

BRIDGE MONITORING & EVALUATION COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: 9 March 2023

From evidence to impact: using research effectively to improve learning outcomes



Background and context

The facilitator Margie Roper gave a brief recap of M&E CoP themes in 2022, which focused on doing data better. Through masterclasses, practical activities and expert input, the CoP discussed issues such as data quality, data visualisations, and data potholes. In 2023 the CoP will continue with a broader scope on the role of research and evidence in monitoring and evaluation for the purpose of systems improvement (as well as programme improvement) for the education sector as a whole.

The National M&E CoP is led by BRIDGE together with its partners who bring M&E expertise to the team: Khulisa (Margie Roper: CoP facilitator), SAMEA as the association for M&E professionals, and Tshikululu as a funding body with a focus on M&E.

Margie also welcomed those new to the CoP. She emphasized that the aim of the CoP is for participants to share experiences in M&E. We would like to encourage people to come forward to present, to pose questions, to share their issues and challenges so that CoP members play a role in setting the CoP agenda. The team will support those who wish to give input. Contact melissa@bridge.org.za in this regard.



Presentation: *Leveraging on strategic partnerships to reinforce the capacity of government and local education partners* [Thandeka Mtobi, VVOB]

Click [here](#) to see all slides

VVOB was founded in 1982 and currently works in eight countries, several of these on the African continent. The key goal is always to strengthen local education actors in their own contexts, with a particular focus on programme sustainability through enabling country ministries and educational institutions to take ownership. To this end VVOB works primarily through memoranda of understanding with education authorities and ministries, assessing needs and developing projects in synergy with these actors. It also works with funding partners such as The LEGO Foundation (see slide 9) and technical and knowledge partners (see slide 10).

Thandeka gave an overview of VVOB's current work in South Africa. The impact of Covid-19 on education has been huge, and the resulting need for changes to programmes and outcomes has been one of the drivers of VVOB's move to a more research-focused agenda.

VVOB's four pillars address the continuum of education and the linkages between stages:



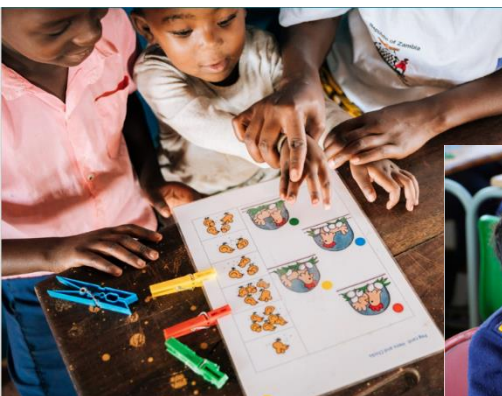
At each stage there is a focus on **quality teaching** and **effective school leadership**, implementing programmes in the different contexts as required.

Currently VVOB's work is concentrated in KwaZulu Natal (KZN), working with the National Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the KZN Provincial Department. ECD is a focal point here, due to its importance in laying foundational skills for later learning and ensuring that children are school-ready. At primary school level there has been a focus on language, literacy and maths, due to the crises identified in these key areas. Climate change has also become an important area, and VVOB has just concluded a project empowering teachers to integrate climate change issues into their teaching subjects; very positive feedback has been received on this programme, in particular in relation to changing mindsets on environmental issues.

Professional development is central to the implementation of programmes, and VVOB works with the South African Council of Educators (SACE) so that courses can be endorsed and teachers acquire CPTD points. While VVOB facilitates training only to those directly in funded programmes, there are a number of courses on the VVOB Learning Management System as well as on the SACE website which are freely available for use.

Examples of current and future programmes are listed on Slide 13. Thandeka noted that these programmes are informed by ongoing research conducted by Department of Basic Education, the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation and noted education specialists such as Brahm Fleisch. These interventions in turn generate further research to inform system improvement.

Early Childhood Education



Primary Education



Teacher Development





Q&A: Participant Comments

- We know that there are many good programmes implemented by NGOs which are not replicated or taken to scale, because they are not integrated into the system as a whole. VVOB is an example of the value of making programme choices based on the needs of the system. This means that when VVOB and their evaluation/ research partners come up with an evaluation process or with a piece of research, those outputs are partly "owned" by the system owners. This helps to build the case for replication and scaling. In this context partnerships become part of a system strengthening process.
- The VVOB-supported Funda Udlale Nathi programme funded by the LEGO Foundation is an example of research and learning being put at the centre of a project, with an emphasis on systems building and post-project success which has been built into the project from the design and inception phases.
- It would be interesting to get more detail on how an entity such as VVOB keeps track of their different partners and monitors programme impact. How do you marry VVOB's indicators and criteria with a specific organisation's goals?
- In the ECD sector, local authorities are important 'system owners', with a number of different entities and government departments at local levels that need to be involved. At the last BRIDGE National ECD CoP meeting (16 March 2023), the Real Reform for ECD shared information on its campaign to help ECD centres and service providers to get ECD included in the local Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). Find out more at <https://www.ecdreform.org.za/#local-gov>.



Presentation: *How research can inform implementation and promote scalability: two case studies*

[Sahar Mohy-Ud-Din, VVOB]

Click [here](#) to see all slides

Sahar introduced her presentation by highlighting the difference between research and M&E, noting how each activity informs and reinforces the other. At the start of a programme, research done can inform the design of concept notes, design of the intervention itself, and design of the M&E framework for the intervention. During and after an intervention, evidence gathered by M&E can contribute to further research findings.

One case study example discussed was the BLEND Project, aimed at identifying and implementing what works best in blended forms and different modalities for professional development for teachers, to strengthen learning through play for mathematics at the Foundation phase. Research into existing evidence on what works in Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) – that is, what are the enabling conditions for success? – was required: for example, what are the issues relating to access, digital skills, use of Learning Management Systems, transfer and application of skills to practice? The research asked these questions, then used the evidence gathered to formulate the BLEND intervention programme

for CPTD. Research also informs the potential business case and cost implications for an intervention. Sahar noted too that implementation has to be adaptable; for example, in this instance the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that several iterations had to be made in response to changing contexts, while changed outcomes still needed to be linked to the original intentions. While the Theory of Change (ToC) guided the evaluation design, one learning was that incorporating outcomes mapping into the implementation process helped both evaluators and implementers to be on board with the project. The report on the BLEND project is available on VVOB's website.

Researchers, M&E practitioners and education project implementers need to understand the benefits that targeted research bring to an intervention. VVOB's Implementation Research Model setting out the links between research and the intervention is summed up in Slide 5.



Issues for Implementation Research:

- ❑ Use of evidence to design concept notes for funders – situational analysis, structural analysis, system leverage points, materials, instructional design features, content development of LtP modules, needs assessment
- ❑ Documentation- you won't know what works, or how to improve so you need to figure it out- cannot do this is there is no document trail (Backer, 2004).
 - ❑ *What has VVOB done? Create live project documents where iterations to theory of change and implementation are recorded*
- ❑ Sustainability/Scalability
 - ❑ *How can evidence-based interventions be implemented so they'll last over time, and how can principles for promoting sustainability be incorporated into implementation research?*
- ❑ Impact- identifying level of impact and appropriate measures in relation to what the intervention aims to deliver on i.e. ToC

The second case study presented was the New Teacher Induction (NTI) programme developed for the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and piloted and evaluated in three provinces.

Slides 6-10 set out the Theory of Change and selected findings from the pilot evaluation. The NTI materials are on both the VVOB and DBE websites.

In terms of the research model, interest lies in using the evaluation findings to inform discussion about how to take the NTI to scale. VVOB uses a scalability checklist to determine when and how scaling may or may not be successful. Further steps were outlined, including commissions which share learnings, challenges and data from all levels of the system (national, provincial, district and school). Sahar noted the need for a common language for speaking about inputs and outcomes, and how indicators are understood and how data is collected. This also applies to understanding what scale means in each context, so that there is accountable reporting within a common framework.

She ended by sharing another example of VVOB research as captured in [VVOB Working Paper](#) on empirical research on Professional Learning Communities.



Q&A: Participant Comments

- Can implementers also be evaluators?

There is a role for implementers in terms of collecting monitoring data, and there will be an element of evaluation in deciding how to respond to this evidence and use the data to make any changes to their implementation. Internally, there must be an understanding of monitoring progress in relation to project outcomes. But it is also critical to have objective and external evaluators who take a bird's eye view at different stages in a project.

- It was also noted that we need to strengthen the role of internal evaluators in implementing organisations or service providers; this has not been efficiently promoted in South Africa.
- We need to remember that globally we are in crisis mode due to climate change, and the UN Secretary General has placed the world on 'red alert'. Are we in South Africa responding with enough urgency to this in the education sector, and how can we expand on our role here?

While VVOB has used climate change as a transversal theme in its evaluations, in the last five years there has been an increased sense of urgency in relation to integrating climate change awareness into the curriculum. There are moves to embed climate change projects across different subject areas in schooling and in vocational training as well, and even in ECD. The *Keep It Cool* project refers to a network of educators being supported to vocalise climate change education, including specific support for

geography and science teachers. VVOB is Involved in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) with the private sector as well as with DBE.

- Climate resilience is a critical theme from a research and M&E point of view as well. How can people use this information and embed climate in all programmes in cross-cutting ways? Climate issues should not be on a separate track. What are the indicators and how could we track these in educational programmes? The BRIDGE M&E CoP should explore this theme further.
- In South Africa, SAMEA and the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation have developed a guideline on how to incorporate ecosystems health as a criterion in evaluations.
- Who are the donors currently funding climate-focused projects?
The World Bank and UNESCO are known to fund these. VVOB works with the Belgium and Flemish governments.
- Scaling up of effective impact is another critical area that we often speak too glibly about. Scaling also links to building sustainability of impact.
- How should we go about selecting and using research to inform programme design?
Strategies include looking at literature reviews, finding best practice case studies, trawling through evaluations which set out project strengths and weaknesses, finding synthesis studies, and gathering both global and local evidence about what works and what doesn't work. Draw on and pool any expertise within your own organisation, and link to subject matter experts. Relationships with producers of research are key, and researchers can also learn from implementers.
- It was also stressed that NPOs need to have evidence to back up any funding proposals – research can help with access to funding. To get funding you need to understand current trends and learnings.



TOOLS AND RESOURCES - *Research Resources*

[Benita Williams, Benita Williams Evaluation]

Benita noted that academic research can sometimes be difficult to access online, and can also be quite dense to wade through. She suggested finding a few key experts in your area of interest to follow on Twitter, and be kept up to date with bite size pieces of information. She also recommended a podcast series called Education Matters which can be found on the link: <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/pod/show/education-matters9/episodes/Language-Series-ejrm1v>

Synthesis studies which pull together information from a number of sources are very useful. Currently there is an extensive open access resource which can be downloaded as e-PDFs on

Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Interventions in South Africa. **Free digital copies can be downloaded at:**

<https://resourcehub.oxford.co.za/higher-education/resources-higher-education/early-grade-interventions/>.

The three volumes contain a range of pieces from subject matter experts (many of whom participate in BRIDGE CoPs) on the topics and on related interventions. Slides 3-5 list all the chapters in these volumes.

Finally, both the BRIDGE and SAMEA websites are repositories of information gathered and shared on a range of education and M&E issues.



SAMEA UPDATE

[Benita Williams, Benita Williams Evaluation and SAMEA representative @CoP]

The South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) fulfils a number of roles for M&E professionals and other interested parties. It hosts training events, topic-specific seminars and international conferences, as well as advertising assignments to consultants. An important benefit for members is the building of their own networks, linking M&E professionals in spheres such as health as well as education, and promoting ongoing learning in the field of M&E. (See Slide 1 and Website: www.samea.org.za)

While the BRIDGE M&E CoP has an implementer focus on M&E in education as well as being for evaluation professionals, SAMEA is an association of M&E professionals across all sectors. There is always an education track at the SAMEA conference. There are also regional SAMEA chapters. The slide below gives information on SAMEA events.



Thematic areas for 2023-2026

- **M&E addressing systemic crises:** focus on climate change, ecosystems degradation and just and equitable transition
- **M&E for adaptive management:** focus on rapid evaluations, virtual evaluation, and use of M&E evidence for adaptive management
- **Made in Africa Evaluation:** focus on indigenous knowledge systems and promoting African evaluators; African Evaluation website being reactivated
- **MERLTech:** focus on implications of rapid developments in technology on M&E
- **Investing in impact:** focus on contributing to social investment discourse to improve IMM practice and utility
- **M&E Capacity Building and EEs, Competencies:** Support SAMEA's mission by contributing to the competence and capacity of the M&E sector at all levels
- **M&E and Leadership in SA:** A developing area; Local Government COP in development stages

Past and upcoming events

COPs and TIGs

- M&E for Just Transition: meets monthly
- MERLTech COP: 1st meeting 24 March, quarterly meetings
- Emerging Evaluator TIG: 2nd Meeting on Friday

Partners Forum (24 March): held to engage partners in thematic areas and plans for next three years

gLocal: 29 May – 2 June

SAMEA Round Robin: September 2023 – hybrid approach for knowledge sharing and networking. Stay tuned!

Emerging Evaluator TIG Webinar

Join us at our next EE TIG Webinar. We will be unpacking and discussing all you need to know about Rapid Evaluations with Prof Ian Goldman and Gift Mmolotsane

Facilitator: Khumo Pule

Date : Friday, 31 March 2023

Time: 13:00 - 14:00 (SAT)

Venue: Zoom (Please note, the Zoom link will be sent once RSVPed)

Free Webinar!

RSVP: <https://lnkd.in/d88U5J6M>



The CoP facilitator Margie Roper then closed the CoP with thanks to the presenters, reiterating the invitation to all participants to contact BRIDGE if they are interested in presenting at any of the events this year.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

	First Name	Last Name	Organization
1	Arista	Bouwer	Institute for Balanced Living.
2	Ashnee	Inderjith	TREE
3	Beatrice	Watermeyer	Independent consultant
4	Benita	Williams	Benita Williams Evaluation
5	Braimoh	Bello	Centre for Statistical Analysis and Research (CESAR)
6	Christine	Waldie	
7	Dave	Temane	Centre for Statistical Analysis and Research (CESAR)
8	Dorette	Louw	Book Dash
9	Dr Joyce	Raanhuis	
10	Dr Rudi	Venter	
11	Duduzile Edith	Nkosi	
12	Dzifa	Tse	
13	Eleanor	Hazell	SAMEA
14	Elekeana	Nyirenda	
15	Franck	Katalayi	
16	Garth	Spencer-Smith	Ukufunda Education
17	Geraldine	Mutambala	
18	Giles	Gillett	NASCEE
19	Gill	Naeser	
20	Heather	Hadebe	Play Africa Group NPC.
21	Heaven	Nen	

22	Jason	Bygate	
23	Jenny	Dry	Institute for Balanced Living.
24	Jerome	Steenkamp	
25	Jesse	Webb	
26	Johannes	Ranoko	SmartStart early Learning
27	Joyce	Raanhuis	
28	Kaley	Le Mottee	Ntataise
29	Kedibone	Mosala	Lesedi Educare Association
30	Kerry	White	
31	Khosi	Nkambule	BRIDGE
32	Koketso karabo	Manyaka	
33	Lebohang	Letsela	
34	Leticia	Taimo	
35	Lezelle	Strydom	Capacitate
36	Lisa	Willson	OUP here
37	Lucy	Mjojo	
38	Malusi Leonard	Mazibuko	Free State Education.
39	Mandisa	Magwaza	DPME
40	Mandla	Nkosi	
41	Margaret	Roper	Khulisa
42	Marion	Bakker	IkamvaYouth
43	Marion	Bakker	IkamvaYouth
44	Maryla	Bialobrzieski	Saide
45	Melissa	King	BRIDGE
46	Merunisa	ismail	
47	Michelle	Peters	
48	Modiehi	Mthimkhulu	
49	Mutsa	Chinyamakobvu	
50	Nare	Mahwai	
51	Nargis	Motala	
52	Nicolette	Vigeland	Go for Gold
53	Nokuthula Thuli	Mashiyane	
54	Noluthando	Nkebetwana	
55	Nomandla	Mkwananzi	gold-youth.
56	Nomonde	Mkhize	TREE (Training and Resources in Early Education)
57	Ntombikayise	Nkcithakala	Olico Heather Hadebe
58	Patience	Voller	BRIDGE
59	Patience Tsitsi	Chinyanga	
60	Pieter	Mostert	Axiom Education
61	Portia	Ravhutulu	
62	Precious	Msimango	
63	Rebecca	Mhere	Social Impact consultant.
64	Rebecca	Wakeford	Midlands Community College
65	Rememberance	Chimeri	M&E consultant at Trialogue

66	Rolland	Malongete	CoJ Skills Development
67	Rosaline	Pineteh	CESAR
68	Rosemary	Wildsmith-Cromarty	NWU
69	Sahar	Mohyuddin	VVOB
70	Simangaliso	Twala	
71	Sinovuyo	Tanci	
72	Siyabonga	Malinga	
73	Steve	Zimri	
74	Sylvia	Baguma	Gold Youth.
75	Tamar	Boddé-Kekana	Khulisa
76	Thandeka	Mtobi	VVOB
77	Thembakazi	Kojana	
78	Thembi	Mahlangu	
79	Thoko	Goniwe	
80	Tracey	Appollis	Michael & Susan Dell Foundation
81	Tshandapiwa	Tshuma	
82	Tumi	Moalafi	
83	Yenziwe	Yenziwe	
84	Yonke	Maholwana	Trevor Noah Foundation
85	Zamabongo	Mojalefa	
86	Zamokuhle	Thwala	Khulisa