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## 4 KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM MY CONFERENCE & WORKSHOP EXPERIENCES

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### **Introduction:**

I am fairly new to the M&E field, however, after this experience I feel convinced that this is where my future career path lies. I thoroughly enjoyed the two workshops I attended at the SAMEA conference, the first was Systems Thinking for Evaluation and the second was Enhancing qualitative data management, analysis and Visualization using NVivo. I have four key takeaways to report: one from attending the conference as a whole, one each from the two workshops mentioned above, and one from my new fellow mentee whose presentation on how to implement a decentralised M&E system in an NGO to be quite inspiring.

### **General conference takeaway:**

There were not many M&E and Sustainable development related presentations at the conference, although, in my mind, M&E is essential for sustainability. This corresponds to a gap at the learning institution where I studied my masters in SD- where there was little mention of M&E and a large emphasis placed on Systems Thinking and the importance of a shift in development towards taking complexity/ complex systems into account when designing and implementing interventions. It then crossed my mind that both M&E and SD are fields that essentially cut across many, if not all, other fields of study and work- so how could they be brought together better?

I hope to dedicate some time and energy towards figuring this out, and hopefully meeting like-minded people and exploring opportunities for how to make meaningful contributions to both fields. This experience, overall, has opened my mind to future possibilities as well as having connected me with a network of people and provided a platform

### **Systems Thinking for Evaluation:**

I found the first workshop so exciting because it inspired me to think more about (1) how I could try and merge my work experience in M&E with my background education in sustainable development



(SD), and (2) how this could possibly be done through the use of a systems thinking approach to evaluation for SD projects. This is an idea and represents a gap in my knowledge that I intend to

investigate further and see where it leads. I also enjoyed meeting and linking up with the like-minded facilitator Sahar Iqbal- I intend to explore future opportunities with her and/ or just learn more from her work. This experience gave me more of an evaluation lens through which to interrogate my understanding of SD theory and practice and showed me that there are others out there with similar ideas and questions who would be eager to link up and explore opportunities.

#### **Enhancing Qualitative Data Management, Analysis and Visualization:**

This workshop was extremely entertaining and enjoyable. The facilitator knew his content well and was very charismatic in the way he taught it. I can say with confidence that I am able to begin analysing and visualising data with NVivo. This is a very useful skill to have developed as it is directly relevant to the work that I do at Data Innovator- a consulting company that specialises in providing both M&E and Data Visualization services. My work involves doing data analysis and visualisation for evaluation projects that Data Innovator's clients. This course has enhanced my ability to contribute more directly to evaluation in my daily work. I am grateful for the experience and new skills!

#### **A takeaway from my new fellow mentee:**

My fellow mentee presented her work on setting up a decentralised M&E system in an organisation. Having been part of an M&E system set-up process myself, I was familiar with many of the initial challenges they had in operating the system at national level through a centralised system. I was intrigued by how many of these challenges were met by taking a completely different, decentralised, approach. This added yet another layer to my understanding of M&E and how much room there is to innovate and solve problems creatively in this space.

#### **Conclusion:**

I am very grateful for this whole experience because, apart from having equipped me with new, practical skills, it has given me a new perspective on the possible direction for my career going forward and has given me a platform from which to begin my explorations into the field of M&E and SD. I hope to use these to make a valuable contribution towards evaluation, although I now need some time to do further research into what this contribution may look like. Thank you very much for the opportunity.