

BRIDGE Monitoring & Evaluation Community of Practice

Virtual Meeting held on 27 May 2020



Setting the scene

As education stakeholders continue to grapple with the impact of Covid-19 on schools and learners in all contexts, it is clear that reliable data is essential for making good decisions on how to address emerging challenges. CoP facilitator Margie Roper welcomed over 50 online participants to a session focusing on the critical role of M&E in emergency situations, sharing data, and practical ways of gathering data during lockdown and beyond.

Some of the participants put their videos on



PRESENTATION: Coordinating education responses to Covid-19: the role of M&E and the need for evidence (Benita Williams, Benita Williams Evaluation)

The current pandemic demands that quick but well-considered decisions are made in relation to providing support to the education sector. This applies to possible adaptations to existing programmes as well as decisions on new interventions. Benita noted that this new reality means that M&E has an important role to play: stakeholders are trying to coordinate their efforts, and are trying to make sure that their initiatives are driven by real needs. Reliable data is essential to inform these endeavours.

The first part of Benita's presentation serves as a rich resource on a number of data-sharing initiatives, including the following.

- SAMEA is bringing together those involved in and collaborating on information-sharing.

SAMEA's EduCovid Topical Interest Group (TIG) is undertaking a number of information-sharing initiatives – see details and contact information on slide.

To see Benita's whole presentation, click [here](#).



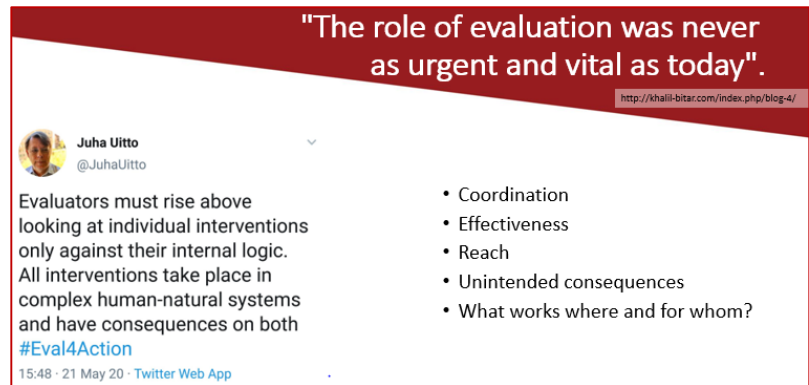
The slide features the SAMEA logo at the top left, which consists of a stylized orange and blue circular emblem above the text "SAMEA" and "South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association". The main title "Launch – EduCOVID (TIG) Topical Interest Group" is in bold blue text. Below it are the social media handles "@samea_za #EduCOVIDTig" and the email "Email: info@samea.org.za". On the right side, there is a numbered list of seven points detailing the TIG's activities and goals.

- 1) Established a TIG convening committee - email info@samea.org.za to volunteer
- 2) Pursuing links with BRIDGE, NASCEE and the African Evidence Network.
- 3) #EduCOVIDtig twitter chats were started on twitter
- 4) Coming soon - An EduCOVID TIG blog on the SAMEA website.
- 5) Launching- EduCOVID list serve that integrates with the SAMEA website, **but is also open to non-members**.
- 6) A survey to determine which data collection efforts are currently planned on specifically school readiness for reopening – Results to be shared soon
- 7) A survey was developed to allow the TIG to develop a database of skilled volunteers that may support TIG work – This will be released soon.

- The World Bank Report on the effects of Covid-19 on education takes a global perspective, analysing the effects of school closures on countries in different contexts and suggesting mitigating policies. There are some lessons for South Africa here.
- In 2014 the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs produced a 'Disaster Management Monitoring and Evaluation Framework' which contains some useful elements that could be adapted.
- A number of surveys and rapid response reviews have been conducted, many to gather data on the state of school readiness at provincial levels. The Standard Operating Procedures for teachers, non-teaching staff and learners developed by the Department of Basic Education should be used as a baseline for this.
- Data can also be gathered from Management Information Systems such as the Data Driven Districts Dashboard run by New Leaders Foundation; and through citizen chat platforms and information sharing (see slides).
- Case Studies and Thematic papers are also critical sources of information: examples are the JET Boot Camp with its 12 research themes, and work done by university collaborations such as RESEP and CRAM (see slides). Some of this data relates to information on parents, caregivers and how learning is happening in the 'at home' phase of schooling.
- Donors (for example, through IPASA) and NPOs (for example, through NASCEE) are also coming together to reflect on Covid-19 responses.

Given all these diverse sources, Benita stressed that we have to use focus and innovation to build up reliable data. Evaluation data is often political: whose questions are being asked, how are they being asked, and who is being asked? Recognising this means that evaluators should evaluate specific

projects within a larger ecosystem; in addition, it is also an opportunity for the professional evaluation sector to 'build back better' – to consider how data collection and data analysis in education in different projects fit together at a systemic level. If we want to understand systems impacts and change, the sector needs an 'evaluation agenda', in the same way as a 'research agenda' is sometimes required. A key question we should be thinking about is how to structure this agenda, and what kinds of frameworks would be most useful. Such an agenda would also help government, donors and implementers to start speaking a common language.



Benita also noted some other issues to keep in mind in the current context:

- How do we combine multiple streams of data that are coming in from different sources? What if different collection methods (old style or high tech) affect interpretation?
- How can we ensure that we get data from the most vulnerable communities, most of whom we can't access through online means?
- Who is in charge of the data being gathered, and who needs to use it?

She ended with an emphasis on the need to strengthen M&E capacity and appealed for volunteers to work in collaboration with SAMEA and other initiatives. To find out more about SAMEA, click www.samea.org.za.

Comments and responses

- The M&E community has a social justice responsibility to give a voice to all social development partners, and ensure that they are well enough informed to respond adequately to needs.
- The donor community is talking about responding to their grantees with agility and flexibility, and adapting programmes to respond to Covid-19 needs. How do we measure agility and responsiveness, and track whether or not these kinds of responses have worked? Benita suggested that we need to start documenting the narratives of programmatic adaptations to build up new learning. Both donors and NGOs need to recognise that M&E processes need to change. However, we should still work in a theoretical framework. Most of us are not trained for M&E in disaster areas; we need to learn from tools used in disaster areas, and the experience of those who have worked in such contexts. She floated the idea of a think tank to give us guidance on this topic: this would be different to the SAMEA TIG, and might need funding and project management. The theory and implementation of M&E in disaster contexts could be a critical need both now and in the future.
- Tshikululu is running a survey to check how Covid-19 has affected the NGOs that they fund, including programme schools; the results will be shared.
- The pressure on school principals is immense as they are responsible on so many levels to prepare schools and manage the reopening. The DBE calls on them, they need to manage health and safety as well as academic issues, and support teachers, parents and learners. We need school readiness data but we are not getting reliable data from principals. Survey

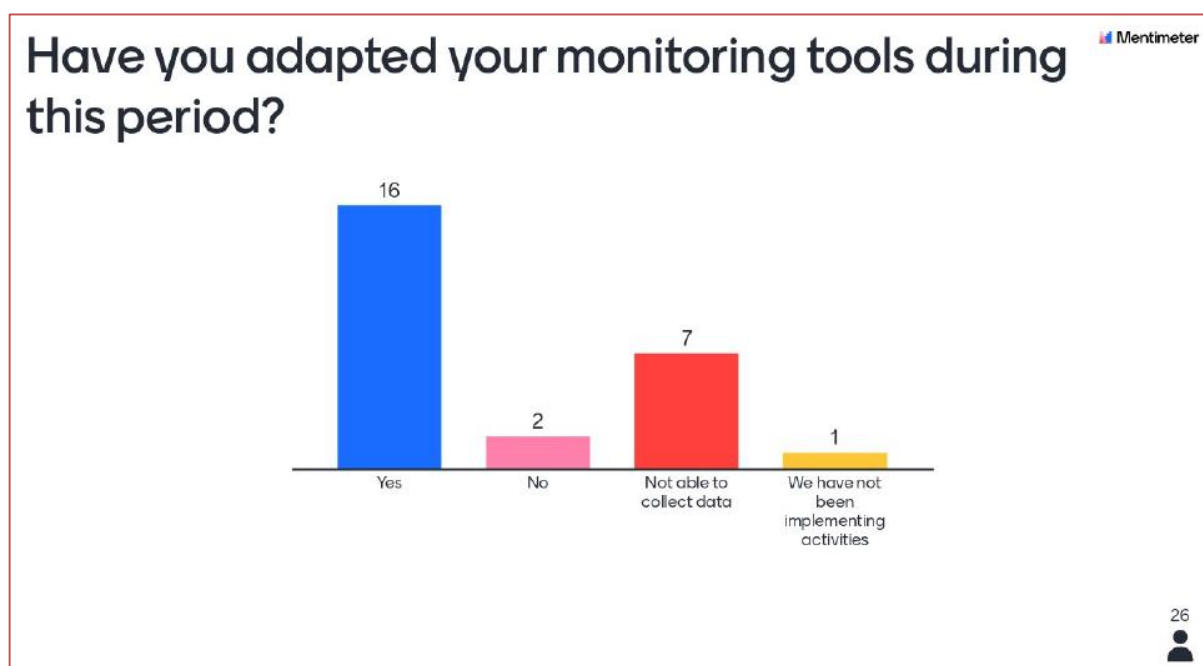
responses – if any – are likely to be quick and shallow as they will not be prioritising this. Principals need on the ground support and many are feeling overwhelmed.

- Are we hearing the concerns of the learners themselves? It is better to use NGO networks to gather this data, or even social media platforms such as twitter. We then need to get any data gathered this way to the teachers.
- Note that we are duplicating at individual school level, and need to share data. We also need to understand different ways in which different quintile schools may be responding.
- Many M&E professionals are sitting at home because work has been cancelled; this expertise could be used, but we need structure and funding in order to manage this.
- In terms of leveraging technology to share and collaborate, the following was noted:
 - See MERLTECH.org network for data scientists and M&E specialists in the development sector.
 - Current CLEAR AA workshops.
 - The EdVision platform (Minimum Viable Product 3 version addressing Covid-19) enables funders and NPOs to post information on areas of interest, in order to support potential cooperation. It is currently testing functionality, focusing mainly on basic education. For more go to: <https://nasceecovid19.edvision.co.za/> Password for EdVision: 12nascee34.



Participant Input: How are organisations adapting to M&E in the time of Covid-19?

The aim of this session was to give people an opportunity to share their M&E challenges and experiences when there is no physical access to sites or beneficiaries. Participants responded to the questions using the Mentimeter online tool, as shown below.



What would help you in your M&E activities during this time? (one word)

Mentimeter



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Other questions garnered a number of common answers. An illustrative sample is given here:

What is your biggest challenge in implementing M&E at the moment?

lack of an overarching strategy from DBE/DHET/DSD

Unable to be onsite. ECDs are still closed and we don't know when they are opening yet

Lack of clarity. Programmes that we are evaluating aren't operational atm.

Face-to-face fieldwork (qual research) is difficult remotely, not everyone has access to data-concern re excluding key groups, how can you measure meaningful engagement/participation

Sites not accessible

Connectivity and access to data for our after school and youth skills development programmes.

moving away from death by survey and being brave enough to use other tech platforms like WhatsApp, Teams, Zoom and interpreting data points like emojis.

The challenges of data collection in lockdown. The need for face to face discussion

How do you assess level of engagement when you are not able to see your beneficiaries face to face?

Consolidating interventions that are taking place as departments tend to work in silos.

hard to reach populations are excluded due to reliance on remote (online) methods

Funders requiring signatures for attendance of sessions- how to do this online.

Collecting primary data - using tech is not always possible due to data costs, access to data etc.

We have managed to adapt quite quickly to getting our intervention online, however the difficulty that we now face is participant data and wifi access (or lack thereof) is a threat to implementation

Collecting data remotely and not being able to verify it

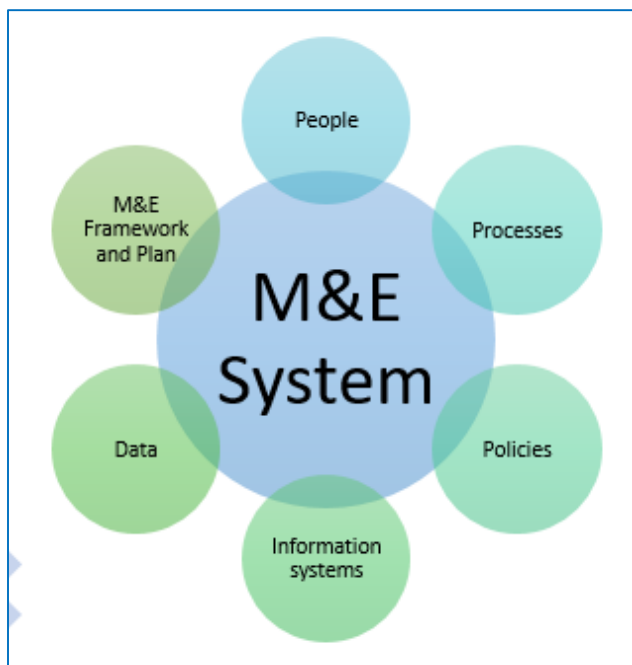
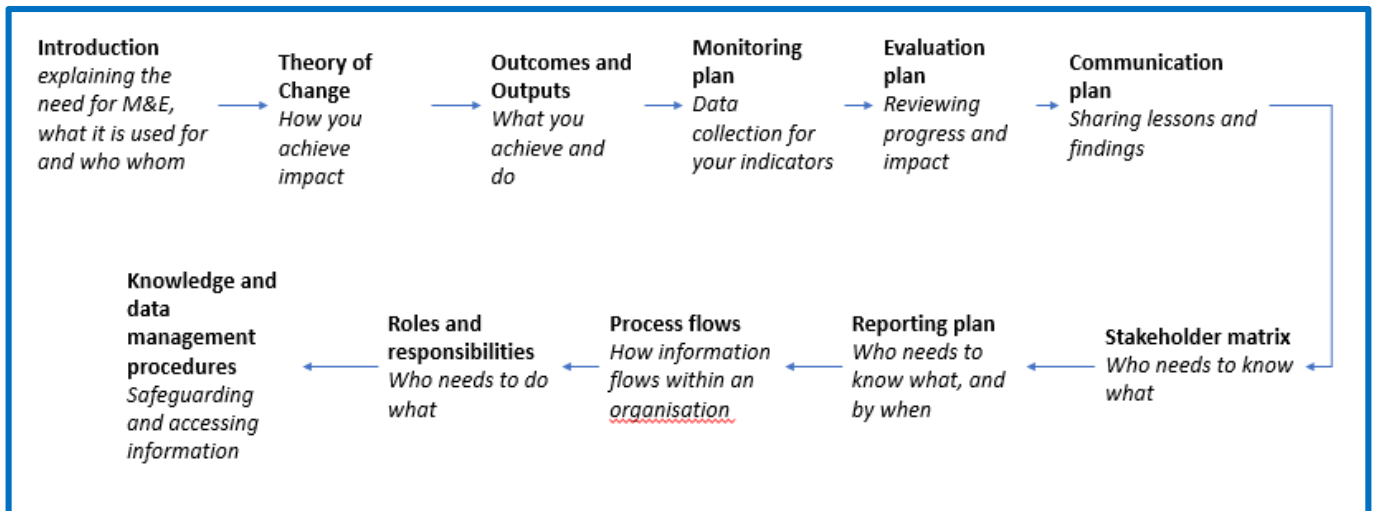
How are you interacting with your beneficiaries/ participants / clients during the Lockdown period?

Responses here ranged from little or no online access, to use of all digital platforms. At the end of the spectrum with few digital resources was face-to-face engagement while delivering food parcels, and old fashioned phone calls. WhatsApp groups and sms messaging were by far the most common means of communication. At the digitally rich end of the spectrum most common platforms were cited – email, Zoom, Google platforms and Skype. Participants commented that it is difficult to foster a sense of community with individuals via online means; it was suggested that using pictures and videos as evidence brings in a more human element. Benita noted that SAMEA’s Educovid group is trying to build up a database of volunteer M&E individuals, some of whom may be willing to provide advisory technical support. The issue of ‘tech fatigue’ was also raised, with some people noting the energy drain from too many Zoom meetings.



PRESENTATION: Navigating M&E systems during Covid-19 – tips, tools and tricks to allow for insight harvesting (Asgar Bhikoo, Allan Gray Orbis Foundation)

Asgar’s presentation dealt with adjusting and adapting monitoring and evaluation tools and strategies in the unusual circumstances – primarily lack of access to intervention sites and programme beneficiaries – brought on by Covid-19. In order to provide context for considering off-site M&E adaptations, Asgar gave a summary of the major components of any M&E plan as outlined below.



All these components of an M&E system affect each other, so issues in one area have a knock-on effect. Here are some common questions which come up when trying to adapt the overall M&E strategy:

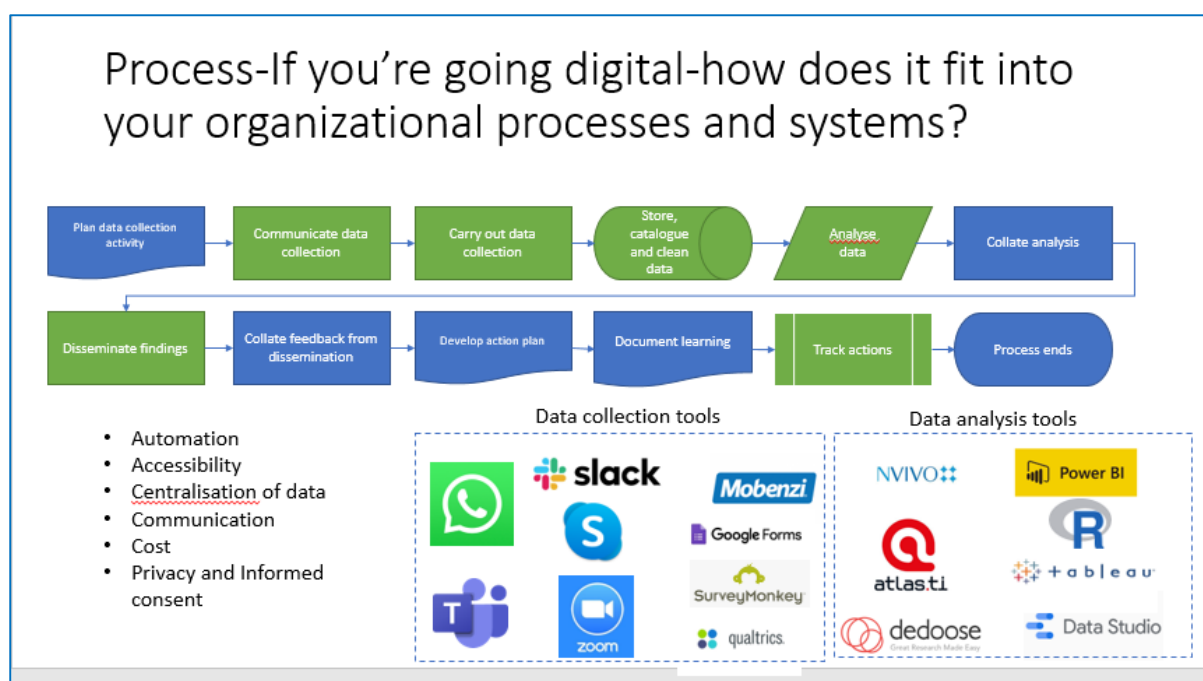
- Where do we start?
- How do we pick up from where we left off?
- Do we have the staff available?
- Do we have budget for efficient databases or devices?
- Our data sits in different places – how do we coordinate data collection, how do we marry different data, how do we use our data?
- How do we do manual data collection if this is called for?
- How do we get hold of our participants?

What these problems suggest is that one of the main issues is how to cross-verify and correlate data from different sources (and data that has been gathered differently in pre-Covid stages) in order to do an integrated analysis.

Asgar shared some survey results on how Covid-19 has affected the ability of organisations to carry out M&E, linked to their own digital capacity (see slides 5 and 6). What is becoming apparent is that the main trend in M&E is to embrace 4IR and digital tools and capacities. NGOs themselves need to find new ways of working digitally, even (or especially) in non-digital beneficiary contexts. Operational processes in many NGOs need to shift to being more digital – this is an opportunity to look at what you do manually and consider shifts for future efficiencies. Think ‘now’ but also beyond for better monitoring in future, in relation to those who are part of programmes which will be monitored and evaluated, and your own staff who need to carry out these activities.

To see Asgar’s full presentation, click [here](#).

Developing an M&E plan or framework can help guide organisational transformation for M&E. Consider also new efficiencies in terms of auto-transcription and data privacy protocols (see slide 11 for examples).



Asgar shared the experience that Allan Gray Orbis Foundation went through in regard to integrating digitisation into its organisational systems and processes. The programme was moving towards online learning platforms in any case, but had to adapt in other instances where on-site or face-to-face interactions with students and graduates were no longer an option. They have learned some lessons on practicalities and sustainability, which led them to question WHY they are collecting certain kinds of data, and to consider WHAT they really need to know. This has led to a leaner approach to impact measurement and management. Undergoing a review of your M&E frameworks in this way can help organisations focus on doing what is required when it is required, which is suited to social enterprises which are trying to re-shape themselves.

Asgar discussed a number of practical strategies for continuing with M&E in the current situation. These include suggestions such as carrying out a needs assessment in order to prioritise; considering issues in relation to data policies; using gatekeepers and key informants if you can't access your primary beneficiaries; working with other organisations that may have similar data points. He provided links to a number of useful platforms, and shared details of online M&E courses that will provide more information (see presentation).

Comments and responses

- Some of the sensitivities in relation to the 'people aspect' of communicating online were discussed. For example, we need to be sensitive to silences: is this due to lack of understanding

or lag because of uneven connectivity? We need to find tactful ways of checking people's understanding. We also need to take people's data costs into account.

- How do you build rapport and buy-in for a new intervention if you can't have a face-to-face launch or event and have to use online means? Some suggestions here included: targeted communications to different groups in an intervention; set up sub-groups and give them dedicated staff members/ programme officers to interact as 'moderators'; remind them that they are part of a community or group with a shared goal; use the programme Theory of Change as a bonding tool.
- The Theory of Change element is really important as it helps with buy-in and mutual understanding of the different stakeholders involved.
- In some sectors (e.g. ECD) in informal contexts and rural areas lack of data and technical knowledge is a huge issue, and using platforms such as Zoom and sometimes even email is not feasible. WhatsApp and sms become the only options. One suggestion was USSD surveys that work with sms dumb phones that can be paid for by the organisation that needs to gather data.
- Participants noted that there are real learning opportunities currently happening, including BRDIGE CoPs, the EduCovid TIG and the Glocal digital event which will focus on interactions between local and global perspectives on Covid-19 responses.



Tools and Terminology (Nyaradzo Mutanha, Tshikululu Social Investments)

In our regular Tools and Terminology session, Nyaradzo shared definitions and examples of key M&E Terms:

Triangulation is required to check one data source (e.g. focus group views on a topic such as gender violence in an area) against other data sources on the same topic (e.g. statistical data/ police reports from the same area) in order to verify its accuracy.

Triangulation

The analysis of data from three or more sources obtained by different methods. Findings can be corroborated, and the weakness or bias of any of the methods or data sources can be compensated for by the strengths of another, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the results. For instance, you can triangulate data collected from a FGD with monitoring data.

Logical Framework

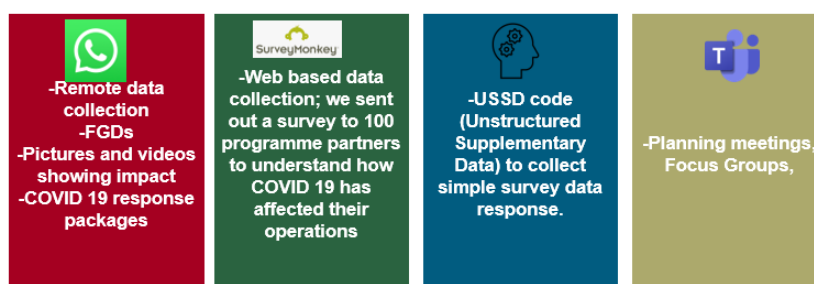
A management tool used to improve the design of interventions. It involves identifying strategic elements (inputs, outputs, activities, outcomes, impact) and their causal relationships, indicators, and the assumptions of risks that may influence success and failure. It thus facilitates planning, execution, and monitoring and evaluation of an intervention.

Logical frameworks are a design tool for programme interventions, charting the causal relationships between programme elements.

Nyaradzo also noted another example of adapting M&E during Covid-19 through using geographic information system maps which show where your organisations are working. This helps in planning Covid-19 responses, as organisations can identify priority or neglected areas. Mapping is vital to show beneficiary and spend numbers at provincial levels.

Click [here](#) for the presentation.

Tools and Resources



Margie closed by noting that BRIDGE, SAMEA, Khulisa and Tshikululu look forward to seeing the same level of engagement at the next CoP meeting which will take place on 28 July 2020.

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