Call for Abstracts

Artificial Intelligence in Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning in the Global South: Methods, Practice, Ethics, and Innovation

clear evaluation anglophone africa | UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG | global evaluation initiative

Background

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming how evidence is generated, organized, interpreted, and communicated across public policy, development, education, health, and governance systems. While AI (especially generative AI) can support multiple stages of evaluative work (design, analysis, synthesis, and communication), it also raises pressing questions about accountability, transparency, inclusion, ethics, power, and context in evidence quality.

Is AI neutral? AI systems reflect the data, assumptions, values, and power structures embedded in their design. This raises important questions about whose knowledge is represented, whose knowledge is excluded, and whether AI could reproduce existing inequalities in evaluation.

For Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems operating in the Global South, these questions are amplified by resource constraints, unequal data infrastructures, multilingual realities, donor influence, uneven digital access, and institutional capacity gaps.

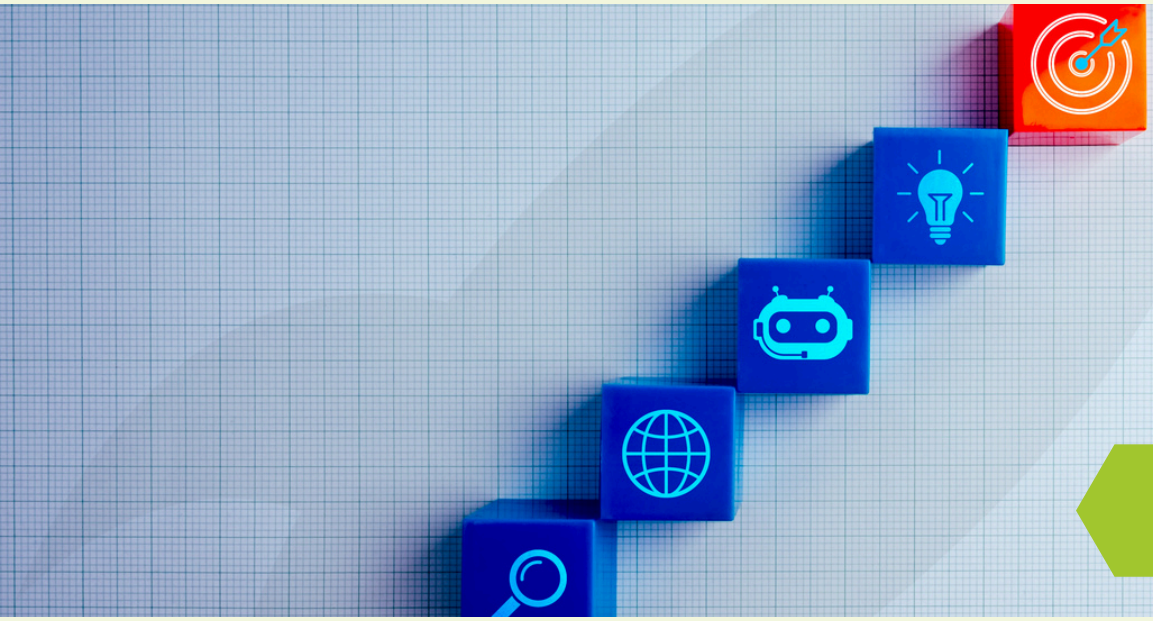
A related concern is whether AI could reproduce Global North knowledge systems. This is particularly important for a Global South volume, since AI models are often trained disproportionately on data and knowledge produced in the Global North. The call therefore also invites contributions that ask whether AI can help decolonise MEL, or whether it risks deepening existing epistemic dependencies.

Despite growing global interest in AI and evaluation, the literature remains fragmented across disciplines. This edited volume responds to the need for a coherent platform that speaks directly to MEL as a field of scholarship and practice in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and other Global South contexts.

Purpose of the Book

The volume will consolidate emerging knowledge, practical experiences, and critical perspectives on the use of AI in MEL in the Global South. It aims to:

1. Provide a conceptual foundation for understanding AI within the broader field of MEL in Global South contexts.
2. Document practical applications of AI across monitoring, evaluation, learning, reporting, and adaptive management.
3. Examine ethical, governance, equity, and quality assurance issues arising from AI use in MEL work.
4. Stimulate interdisciplinary scholarship and professional dialogue on the future of evidence generation and use in the AI era.



Objectives

1. Map the current and emerging roles of AI in MEL theory and practice in the Global South.
2. Identify methodological opportunities and limitations associated with AI-supported MEL in low-resource and institutionally diverse settings.
3. Highlight sectoral and institutional case studies demonstrating real-world use of AI in MEL across Global South contexts.
4. Advance discussion on ethical, equitable, transparent, and human-centred approaches to AI adoption in MEL.
5. Contribute to capacity strengthening by identifying skills, systems, partnerships, and governance arrangements needed for responsible use of AI in the profession.

Scope and Contribution

This book positions Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, rather than technology alone, at the center of discussion, connecting AI to the full MEL cycle: scoping, design, data collection, quality assurance, analysis, interpretation, reporting, learning, and utilization. The Global South emphasis foregrounds Southern contexts as sites of methodological innovation, governance experimentation, and critical reflection rather than as secondary examples.

The editors welcome conceptual chapters, methodological papers, empirical studies, reflective essays, and sector-based case studies. This breadth reflects the reality that AI in MEL is not only a technical issue but also a methodological, institutional, political, and developmental one.
Contributions should demonstrate a substantive connection to MEL practice, systems, methods, evidence generation, learning, or utilisation; chapters focused primarily on AI applications without a clear MEL dimension will fall outside the scope of the volume.

Thematic Sections

Prospective authors are invited to submit abstracts under one of the following eight thematic sections:

Section 1: Foundations of AI in Monitoring and Evaluation in the Global South

Conceptual, theoretical, and historical perspectives on AI in MEL, with attention to Global South institutions, evidence cultures, and development settings.

Section 2: AI in Monitoring Systems and Performance Tracking

Use of AI for routine monitoring, indicator tracking, dashboarding, forecasting, anomaly detection, and real-time decision support.

Section 3: AI in Evaluation Design and Methodology

How AI can support evaluation planning, theory of change development, sampling, instrument design, mixed methods, and analytical workflows, alongside questions of validity and contextual fit.

Section 4: Data Collection, Management, and Analytics for MEL

Natural language processing, machine learning, administrative data, digital trace data, geospatial evidence, and predictive analytics addressing common data limitations in Global South contexts.

Section 5: Generative AI in MEL Practice

Use of generative AI for literature reviews, evidence synthesis, coding support, report drafting, visualization, translation, and communication, with attention to risks such as hallucination and misleading claims.

Section 6: Ethics, Governance, and Responsible AI in MEL

Fairness, privacy, security, consent, transparency, documentation, human oversight, and locally grounded governance approaches.

Section 7: Sector Applications and Case Studies

Practical experiences from education, health, agriculture, humanitarian action, governance, climate adaptation, and social protection.

Section 8: Capacity Strengthening and the Future of the Profession

Competencies, curricula, institutional readiness, partnerships, digital inclusion, professional development, and South-South learning.

Who Should Submit

Contributions are welcome from academic researchers, MEL practitioners, data scientists working in social sectors, policy analysts, development consultants, donor representatives, government MEL units, NGO practitioners, and institutional leaders engaged in digital transformation and evidence systems. Both established and early-career scholars from Global South institutions are strongly encouraged to apply.

Intended Audience

The published volume will target university faculty and students, consultants, government MEL units, NGOs, regional and international development agencies, and commissioners of evaluations, serving both as a teaching resource and a practical reference.

Abstract Submission Guidelines

Interested authors should submit a structured abstract of 350-600 words that includes the following elements:

Element	Description
Proposed chapter title	A clear, descriptive working title Indicate which of the 8 sections the chapter addresses
Thematic section alignment	Indicate which of the 8 sections the chapter addresses
Author(s) and affiliation(s)	Name, institution, country, and contact email for each author. The lead author should be the first
Background/purpose	The problem or gap the chapter addresses
Approach/methodology	Conceptual framing, methodology, or case study approach (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, desk review, etc.)
Key argument or findings	The central contribution or expected findings
Relevance to the Global South	How the chapter speaks to Global South realities, equity, or context-specific dynamics
Expected contribution	The chapter's anticipated value to the volume and to MEL scholarship/practice
Keywords	4-6 keywords

Abstracts should be submitted in English, formatted in APA 7th edition style, as a Word document (.docx), using 12-point Calibri font, 1.5 line spacing.

Important Dates

Review Process

All abstracts will undergo an initial editorial screening for fit with the book's scope and thematic sections. Selected authors will be invited to submit full chapters, which will then be subject to double-blind peer review. Editorial feedback will focus on conceptual clarity, methodological rigor, relevance to the Global South, and contribution to the overall coherence of the volume.

Expected Outputs

The immediate output of this call will be a curated set of chapter abstracts organized by thematic section. Selected contributions will be developed into full chapters for peer review and editorial development, culminating in a published edited volume that:

- Produces a curated body of knowledge on AI in MEL in the Global South.
- Strengthens professional dialogue on responsible innovation, equity, and local ownership in evidence work.
- Helps shape emerging norms, competencies, and institutional practices for AI adoption in MEL across development settings.

Contact and Submission

Email: CLEAR.AnglophoneAfrica@wits.ac.za for queries
Submission Link for an abstract: https://ee.kobotoolbox.org/x/hrXhJRCk

Some of your questions are addressed on the FAQs sheet

Disclaimer: Editors reserve the right to invite chapters directly from recognized experts to ensure balanced sectoral, regional, and thematic coverage across the volume.