

Nozipho Manqele

## SAMEA Report

I would like to express gratitude to SAMEA for the opportunity to attend the 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference held on the 12<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> October 2015. The calibre of presentations was outstanding, it gave me insight into what is required from an evaluator in the field. As an emerging evaluator I attended two pre-conference workshops. The first was a two day workshop titled *Utilisation of Evaluation*. During this workshop participants were given skills on developing specific evaluation questions, identifying data sources required to answer those questions and compiling evaluation reports. Challenges involved in engaging stakeholders during and after evaluation efforts were addressed through skit presentations. Facilitators divided participants into groups and gave each group a scenarios they might encounter when dealing with different stakeholders. This activity generated a lot of laughter and taught us the value of having effective communication and negotiation skills as an evaluator. Participant also reflected on how evaluation results are often not utilised and ways in which they can be used in decision making. *The Theory of Change as a program design and evaluation tool* workshop focused on theory-driven approaches to evaluation, with an emphasis on casual mechanisms of how programs work. This workshop gave practical skills on how to unpack the theory underlining a programme. It also gave participants skills in investigating the external factors, mechanisms and assumptions of programme theories.

During the conference I attended the Emerging Evaluators' stream which taught me not only the basics of evaluation but it also revealed the challenges experience by emerging evaluators in the field. Such challenges includes transferring theory learnt in the classroom to the evaluation field, creating logic models and ethical considerations pertaining to the nature of work. As participants we were advised on how to get the necessary skills to be employable such as networking with possible mentors through social media and conferences, and volunteering for evaluation projects. From this session I learnt that becoming a fully fledge evaluator is a process and it requires one to constantly learn through theory and experience as one never fully arrives.

What most stands out for me was the keynote speeches delivered by Kate McKegg and Patricia Rogers. McKegg spoke on professionalization and the ways in which it could perpetuate inequality. Rogers highlighted that evaluations must advance communities and not dehumanise them. She further added that evaluators should not lose sight of why they do the work; the work of an evaluator is value committed and not political.

I would like to thank SAMEA again for this opportunity, it will certainly add value to my career aspirations.