

## **The opportunities for YEE's aka the “new evaluator”.**

Over the years, M&E internships have blossomed in both the public and private sectors. These have been welcomed by many YEEs (Young Emerging Evaluators) as an opportunity to access on-the-job experiences and build valuable skills in the field. Internships help give YEE's the practical training to complement their M&E academic learnings. However, is this enough? Does the education offered acceptably equip students with the skills to break into the space? How can internships supplement M&E training? The following blog is targeted at the ‘new evaluator’, who has just joined the evaluation field after a M&E academic qualification, with no past work experience in evaluation and needs relevant work experience. I share my experiences and insights from my MA dissertation, as well as my personal insights on breaking into the M&E field.

In 2022, I completed my MA dissertation, titled “Opportunities and challenges for Made in Africa Evaluation Capacity Development: South African experiences”. I did my studies with the Wits School of Governance, in Public and Development Management. As part of my research, I collected data from a series of semi-structured interviews with 15 M&E consultants, academics and commissioners of evaluation, YEE's, working across universities, NGOs, CSOs, government, consultancies and VOPEs working in South Africa. A section of my research was specifically dedicated to looking at Evaluation Capacity Development initiatives to support YEEs.

Studying monitoring and evaluation at a postgraduate level arguably provides insufficient time for scholars to understand the field and to gain the vocational training required. Critiques within the M&E space share that universities are producing ‘no value certificates’, releasing students into the sector who can't perform required skilled tasks. The multi-disciplinary nature of M&E requires ‘extensive and deliberate socialization’ of new evaluators into the field.<sup>1</sup> There are many avenues to get formal/informal evaluation capacity development training. More experienced evaluators may question whether the type of formal training they undertook was useful and/or sufficient. There is more to evaluation training than learning technical learning of research methods and data coding. There are process skills and other competencies that come with practice.

If I ask myself whether my post graduate qualification in M&E equipped me to engage with the working world, I would unreservedly respond “No”. In my own masters' research I interviewed individuals working in the M&E sector, asking their views on *current training capacity development aimed at YEE*. A gripping comment, made by one consultant noted: “...other professions (doctors, engineers, lawyers), or any area of professional practice, you don't train people and lead them into the market. Usually, learning is linked with the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ngwabi, NT, OG Mpyana, and A Mapatwana. 2020. “Reflections from emerging evaluators in shaping Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation capacity-building initiatives.” African Evaluation Journal.

practice so that a young person can get the practice and experience in a safe place. Teachers must find a way of having a strong link with industry to assist in a project....". I agree with this thought. Practices of medical residency and specialisation fellowships, law articles and achieving a Professional Engineer licence (that includes working for four years under a licenced engineer), set the professionals up with factual experience before being sent out in their industries. This approach should be replicated in the M&E space.

In addition to lack of practical learning in M&E post-graduate programmes is the actual cost of higher education fees. This can be a major block to young people entering the M&E space. The exorbitant fees stifle out young people's accessibility to the discipline. The costs of fees filter out those who can afford the hefty costs and those who can't. To circumvent this, internships become an alternative route for YEE's to gain additional informal and/or formal training while learning on the job.

DPME is applauded for its initiative to take a great deal of interns, who (in most cases) end up being employed across various departmental M&E programmes. Other active organisations that give YEE's opportunities include Khulisa Management Services, Southern Hemisphere, and DNA Economics. Lastly, VOPE's are increasingly realising the importance of mainstreaming YEEs in capacity building initiatives for sustaining the evaluation professions, SAMEA has also been doing outstanding work in this aspect, given its mentorship programme which has created a database of EEs.

From personal experience, in 2022, I joined the SAMEA Emerging Evaluator program, held in partnership with UNICEF, CLEAR-AA and WFP. The programme was well executed in combining experiences of professional and personal development. I was assigned to work with Southern Hemisphere, a consultancy based in Cape Town. From the outset, the internship exposed me to the fast-paced world of M&E consultancy work. I had the opportunity to assist in, and understand the work processes behind designing evaluations, from developing the TOC, designing data collection tools, to the data collection, data coding and analysis – giving an opportunity to practice my NVIVO skills, outside of an academic learning setting. I was a part of the report writing, sharpening my critical analysis skills through meticulous and exhaustive investigation of the data collected. It was an excellent preface to introducing me to the world of M&E consulting.

Since the internship, I have been thrust into M&E consultancy, working on developmental donor projects, as a MEL analyst. I will say I am part of the fortunate few who have been able to captulate my career in such a short time.

What can be commended is the work various consultancies, national government and SAMEA have done to create space for the 'new evaluator'. The field is not the easiest to just pick up, and these internships pay a vital role in inducting YEEs. Further openings of

internships could be put in place. Internships that don't reduce evaluation training to mere administrative duties, but really engross the intern in the everyday working of conducting evaluations.

### South African Internships available for YEE's

A note to keep in mind, beyond the dedicated strand for YEE's SAMEA includes in its biennial conference, SAMEA has the ongoing and specialised Topical Interest Group (TIG) targeted at YEE's. The group invites members of common interests, where YEE's and other evaluation consultants share their opinions and work in the YEE space.

Are you interested in internship opportunities? Below is a list of widely recognised institutions who offer internships and training for recent graduates, looking for that practical exposure, as well as indicating the length of the internships. As a disclosure, by all means, these are not the only institutions that offer M&E training, but rather a few of recognised institutions. The listing of these organisations is to serve as a short reference list of where some YEE's can look for that practical training.

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Internship durations</b>	<b>Description</b>
<a href="#">UNDP South Africa</a>	6 months	Internships give students and recent graduates. interns are selected on a competitive basis.
<a href="#">CLEAR-AA, SAMEA, WFP and UNICEF</a>		Joint EE programme targeted at professionals with 5 years or less experience. You will be placed in a partnering organisation with SAMEA
<a href="#">UNICEF</a>		internship programme targeted at undergraduates, graduates or PhD holders enrolled in, or have graduated within the past two years
<a href="#">DPME</a>	6 months - 2 years	facilitates numerous cross-departmental internships ranging from 6 months to 2 years
<a href="#">Southern Hemisphere</a>	6 months	6-month internship programme with possibility for renewal up to 1 year
<a href="#">JET Education</a>	1 year	fixed-term contract that will run for one year. It may lead to employment as an M&E officer, subject to performance.
<a href="#">WFP South Africa</a>	6 months	training programmes in either the monitoring or evaluation units
<a href="#">DNA Economics</a>		approaches from both newly qualified/less experienced individuals
<a href="#">Genesis Analytics</a>		usually take place bi-annually from May to July, and again from October to December depending on the academic calendar and schedule

[M&E Sure](#)

Full time internship, giving candidates the opportunity to hone research and evaluation skills in a dynamic and stimulating environment.