

## **SAMEA BIENNIAL CONFERENCE 2013**

### **Emerging evaluator scholarship report – 25 September 2013**

**Prepared by: Deirdre M. Solomon**

I am pleased to report on my attendance at the conference and how I will use this knowledge and experience to further monitoring and evaluation.

The first area of new knowledge that stood out for me was the extent of the commitment to performance change the government has through effective monitoring and evaluation of its services and departments. I was interested to hear from the DPME and PSC speakers at various sessions and to discover their commitment to improvement over the coming years. Their spirit of discovery of the true state of affairs in spite of the potential negative ramifications such as negative publicity and negative public criticism so that they can effect improvement, really affected my whole outlook on the government of South Africa. For the very first time, I have hope in the current political arena, and even wish to be part of it. To me, I have always believed in South Africa but with government coming on board and showing commitment to improvement by way of transparent monitoring and evaluation, I am happy to be a South African and am excited about playing a part in making our country great for its people. I was very inspired specifically by Dr Sean Phillips's presentations in this regard. I hope to somehow play a part either at the DPME or as an evaluator contributing to their endeavours.

The second area that I really found of interest was the whole concept of Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE). This was the first time I had really heard of these issues being teased out and debated and so I attended the parallel session by Sulley Gariba and Dr Andy Rowe on Thursday morning as I am interested in evaluation for development. The discussions that ensued raised many important concepts and issues and I intend reading more about these in the coming months and even trying to apply the concepts to my evaluations undertaken in South Africa in the future. It will be good to be able to report on an attempted MAE at the next SAMEA conference.

The third area I really enjoyed was the frank discussion on the Thursday afternoon at the session entitled "advice and lessons for new and inspiring evaluators". This session was filled with many practical tools and techniques and very helpful advice. I will definitely be looking into the web-based tools suggested by Jenny Bisgard and taking to heart the issues raised by Thabisile Zuma and Candice Morkel. They were inspiring.

The parallel session I chose Friday morning wasn't a very good choice (innovative methods measure impact) and I didn't find the speakers to be very good. However, this is not to say others didn't find these talks helpful – I am just sorry I didn't choose better as there were other topics also of interest to me which I missed as a result.

But, I wish to end on a positive note, which is this: I thoroughly enjoyed this conference. I also found the accommodation lovely, the conference venue fantastic and the food excellent. It was such a privilege to attend this conference and my utmost gratitude goes to SAMEA for making this possible through the scholarship.

I know that this conference has been an inspiration and I will try to follow up (as soon as my Masters dissertation is complete as that is taking priority) on the various points of interest and people that inspired me.