

SAMEA CONFERENCE FEEDBACK FOR FAITH CHIWUNGWE

Explain how you will use this knowledge and other experiences to further M&E

My goals before the conference

- ❖ To improve my evaluation report
- ❖ To actively participate in M&E activities in my work
- ❖ To be able to provide evidence to my colleagues on how our department can be more efficient

When I applied for the scholarship to attend the SAMEA conference, my goals were mainly academic and work related. As I attended the workshops and the presentations, I realised that the conference was actually a real-life learning scenario. The following is a summary of my experience of the conference.

Designing a theory of change

The first workshop I attended was about developing a theory of change. The presenter used a practical approach whereby the attendants were divided into small teams and worked through a problem and intervention that required a theory of change. This was valuable experience to me because, in my mind, the theory of change and logic model are tools developed by the M&E personnel. The experience also taught me that no idea is too big or too small during such a process because when all is complete, the program in question should take the more efficient route therefore it is important to exhaust all the possibilities.

Starting an evaluation consulting business

The introduction to evaluation consulting was also a highly practical session. In smaller teams, we were tasked with setting up a consulting company and had to respond to a simple request for proposals. As with any business, a consulting company requires hard work, dedication and sacrifice. Although my initial goals for attending the conference were mostly academic and work related, I began to think about the possibility of starting my own company.

Continued professional development

Continued professional development to me has always meant attending a formal short course and receiving a certificate recognising such attendance. During the conference however, I learnt that as an evaluator I need to stay up to date with my professional and academic surroundings. I learnt about the Learning Circles which are informal meetings with fellow evaluators to discuss current articles or affairs in M&E in general. With the prevailing poor M&E culture in organisations and workplaces, I

have taken the challenge to initiate the formation of an M& E learning circle at the organisation where I currently do internship. I believe that if we can meet informally and talk about M&E issues and how if not addressed may affect the progress of the program, there can be an improvement in the M&E culture organisation wide.

Practical examples

The practical examples that were given in the presentations throughout the conference are very helpful as it gave me an opportunity to reflect on my own experiences and consider possibility of different approaches to the challenges I have encountered

Emerging evaluator network

The highlight of my experience at the conference was meeting other evaluators with an experience similar to mine. The network is a mixture of individuals from different academic and professional background, and that was enriching because we all could contribute different ideas from our different backgrounds. The overwhelming support from SAMEA was incredibly humbling, from the sponsorship to the appointment of Mentors to each emerging evaluator. It is not so lonely after all as support is available when needed.

In conclusion, I received more than I had anticipated. My initial goals though very narrow were met and in the process, I developed bigger picture goals in terms of where I would like my M&E career to go.