

Conference Venue: Emperors Palace

Dates: 23 – 25 October 2019

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Introduction

I am privileged to have attended the 7th Biennial South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association Conference hosted by SAMEA, from the 23rd to 25th October 2019, at Emperors Palace in Johannesburg, South Africa. My attendance was facilitated by SAMEA Emerging Evaluator Scholarship, which covered my conference fee, travel and accommodation. In the absence of this scholarship, I would not have been able to attend the conference due to the cost implications, which were difficult for me to bear as an emerging evaluator who has just begun working. This was a wonderful opportunity for learning from the presentations and plenary sessions, as well as networking with the other delegates in attendance.

Pre Conference Workshops

Did not attend

Conference

Highlights:

- ☑ Meeting other emerging evaluators and sharing our experiences, challenges and highlights. Connecting with people in the same space is very valuable.
- ☑ Learning from respected evaluators through the presentations and plenary sessions. It would be great to have access to some of those presentations
- ☑ Seeing the diversity of stakeholders that exist in the monitoring and evaluation space.
- ☑ Learning about how technology is changing and has potential to change the current evaluation landscape, and listening to the different case studies presented in the MerlTech track.
- ☑ Seeing the commitment towards capacity building and inclusion of emerging evaluators. It is encouraging to see that there is a space for us in this sector, and that there are people willing to bring us in. I look forward to mentorship or buddy systems that can take this further.

Lessons learnt:

☒ There are many tracks that reflected the diversity that there is in evaluation. Through this I learnt that there are many ways to express myself as an evaluator, and different sectors I could work in as an evaluator. It was great to get to speak to people working in those different spaces and hear from their experiences.

☒ I realised the importance of having a career mentor, someone who can help you navigate and chart your own evaluation path, based on your interests. During the conference, I became more aware of the value of practical evaluation experience, and how important it is to have that in addition to a sound academic background.

☒ I noted the need to take time to set networking and networking goals before the conference, and to review them daily. The conference provided plenty of information and opportunities, and it was easy to get lost in all of it, by just going with the flow. Perhaps a daily face-to-face check in with emerging evaluators would have been useful; in the same way there was a short introductory meeting.

Challenges:

☒ There were many tracks running simultaneously, in different formats and with different timings. While this was good for diversity of options, it made it difficult to move between one track and another. For instance if I was in Track 1 and the speaker I was listening to was done speaking, and I left that session to attend track two, I could find that the speaker in that session was half way or already done. It may be useful to attach timings to each speaker.

☒ It was great to be accommodated through the scholarship and having agreed to share rooms, sharing was fine. However, due to the size of rooms the two single beds were fairly close to each other. In addition to this, the bathroom was covered by a curtain, which did not close all the way, so there was little privacy.

Networking:

☒ Having the nametag with 'emerging evaluator' written made it easier to approach people when networking. People were more recipient and willing to help when they realised that I was emerging.

☒ It was useful to be introduced to people by the SAMEA Board members as this made it easier to approach people, particularly 'influential ones'.

☐ The provision of accommodation made it easier to stay longer for networking events such as the author's night and SAMEA awards, as well as to network during things like breakfast.

☐ The HelloCrowd App had a list of attendees and a way to contact them and request a meeting. This is an excellent innovation; the use of this should have been encouraged.

☐ At the end of it, I came away with some key contacts of people who are doing work that I am interested in and networks that I would like to be a part of.

Next steps:

☐ My next steps have included following up on the contacts that I have made by sending emails to the people I received business cards from.

☐ During the conference, I became aware of a number of platforms and resources that are useful for evaluators for example the 'Free Range Evaluation' Blog run by Thomas Archibald, SAMEA Talk, and the AFREA emerging evaluators platform. I look forward to engage with these and other initiatives that I learnt about. This is to keep abreast of the trends and learning in evaluation.

☐ Looking forward to the next conference, I am interested in submitting a poster or paper for the conference.

☐ It would be useful to maintain the Whatsapp group of emerging evaluators that was formed for scholarship recipients. This can be used in addition to YEE TIG as a way to keep in touch, share opportunities and interesting evaluation related information.