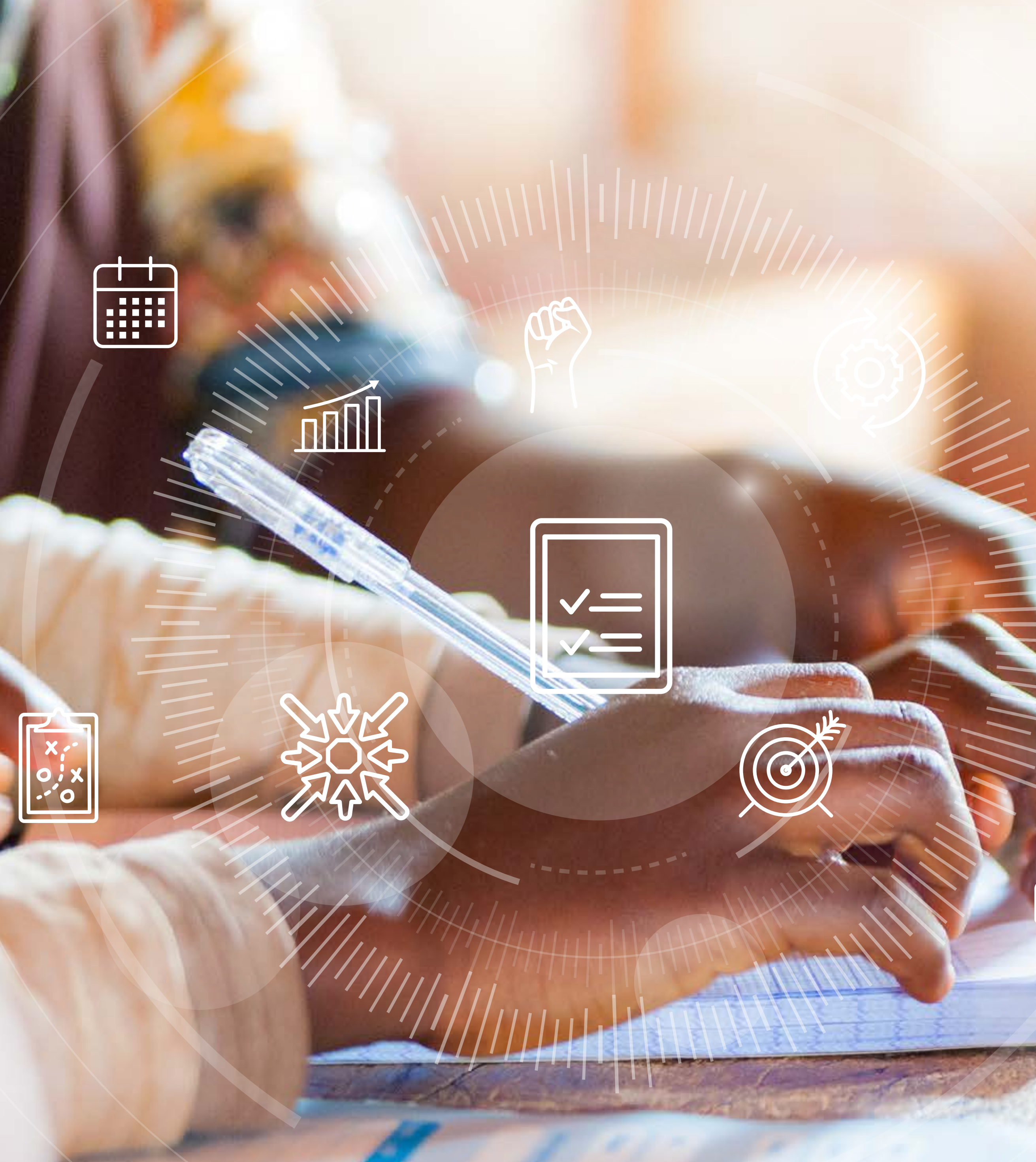

ZENEX FOUNDATION

Lessons and Reflections about Implementing M&E in South Africa: An anthology of articles by Zenex staff, M&E experts and NGOs

Advancing mathematics, science and language education

Contents

Monitoring and evaluation at Zenex Foundation

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is an important and integral part of the Zenex Foundation funding approach. It is important to our ongoing learning, informing project design and rollout and adds to the body of evidence about education interventions. When Zenex started to embed M&E practices within the organisation, there was a high level of buy-in from the Zenex Board, who recognised the importance of this approach. Our Board have been strong proponents of M&E to drive an evidence-based strategy. Our M&E approach includes, planning and budgeting for M&E activities, developing internal M&E capacity and using evaluations for learning and influencing policy and practice in the evaluation sector.

Our funding approach has developed over time. In the early years, we had a scattershot approach of making small investments in multiple projects. This changed in the early 2000s to investment in a few strategic projects. Over the years the quality of our evaluations also improved. We initially struggled with evaluation design, particularly impact evaluations. This was in part, due to the limited evaluation experience within Zenex and partly because the M&E sector was in its infancy stage. Our expertise in commissioning and design grew simultaneously with the education M&E sector, and developments such as the establishment of the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA), an increase in scholarship, growth in the number of accredited qualifications, and the establishment of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME).

Our investment in M&E has informed our strategy. Not all evaluations have shown positive results from our funded interventions. However, in the spirit of learning, we have shared these with the sector. Through our M&E work, we have seen the need to build capacity in the M&E sector, particularly in education. While we have an ongoing commitment to M&E in our portfolio, we will also contribute to strengthening M&E in the sector. The importance of building capacity for education M&E was further cemented by the findings of our M&E landscape study, which showed that the demand for M&E and capacity-building in M&E remains high in the country and that the greatest constraint in M&E programmes in the country is the lack of capacity.

While we have made significant strides towards embedding M&E, the next step in the journey is to focus on utilisation and uptake. This means maximising the use of evaluation findings to inform our projects and to optimise the influence of findings on wider policies and practices. Ultimately we aim to contribute to finding solutions to educational problems through evidence generated from evaluation studies.

In 2018, we ran a social media campaign on M&E with inputs from various writers. This publication includes an anthology of articles from Zenex staff, M&E experts and NGOs reflecting on their experiences in M&E.

“Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is an important and integral part of the Zenex Foundation funding approach.”

Introduction to M&E concepts and how we conduct it at Zenex

In conversation with Lettie Miles and Lauren Fok on conducting M&E at Zenex Foundation

Lettie Miles
Senior Programme Manager at the Zenex Foundation. Her portfolio focuses on school programmes in Mathematics, Science and Language education. Her responsibilities include stakeholder engagement, programme design, project monitoring and management of external evaluations and research.

@MilesLettie

The value of monitoring is that we can better understand our beneficiaries and the context in which we implement projects. We can see the project in action, identify gaps in implementation and capacity issues. Monitoring gives insight to the nuances in context and can help to manage risks in the project. These lessons can then be shared in the sector.

Q&A with Lettie Miles

What is the nature of your role in the programmes that you manage?

I work with complex projects that have multiple partners and multiple intervention components. Most of the M&E that I do involves managing and coordinating multiple stakeholders such as the Department of Basic Education (DBE), partners and external evaluation agencies. My monitoring involves holding all aspects of the project and partners together to drive a common vision and strategy, and create an enabling environment for evaluations to be conducted and for learning to take place. I also ensure that implementation aligns with the vision and strategy.

What do you generally monitor and for what purpose?

We generally monitor contract compliance and budgets. This includes monitoring whether the delivery is taking place as per the implementation plan and monitoring quality through actions such as attending training sessions, and school coaching sessions. We also monitor to troubleshoot, problem-solve, facilitate engagement with stakeholders to learn and share ideas, and to manage risk and reputation. In essence, it is ensuring my eyes and ears are on the ground to have knowledge of the context and to understand what works and does not work in practice.

What do you see as the value of monitoring?

The value of monitoring is that we can better understand our beneficiaries and the context in which we implement projects. We can see the project in action, identify gaps in implementation and capacity issues. Monitoring gives insight to the nuances in context and can help to manage risks in the project. These lessons can then be shared in the sector.

What have been the benefits and limitations of the evaluations of your projects?

The benefit of evaluations is that they are an independent view of whether the intervention model works and whether it is giving us the desired outcome. Evaluations help to elevate project thinking by explicitly clarifying the project logic. Below are some of the limitations I have identified with evaluations in the projects that I have worked on.

- The evaluation design is often limited by our budget constraints.
- Evaluations are usually commissioned after the start of project implementation.
- The complexity of our project designs create difficulties with attribution.
- Often during the course of the evaluation, we realise that data is not available, accessible or helpful for the evaluation question.
- We try to plan and pre-empt everything that may be a risk to the success of the evaluation but we have realised that even with our planning, there are still issues that transpire.

Lauren Fok
Programme Manager at the Zenex Foundation, where she is responsible for projects in the Schools and initiatives. We sat with her to discuss her involvement in M&E for the programmes that she manages.

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Q&A with Lauren Fok

Zenex does clarification workshops at the beginning of an evaluation; How do you think this has helped project partners?

Clarification workshops in the context of Zenex projects have helped to:

1. Promote buy-in and ownership by all project stakeholders and partners.
2. Forge a common vision and build consensus.
3. Clarify roles and responsibilities of different partners.
4. Build relationships by understanding the various organisational cultures of partners.

Clarification workshops take place at the inception phase of an evaluation. They bring together all the intervention stakeholders in order to clarify and come to a common understanding of the objectives, theory of change, indicators and assumptions of an intervention. Unpacking assumptions is important during this process because they give the theoretical underpinning of why we chose a particular approach. The product of a clarification workshop is a document that articulates what we hope to achieve and how the activities we undertake will help us to achieve the desired outcomes.

Tell us about a time where you changed an implementation plan following feedback from an evaluation report.

I managed a Zenex Literacy project where the original plan was to conduct one-on-one coaching sessions with Foundation Phase teachers. The evaluation revealed that the school context did not allow for individual coaching sessions. We discovered that Foundation Phase educators teach the whole day and some of them could not stay for coaching after school because they are part of lift clubs. At the end of year one, the project revised the approach and adopted a blended approach that involved group coaching sessions at phase meetings and one-on-one sessions during classroom observations. There have been several other examples where preliminary evaluation findings have resulted in immediate revisions to the approach and remedial action to improve project implementation.

Have you had an experience where the findings of an evaluation were contrary to what you expected?

In instances where the findings of an evaluation are contrary to what is expected, we engage the evaluator. The evaluator may probe further on the finding by using additional sources. There are cases, however, where the findings are valid, and Zenex and the evaluators moderate the tone to ensure that the message is well received. We do evaluations to learn. We engage in this action research in order to test ideas and answer questions that we do not have answers to. It is therefore important for evaluations to be completely objective and be communicated in a tone that fosters learning for all stakeholders.

You have been involved in sharing school-by-school feedback on evaluations; what has been the feedback of principals?

Research has shown that the school community and beneficiaries do not receive feedback when they have participated in research studies. For Zenex giving feedback is a critical part of the process. Zenex is not extractive and we understand that there is a two-way responsibility. The schools provide information and we have a responsibility to provide feedback.

Schools and principals appreciate the feedback because it gives them an opportunity to respond, challenge findings, ask questions of clarity, and learn in the process. Zenex has also tried to make the evaluation reports accessible through the visual depiction of empirical data. Reports mirror school performance and we deliver them with practical recommendations for how schools can improve.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning systems

by Robert Worthington

Rob Worthington
Director at Kwantu

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Why does MEL matter?

In a world of limited resources, we need to make informed decisions on the best use of funds. Monitoring, evaluation and learning is the practice of:

- continually monitoring the performance of your project or programme;
- selectively evaluating your assumptions about which activities result in the changes you seek to achieve; and
- ongoing learning to understand how you adjust and improve what you are doing.

Together these practices can help you to understand which activities are most effective. As the scale of your work grows, putting in place robust systems to support monitoring, evaluation and learning become essential.

MEL systems and the different options that exist

There are a bewildering number of different systems available to support MEL in your work. However, most systems tend to fall into one of the following categories. Understanding these categories can help determine which is best suited to your programme.

Survey - survey tools are designed to collect responses to questionnaires. They streamline the process of designing and publishing questionnaires. They often make it easy for programmes to collect responses using mobile devices. They may also assist with the analysis of the data collected. Take a look at the range of tools built on Open Rosa / SDK for options in this area - https://enketo.org/openrosa/

Indicator - indicator tools are designed around a log frame or results in the framework. These tools focus on helping you define a number of indicators and collect data needed to measure them. In some cases, they will use survey tools to collect the underlying data. They may also assist with measuring trends over time for indicators. Take a look at tools like https://www.mandeonline.com/ and www.logalto.com for examples.

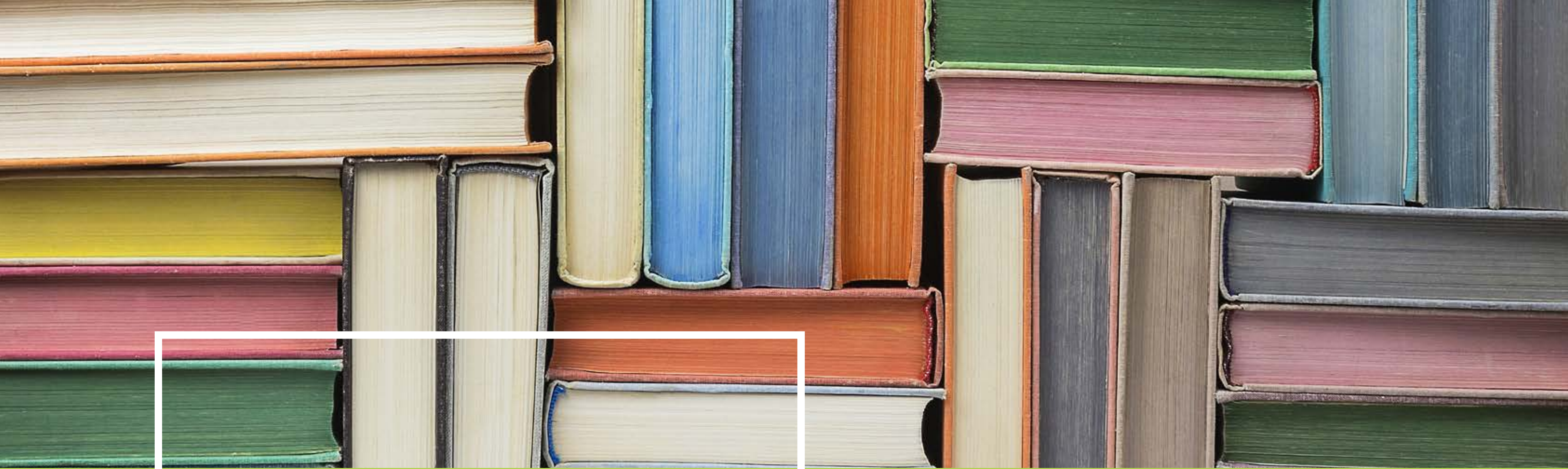
Outcome - outcome-based tools use approaches like most significant change or outcome harvesting. These are based on the assumption that change is complex and unpredictable. Instead of monitoring what you hope will happen, it focuses on tracking outcomes that you see - and then assessing to what extent they resulted from your work. Take a look at http://www.kwantu.net/process-apps/2016/11/25/outcome-harvesting-app for an example.

Administrative - administrative systems are primarily focused on managing the delivery of a service. However, in doing so they can also collect high quality and disaggregated data. An example of an administrative system is registering students in a school, assigning them to classes and tracking their attendance and results. There is a wide range of specialist administrative systems that focus on specific contexts. www.openemis.org is one example focused on the education sector. The Kwantu platform - www.kwantu.net - is an example of a platform designed to create specialist administrative systems quickly and at low cost.

Things that organisations should consider when choosing MEL systems

Before embarking on the process of finding the right MEL system for you, it is important to get the right foundations in place. The most important foundation is to have agreed on a MEL framework that sets out what change you hope to see, what you will do to bring that about and what you will measure to see if it is happening or not. This will help guide which of the types of MEL systems are best suited for you.

Introducing a MEL system can require significant organisational change. The challenges this bring may take time to overcome. Having both a senior champion and a technical lead are important to drive this change. Finally, as you start looking at the options available (or contracting a supplier to create something just for you) we recommend having a clear specification to guide your search. This will help you rule out options that do not provide what you need and focus your energy on what is necessary.



Lessons on commissioning evaluations

Government commissioned evaluations: A reflection from the DBE

by Dr Stephen Taylor and Tshegofatso Thulare

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Stephen Taylor
Director Research, Monitoring and Evaluation at the Department of Basic Education

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The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has commissioned a number of evaluations in recent years. In the process, we have learned a great deal about how to improve policy and programme design as well as about how to conduct better evaluations in the education sector. Notable evaluations include an impact evaluation of the introduction of the Grade R programme (2013), implementation evaluations of the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme (2016), the National School Nutrition Programme (2016) and the National Curriculum Statement Grade R to 12: Focusing on the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (2017), as well as the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS). These were all commissioned in partnership with the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME)

The support of the DPME's National Evaluation System (NES) as well as that received from numerous partners including UNICEF, the Zenex Foundation, USAID, Anglo-American and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, has been invaluable.

If the findings of an evaluation are to be accepted and used to improve practice, it is crucial to gain the support and involvement of key departmental personnel (senior officials and those directly responsible programme being evaluated) from an early stage in designing and commissioning the evaluation. One advantage to our role as commissioners of evaluations is that we have been able to facilitate access to key programme officials and sources of data, as well as to communicate findings to the relevant decision-making forums such as Cabinet, the Council of Education Ministers, and the Heads of Education Departments (HEDCOM). Ensuring that evaluation findings actually influence policy and programmes is never a seamless process, but we have found that the system of requiring the Director-General to sign a management response as well as an improvement plan has provided a useful mechanism for following up on evaluation results. Further benefits include fostering an evaluative culture in the sector, strengthened capacity through exposure to evaluation methodologies and practices, and a greater appreciation of the value of good data and evidence.

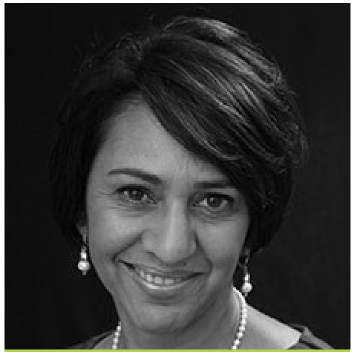
Things haven't always gone smoothly. It requires capacity and coordination to develop appropriate Terms of References; procurement processes weren't always responsive to the needs of completing timely evaluations; limited budgets sometimes restricted the scope of an evaluation; the pool of high-quality service providers proved to be rather narrow; and certain findings were not always well received. A lot of work needs to be done to improve the supply of evaluators and organisations to meet the scale of government projects and BBBEE imperatives.

Overall, the benefits to the sector clearly outweigh any obstacles which have been experienced – now we need to capitalise on these gains. We would highlight three priorities in the next phase. Firstly, the government needs to lead by institutionalising the relatively young National Evaluation System. Secondly, funding mechanisms must be created to ensure that rigorous evaluation becomes a routine process within large-budget programmes. Thirdly, we need to recruit and train a wider pool of young evaluators.

" Overall, the benefits to the sector clearly outweigh any obstacles which have been experienced. "

Commissioning evaluations at Zenex Foundation

by Dr Fatima Adam



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Director at the Zenex Foundations

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Why are education evaluations becoming increasingly important?

There is no doubt that improving education is a high priority for all key stakeholders in South Africa. This is evident through the huge financial investment and numerous initiatives underway to improve education delivery and outcomes. The South African Government allocated R320 billion for education in 2017. This is approximately 6.4% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is higher than other developing countries. In addition, there has been a significant increase in private sector support for education development, estimated at R25 billion.

Despite these huge investments and efforts, education outcomes are not improving at the expected rates. This is evident by the poor performance of South African learners on a range of international benchmarking mathematics and language tests. South African learners continue to perform at the lower end of the spectrum even when compared to their counterparts in other developing countries.

This has led to the widespread increase in interest and support for undertaking evaluations of education projects/interventions in order to better understand what works/doesn't work, under what conditions, as well as how and why things are working or not working. This is leading toward a path of using evidence to drive decision making in the design and implementation of education improvement initiatives.

Why are evaluations important for Zenex?

The Zenex Foundation has always been committed to undertaking evaluations of its education initiatives. Over the past 20 years, the Zenex Foundation has commissioned over 70 evaluations. These ranged from the process to outcomes as well as impact evaluations. The results were used extensively to inform Zenex's own work as well as share its learnings with others. Through the journey, we have also recognised the importance of carefully curating and managing the commissioning of evaluations.

How do we add value through commissioning processes?

For Zenex, it is not about whether we should commission evaluations but rather about how we commission them so that they are better able to inform our strategies and programmes as well as inform education policies and practices.

Whilst the Foundation relies on expert evaluators to undertake project/programme evaluations, it believes that quality evaluations start at the point of commissioning. High-quality evaluations are generally underpinned by high quality commissioning processes. Although commissioning doesn't require the same expertise as evaluators, commissioners should have a basic knowledge of the following:

- evaluation and research processes and design;
- research methods; and
- types of evaluations.

Without this basic knowledge, it is very difficult for commissioners to develop a scope of work and effectively manage the evaluation contracts.

In addition to this basic knowledge, commissioning good evaluations requires consideration of four critical factors. These factors form the scope of work to evaluators.

The first is to develop a clear and explicit description of the project, including its theory of change. The second is ensuring a clear purpose for commissioning the evaluation. Evaluations can be commissioned for various purposes, ranging from improving programme designs and implementation, informing decision-making, to establishing outcomes and impacts, and contributing to knowledge. The third is developing clear questions that are aligned with the purpose. The fourth is knowledge of the costs of the different type of evaluations. For instance, evaluations that test young learners in diverse languages, are geographically spread and in rural areas are more costly.

In the Zenex context, the scope of work informs the call for proposals from evaluators who are interested in undertaking the work. Zenex then short-lists and selects their preferred provider based on an assessment of their proposals against a set of criteria. Once the evaluator is appointed, Zenex has an engagement with the evaluators on whether the project is valuable, whether the questions can be answered and how the evaluator proposes to answer these questions. Often engagement between the evaluator and Zenex involves a robust discussion about sampling, design and methods and the trades offs that need to be made based on cost and feasibility.

Throughout the evaluation process, we remain clear about our role as a commissioner and this guides our level of engagement. Zenex typically has extensive upfront involvement in design and methods and then later involvement in understanding findings and engaging in dissemination and utilisation.

Solving development problems is an increasingly complex endeavour, which calls for a methodical approach of deciding on the appropriate course of action. This approach must be driven by systematic evidence-based approaches to programme design and delivery. This is achieved by implementing a systematic monitoring and evaluation strategy and plan to inform all aspects of the organisation's work.

> "Over the past 20 years, the Zenex Foundation has commissioned over 70 evaluations."

Experience responding to call for proposals by JET Education Services

by Benita Reddi-Williams and Fatima Mathivha

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Specialist Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager at JET Education Services

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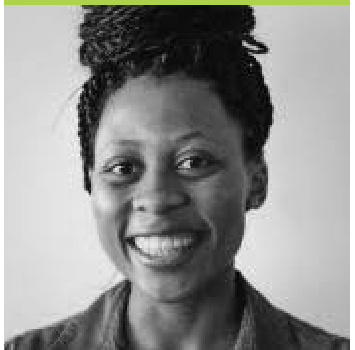

Fatima Mathivha
Monitoring & Evaluation Officer at JET Education Services

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The increase in the call for proposals for evaluation in recent years is likely an indication of growing understanding of the importance of evaluation. More specifically, there appears to be growing interest in understanding how programmes are actually implemented and the 'impact' of particular programmes. And whilst in theory this bodes well for ensuring accountability and improving programming to maximise benefits, the process of responding to calls for proposals brings prevalent challenges to the surface.

Jumping the gun

Poor internal understanding of M&E or lack of planning for an evaluation means that some programmes are not yet ready to be evaluated when they put out a call. However, this often only becomes apparent after contracts are signed and evaluators have been given access to programme documentation and data. This results in one of three options being chosen:

1. dropping the evaluation;
2. using the evaluation budget to develop and embed M&E within the organisation or programme; or
3. onducting an evaluation with weaker methodologies, predominantly assessing observable data gathering perceptions, with an understanding that the reliability of the findings will be compromised by limited evidence.

An unclear Terms of Reference

Project implementers develop Terms of Reference wearing their implementer hats. And although project implementers bring a wealth of knowledge to evaluation, the information most critical for developing a good and realistic proposal is sometimes missing. Here is an external evaluator's wish list, if we're not being too fussy:

- a clear summary description of the intervention with respect to details which affect evaluation budgets and sampling (e.g. the number of beneficiaries, the number of implementation years, location of sites);
- a problem statement;
- a theory of change or (even better) a logframe/logic model;
- an indication of existing monitoring data and existing external databases the project uses when evaluating progress internally; and
- the specific unit of analysis of the evaluation that is required (e.g. a policy, plan, programme, project or system).

The "I" word

Impact has been the black sheep of the evaluation world - with some evaluators doing away with academic rigour to avoid the process of explaining our seemingly niche interpretation of 'impact'.Although impact is generally thought to mean "what difference did we make", conducting an impact evaluation is more of a science that requires specific data and documentation to determine causal relations between programmes and changes, some of which can be collected as part of the evaluation - but at a cost.

The true cost of evaluation

More is always more, so whether clients budget enough for evaluations or not is a whole conversation on its own. What's more useful to understand is that for an external evaluator, allocated budgets for evaluations are often hard to navigate. This is because external evaluators usually don't have the luxury of collaborating with programme managers to consider methodological alternatives that have budgetary implications. As a result, the possibilities that are actually available aren't explored and an opportunity is missed.

What's more valuable than money itself?

Time - an evaluator never has enough of it. This is usually a result of organisational deadlines for the evaluation results to inform strategic and financial planning. But something has got to give, and usually the quality of the evaluation or the scope of the evaluation are compromised. Reliable and useful evaluations are still possible - even in the context of limited resources.

Perspectives on budgeting and costs of M&E

by Gail Campbell

Gail Campbell
CEO at the Zenex Foundation

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I am a strong proponent of M&E as a key lever in evidence-based grantmaking. It definitely adds a cost to the donor and I am sharing my perspective on four key issues to do with budgeting for, and the costs of, monitoring and evaluation (M&E):

1. the importance of allocating grant funding to monitoring and evaluation;
2. budgeting for monitoring and evaluation;
3. funding for the dissemination of evaluation results; and
4. strengthening M&E in the sector.

The importance of allocating of grant funding to monitoring and evaluation

Over the years, Zenex Foundation has been questioned on the amount of money that has been allocated to evaluations. The frequent refrain is that the money could be better spent on beneficiaries, and this is something of a moral conundrum for those of us doing grant making in a context where the education need is so great.

Evaluations are indeed an additional cost to project costs, but it is important to do them. We need to undertake both formative as well as summative evaluations, as it is important for us to learn as we implement. Because the Zenex Foundation makes learning the primary purpose of evaluations rather than only being about accountability, our experience is that partners have found them to be valuable. However, as evaluations are ultimately about value judgements on the impact of interventions, evaluations are not always well received. It is difficult for both donors and partners to get feedback on projects or components of projects which are not working. However, we learn from success and learn even more from failures.

Budgeting for monitoring and evaluation

When I first started at the Zenex Foundation, we dedicated 10% of the project costs to evaluation. However, we don't slavishly follow the 10% guideline anymore as it's more effective to budget according to the defined purpose of an evaluation as well as its value to project partners and the broader sector. We don't commission an external evaluation of every project and thus we have been able to keep the overall costs of evaluations within the benchmark of 10% of our total project funding per annum.

An evaluation can cost as much as 30% of a project's costs. I had an experience of this three years ago when the Zenex Foundation evaluated a pilot of a school-based internships in Initial Teacher Education. We had the project evaluated so we could establish the efficacy of the model and to determine whether the pilot could be replicated. In order to do this, the evaluation needed to consider the various components of the programme – the at-school mentoring, the wrap-around support provided to the intern, the academic distance learning model, the resources needed by the managing agency and tracked the interns in their first teaching role – in order to make an argument about the replicability of the model. This made it a time-consuming process and the evaluation exceeded the 10% guideline.

We as donors need to set up our own internal monitoring systems as well as commission external evaluations of the projects we support. Both have cost implications for the donor and are both equally important.

The importance of dedicating funding to the dissemination of results

The schooling sector is hugely researched in South Africa. Government, researchers, NGOs, evaluators and donors all collect data from schools. Our experience is that little of this research finds its way back into the sector and indeed back to schools. It is vital that we donors take responsibility for giving feedback to project participants, implementing partners, government partners as well as the broader sector, and to allocating funding to do so.

Feedback on evaluation results to schools has been most illuminating. Principals and school management teams have embraced the findings and used the evidence for more informed planning and he of targets to improve learner performance. Dissemination costs include, for example, packaging the findings of evaluations into various fit-for-purpose knowledge products, events with various partners to share information, and sharing on both digital and face-to-face platforms. Doing this helps to build a body of knowledge and evidence about what works and what does not work in education today. Dissemination is the first step to promoting uptake and usage and then the real value of M&E is attained.

Strengthening M&E in the sector

As donors, we request monitoring data from our partners and we must take cognisance of the fact that this has a cost implication for partners. I am of the view that donors need to fund the setup of monitoring systems and contribute to the ongoing human resource costs in NGOs. While monitoring data is important for donor reporting, is also assists NGOs in obtaining real-time feedback on implementation and making adjustments accordingly. The need for monitoring data should not be only an externally-imposed condition of donors but be part of the standard processes and procedures of NGOs. Over the years, the Zenex Foundation has been increasingly supporting our NGO partners to set up M&E systems.

As proponents of M&E, Zenex has also realised the importance of strengthening the M&E eco-system and the pool of experienced evaluators. This includes strengthening M&E at institutional academic level, supporting continued professional development and supporting M&E voluntary associations. We are currently completing a research project on the M&E landscape to better inform future strengthening initiatives.

Ultimately, M&E costs are not merely 10% of project costs. We need to take a holistic approach to funding M&E. Government is increasingly leading the charge in M&E. More and more donors and NGO’s are recognising the importance of M&E. Through experience, I can really attest to the value of M&E in informing the strategic direction of Zenex, as well as contributing to learning in the education sector.

> “We as donors need to set up our own internal monitoring systems as well as commission external evaluations of the projects we support.”

Considerations for evaluation design

Which evaluation methods should we consider? All of them.

by Benita Williams

Benita Williams
Evaluator and Director at Benita Williams Evaluation Consultants

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Those who work in education are acutely aware of the complexity of the problems in the South African education system. No silver bullet solution exists. Despite this, donors like the Zenex Foundation continue to implement initiatives to improve education with the expectation that evaluation should help us learn.

We use ***ex-ante*** studies, process evaluations, economic evaluations, outcome evaluations and impact evaluations to answer a wide array of questions. End-of-programme evaluations frequently aim to answer questions such as:

- "Was the project implemented as planned?"
- "What results were achieved by the intervention?"
- "What is the likelihood that intervention effects will be sustained?"

It may also ask:

- "Why did the intervention achieve good results in context A, and poor results in context B?"

To answer these questions, different evaluation approaches, designs and methods may be appropriate. It is not reasonable to expect that one type of evaluation design can adequately address all evaluation questions in all contexts.

A randomised control trial (RCT) or another quantitatively oriented design such as a regression discontinuity design or propensity score matching might be the best method to answer: "What magnitude of change was achieved by the intervention that would not have been achieved otherwise" in a specific case. It will likely have to be supplemented with other ualitative methods, such as descriptive case studies and ethnographic observation if it wants to answer the important "why" questions.

The NONIE guidance on Impact Evaluation recognises that an RCT is not always required to answer impact questions. Alternative impact evaluation designs could be used when it is not necessary to quantify the effects of an intervention, but the effects still need to be attributed to the intervention. The General Elimination Method and Causal Contribution Analysis are two such designs that rely on mixed-method data collection. Theory-based evaluation is also a widely used alternative.

The ILO pokes fun at the idea that RCTs are some kind of "gold standard" and concludes: "The only standard that does exist is one of methodological appropriateness."

In selecting an evaluation approach, we need to strive for rigour. Michael Quinn Patton, the author of classic evaluation texts such as Developmental Evaluation says, "Rigour does not reside in methods, but in rigorous thinking." If this is true, evaluators and those who commission evaluations are invited to critically engage with more than just the evaluation design. We are invited to embrace evaluative thinking. Only then will we learn from our efforts to solve the education problems.

Resources

The Zenex Foundation conducted a review of its programmes in 2006, and again in 2012 and identified lessons about interventions and evaluations that are worth reading.

An excellent text on quantitative evaluation designs such as RCTs is Shadish, Cook & Campbell's *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs*. It is not an introductory text, however.

Between 2001 and 2008 a debate about Impact Evaluation raged in the international evaluation community. They arrived at a consensus statement in the 2008 publication: the *NONIE Guidance on Impact Evaluation*.

John Mayne's *Contribution Analysis Approach* aims to make credible casual claims about the contribution an intervention is making to observed results using rigorous alternatives to RCTs. Michael Scriven explains the premises of the *General Elimination Model* which aims to identify the modus operandi underlying programme strategies. Theory-based evaluation as explained by Carol Weiss has a long history and examines the mechanisms that mediate between intervention processes and outcomes.

For a good laugh about RCTs as "gold standard" see some of Chris Lysy's cartoons in this ILO publication or on the *Fresh Spectrum* website.

In recognition that our complex problems are not easily fixed, and our evaluations should therefore be responsive to this complexity, evaluation approaches such as Michael Patton's *Developmental Evaluation* and Pawson and Tilley's *Realist Evaluation* have gained traction.

It is increasingly recognised that evaluative thinking is necessary if we want to truly learn. A 2018 edition of the *New Directions in Evaluation Journal* edited by Vo and Archibald interrogates this.

Lessons on evaluation design

by Gail Campbell and Thabisile Zuma

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Any organisation that is committed to improving the quality of evaluations understands that one of the most critical steps is getting the design right. Our own experience in M&E, particularly in designing evaluations has evolved over the years. We see evaluation design as the structure of the evaluation that will provide information/data to answer evaluation questions. The design is determined by the purpose of the evaluation, the programme theory of change, the evaluation questions and of course, the budget.

This is overlaid with various contextual elements, existing monitoring, and performance data. Over time, the design of evaluations at Zenex has progressively improved. Some of the notable improvements include:

- clearer Terms of References that specify the project outcomes and evaluation questions;
- detailed upfront engagement with evaluation teams to ensure that the evaluation is able to adequately respond to the questions that Zenex wants to be answered; and
- clarificatory workshops with all partners in a programme to co-develop/refine the Theory of Change and logic models.

Based on our experiences, here are some of our examples of ways that the design of evaluations can be improved.

1. Quality Terms of Reference

The biggest change in our design process has been developing our capacity to draft Terms of Reference. In the past, we appointed an evaluator and were heavily reliant on the evaluator to develop the evaluation questions, together with the theory of change and design.

This changed as our knowledge improved. In 2008, this hands-off approach came to haunt us, so to speak. We had to commission a review of an evaluation mid-way through the evaluation. The review led to a revised design. We realised that we needed to build more in-house capacity on M&E. We have learnt on-the-job through engaging with our evaluation partners and through participating in M&E training programmes.

As mentioned by Dr Fatima Adam in her article on commissioning evaluations, the process is as follows:

- Zenex develops the scope of work and that informs the call for proposals;
- we put out a call for proposals and interested evaluators submit proposals to undertake the evaluation;
- we then short-list and select a preferred provider based on an assessment of their proposals against a set of criteria;and
- once the evaluator is appointed, Zenex has an engagement with the evaluators. This involves a robust discussion about sampling, design and methods and the trades offs that need to be made based on cost and feasibility.

2. Quality Assurance mechanisms

While our own M&E competencies have improved, we realised that we still needed assistance from M&E experts. As needed we appoint reviewers to comment on the evaluation design. We have had experts on our panels to select service providers and we have experts to review evaluation reports. This has been especially valuable for evaluations of complex and/or large-scale projects. We have appointed quality reviewers who are experts in M&E and/or the education context. The reviewers, therefore, serve as an additional quality assurance mechanism that supports us and the evaluators.

3. Impact Evaluation Designs

The complex education change process and varying contextual factors are a challenge in impact designs. As Benita Williams put it in her article on evaluation designs, the South African education system is complex and no silver bullet solution exists. The same applies to evaluation designs. A Randomised Control Trial (RCT) might be the best method to answer a question about the magnitude of change achieved by an intervention, but may need to be supplemented with other qualitative methods if it wants to answer the important "why" questions. Read the full article: https://goo.gl/yfCjci

Zenex has experienced two problems in designing impact evaluations. These are (i) finding matched control schools and (ii) having sufficient control schools. In our earlier foray into evaluations, we did not apply statistical rigour to determine the number of control schools and we tended to have fewer control schools. While we did this with the good intention of trying to manage budgets, we realised that it affected the rigour of the evaluations and we could not make conclusive claims about whether or not we achieved the desired impact. This was a major critique of our evaluation portfolio in our ten-year review (2007: 32-47) which you can access on this link https://bit.ly/2NbHQs1.

We realised that you can seriously compromise the evaluation design if you are constrained by finances. Evaluators want to ensure absolute rigour when designing evaluations but this can often outweigh the budget for the evaluation. During the inception phase we therefore, have to balance the need for rigour with the reality of our resource constraints. Without compromising quality, we must find the most cost-efficient design given the available resources. In Gail Campbell's article on evaluation costs, she talks about balancing costs with the need for evaluation rigour. Read the full article here: https://goo.gl/59sQJs

4. Mixed method approaches

In the earlier evaluations, we relied mainly on qualitative data and analysis. As we progressed and gained more experience, we looked at quantitative data to determine whether programmes had the desired impact. This change was aligned with the evolution in the field of M&E to combine both quantitative and qualitative data in outcomes and impact evaluations.

We are a strong proponent of mixed methods designs to ensure that we can explain the quantitative data (we made a determined effort not to commission "black box" evaluations). In many of our evaluations, quantitative data is triangulated with qualitative data from observations, interviews, surveys and document reviews.

Our learning continues through our Continued Education Professional Development (CEPD) and through engaging with evaluation experts in the education sector

> "The complex education change process and varying contextual factors are a challenge in impact designs."

Why we use randomised control trials (RCT) in educational research

By Brahm Fleisch

Brahm Fleisch
Associate professor in the Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the School of Education, University of Witwatersrand

Over the past decade, there has been a resurgence of interest in evidence-informed education policies and programmes in South Africa. Specifically, there is a growing recognition that rigorous research designs, particularly designs that include 'counterfactuals' can provide strong findings into what works to improve learning outcomes.

What exactly is a rigorous research design that includes a counterfactual and why should we trust such studies?

There are a number of different 'counterfactual' research designs including:

- propensity score matching studies;
- natural experiments;
- regression discontinuity designs; and
- randomised control trials.

What they share in common is the core comparison of at least two groups (of learners, classrooms or schools) that are as close to identical as possible in both observed and unobserved characteristics. In these studies, one group gets an intervention and the other does not (called the control group).

In randomised control trials, the allocation to groups is done randomly. When we measure the difference in average outcomes between the two groups (intervention and control) at the end of the intervention or any point thereafter, we can discover if the intervention actually works to improve learning outcomes and the size of the impact of the intervention. For example, the intervention group is on average six months ahead of children in the control group at the end of Grade 2 on a learning outcome like accurate word reading per minute.

Why is it important to have a counterfactual?

The key idea behind the 'counterfactual' is that we are able to isolate factors associated with the intervention and not measure other factors or causes of improvement. If we take a standard study that measures correct answers in simple mathematics operations, and we see that average learning gains go up from 35% to 50% between the pre and post-test, could we be absolutely certain that the improvement is caused by the intervention? The answer is no.

An example from the Reading Catch-Up Programme

The experience of the Reading Catch-Up Programme undertaken in the Pinetown District of the KwaZulu Department of Education in 2014 with funding from the Zenex Foundation showed very strong gains in one term for learners doing an English remedial programme. We would have incorrectly assumed that these gains were because of the intervention had we not had ann equivalent control group of learners (and schools) which improved by almost exactly the same amount. The mean difference between the intervention group and the control group was very small and not statistically significant. The findings of Reading Catch-Up Programme randomise control trial helped policymakers avoid a costly decision about implementing a programme that looked good in theory but did not necessarily work effectively in practice in this context.

Conclusion

While randomised control trials and other related counterfactual research design studies are an important part of the tools that policymakers can use to improve decision-making, they are not perfect and need to be interpreted with care. We know that the best of such studies need to be complemented with other research studies, particularly qualitative case studies that provide insights into the actual mechanisms that make these programmes work.

Successes and challenges with implementing evaluations

Implementing evaluations: Successes and challenges from a DBE perspective

By Nompumelelo Mohohlwane

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Evidence-based research, monitoring and evaluation is foundational to rational decision-making when informing policies, programmes and interventions. This is imperative for public policy to have an impact on service delivery, and especially so in the education sector. The information derived from this evidence base determines the value or merit of programmes or policy options by identifying standards, performing empirical investigations using various techniques and integrating these findings into conclusions and recommendations for the sector. In the short-term, this is helpful for programme managers to improve performance and accountability. In the long-term, the knowledge generated for the sector could inform broader programme and policy design, and practices beyond the programme being evaluated.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) leads and conducts several national research, monitoring and evaluation efforts to support the medium-to-long range performance of the education system. This includes:

- comparative analyses using existing data such as the General Household Survey data;
- collecting new data to evaluate progress against sector indicators and goals where such data is not regularly collected;
- conducting research on policy options or prospective programmes and interventions; and
- conducting programme specific evaluation such as the implementation evaluation of the National School Nutrition Programme.

System level challenges associated with implementing evaluations include uncertainty on the value of evaluations, concerns about repercussions, and perceived underperformance. A programme manager may be held accountable for the programme being evaluated, but they may not have control of all the underlying processes due to complexities in the structure, resourcing and the scale of programmes.

These complexities include concurrent functions between national departments as well as the national and provincial education departments; funding that is received directly from National Treasury or Provincial Treasury to nine different Provincial Education Departments but accounted for nationally; and the number of schools in a programme.

These concerns are specifically addressed through highlighting the benefits of undertaking evaluations. This includes opportunities to collect reliable data on concerns which programme managers may have; objectivity and documenting both successes and challenges; identifying ways to improve efficiencies; and providing recommendations that are targeted at the various levels of delivery, including district and provincial levels in addition to the national office.

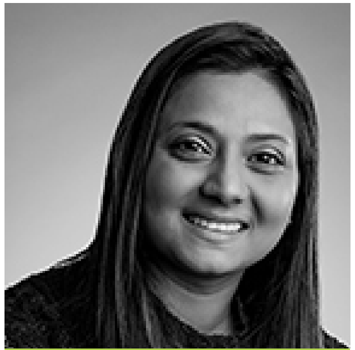
Despite the continuous efforts being made to address these concerns, some challenges continue to persist. Collecting school-level data requires communication with provinces, districts, circuits and schools. The contact details of schools are not always up-to-date, and information may not always be cascaded on time. A further complication arises when an unannounced visit is the most appropriate evaluation strategy: the unanticipated disruption to the school may result in a denial of access to the school and the unavailability of key personnel and information. In some instances the province, district or the school itself may have a different plan on the data collection day.

Once schools have been accessed, the school day may be too short for the planned data collection due to a high number of data collection instruments or delays in logistics to start collecting data at the school. Finally, the school calendar and curriculum activities such as examinations, affect when schools may be accessed and which grades are available. A substantial amount of planning and mitigation strategies are necessary to cater for these data collection processes and unforeseen circumstances.

Although conducting research, monitoring and evaluations in a system as large as ours has its challenges, it is both possible and remains important. Moving forward, the recommendations are for the DBE to firstly adopt existing guidelines and develop new guidelines for research, monitoring and evaluation, in new and existing programmes; secondly, to systematically build capacity among programme managers and advocate for high quality evaluations internally and externally; and thirdly, to ensure that organisational structures such as evaluation Steering Committees include provincial representatives, programme managers as well as the evaluation officials.

What does it take to get stakeholders to participate meaningfully in evaluations?

By Amanda Jitsing



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Picture this scene: It is 10 am on a Monday morning, and the room is filled with evaluators, programme managers, implementers, funders, policymakers and beneficiaries. As joint stakeholders vested in the success of their programme, they have gathered to agree on an evaluation framework which will guide the evaluation. However, whilst some of them understand the meeting's purpose and know how to proceed with the task at hand, others have never even heard of a 'theory of change,' let alone previously seen an evaluation framework. The meeting progresses then, with a few voices tending to dominate the discussion as the others scramble to keep up with proceedings.

Does this sound like effective stakeholder participation in evaluation to you?

The short answer is probably not. In this scenario, there is little room for meaningful engagement between different stakeholders. The voices of implementers, funders and policymakers are largely subdued, and none of the beneficiaries have been invited to the meeting. A number of things might have gone wrong with the meeting. Perhaps the meeting's facilitator was not adept at encouraging discussion. It could also be that stakeholders were not prepared or they were not the right people to attend this meeting. Nevertheless, the outcome is that minimal stakeholder engagement took place during this workshop.

There are two main reasons why stakeholder participation in evaluation is important. Firstly, evaluation theories such as Patton's Utilisation-Focused Evaluation are built on the notion that if stakeholders are engaged throughout an evaluation, they are more likely to use its results. Secondly, stakeholders often hold valuable information about the programme. They can help evaluators understand the programme better and identify the wide range of issues and challenges experienced by the programme.[1] This information influences how the evaluation is designed and questions are formulated.

Stakeholders typically participate in an evaluation by sitting on an evaluation steering committee or attending stakeholder workshops at key points throughout the evaluation. In my experience, the level and quality of stakeholder engagement in these forums tends to vary considerably. An evaluation where the level of stakeholder engagement is weak undermines the credibility of the results, irrespective of how rigorous the evaluation is. If stakeholders are not engaged throughout the process, they are less likely to understand, accept and use the results.

It is not uncommon to find that stakeholders are invited to the steering committee or stakeholder meetings simply to ensure representation. In other words, the primary goal is to get as many stakeholders onto the committee, irrespective of whether they have an interest in the programme or would contribute meaningfully to the evaluation. Not only does this make the evaluation steering committees unwieldy, it undermines the objective of stakeholder participation.

On the other hand, there are also examples of good practice, where stakeholder engagement has been thought through, and efforts made to find the right people for the steering committee. In these cases, the evaluation process and content of the report is enriched through stakeholder participation.

What does it take to get stakeholders to participate meaningfully in evaluations? The first step is finding the right stakeholders, those who have knowledge of, and an interest in the programme.[2] From past experience, I have often seen evaluation steering committees made up of senior programme managers. While this group of stakeholders may have strong knowledge of the strategic objectives of the programme, they tend to have limited knowledge of the day to day operations. Hence, it is necessary to bring in a mix of programme managers and implementers to generate balanced input from individuals with an understanding of the strategic intent and those involved in the execution of the programme. These two perspectives can enhance the evaluation design. One way of finding the right stakeholders is

1 Greene, J.C (1987) Stakeholder Participation in Evaluation Design: Is it worth the effort? Evaluation and Programme Planning. Vol 10. Pp. 379-394.
2 Markiewicz, A & Patrick, I (2017) Developing Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks. SAGE Publications, Kindle Edition.

to create a stakeholder map at the start of the evaluation to identify the types of stakeholders, how they are connected to the programme and their roles in the evaluation process.

Another important group of voices that should be included is the beneficiaries of the programme themselves. Beneficiaries provide a "reality check" on evaluations and bring in the perspectives of those who the programme is designed to help.[3] Unfortunately, they often cannot be included in evaluation steering committees due to practical and time constraints. For example, while teachers might be able to validate or refute the findings on their experiences of coaching programme, it is unlikely they would be able to attend regular evaluation steering committee meetings. Nonetheless, where possible, it is critical that the voices of beneficiaries are included in the evaluation process. This can be done by creating specific opportunities for beneficiaries to participate in the evaluation.

Once the composition of the evaluation steering committee has been balanced, one needs to ensure the invited stakeholders remain engaged throughout the process and contribute both effectively and meaningfully. Although, most evaluation steering committees begin with many members, the numbers tend to dwindle as the evaluation progresses. Stakeholders, under pressure from other work commitments, stop attending or come to meetings sporadically. This can be disruptive for an evaluation, particularly if it delays decisions on key milestones delivered during the evaluation process.

Creating practical commitment mechanisms is one way in which to deal with this challenge and foster the desired meaningful participation. Evaluation steering committees should consider agreeing on a schedule of meetings upfront, requiring stakeholders who cannot attend a meeting to provide written feedback, and asking members who miss a certain number of meetings to leave the steering committee or to nominate another representative for the duration of the evaluation.

In practice, there are budget and time constraints that limit the number of stakeholders that can participate in an evaluation. This is why making an effort to find the right stakeholders is a crucial part of evaluation planning and must be done before the evaluation starts. Ultimately, meaningful stakeholder participation is about finding the right number of diverse stakeholders, who are willing and able to share their knowledge of the programme and give feedback to the evaluators.

> "...it is necessary to bring in a mix of programme managers and implementers to generate balanced input from individuals with an understanding of the strategic intent and those involved in the execution of the programme."

3 Markiewicz, A & Patrick, I (2017) Developing Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks. SAGE Publications, Kindle Edition.

Dissemination and use

How do we build our collective capacity in M&E?

By Melissa King

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Not so long ago, evaluation was considered a specialist niche area of expertise: a mysterious and highly technical undertaking only to be carried out by the initiated. There is growing recognition, however, that M&E processes and frameworks are an essential part of all education project work, and that those involved in programmes aiming to improve learner outcomes need to strengthen their understanding of the goals, methodologies and practices of M&E. There is a need to build our collective capacity in M&E, not just as individuals, but as a community working for educational change. Monitoring and evaluation is everyone's responsibility.

Over the past two decades, government has expended a huge amount of energy and resources at both a policy and delivery level on the education system, in an attempt to rectify some of the negative impacts of the apartheid education system. In this it has been aided by private sector and donor organisations, which have also invested significant amounts, and by project implementers such as NGOs and other providers.

There have been concerns, however, that many of these projects have not been effective, and do not offer large scale return on investment - as shown by learner performance in the NSC examination results and international comparability assessments. The education sector in general has recognised the need to focus on how to maximise the effect of education interventions.

In order to do this, we need more data, a better understanding of when and how to gather this data, and how to interpret it in order to track what works and what doesn't in innovations and interventions. In addition, evaluation approaches should be more inclusive: those who are delivering the programmes and working closely with the beneficiaries should also be involved in shaping ways of getting data, and in sharing their knowledge of contextual factors that affect analysis. This is one of the reasons why there has been a growing interest in collaboration between agencies and professionals who carry out M&E, and implementers who have been more used to being at the receiving end of an evaluation.

One way of promoting and supporting such collaboration is through a community of practice (CoP). A CoP is a group of people with a common interest who come together to learn more about it. The sharing of ideas, experiences, tools and resources in a particular field makes a CoP a context in which participants can learn new skills and information. BRIDGE runs a number of CoPs in different areas of education, giving shape to its mission of connecting people, driving collaboration and sharing ideas to shift practice towards quality education. The BRIDGE Monitoring and Evaluation Community of Practice, funded by the Zenex Foundation, has key goals relating to the dissemination of accessible information on M&E, and capacity building in M&E as applied in its members' diverse educational contexts.

This CoP has been going since 2011, performing the useful function of showcasing evaluations on various funded projects, in particular those relating to maths and science. Since 2016, however, there has been a shift towards a focus on the discipline of M&E itself. At the end of 2017 BRIDGE entered into a partnership with the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) to reshape the CoP as 'learning space' for M&E. Both organisations recognised common aims in their work: to share information, resources and knowledge about M&E, and to build capacity around M&E in the education sector.

The launch of this collaboration happened at the first CoP meeting of 2018 on 13th of March, where the aim of bringing together both practice and theory, and accommodating emerging and experienced M&E professionals as well as general education practitioners with an interest in the field, was considered in the context of the needs of CoP members who attended. Organisations present included NGOs, funders, government, municipalities, schools, unions, and education projects.

A variety of M&E 'needs' have been expressed in meetings held so far in 2017 and 2018, and these themes are addressed in the M&E CoP programme through a number of methods. These include 'expert' presentations, with question-and-answer sessions; interactive group work, at which tools are used or experiences, perspectives and problems shared through a structured activity; 'how to' brainstorming sessions; and useful updates on what is going on in the field. BRIDGE then disseminates all presentations or tools shared to its CoP database, and more widely through its Knowledge Hub on the BRIDGE website. In addition, we circulate a detailed 'meeting highlights' report, capturing discussions and ideas shared and including further links to resources.

M&E Community of Practice members share some ideas on how the CoP can be a learning space:

There should be opportunities to discuss 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.

The 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.

We need 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 we work?

We need to improve our own ways of interpreting and reporting data in order to inform new decision making.

A Community of Practice serves as an immediate learning space for those attending, as well as having wider impact as CoP members take their learnings back into their own organisations and spheres of influence. The BRIDGE M&E Community of Practice hopes to contribute to more insightful use of data in the education sector in order to improve programme quality, and to enhanced collaboration between evaluation professionals and education implementers

> “The education sector in general has recognised the need to focus on how to maximise the effect of education interventions.”

Education evaluation: Reflections from the field

By Henre Benson

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The Monitoring and Evaluation experience of implementers of education interventions can be traumatic. NGOs, already stretched to capacity, face the prospect of their internal processes being brought under scrutiny, deliverables and dosages counted and outcomes tested.

The reality is that in many cases the impact is unclear and attribution is nearly always uncertain. Nobody sets out to fail. Most interventions are based on a theory of change, model or idea (whether rigorously tested or just drawn from years of experience) and a belief that what is intended will work. In many cases that belief is well founded as these initiatives are changing lives. There are countless personal stories of learners, schools and teachers presented with new opportunities, brighter futures and hope as a result of training, support or an essential resource provided.

However, when viewed through the lenses of quantitative evaluation frameworks or controlled comparison groups, the impacts are not always as expected. Naturally the evaluation results can and will be defended. Within highly complex systems, education being one, mitigating factors will be cited, such as contexts beyond project control, systemic factors or challenges just too overwhelming to address within the confines of time-bound, resource limited education interventions.

Given the extent of time, money and resources invested in education interventions it is understandable that efforts to monitor and measure impact by the sector are now entrenched. The work of evaluation is to illuminate the successes and failures, but it should also to be transparent about its own limitations and put these as a preface not a footnote.

So whilst most right thinking, learning organisations will respect and appreciate the value of evaluations, it can be said that evaluations are not always well planned, executed or communicated.

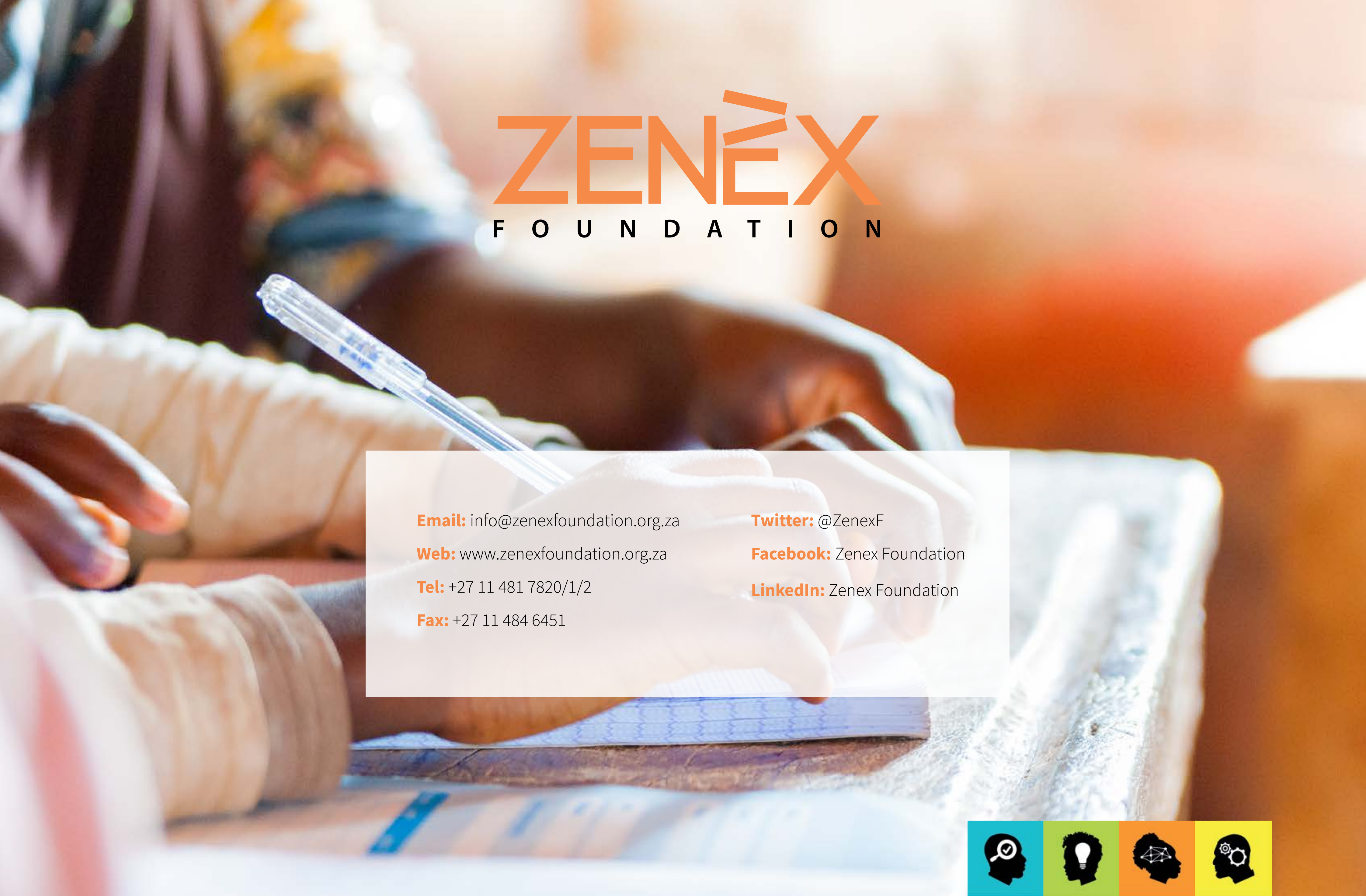
A few represent the worst in class. For example, when evaluation is exclusively summative, usually designed post-hoc and draws illegitimate conclusions based on superficial data. These tend to be compliance driven ("Oops, did someone say we need to evaluate this?"). Then it is executed simply to meet this request. Similarly, when an evaluation is commissioned after the start of an intervention, it typically prompts a scramble for baseline data, and the cobbling together of frameworks and indicators.

I think what evaluators do need to recognise is that they are not necessarily experts in the fields they are evaluating (sometimes they are). In some cases they are not even experts in social research, but just someone with a laptop anda keen ability to draw graphs and write compelling reports. Fortunately, with capacity building and professionalisation commitments coupled with recognition of the important role evaluation plays, these types of evaluators are a diminishing breed.

If there is honest and transparent engagement they will facilitate a process of developing a framework alongside the experts and not impose unrealistic measures to simplify their work. Education development is complex and happens within a system of super-complexity. The work of teachers and teacher-educators is not simple, nor should be the work of those evaluating it.

In my experience, well planned, executed and communicated evaluation is an opportunity for all stakeholders to reflect and learn; if that is how your organisation chooses to respond. Achieving this requires management of knowledge, relationships and process, not just process.

The most worthwhile evaluations are developmental and aim to improve impact and outcomes as implementation takes place. This means adopting an agile approach and afail-fast-forward mindset. It also means that evaluation reports should be shared widely and timeously, and that opportunities to engage with them are created. That engagement requires leadership and, if necessary, the courage to change the things we can. The worst evaluations are those that are ignored, both by implementers and donors



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