SAMEA CONFERENCE 2017: EXPEREINCE FEEDBACK

Being selected as one of the attendees for this year's SAMEA conference, the same year I made a decision to channel my career path from social work to program monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has been exuberantly a defining moment in my career path thus far. In addition to getting well acquainted with experienced professionals, gaining in-depth understanding of the M&E field, I also increased knowledge on M&E related skills such as data management, data visualisation, and logic model development through insightful workshops, presentations and discussions.

The 'Strengthening M&E data management and analysis capacity using advanced Microsoft Excel' workshop was a great start to the conference as it allowed me to build on the my basic excel knowledge. I learnt new skills such as creating pivots table, manipulation of data for analysis and creating of graphs and charts for interpretation. This workshop made a remarkable input to my work as I am able to apply these skills in my data management tasks. An outstanding takeaway I drew form this workshop was the importance of interpreting data for the benefit of the audience for which it is intended. This helped me to remember that some of the vital purposes data collection is for program accountability and learning; as a result delivering data in a manner that is not understood for the improvement of the program is not constructive and defeats the purpose of M&E.

The second workshop entitled, 'Developing a Purpose driven Measurement, Monitoring and Evaluation system (PDMM&E) and Institutionalizing Outcome Management through a standardized logic model approach' equipped me with an understanding of the requirement in developing logic frame models that are outcome focused. The key take away from this workshop was the realisation that most projects and programs in developing countries are output focused instead of being outcome focused and for that reason most programs are crumbling to the ground having made no impact. The workshop taught me how to design and implement a performance result measurement strategy including stating outcome objective statements. Although I had some basic knowledge on logic models, this workshop both refreshed my memory and equipped me with in-depth knowledge of a standardized logic model development. I have not yet been tasked with logic model designing tasks in my work place; however after this workshop I was empowered to confidently request to be involved in the logic model brainstorming sessions in future.

Apart for workshops, attending presentations, awards and getting a chance to rub shoulders with prominent figures in the M&E field was another highlight and an inspiring moment of the conference. I was mostly intrigued that discussions are underway for the future sustainability of SAMEA and that through the AfRea networking, emerging evaluators will not fall off the wagon without guidance and assistance. SAMEA as an organisation has reassured me of a successful outcome in my endeavours to be a successful evaluator, as I know that there is help and continued guidance. For all this experience I am thoroughly grateful to my sponsors. **Sincerely Miriam Chikwanda**