



Rethinking Evaluation in Africa Project: the role of the private sector

Executive Insight Summary

The *Rethinking Evaluation in Africa Project* examines the role, value, and challenges of African-led monitoring and evaluation (M&E) companies. Although these firms bring deep contextual knowledge, cultural competence, and long-standing local presence, they remain under-recognised and under-utilised in evaluation markets which are dominated by international organisations and are neglected in evaluation capacity development efforts. Drawing on new survey data and practitioners' experiences, the project explores structural barriers such as funding and procurement practices, power imbalances, and capacity constraints while highlighting the unique strengths of African evaluators. The initiative aims to put the issue of African-led M&E firms on the policy agenda and identify practical strategies to strengthen these companies, promote equitable partnerships, and advance locally driven, sustainable, and contextually relevant evaluation systems that better support Africa's development priorities.

Strategic Concept Note

Rethinking Evaluation in Africa: Strengthening African-Led Evaluation Companies for Sustainable, Contextualised, and Equitable Evidence Systems

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What this project is about

Across Africa, evaluation is playing an increasingly important role in shaping policies, programmes, and development investments. African-led monitoring and evaluation (M&E) companies are at the heart of this work. They bring deep local knowledge, cultural understanding, language skills, and long-standing relationships with communities and institutions. Yet despite these strengths, African-led firms remain under-recognised and under-utilised in global evaluation markets that are often dominated by international organisations and relatively neglected in evaluation capacity development.

This project examines how African-led evaluation companies currently operate, the value they bring to evidence generation, and the barriers that limit their visibility, influence, and sustainability. Drawing on new survey data and lived experiences from evaluators across the continent, we aim to better understand what is working, what is holding back local firms and what needs to change to build a more inclusive and effective evaluation ecosystem in Africa.

Why this work matters

Decisions about development policies and programmes are only as good as the evidence that informs them. When evaluation is disconnected from local realities, it risks missing what truly matters to communities. African-led evaluators are uniquely positioned to produce evidence that is contextually grounded, culturally responsive, and ethically sound. However, current funding and procurement practices often favour large international firms, limiting opportunities for African companies to lead complex evaluations, grow institutionally, and retain skilled professionals.

These dynamics contribute to capacity loss, unequal partnerships, and one-way knowledge flows. Strengthening African-led evaluation companies is therefore not only a matter of fairness, but a critical step toward improving the quality, relevance, and long-term sustainability of evaluation evidence across the continent. Supporting local leadership in evaluation also contributes to decolonising development practice and ensuring that evidence aligns with Africa's development priorities and lived realities.

What we are doing

We will conduct an online survey with heads of African M&E firms in eight countries. The survey will be followed up by in-depth interviews with 4-6 respondents in each of the selected countries.

Through this project, we are:

- Mapping the current landscape of African-led evaluation companies across different regions and sectors
- Documenting the challenges these firms face, including funding constraints, procurement barriers, power imbalances, and skills retention
- Highlighting the unique strengths and comparative advantages of African evaluators
- Examining how partnerships between African and international firms currently work in practice
- Identifying practical, actionable strategies to strengthen African-led evaluation companies and ecosystems

The project combines survey data with insights from real-world experience to move beyond theory and focus on solutions that are feasible, relevant, and grounded in practice.

What we hope to achieve

This work aims to put the issue of African-led M&E firms on the policy agenda by disseminating the study findings at evaluation events across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and being available for presentations to agencies engaged in Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD). We hope to generate clear, practical recommendations for:

- **Donors** – to improve commissioning, funding, and partnership models
- **Governments** – to strengthen local evaluation capacity and leadership
- **Evaluation networks and institutions** – to support professional development and collaboration
- **African-led evaluation companies** – to enhance sustainability, visibility, and influence

Ultimately, the project seeks to contribute to a shift toward evaluation systems that are African-driven, locally owned, and better equipped to support inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

About the Research and Evaluation Centre (REC)

This project is an initiative of the REC, a global network of researchers and evaluators mainly from Africa and Asia.