# BRIDGE MONITORING & EVALUATION COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

**Meeting held on 13 March 2018 at Wits School of Education**

## SETTING THE SCENE

Over 55 people attended the first M&E community of practice (CoP) meeting of 2018, which comprised a mix of regular participants and first-timers. Participants represented a range of M&E expertise, from emerging and experienced M&E professionals, to other education practitioners with a 'beginner' interest in M&E. Organisations represented included NGOs, funders, government, municipalities, schools, unions, and education projects.

The event represented a new direction for this CoP, as BRIDGE is embarking on a partnership with the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) in order to jointly reshape the CoP as a 'learning space' for monitoring and evaluation across education sectors.



## LOOKING BACK & TAKING FORWARD

In order to orientate new participants, some of the regular CoP members were asked to share what they had gained from the CoP in 2017.

- Edwin Madisha noted that in his work he had grown accustomed to presenting the results of education projects in terms of pass rates and other quantitative data. Through the CoP, he has become more aware of how M&E can be used to track progress in different ways, and how the focus can shift to quality. He used the example of comparing pre- and post-test results, and how M&E tools such as these can be used to illustrate various factors that are relevant to project impact.
- Leticia Taimo said that, as an 'emergent evaluator' she found the CoP to be a source of practical insight into different methodologies; It has helped her become better informed about available resources, and been a great space to learn from other evaluators. This helps us all build toward the goal of improving the quality of the programmes that are delivered, and ultimately the quality of educational outcomes.

- Evalisa Katabua said that she has found the CoP meetings very stimulating, as getting views from different perspectives and different types of stakeholders illuminates some of the challenges of M&E. Many of the topics discussed last year raise issues that the CoP can respond to going forward.

## A NEW DIRECTION FOR THE CoP

Benter Okelo from BRIDGE gave participants some context and history about the CoP. Originally established as the M&E Colloquium in 2010, this interest group emerged from the Maths and Science Community of Practice in BRIDGE's Learner Support focus area and later grew into a fully-fledged community of practice.  Because of the importance of M&E to all four BRIDGE focus areas (school leadership, teacher development, learner support and early childhood development), we decided in 2017 to establish the concept of 'cross-cutting themes' as a fifth focus area for BRIDGE, and to categorise the M&E CoP as such.

Since then, the CoP has been through a cycle of highs and lows, with fluctuating attendance. Initially the focus was on the content of project-specific evaluations, sharing lessons about project implementation. As the role of M&E in educational transformation became more valued by government agencies, funders and programme implementers, we began to focus more on M&E tools and methodologies themselves. In 2017, the CoP brought together the practical and technical sides of M&E, sharing tools and real-world applications with those who need to use M&E in their daily work.

In 2018 the focus will be on taking the M&E agenda forward with SAMEA. By combining forces and using SAMEA as a platform, we hope to reshape this CoP into a true learning space for monitoring and evaluation.

## SAMEA: PURPOSE-DRIVEN MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Jerusha Govender is the Deputy Chair of the SAMEA Board, and the founder of Data Innovator. She discussed the concept of 'purpose driven M&E' and why it is relevant to the BRIDGE CoP.

Jerusha gave an overview of the ways in which M&E has changed over the years. One of its primary functions was holding providers accountable, generally using numerical data for this purpose. Funders and evaluators are now looking beyond the numbers to the stories of the beneficiaries, combining quantitative and qualitative information, and focusing on how evaluation results can be used to improve decision-making and programme quality.

## Changing M&E landscape

**Strategic shifts**

SA Government advocating for the National Development Plan, international Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Global debates**

International and domestic debates currently emphasise the need for better quality and rigour of evaluation work, clear frameworks for evaluator competence, evaluation standards and more advocacy for the use of evaluation evidence for informed decision making.

**Demand**

Acknowledging the value of 'M' and 'E'

State institutions and development partners intend to use evaluation evidence to measure development results.

**Focus on use**

The shift includes a better understanding of the vital role played by context in any project, and a focus on how M&E tools need to change to take the broader contextual factors into account.



"Context matters deeply. A single perspective which doesn't take the broader picture into account can give an inaccurate picture – that is why we need skills and tools that take context into account." Jerusha Govender, SAMEA

The idea of 'purpose-driven M&E' is then based on the concept of useful data that takes contextual factors into account, and that drives change and improvement in programme design and delivery. Communicating data more widely is also seen as key, as is collaborating with others and sharing information on evaluation content. Some of the goals and mechanisms of purpose-driven M&E are listed in the given slide.

Connecting with the BRIDGE CoP will enable SAMEA to gain different sources and insights on M&E issues in support of this approach, as well as to identify areas in which more skills are needed and to grow capacity.

## Purpose–driven M&E

1. Strengthening Performance Monitoring Systems
2. Enhancing Data Management and Visualisation
3. Using Evidence for Decision Making
4. Lessons learnt from evaluation case studies
5. Strengthening the Monitoring and Evaluation Profession

From learning to action - AEA 2017

Jerusha then went on to talk about SAMEA, explaining its aims and objectives, activities and membership benefits. SAMEA provides a number of opportunities for members to interact, to set up networks and to learn; these opportunities include conferences, webinars, open chat groups, capacity-building workshops and other platforms, as well as access to learning materials. There are also Topical Interest Groups (TIGs) which cover a range of sectors, specific topics and areas of interests.

"At the heart of SAMEA's mission is the aim of developing and strengthening M&E as a discipline and a profession in order to contribute to sustainable development in the country." Jerusha Govender, SAMEA

*To see Jerusha's presentation with more information about SAMEA, click here.*

Left to right: Zarina Khan (CoP Facilitator) Asgar Bhikoo (SAMEA Board Member) Jerusha Govender (SAMEA Board Member) Kate Mwaura (Coordinator) and Benter Okelo (BRIDGE M&E CoP Project Manager)



## Comments from the floor

- Given the complexity of issues within educational contexts, we need to focus on where we want to grow people's skills.
- While the focus on practical tools and on understanding contextual factors is vital, we must maintain a rigorous research focus as well.

## POSITIONING THE CoP AS A LEARNING SPACE FOR M&E

Participants formed groups and were asked to discuss four questions.

**Report Backs and Plenary Comments**

### What does it mean for this community of practice to be a 'learning space'?

- A learning space needs to be interactive.
- There should be opportunities to answer specific questions from participants, relating to particular M&E challenges in their own contexts. The CoP could help participants generate practical solutions to real problems.
- There needs to be some form of sharing by different participants from different contexts. People from different backgrounds bring different perspectives into discussions, which can be illuminating.

- Brainstorming around 'How to' questions is important (e.g. designing M&E frameworks).
- M&E should be made accessible and empowering, rather than exclusionary. Beneficiaries need to be able to understand monitoring results and evaluation information and data.
- CoP meeting content has to speak to a mixed range of participant knowledge and skills.
- We need to demystify the language of M&E.
- A learning space should be a safe space. People are always willing to talk about success stories, but not so willing to share mistakes and open themselves or their organisations up to criticism and judgement. However, it is from mistakes that we often learn the most. How do we engender trust between CoP participants, especially when attendance is open and not necessarily regular?

## How do we 'manage' a range of M&E knowledge/expertise (from 'beginner' to 'expert' within the CoP?) How can different profiles of CoP participants assist each other?

- Theorists and practitioners need to be in the same space, as there are opportunities to learn from each other. While programme implementers can benefit from an evaluator's perspective, the professional evaluator can also learn more about on-the-ground, contextual factors that can affect monitoring processes and evaluation results.
- We also need to recognise that someone who is expert in one area may be a beginner in another area.
- It would be very useful to do an 'audit' of those who attend the CoP – that is, build up a profile of who does what, and the types of skills and knowledge exist within the CoP. This will support the principle of collaboration, as it is difficult to collaborate if you don't know what skills people have.
- This in turn could link to the development of a framework for the grading of skills and knowledge within this CoP.
- The CoP may offer opportunities for 'pairings' of someone who is grappling with an issue with a 'space leader' on that issue. While such connections may begin in the CoP, participants can build these connections outside the CoP if they wish to do so.
- We need to reconsider our terminology regarding the spectrum from beginner to expert. Suggestions to capture the range in relation to M&E skills and knowledge include beginner to specialist, or general education practitioner to professional (or emerging professional) evaluator.
- People who attend the CoP need to be aware that it embraces the principles of:
  o Valuing different kinds of knowledge
  o Reciprocity in skills sharing
  o Capacity building and empowerment.

In line with this, the CoP may want to consider some form of Guidelines for Group Practice.

## What are the M&E needs / priorities of CoP members within the context of a collaborative learning space?

Many of these had been covered in discussion of previous questions. In summary:

- Exposure to new philosophies and approaches in M&E.
- Sharing of useful tools and resources for M&E.
- Assistance from M&E specialists around specific M&E problems.
- Different perspectives on M&E issues.
- Capacity-building in M&E.
- Expert input on specific topics.
- Help in ways in which CoP members can build M&E understanding in their own organisations: how do we ensure that M&E becomes part of the organisational culture wherever your work?
- Ways of interpreting and reporting data in order to inform new decision making.
- Need to note that needs and priorities will be different for different types of CoP members.

Most people seemed to be in agreement that there is a need to build our collective capacity in M&E, not just as individuals, but also to all those working for educational change. Monitoring and evaluation is everyone's responsibility.

## What kinds of effects can the CoP have on practice outside of CoP meetings? – e.g. can it generate action or outputs?

Due to lack of time this question was not addressed in any depth. Some of the comments here include:

- Collaboration on particular issues in between CoP meetings, or developing partnerships as an outcome of networking through the CoP.
- Using SAMEA's TIG groups to continue CoP conversations.
- It will be the responsibility of CoP members to take what they have learned back to their own organisations and spheres of influence.

**BRINGING IDEAS TOGETHER**

On the basis of these discussions, the following elements can feed into a 'Learning Framework' as an agenda for this community of practice:

| TOPICS OF INTEREST | There seemed to be clear agreement that the standard practice of inviting knowledgeable presenters to talk to specific topics, followed by questions and discussion, should continue. |
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| | Two examples of possible topics to explore: |
| | • Many of the problems in education are social problems and not educational ones. How does M&E take this into account? |

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| | • Our teaching culture is compliance oriented; when teachers asked to apply monitoring tools, they often do so in the spirit of compliance rather than understanding leading to changed behaviours. How do we change this dynamic? |
| **WHAT'S NEW IN TOOLS?** | There could be a standing agenda item which deals with sharing new or interesting M&E tools and how to apply these. |
| **PROBLEM CORNER** | This deals with a real M&E issue or case study brought to the CoP by a CoP member, for discussion and advice on an effective approach. |
| **CHECK IN WITH SAMEA** | Report backs on any interactions held with SAMEA. |
| **REFLECTION & SELF-ASSESSMENT SESSIONS** | This CoP has proposed a number of approaches and activities which could be undertaken, with the idea that we will periodically 'check in' and see if these are working. We have also noted that, as a community of practice, we want to reflect on these and assess our progress and growth at the end of the year. |
| **LEVERAGING OFF TECHNOLOGY** | Apart from the opportunities presented by SAMEA, are there any other ways in which the CoP can use technology in support of its aims? |

## ATTENDANCE REGISTER

| Name & surname: | Organisation: | Name & surname: | Organisation: |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anacletta Koloko | Sasol | Kate Mwaura | SAMEA |
| Andrea Sciarappa | Tools for School | Kopano Bokaba | Tomorrow Trust |
| Andrew Chinembiri | Katia Day Care Centre | Lennox Tapera | BrainBoosters |
| Anthony Diesel | South Africa Partners | Leticia Taimo | Khulisa Management Services |
| Asgar Bhikoo | Tshikululu Social Investments | Lisa Mapholisa | Humpty Dumpty Daycare |
| Bernadette Fourie | Hlanganani Primary School | Louise Erasmus | AECYC/VVOS |
| Benter Okelo | BRIDGE Innovation in learning | Margie Vorwerk | BRIDGE |
| Bonny Msoeleng | Ntataise | Mary Webber | Sparrow FET College |
| Bronia Vollebregt | Lasec | Melissa King | BRIDGE Innovation in Learning |
| Carla Richards | Tomorrow Trust | Modupi Mazibuko | Lesedi Educare Association |
| Christiaan Visser | Private | Nkokone Sehoole | PROTEC |
| David Semela | PROTEC | Norman Pillay | Sci-Bono Discovery Centre |
| Debbie de Jong | Private Practice | Patience Chinyanga | Hand in Hand Southern Africa |
| Dikeledi Tsuela | Ntataise | Patricia Mokgosi | Tshwane university of Technology |
| Duduzile Ngoepe | PROTEC | Peter Glover | Peter Glover & Associates |
| Edwin Madisha | Sasol Inzalo Foundation | Roger Dickinson | A BETTER AFRICA |
| Erik van den Top | The Love Trust | Rolland Malongete | City of Joburg Skills |
| Evalisa Katabua | PILO | Schlain Bhayla | Tshikul[u]lu Social Investments |
| Ewa Skowronska | The Topsy Foundation | Shavilla Harpal | NBI |
| Felix Gumunyu | Sci-bono | Shylet Tshyma | ECD |
| Franck Mpoyi | Dinoto Technical School | Sithembinkosi Dawu-Tshuma | Topsy Foundation |
| Ife Adeleke | TUT | Tang Khobotlo | Save the Children |
| Irene Miya | Izibuko Primary School | Tshegofatso Bokaba | Nedbank |
| Jade Pieterse | BRIDGE | Vuyiswa Ncontsa | BRIDGE |
| Jerusha Govender | SAMEA | Zarina Khan | Facilitator |
| Johannes Tsotetsi | Brakpan Primary | Zenobia Peterson | World Bank Group (IFC) |
| Kagiso Mokoena | Sci-bono | Zola Languza | COGTA |
| Kaizer Raseane Makole | PILO | | |