

BRIDGE Monitoring & Evaluation Community of Practice

Virtual Meeting held on 6 October 2020



The year of Covid-19 and online CoPs

The last M&E CoP of 2020 marks another year of successful collaboration between BRIDGE, SAMEA, Khulisa, and Tshikululu in the planning and management of this community, and in particular in dealing with the changing processes brought about by Covid-19.

CoP facilitator Margie Roper (Khulisa Management Services) gave us a brief overview of what we covered this year:

- The March M&E CoP was BRIDGE's first fully online CoP meeting, prompted by the start of Covid-19. We discussed problems and challenges in data collection and how to address these, and looked at the terminology around dosage. At the start of Covid-19 we were only beginning to think about the consequences of lockdown on projects and on M&E.
- As the pandemic took hold, in May we discussed coordination of educational responses to Covid-19, and the need for evidence to inform decisions and project adaptations. The focus was on innovative responses by projects, and the M&E tools that could help us collect data in this context.
- As the issue of schools closures and re-openings took centre stage, the psychosocial needs of all those in education – learners, parents, teacher, school leaders – were highlighted. The presentation and facilitated workshop by the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI) highlighted the importance of mainstreaming psychosocial support during times of crisis (and in general) and explored various tools for monitoring such support.
- This final CoP focuses on the recognition that there are long term implications for life in general post-Covid-19, and for education in particular. The focus was on how school closures have exacerbated the learning backlogs and increased learning gaps for many learners: what data do we have on this, how do we approach the issue of learning losses, and how do we adapt our programme evaluations which were planned around pre-Covid circumstances?

Margie also reminded people that communities of practice are all about interaction, engagement and networking. These principles need to be remembered even in the context of online CoPs. BRIDGE is currently reflecting on lessons learned about online CoPs: the member survey conducted was a first step in this process. Read the survey findings [here](#).



Presentation from DBE: How do learning losses impact on evaluation plans and practices? (Nompumelelo Mohohlwane and Debra Shepard, DBE)

The first part of the presentation focused on Covid-19 related data gathered by the DBE around school closures, and the second part on the M&E processes and tools used.

Click [here](#) to see the whole presentation



**COVID-19 and
basic education:
Evaluating the initial
impact of the
return to schooling**

6 Oct 2020

Debra Shepard from DBE began by explaining the context and origin of the data currently being used by DBE to track the impact of Covid-19 on schooling. In 2020 the Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAM) was put into effect in order to gather relevant data. The National Income Dynamic Study (NIDS) is a multi-generational, nationally representative survey which has been conducted regularly since 2008. Over 7000 individuals were selected from this pool for the NIDS-

CRAM 2020 survey which focused on Covid-19-specific perspectives and experiences. See full details of respondent numbers and survey time frames in relation to school dates on Slides 2 – 4 of the presentation.

The following categories of data were collected:

What were the attendance rates after reopening?

As applied to the grades which were officially open in June and July, (Grades 7, then 6; Grade 12, then 11), the picture is as follows: lower high school grade attendance of approximately 62% for Grade 6, and 80% for Grade 7; while the higher grades showed attendance of approximately 78% for Grade 11 and 83% for Grade 12. See slides 7 – 8 for detail. This translates into a number of ‘days’ of learning losses for different grades (see slide 9). Debra noted, however, that ‘one day’s school loss’ does not necessarily equate with ‘one day’s learning loss’, but is closer to 1.25 days of learning in the context of the overall school calendar. In sum, Grade 12 lost about 21% days of learning whereas lower down these figures rise to up to 50%. In addition, these can’t be viewed as final figures as rotational learning will mean further time losses, and we can’t predict further closures. It also needs to be noted that ‘attendance’ was three times higher amongst wealthier households. However, there could be some confusion around the concept of attendance: does this mean only physical attendance at school, or could formal, structured online learning sessions be construed as attendance? In addition, this could be reflecting school readiness issues in poorer socio-economic contexts, where some schools did not reopen.

What were people’s perceptions about returning to school?

Reopening schools in a pandemic has emotional elements as well as logistical ones. There are new protocols to follow, the school day and its timetables look different, and schools also tended to close unexpectedly in response to infection rates. All of these factors cause anxiety amongst parents, caregivers, learners and educators. Some of the public contestations around reopening (e.g. by unions, School Governing Bodies and even student bodies) have added to these anxieties. The survey instrument did not really allow for drilling down into the range of points of concern: one of the limitations of the survey was the fact that, due to Covid-19, interviews were conducted telephonically and could not be longer than 20 minutes. It was therefore difficult to define the nature of the anxieties expressed, which could include health and safety risks to children and other household members, or the quality of teaching by anxious or substitute teachers. Scheduling complexities for different children in different grades, or in the context of rotational learning, could also cause anxiety, especially for women who take on most of the child care responsibilities.

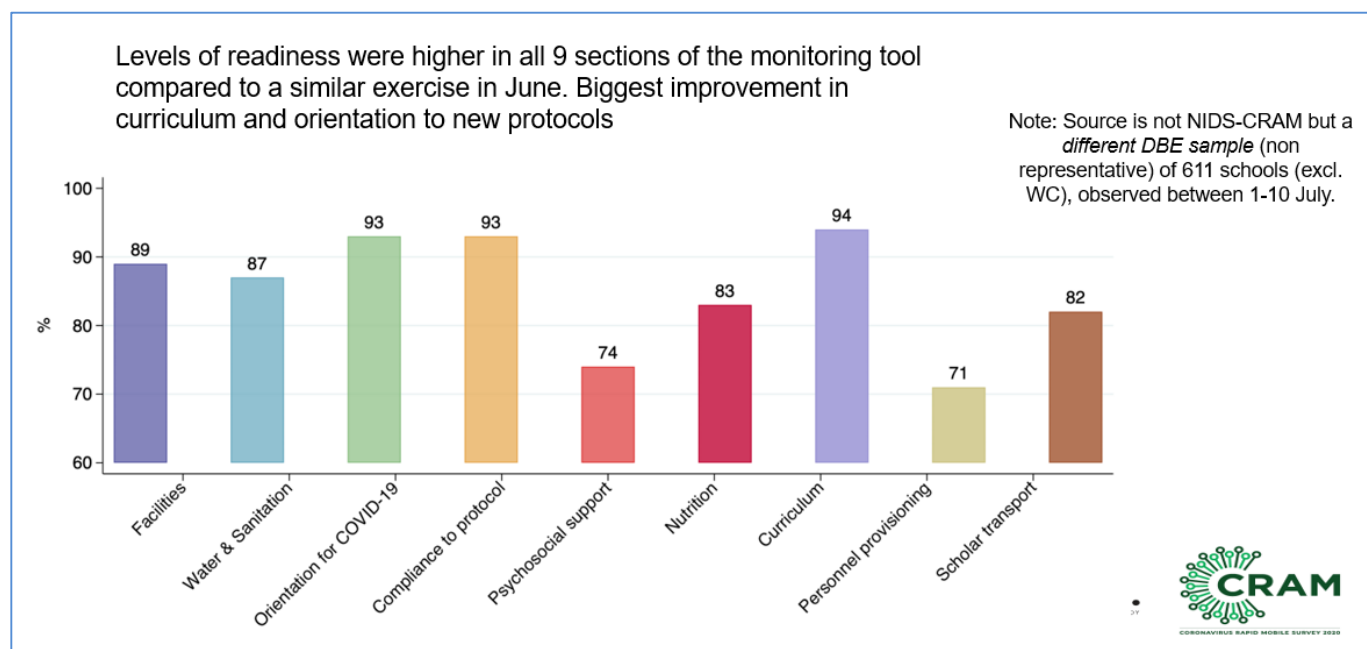
Over 70% of the respondents expressed concern over school reopening (see slides 12 – 15). One interesting factor is that there was very little difference in whether or not respondents were talking about open grades or grades that had not reopened. In other words, parents might be worried and

yet still send their children to school. Caregivers are faced with balancing two types of concerns, health issues or worries over learning losses. There is also a split between different kinds of households, with concern at lower levels in wealthier households.

How ready were schools to receive returning learners?

Nompumelelo Mohohlwane from DBE stressed that ‘...what matters ultimately is the extent to which the reopening of schools contributes to the spread of the virus.’ She referenced research reports which suggest that children are not the main spreaders of the virus, and that there is little evidence to suggest that closing schools slows down the pandemic. She also noted that access to schools is crucial for the National School Nutritional Programme (NSNP), which benefits over 9 million children by providing school meals. This support was not available during school closures, with detrimental effects.

School readiness has been measured according to **nine thematic areas**, as illustrated by the slide below:



Slides 19 and 20 give further statistical information on school closures, the rates of Covid-19 infections in school (higher amongst teachers), and the NSNP.

Parents are aware of the risks posed by Covid-19, but are equally aware of the need for schooling to resume. It is especially important for those who for various reasons are not able to take part successfully in online learning. Nompumelelo concluded by emphasizing that schools must stay open, with a focus on long term recovery.

What were the challenges and lessons in relation to M&E resources?

NIDS panel data allows for rich background data over an extended period of time with a stable sample, which is a key advantage for data analysis. The telephonic survey data collection process had some limitations, noted as follows:

- Telephonic interviews can sometimes be challenging, and need to be limited to 20 minutes.

- While questions were posed in appropriate languages, there can sometimes be nuances in meaning when questions are versioned into different languages.
- With 50 field workers, there may be inconsistencies in the ways in which answers are interpreted.
- There were tight time frames in terms of gathering, cleaning the data for analysis.

Some of these factors were mitigated by the fact that there was cross checking against different data sets and a range of other sources, and team work for data checking. See slide 23 for more detail.

Slides 24 and 25 list the papers and technical reports that have emerged from the CRAM process, and can be accessed on <https://cramsurvey.org/reports/>. The School Monitoring Survey can be accessed from the DBE website through a research request process. Finally, the NIDS-CRAM questionnaire and data are available here:

<https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za/dataportal/index.php/catalog/NIDS-CRAM>.

The following was also shared:

From Nompumelelo Mohohlwane: a report by Gustafsson and Nuga Deliwe provides a good discussion on how learning is being considered, accounting for where SA was prior to COVID and how learning loss and longer term thinking is being considered in the COVID-19 context. You can access it here:

https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Gustafsson.-Nuga.-How-is-the-COVID-19-pandemic-affecting-educational-quality-in-South-Africa_-1.pdf.



Facilitated discussion: Looking at evaluation in times of chaos (Donna Podems, OtherWISE)

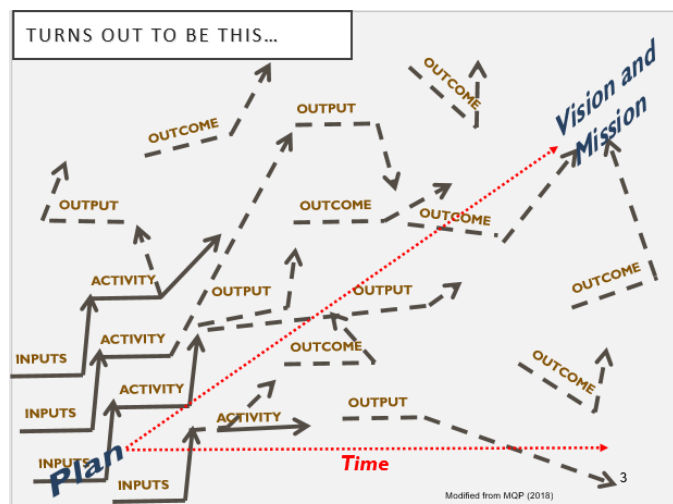
Click [here](#) to see presentation

Donna Podems is an M&E specialist who has worked at Stellenbosch University and the University of Johannesburg, and is currently the founder and director of OtherWISE. She brings 20 years of experience working with governments, civil society, nongovernmental groups, international donors, and foundations to conduct monitoring, evaluation, strategic planning and training. The aim of this session was to hold an interactive discussion on how M&E can respond in agile ways to rapidly changing learning contexts such as those brought about by Covid-19.

To orientate participants for the discussion, Donna shared a few insights. Traditional M&E

approaches begin with the intended strategy and plan, setting out the 'deliberate activities' (inputs, activities, short term outputs) proposed in order to get to the intended results or objectives. However, if something like a pandemic hits, most activities are derailed and a whole lot of unexpected outcomes happen in unexpected ways, as illustrated in the slide alongside.

In times of change and chaos, we should move away from traditional ways of



thinking. These circumstances prompt innovation and flexibility, so for monitoring and evaluating we need to ask different questions and use different M&E systems, tools and indicators.

Donna suggested that the Developmental Evaluation (DE) approach can help us in this regard. DE is designed to document conditions of complexity and unexpected interdependencies as interventions unroll. The approach therefore works well for contexts of high uncertainty characterised by uncontrollable factors.



These slides illustrate that, overall, DE promotes more strategic and agile M&E planning and implementation. Its key characteristic is using M&E as a learning tool in order to adapt an intervention to respond to changing circumstances and unexpected factors. In the current context, this might include the shift to home learning, or ways of dealing to lack of access to school sites during closures. Links to further reference material is given on the last slide of the presentation.



Participant inputs

The main topics raised were as follows:

Learner/ Baseline Assessments

- What do we do about M&E activities implemented pre-Covid, such as baseline assessments? Can we test learners for learning losses and generalise from those samples? Estimating the impact of any interventions and factoring in Covid-related learning losses will be difficult. Donna noted that using a DE approach doesn't mean that we have to exclude any of the M&E data and baselines already in place in a project, but we can incorporate DE to capture any project innovation around unexpected changes, such as the role of home learning. If we can't focus on learner performance outcomes in the ways originally planned, we can use DE to try to understand what is actually going on with learning. Any data on learning at this time is useful.
- Pre-covid baseline assessments still provide useful data. If hardly any work has been done since these, new baselines will be needed. In addition, professional conversations with teachers will be required; teachers will need to report on where their learners are in relation to the trimmed curriculum, and these insights will be critical for 2021 planning.

- Learning losses can also be tracked through looking at learner workbooks and other types of data collection.

Foregrounding Developmental Evaluation

- It was noted that it is easier to pivot to DE for an organisation's own internal programme M&E than for externally-appointed evaluators. With clients there is sometimes a fixed term of reference; this requires negotiation to change, and working with clients to stress the problem-solving nature of DE. DE can be combined with other evaluation approaches that may already be in place, such as utilisation-focused evaluations.
- The challenge for NGOs is getting understanding from the donor side. Some evaluations are donor-driven, and not all donors buy into the DE approach but want implementers to report against log frames already in place. How do we bring the three pillars of funders, evaluators and implementers together to understand agile ways of tracking the project impacts and the Return on Investment (ROI)?
- This highlights the need for ongoing conversations between the three players. This is easier in the context of established, long term relationships. Evaluation specialists should be the bridge between the donor and the implementer. The DE approach in particular brings in new learnings around possible changes to implementation and these must be communicated to funders.
- Being transparent on the criteria used for monitoring will be helpful to donors. We need to be clear about the indicators we are using: what should we track now, and how does this relate to what should we track next year?
- One participant noted that her organisation has adapted their strategy in the light of Covid-19, and they are now trying to understand how to phrase their new outcomes and how to use the term 'impact'. How does she convey this to her funders? Does she just try to 'tell a good story' as the rationale? Donna noted that evaluation is not a personal opinion, and that the key factor is to be transparent with evidence about why you have made certain decisions. You can approach a donor with a narrative, but be sure to have evidence to back it up. Consider what kinds of evidence specific donors tend to highlight – e.g. quantitative or qualitative. Your 'story' needs to be credible, based on the data you share.

Involving learners in evaluations

- Learners themselves can also be involved in evaluations. At what point do we shift from a top down approach and involve children and learners in the decision-making processes that directly affect them? Are they not the primary beneficiaries?
- Benita Williams responded to this point by noting that the American evaluation association recently spoke about engaging children in evaluations on their blog AEA 365 blog - see: <https://aea365.org/blog/icce-tig-week-engaging-children-in-international-and-cross-cultural-evaluations-by-michele-tarsilla/>. She shared the following tips:
 - Hot Tip # 1: Try to "walk the equity talk" and engage children fully in your evaluations. To this end, move as much as possible towards the right of the Child-Focused Evaluation Spectrum.

- Hot Tip # 2: You do not need to work on a Child Program evaluation to engage children. Engaging children in evaluation is not just “something nice to do”- it is a necessary act of responsibility and accountability.
- Hot Tip # 3: When conducting a child-focused evaluation, follow a Human-Rights Based Approach and frame the related questions and rubrics based on global normative documents.
- Hot Tip # 4: Engage Children creatively.
- Hot Tip # 5: Gain field experience in child-focused evaluation to avert the risk of “doing harm” during overseas assignments.

Curriculum issues

- Nompumelelo from DBE noted that this is a good time to reflect on the curriculum. The Assessment Policy Statements (ATPs) are being reworked to cover skills achieved over two years rather than one year, so curriculum components are moving around in relation to the trimmed curriculum. Life skills will be incorporated into language skills, using the same content to save time. Schools will have some say in implementing their own timetables. The main challenge schools will face next year will be how to address differentiated learning and learner levels, and NGOs need to consider how to support teachers in a sustainable way in teaching a diverse classroom.
- For 2021, programme and M&E planning should focus on these new kinds of needs from a teacher’s perspective.
- Issues of inclusivity and learner special needs also need to be brought back into play.
- Tracey Butchart from Reflective Learning noted that it is well known that there are historical backlogs in learner skills in mathematics. Numerous maths diagnostics assessments over the past three years record pre-Covid maths backlogs of 4-6 years among Senior Phase and FET learners. These need to be addressed from the grade of origin to be able to successfully catch up. School closures will worsen these learning losses; however, at the same time the pandemic offers the opportunity to highlight both pre-existing and new learning losses, and to consider broader interventions to address these. For example, her organisation has developed a diagnostic on maths proficiency on 81 fundamental concepts in maths which provide a customised catch-up overview to bridge these.
- Janet Marx from the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust agreed that, as a funder, they have seen evaluation evidence showing backlogs of 4-6 years in maths, and added that there are also literacy/language problems. Covid-19 lessons also show the need for additional psychosocial support.



Reflection: How have we have used M&E in 2020, and what we can take forward into 2021?

Margie reminded all participants that they can find all the Tools shared over this year in the 2020 CoP meeting highlights: go to the BRIDGE Knowledge Hub at <https://www.bridge.org.za/knowledge-hub/> and click on *Find a Community of Practice* on the drop down menu on the left. Select *M&E*

Community of Practice and you will be able to find all the meeting highlight reports with links to tools and presentations.

Benter reminded participants that this CoP is in the process of being evaluated; the final evaluation report will be ready by the end of the year. BRIDGE would really like to get feedback from people regarding any of the tools they have used this year, and to this end we will be sending out a short survey.

One participant noted that, in her role as both an implementer and an evaluator, she has found it hard to change tools in mid-stream because it is difficult to get buy-in from others involved. The M&E CoPs have been helpful in this regard as they provide content for critical conversations with her Board and with staff members.

Thinking ahead, we would like participant views on what to cover in 2021. Suggestions gathered through Mentimeter were as follows:

Inclusivity in education	Developmental Evaluation (DE)	Case Studies are helpful – DE case study	Participatory approaches
Impact reporting	Different approaches to evaluations and case studies	Collection of change stories	Function shift of ECD to DBE
NGOs sharing learning experiences from evaluations, or challenges to their evaluations	Ways of educating donors re different evaluation approaches	Role of the teachers in education evaluations	Fields or sectors other than education? Health? Strengthening government?
Constructive feedback on M&E attempts by ‘amateurs’	Blending different evaluation approaches	How to look more deeply at psychosocial support and schooling	Role of geomapping technology in M&E
M&E of non-centre-based and home-based ECD	Unbundle DE further	Decolonising evaluation	

Margie noted other themes that had emerged in the meeting:

- We need to consider the bigger circle of how data is used, even to the extent of informing global studies on education (for example).
- We need to look more closely at the interactions between funders, evaluators and implementers.
- We must not forget participatory evaluation, equity and inclusion.



SAMEA UPDATE (Benita Williams, Benita William Evaluation)

Benita reminded everyone of the upcoming SAMEA conference and capacity-building workshops. More information can be found at:

SAMEA 2020 virtual Capacity Building Workshop Website (<http://www.samea.org.za/virtual-conference>).

There are international world-class experts such as Dr Michael Quinn Patton who will be hosting some of the workshops, and these are learning experiences not to be missed. The workshops are open to members and non-members and some spaces may still be available.

See some examples of topics in the snip alongside.

19	Mon	9am - 1pm	Adapting Your Systems and Processes to Promote Evidence Use
		Course: 2 dates	Strengthening Evaluation Data Analysis & Visualisation capacity Using Advanced Microsoft Excel
		Course: 2 dates	Developing a Theory of Change - A Step by Step Process
		Course: 2 dates	Integrating Gender and Social Inclusion into Evaluations
		Course: 2 dates	Evaluative Thinking for a Changing World
20	Tue	9am - 11am	Made in Africa Evaluation: Decolonizing our thought and practice
		11am - 1pm	How to Transform Your Report into A 2-Page Infographic Summary
		2pm - 4pm	Blue Marble Evaluation for Global Systems Transformation

Benita explained the benefits of becoming a SAMEA member, and how to join (see slides below).

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- Click on the word **'JOIN'** to start the registration process
- Follow these simple steps and
- Upon completion, you will receive an invoice for payment. Submit this to info@samea.org.za and you will soon be activated!

Website: www.samea.org.za Twitter: @SAMEA_ZA
SAMEATalk: talk@www.samea.org.za EduCOVID TIG: educovid@www.samea.org.za

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Benter Okelo	BRIDGE	Margaret Roper	Khulisa
Beatrice Watermeyer	Independent Consultant	Melissa King	BRIDGE
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Benni Sokhela	COUNT	Michele Botha	IEB
Bheki Ngidi	PILO	Miriam Chikwanda	
Carlen Vorster		Mokgodu Maake	eThutha Learning Centre
Caroline Tuckey	Flying Children	Mthulisi Tshuma	
Catherine Langsford	Litasa	Nadeen Moolla	Pearson Marang Education Trust
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Lucille Smith		Zama Mboyisa	Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy