course of action should be. The ``power play'' is using the position of authority or status to get your way with total disregard for the feelings or ideas of others.

What has this got to do with Africa and Aid Conditionality?

To begin with, conditionality in international development is a condition attached to a loan or to debt relief, typically by the International Monetary Fund or World Bank. Conditionalities may involve relatively uncontroversial requirements to enhance aid effectiveness, such as anti-corruption measures, but they may involve highly controversial ones, such as the privatisation of key public services, which may provoke strong political opposition in the recipient country.

Twenty five years after the advent of the infamous Structural Adjustment Programs, new research continues to show that aid money, new loans and debt relief are still contingent on recipient governments accepting highly specific economic reforms that are conceived, designed and approved in Washington, by the IMF and World bank staff and their boards – not in the countries where they are implemented.

Conditions that donors attach to their aid programmes go beyond any legitimate measures to ensure effective use of those funds. They go to the heart of the public policy process in the countries concerned. During the 1890s, the core preconditions for the panopticon had already been put in place through the SAP conditionalities .

1. Removal of state control over prices and money leading to the removal of subsidies on basic goods such as food and fuel leaving the poor even more vulnerable.
2. Large cuts in public spending had already led to massive layoffs of public sector workers in many countries. Hundreds of thousands of workers were retrenched in places like Senegal, Zambia and Tanzania as a result of SAP's. Other cutbacks in public spending have seen reduced social programs and increased charges.
3. Privatisations of state owned corporations such as electricity, water and transport replaced a state monopoly with a private monopoly which has generally led to price rises and the effective barring of the services to vast numbers of the poor.
4. Policies to promote a 'flexible' workforce reduced tariff barriers and reduced taxes on businesses and the rich to attract "investment". As a result of this, local industries can be undermined by cheap imports as happened to the South African textile industry over the last decade.

What current research is revealing is that agencies are now coming in force to complete the polishing of this pathway that has already wreaked such havoc with people's existence.

Firstly, the use of the conditionalities continues at structural level to undermine democratic accountability within countries. These conditionalities are not only:

a. unfair in that they perpetuate a relationship between donors and developing countries that is already stacked in favour of the former and represent a fundamental abuse of this power; they are also
b. undemocratic in that the formulation of key policies by IMF staff is a closed process with small groups of government officials, thus moving accountability away from the electorate towards the donors and publicly signalling a lack of ownership on the part of the country. They are also

c.   ineffective as has been acknowledged in the litany of failed IMF/World bank projects (Killick 2004) where heavy use of external conditionalities fail to meet local needs. They are also

d.   inappropriate in that they reflect the priority of external financiers at the expense of the needs of poor people (ActionAid 2004)

New concepts like "ownership" make a mockery of the subjection that poor countries are already undergoing.

This concept has now acquired its own meaning, which is in effect, is ownership of risks related to implementing externally defined development policies and initiatives.

IMF's definition of national ownership is "a willing assumption of responsibility for an agreed programme of policies by officials in a borrowing country who have the responsibility to formulate and carry out those policies.

According to working documents from the IMF itself,

Ownership does not require that an IMF supported programme be a government's first choice, nor that it be the programme that officials would have preferred in the absence of the IMF involvement… As a general proposition, what is required is that the responsible and controlling officials be committed and that opposition can be overcome (Boughton 2003)

Conditionality in the face of this "ownership" has stuffed down the throats of borrowing countries a series of privatisation of utilities against the wishes of the countries or national populations. These include privatisation of water services in Bourkina Faso, electricity in Ghana, Kenya; water and waste water plants in Pakistan; water supply and sanitation in Peru, Tanzania, and Uganda. A recent survey of 14 low income countries where the World Bank is funding the water sector reveals that 12 of those countries faced some form of privatisation condition (ActionAid 2004).

This massively intrusive power wielded by such institutions is not only that these institutions themselves are not democratically accountable, but that the top-down fiscal accounting in effect, crowds out bottom-up democratic accountability!

Democracy activists have long been opponents of donor power not only because donor agencies were so complicit in curbing local democratic accountability in the countries they engaged with, but also because the policies they pushed had no relation to the priorities as felt by the vast majority in the 'recipient' countries.

Thus in many cases donor agencies kept funding governments that complied with a donor agenda for liberalization that enriched local elites who instituted the most repressive measures against the population (Dakshana 2002).

Soft conditionality and knowledge production

Soft conditionality provides the software for the policy conditionalities. It includes selectivity – the process of directing aid to countries judged to possess "a sound policy environment"; as well as extensive use of policy advice and Technical Assistance.

Technical assistance has been criticised before not only because it crowds out local expertise, but also for its latent complicity in steering governments towards favoured policy choices, thereby legitimizing the external policy agenda. Most of this assistance is far from neutral.

Many policies leading to compliance with core conditionalities are also often concealed within other projects particularly those related to decentralization.

But is was Samoff's trenchant analyses of what he termed the "Financial-Intellectual Complex" that drew out the link between research and policy in the context of aid conditionalities or excessive external influence.

Samoff states that in development as a policy arena, research enters the decision-making process in two principal ways. The first is the research to which the policy makers have been exposed to during their own tertiary education. This provides them with latent frames of reference on which to base their actions.

The second way research enters policy processes is as justification for decisions already made. This situation, he argues, is especially problematic in contexts such as the contemporary development business where the same agencies that fund research are also the same ones that take policy decisions, exacerbated even more in the context of externally induced policy conditionalities (Samoff 1992a; Samoff 1992b).

It is with this in mind that phrases such as "research shows", "increasing body of evidence shows", or that "there is strong evidence that"... become especially onerous.

In the area of education, many of these "research shows" prefixes go on to affirm views and perceptions that breathes uncomfortably close to the neo-liberal agenda.

One such assertion has been propelling the education field for a long time was that research shows that investing in primary education yields the "best return".

Another common one is that evidence from research supports the proposition that within broad limits...changes in class size influence pupils achievement modestly or not at all.

The confidence with which these assertions are made, point to the existence of an implicit consensus on "research" as the principal determinant of educational policy. Funding "research" therefore comes to carry a political if not ideological, power/control imperative as without the claim of research support, policy proposals lose credibility:

> ...Similarly, policy critiques that do not cite supporting research are easily ignored. Prospective participants in the policy debate must demonstrate an adequate supply of relevant research simply to enter (Samoff 1992a:61).

Samoff's analysis highlights the way in which the conjunction between external assistance and the privileged position of research conditions and constrains the content and direction of policy. The "financial/intellectual complex", Samoff argues, consolidates existing assumptions in the specific area of policy:

> ...determines standard operating procedures, while the "appropriate" style and language of research structure the education and development discourse. (This "complex" also) specify the legitimate participants in discussions on educational policy, entrench misunderstandings, accord official status to shaky propositions, and nurture a fascination with a flashy but ephemeral understandings (Samoff 1992a:62).

This intellectual and policy manipulation takes various forms. In an aggressive mode, the funding agency may make the provision of support conditional on the adoption of specific policies, priorities or programmes.

At other times, the funding agency may finance research intended to support its preferred programmatic orientation..

However, the panopticon situation is that which has predominated i.e. that in which the African educators feel compelled to tailor their requests, more or less explicitly, to fit with the funding agency's agenda.

Occasionally the route is even more circuitous in that a desire to win support for a high priority goal in one project may promote a willingness to accommodate to a low priority goal in another (Samoff 1992a).

Fitting neatly with the neo-liberal agenda, education's part in the framework begins from the assumption that local decision makers (as part of the state) have fundamentally mismanaged their responsibilities.

This then leads to the obvious rationale that the external agencies must step in, offer general and rapidly disbursed support in exchange for broad control of the particular policy space.

This is not all, the next issue in line is usually that this external intervention demands broad "expert knowledge". The new experts:

> ...are those who can understand and manage production, finance, international exchanges as well as the social services. This call for broader expertise comes at a moment of severe economic crisis, precisely at a time when African countries are least able to supply expertise and experts at the level and scale and with the credibility and legitimacy required the external agencies demand (Samoff 1992a:63).

Unresolved Problems with the Idea of "Democracy"

Clearly we need to make greater democratic demands on this grossly and ubiquitously undemocratic terrain. However, we have to reflect on what democracy can or cannot do.

As reality has shown, the last two decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of countries describing themselves as liberal democracies, adopting in that wave liberal democratic systems of governance.

Yet, as Luckham (et al 1998) observe, the spread of democracy has been far from smooth. Increasingly, even established democratic systems are facing new challenges and new demands for social and political arrangements that go beyond the systems currently in place.

This calls for some reflections on the nature of democracy and emerging issues surrounding it. I will outline a few of these.

To begin with, democracy is constructed around two creative tensions. The first is between democracy as a universal aspiration for popular self rule on the one hand and as a historically bounded form of governance in modern states (i.e. liberal democracy) on the other.

The second is between democratic institutions and the diverse forms and discourses of democratic politics in particular national and regional contexts. But democratic institutions will only flourish if they are supported by broad-based democratic politics.

At the same time, the design and structure of democratic institutions also makes a difference, both opening spaces for democratic politics, and shaping how elected governments deal with the substantive issues of participation, socio-economic justice, and conflict.

Clearly the existence of democratic institutions does not necessarily mean the spread of democratic politics. This can be traced to debates intrinsic to democracy and democratisation itself.

For instance:
   i.   the meaning of democracy in different regions of the world is not interpreted in exactly the same way as the Western liberal democracies.
   ii.   The extent and 'depth' of democracy is also in question as questions arise over how far the actual practice of democracy is consistent with the aspirations of democracy especially in the way disadvantaged groups – including women, the rural poor – experience citizenship in democratic politics;
   iii.   The 'policy-effectiveness' of democracy – meaning: can democracy meet the demands of ordinary people, particularly the poor as well as reconciling the conflicting expectations regarding social equity and economic growth?
   iv.   The 'conflict-management' effectiveness of democracy – i.e. how far can democracies promote compromise in the face of conflicts, especially those that have the potential to be violent, including those based on seemingly primordial and non-negotiable identity claims?

Here, by way of general analysis, it can be recalled that the Athenian model practised in early Greece put emphasis on politics, with great emphasis being put on maximizing active citizenship ('citizens' excluded women).

The liberal representative model which emerged at the end of the C18th put emphasis on political contestation, on rational discussion and on avoiding tyranny. Greater emphasis was put on institutions than the Athenian model.

Rational discussion was to be achieved by the election of skilled representatives who would debate issues on behalf of citizens. In the US, 'citizenship' excluded women and slaves; and in England, suffrage was based on property.

Twentieth century democracy came along and ushered in a sometimes contradictory fusion of institutions of liberal democracy with the politics of participatory democracy.

In the West itself, it can be said that liberal states only became democracies after the political mobilization of the broad mass of citizens, including urban working class and women behind demands which included the extension of the franchise to all adult citizens.

It is this democratic revolution which increased citizen involvement in the affairs of government, expanded the concept of citizenship itself to cover economic, social, as well as political entitlements – i.e. it introduced the idea of social democracy as a way of deepening democracy and ensuring it was more responsive to demands for social justice .

Thus, if institutions are a socially constructed set of arrangements routinely exercised and accepted, democratic institutions would, in essence be a set of arrangements for organizing political competition, legitimating rulers and implementing rule. The kinds of participation they are involved with are those revolving around the electoral process (i.e, representative, rather than direct democracy).

The distinction between democratic institutions and democratic politics according to Kaldor and Vejvoda, is akin to that between formal/procedural democracy (which emphasize institutions) and substantive democracy which emphasize citizenship participation and redistribution of power (Kaldor M & Vejvoda 1997).

Democratic politics would thus require that political contestation is tempered by certain basic moral and political principles including popular control (over governments and political elites), and political equality (among all citizens).

Democratic politics are those inclusive forms of politics which aim to hold democratic institutions to their democratic promise by:
   a.   ensuring that open and effective challenges can be made to governments and their policies through free and fair elections, the party system and other forms of political contestation
   b.   increasing the scope of citizen participation so that the exercise of power is based so far as possible upon permanent dialogue between government and citizens;
   c.   maximizing the accountability and transparency of the holders of political power and bureaucratic office at all levels of government;
   d.   guaranteeing equal political and civil rights for all citizens as well as the basic social and economic entitlements that can enable them to fully exercise these rights;
   e.   providing accessible procedures through which these rights and entitlements can be protected, not just through the courts, but also in day to day relationships with the agents of the state;
   f.   guaranteeing effective citizenship redress against infringements of rights by private (e.g. corporate) interests as well as by the state;

g.   providing mechanisms to assure that such private or corporate interests can be held accountable by governments and citizens especially where they impinge upon the public domain and citizens' rights (Beetham 1994).

Democratic politics therefore depends on the development of a culture of participation, which, in turn depends of the capacity of citizens to hold powerful private and state agents to account. It emphasizes the deep politics of society and from there, posits the question as to what that implies for the high politics of the state. Within this, the politics of inclusion takes precedence over the politics of institutions.

The rationale for giving this approach high priority is due to the persistent string of democratic deficits or lapses of established Western democracies which include under representation of women in political roles, voting systems which eschew electoral outcomes, majoritarian governments which ignore minority interests, and non-accountable, non-transparent government bureaucracies.

In the "South", watered down versions of democracy are continually courted, or bred and nurtured by Western donors in countries that are eager to forfeit their national policies and swallow the hook, line and sinker of external conditionalities; further subverting the ideals of democracy and undermining the possibility of democratic politics to take root.

In such situations, democratic institutions may co-exist with serious abuses of human rights.

Conclusions

In 1999, UNESCO drew up what is known as the Budapest Declaration on Science: Science for the Twenty First century. In that document, a number of ground breaking proposals were made, central among which was the call for science to reconstruct its link with society. It recognized that profound debates were emerging about knowledge which needed to be taken seriously by science.

What the world most needs, the declaration stated is a more inclusive, a more responsive, and a more dialogical science. The Declaration emphasizes that all cultures can contribute scientific knowledge of universal value, and thus there is a need for a vigorous and informed, constructive intercultural and democratic debate on the production and use of scientific knowledge.

Ways must therefore be found to link modern science to the broader heritage of humankind. That any kind of central monitoring, whether political, ethical, or economic, needs to take into account the increasingly diverse actors entering into the social tissue of science; and urges the scientific community to open itself to a permanent dialogue with society, especially a dialogue with other forms of knowledge.

Writing about accountability, Simon Zadek recently referred to a model of "open democracy". Democracy is above all about being able to hold governments to account. Elections are crucially important for doing this, but by no means the only accountability mechanism required for a flourishing democracy. This requires that all centres of power and influence, including business and indeed civil society and labour organisations, can

be held to account by citizens and their (also accountable) representatives. Throughout history, progressive social movements have pushed for more appropriate and more effectively enforced accountability as the bedrock of their democratic demands. And how this has been done has changed over time, sometimes relying more on the law, sometimes relying on public pressure and ideas and sometimes, sadly, through violent means.

Accountability is the stable core of civilised communities. Without it, we would not travel unarmed in the streets, pay our wages into a bank, get on a train or eat food prepared by the hands of others. Without accountability, we would have no expectations of others, let alone sanctions against them if things went wrong. Without a bedrock of accountability, it is impossible to imagine any sort of stable society. The darker, sadder pockets of our past and present are often terrifying fragments of a world without accountability.

If accountability concerns the civilizing of power, then those with power will seek to evade or crush it. We strive to build values, ideas, norms, standards and the rule of law to stabilise this organic process. But specific accountability mechanisms (even the ones we cherish most), like all living systems, erode over time, and need reinforcing, upgrading and ultimately replacing.
Today's accountability wave is rooted in the principles and practice of what might variously be called open source, dialogic, horizontal, people-centred approaches to bringing power to account.

A proliferation of laws and standards and auditing and targets

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