

SAMEA Capacity Building Workshops 2016

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I was selected by SAMEA (following a list of criteria) to form part of the young Evaluators initiative aimed at capacitating and mentoring young professionals in the field of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). SAMEA provided five upcoming evaluators with an opportunity to attend a two-day capacity building workshop, which focused on the relevant topics emerging in M&E. The call for engaging young-evaluators into capacity building initiatives supports the global network of young evaluators to “promote engagement, innovation, and exchange among youth and emerging evaluators”.

I am currently pursuing a Master’s degree at the Wits School of Governance and Management in the field of Monitoring and Evaluation. Since this is a new discipline and an area that is gaining a lot of recognition especially at a National level- more and more emphasis is being placed on the need for rigorous M&E systems; the need for professionalization of M&E personnel in the field; the need for advocacy and meaningful engagement around the benefits of implementing M&E systems. Furthermore, assessing the extent of our success or failures will inform better decision-making and policy development to ensure that we are take corrective steps to achieve developmental goals

The workshops which I attended was titled, “Strengthening policy implementation through people centred development” by Richard Levin and “Using evidence for decision-making and learning- how to implement a value-adding monitoring and results measurement system”, facilitated by Mishkah Jakoet and Kirsten Mulcahy from Genesis analytics. The highlights which I took away from the respective workshops are as follows:

- A participatory approach to evaluation is crucial for measuring impact and to the development of people and their needs.
- Development is complex and should be interrogated using rigorous thinking; and dealt within the context of a developmental state rather that within an ideological context.
- The development of a sound policy to address issues of social development and change is dependent on an evidence-based approach to inform decision-makers in a way that ensures learning from previous shortcomings and improving on existing plans.

M & E contributes to an evidence based approach; more importantly it tells us what worked and what worked less well. This is a critical aspect that could contribute tremendously towards designing and implementing policies directed at enhancing education initiatives in the country. The priority of the National Development Plan on South Africa speaks to equal access to quality education for all South Africans. This is a grand gesture! But, how do we get there? As a starting point we need to be able to inform where we are and where we hope to be in a few years from now-employing different research methodologies will help us do just that! M & E is a new and growing branch of research and is often associated with the “technical stuff”. It plays an important role in inquiring about why certain things are the way they are and what we can do to influence change.

There is a huge need for professionals in the field of M & E and there are currently a wide range of opportunities within this field. Within the context of South Africa and Africa more widely, I think that it is important that we are able to tell our own story and develop our own “theories of change”. The impact or the change we would like to see should be determined by case studies developed within an [south] African context and should include “our own” perspectives, our own stories, and our own experiences. The role of an evaluator is to facilitate a collaborative process towards achieving good outcomes.