



### Editor's Note

### 2009 Impact Evaluation Conference Cairo: Reminiscences

**A**s frontiers of knowledge expand, innovative ideas and techniques change not only our perceptions about different issues but also how we do things. Applications of these ideas and techniques go a long way in improving the quality of life in the continent. Some say that the faster we adapt and utilise these ideas, the better for our development. The Monitoring and Evaluation fraternity in Africa has been burning the midnight oil in an effort to develop appropriate models for evaluating development.

In light of the above, it is important that M&E practitioners critically examine current evaluation approaches/methodologies to see if they are appropriate to our specific circumstances and how they can be aligned to emerging paradigms in the global arena. It is also important to continually improve M&E approaches for better results in view of ever changing conditions.

The 2009 Impact Evaluation Conference held in Cairo brought together leading M&E practitioners and experts from all over the world and continent to take stock and brainstorm on key issues affecting the profession. In this special edition of AGDENews, we highlight the views of participants with regard to what worked and what did not work well? We also publish reflections on the Conference from the AfrEA President, Dr Florence Etta.

*Alfred*

**T**he AfrEA/NONIE/3ie Impact Evaluation Conference showcased the best of African Evaluation practice in assessing development on the continent. On the other hand, the conference exposed a few challenges that must be addressed to strengthen evaluation practice in Africa.

The 2009 conference, held at the Semiramis Inter-Continental Hotel in Cairo, Egypt, was definitely different from the one held in Niamey, Niger in 2007. And, as is often the case with such high profile gatherings, it elicited a kaleidoscope of feelings among participants.

The theme of the conference revolved around five key questions: How do we know when 'development' is truly successful? How can evaluation contribute to development in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world? What can different evaluation approaches tell us about which policies, programmes and projects work, why, for whom and under what conditions? How can evaluations best be conducted and used to inform policies, strategies and interventions in the continent?

In the above context, AGDENews gathered opinions from a cross-section of participants about their thoughts on what worked well and what did not. Generally, the majority expressed satisfaction with the logistics and quality of presentations made during the conference. However, as the saying goes: 'even a good thing can be improved'

### Ground Breaking M&E Methodologies

*Nermine Wally,  
AfrEA Board Member - Egypt*

**T**he conference offered an overview of the conventional and the ground-breaking methodological fundamentals for M&E practices notably the emergence of Impact Evaluation as a growing concern among pedagogical think tanks/institutes as well as the donor community –how this will influence the work of development practitioners as well as the approaches already adopted in the field - is still unclear.

The research papers presented by fellow African researchers/practitioners provided in several instances the highlight of the conference as far as my learning is concerned— Studies from different parts of our continent (e.g. Patrick E Robin ENCISS in Sierra Leon, Molena Minkova from Bulgaria, Dominique Endamana from Basin du Congo) offered case studies and experimental adoption of RCT, systematic reviews, participatory approaches and the examination of their adaptability in particular contexts which brought the learning closer to what the AfrEA conference is about.

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The value of these presentations, is that they showed the actual strength and shortcomings of some methods discussed during the pre-conference workshops, as opposed to the realities of the field in particular contexts highlighting the politicised environment which in many cases dictates what methodology to adopt, the issue of capacity needs existing within the community of practitioners and stakeholders who directly influence the effectiveness of M&E.

**What did not work well**

Lack of in depth examination of the relevance and adaptability/validity of ground breaking theories/Impact evaluation, Impact learning - a lot of time and effort was spent explaining these concepts, which in many instances were quite evident for many of the audience, and less attention was given to the evidence component as well as the tools and practicality of capturing evidence and adapting the functionality of evidence to feed into policy making.

The absence of the voice of African intellectuals and practitioners from the conference's main scene was conspicuous. Some African scholars and practitioners were indeed present and participated during the parallel sessions and/or special presentations, nevertheless, the core of the conference as well as the main themes appeared to be more donor driven.

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*Dr Florence Etta, AfrEA president (left) with Jess Dart, (right) co-creator of Most Significant Change and Sarah Earl co-author of the definitive manual on Outcome Mapping.*

## **Democratic Elections; Few African Scholars**

*Issaka Traore  
AfrEA Board Member - Burkina Faso*

I was impressed by high number of participants who were supported to attend the conference through scholarships offered by different organisations affiliated to AfrEA. Secondly, the election of the AfrEA Board was transparent, challenging, and very democratic. Thirdly, accommodation facilities and meals were excellent and finally the commitment of the Egyptian volunteers was exemplary. However, the role AfrEA, as the main organiser of the conference, was not visible while pre-conference workshops were dominated by evaluators from outside the continent; there was a conspicuous absence of African Scholars at the Cairo Conference. Meanwhile the quality of certain workshops (pre-conference & conference) was wanting while the conference programme was overloaded and heavy.

## **Great Hospitality; No time For Pyramid Visits**

*Dominic Pealore  
AfrEA Board Member - Ghana*

The venue of the conference was superb, meals, accommodation, conference facilities and services were excellent. The hospitality of Egyptian people both in and outside of the conference vicinity was remarkable. The smooth and democratic manner of election was a landmark that should be passed on. However, the representation of African evaluators as discussants was almost non-existent. Majority were professors from universities outside the continent as if evaluation is a new concept in Africa. Although the topics of discussion were attractive, delivery did not satisfy the expectations of audiences. Also, the overloaded programme could not allow participants to visit the Egyptian Pyramids and the National Museum.

## My Experience of the Impact Evaluation Conference 2009

*Florence Etta, AfrEA President*

### What I did in Cairo at the IE Conference

I attended 3 pre-conference workshops: RCTs, Most Significant Change and Participatory M&E. I found them all very informative and except for the first one, all were given by very experienced evaluators. The content was hugely relevant to the work I do.

The MSC workshop was a real delight, Jess was pleasant, engaging and extremely generous.

I attended a number of main conference sessions as participant, session chair and speaker. As a participant, I enjoyed listening to Robert Chambers and Patricia Rogers. I was honored to have finally met one of the acclaimed Gurus of development - Robert Chambers. That was definitely one of the highlights of my Cairo experience. The other was being taught by Jess Dart the co-creator of MSC!

I regret the fact that the sole session for which I acted as Chair, only one of the three presenters was available and a handful of participants. This was a real shame because valuable information was presented and the presenter could have been supported with more constructive suggestions for further work.

I missed one panel presentation because of a clash in the timetable. I guess it is difficult not to encounter

such problems with so much on offer. I made a presentation at a not-so well attended Round Table. The AGDEN organised round table was targeted at "Measuring the Impact of Gender Programming" and attended by a little over one dozen participants. In addition to offering AGDEN the opportunity to present its work on the Paris Declaration to the public, the round table was useful because it offered the AGDEN network an opportunity to recruit new members. It is unclear why it was so poorly attended. One thing was for sure; the location was not easy to find - tucked away in a sister hotel across a busy road from the main conference halls and hotel! The conference was useful for meeting and listening to new Impact Evaluation colleagues and researchers on the continent - in Rwanda, Ghana and Zambia.

### My lasting impressions and thoughts on the Cairo Conference

I would describe the Cairo IE conference as the conference that sought to crown IE as the ONE standard for development evaluation but the enthronement was vigorously contested by among others devotees of other approaches such as qualitative and participatory approaches. The conference brought to the fore old arguments and battles which made it appear that the methodology adopted for any M or E is more than anything, a political decision. This is a worrisome learning to take away especially for young professionals in the field.

To say, as it seemed this conference was attempting to do, that one

approach/methodology is better than another is to be economical with the truth. Better for what? For who? When? Always? These are questions that must be answered when saying one method or approach is better. One thing was for sure: it was hard to be a fence sitter at this conference - emotions were elicited you were either for -or against IE and that made for a very interesting conference. I hope the next one gives us the same kind of excitement! And hopefully allows more diversity of presenters at all the platforms: workshops, parallel sessions and yes, even plenary ones.

### Other things I did in Cairo

My participation was graciously made possible by support from IDRC's CCAA Programme. As part of this programme I attended a one-day workshop organised by Nathalie Beaulieu - Senior Programme Specialist with the CCAA Programme. This was a valuable meeting; it brought many of those working on Climate Change projects to think about how M&E Outcome Mapping in particular might be better integrated into CCAA research projects.

I cannot fail to mention that I attended the two AfrEA meetings organised on the wings of the Cairo Conference and my most confusing moment was being elected President of AfrEA.

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## Joint AGDEN-FF Project Workshop set for June 2010

The AGDEN-FF project on Rights & M&E has rescheduled the workshop to be held in Lagos, Nigeria. There will now be a combined workshop for Ford Foundation's Human Rights grantees from Nigeria, Egypt and Kenya to be held in Nairobi in June 2010. Due to logistical constraints, it was not possible to hold the Lagos workshop as planned.

The Johannesburg workshop took place without any hitches. It was held from Monday 24<sup>th</sup> – Friday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2009. It brought together ten participants drawn from NGOs, government as well as international agencies.

The Johannesburg workshop delivered three core modules in the areas of Gender and Development; Human Rights and Rights Based Approach to Development; Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation - presented over four days by AGDEN specialists and facilitators. Watch out for highlights of the Johannesburg workshop in our next edition.

The AGDEN Ford Foundation project will, by July 2010 have been running for two years. A rich harvest of experiences is being racked up by the project and those who have been involved with it. We hope to share some of these in future volumes of AGDENews.

## Quotes Corner

*Though no-one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new end.*

~ Author Unknown ~

## AfrEA Prepares to Unveil its Strategic Plan

The African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) is planning to unveil a roadmap to strengthen its operations and enhance its visibility. The roadmap is part of a strategic plan which is currently being discussed by the AfrEA board. With support from the Rockefeller Foundation, the full board will converge in Accra in January 2010 to develop the plan which will herald a new dawn in the annals of the continental body.

In developing the plan, the board will take into account AfrEA's vision as developed over the past 10 years. In the short term, the board has embarked on a series of activities to enhance its operations. First, the board is currently investigating options for establishing a permanent full-time secretariat that will support the work of the board, and manage AfrEA special projects. Secondly, the board will embark on revamping communications infrastructure to enhance the visibility of AfrEA.

The Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC) is poised to fund a proposal submitted by AfrEA which will boost AfrEA's communications. The AfrEA website will be redesigned to make sure that it is a platform for vibrant interaction and an up-to-date knowledge repository. It is envisioned that country Associations /Networks that do not have their own web-spaces, could piggy-back on the AfrEA infrastructure to promote in-country evaluation networking. If you are interested in pursuing this, why not join the communications task team!

The website will be complemented by a bi-monthly newsletter which we have been reliably informed will be launched in March 2010.

## AGDEN Mourns a Core Member

*Letty Chiwara*

AGDEN takes this opportunity to pass its condolences to the family and friends of Atsede Zerfu from Ethiopia, (right) who passed away on 14 October 2009 after a long battle with breast cancer.



Atsede was an active member of AGDEN, right from its inception. At the time of her death she was UNIFEM's Country Programme Coordinator in Ethiopia. Prior to joining UNIFEM, Atsede worked with IGAD as the Gender Advisor, where she was instrumental in mainstreaming gender issues. She was a very passionate person, full of joy and enthusiasm. She had a special and rare touch of hospitality and generosity. Her great sense of humor and bright smile will be sadly missed.

Atsede touched the lives and hearts of many people. AGDEN joins her family, many friends and colleagues all over the world in mourning the loss of a dedicated, energetic, hard working and intelligent woman. She leaves behind a legacy that we all aspire to live up to. Our hearts go out to Atsede's family especially and to all the people who loved her. May her soul rest in peace.

AGDENews welcomes your views and comments on M&E, gender and human rights. E-mail: [admin@agden.org](mailto:admin@agden.org)

### Editorial Board

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