THE NEXT DISCUSSION

SAMEA and DPME
Initiated DFID
Funded
August 2015

Design and Purpose of the Research

- **Aims to inform a roadmap that provides a way forward for professionalising evaluation in South Africa**

The Study

- Managed by DPME and SAMEA

- Funded by DFID

- General literature review, comparator lit review and semi-structured interviews with 10 countries, situational analysis lit review and semi-structured interviews (from a list of 20-30 interview to 73 (63) and a survey (101)

- Open forums (four), the evaluation café, electronic survey to those members of the SAMEA list-serve

- Element of mentoring (two new/emerging evaluators on the team)

Similarities with the Context
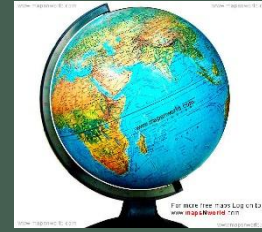
- Evaluation profession has developed as a field of practice rather than a traditional academic discipline (King et al, 2008).

- Evaluation professionals have a mixed history of educational and experiential backgrounds and this has led to various understandings of what is a 'competent' evaluator.

The 🌍 Context

- Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (**anzea**)
- IDEAS
- UNAIDS
- Canada (CES)- Credentialing
- Japanese Evaluation Society (JES)- Certification for education
- South Africa (DPME) – Selection and government focus
- German Evaluation Society DEG EVAL
- EES and UKES (VEPR) --- Development not designation
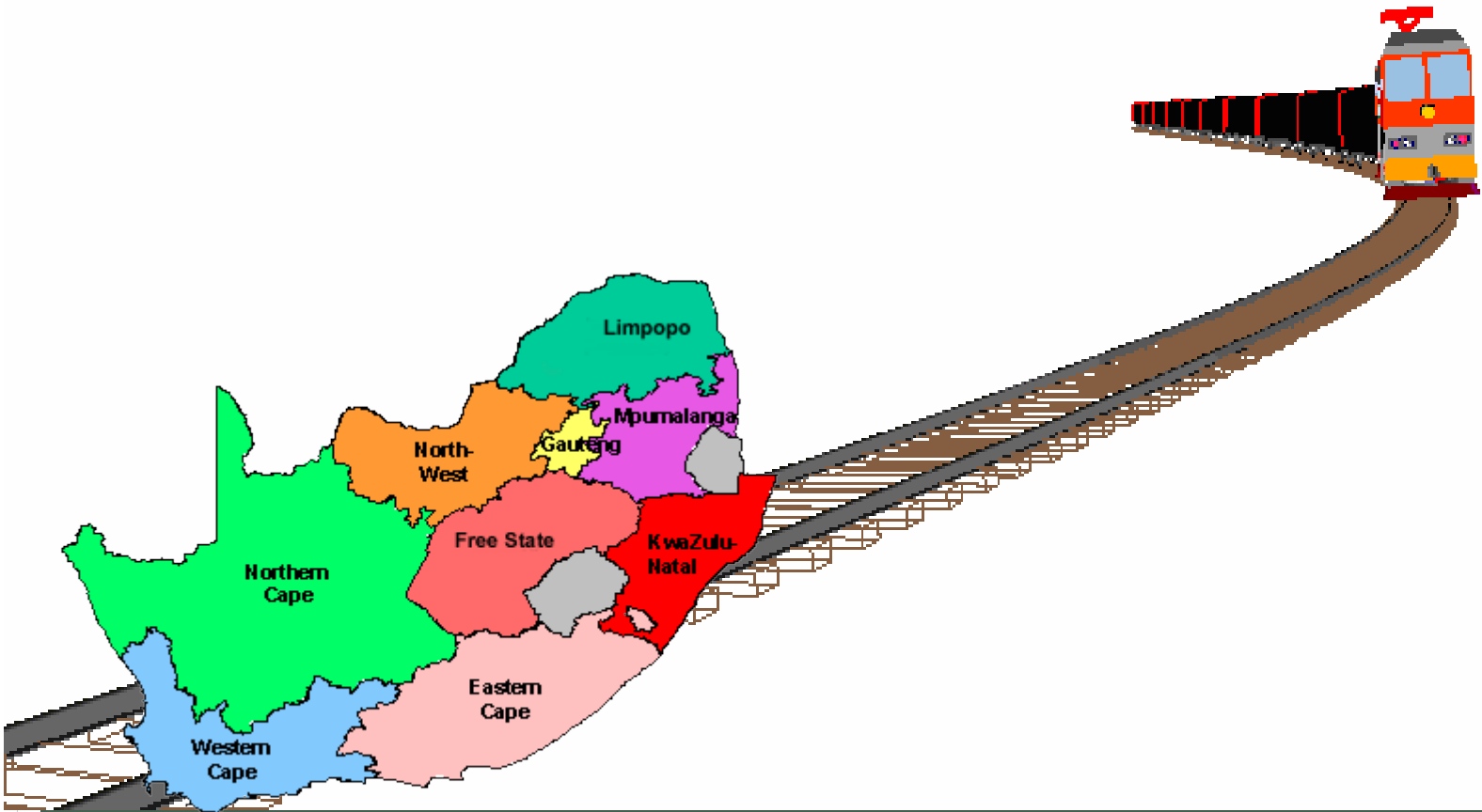
Is Evaluation Moving Towards Being a Professionalisation in South Africa?

Some characteristics or criteria

• **A specialized and unique body of knowledge, theory and skills**
There needs to be access, for those wishing to gain entry to the profession, to high quality training and education; as well as exposure to practice, and the ability to gain mastery of techniques and skills in order to develop the requisite professional expertise to practice.
Do evaluators have access to this in South Africa? Mostly

• **A profession is also distinguished by having an ethical disposition**
It sees itself as having a wider responsibility and orientation towards the public interest; i.e., it is not simply there to protect and further its own interests.
Is this evident in South Africa? No.

• **A profession also has a high status credential**
At the very least a graduate degree from an accredited tertiary education organization; as well as some form of professional designation or licensing that requires the testing of performance.
This is true in only a very few places in the world currently.
Should we aim for this?

- **A profession has professional autonomy**
Control over the recruitment, training, admission, credentialing and licensing of its professionals. It also has control over the guidelines, ethical standards, administrative rules, quality assurance and disciplinary processes of those in the profession.
This is not the case for evaluation.

- **Those in a profession should also demonstrate a loyalty to the occupational group**
They are expected to dem. collegial behavior and occupational solidarity, as well as a visible and practical commitment to ongoing professional development as part of their responsibility for the quality of their work. The existence of a profess. assoc. representing these interests is also a key characteristic of a profession.
Is this happening in South Africa? YES

- **A profession has a relatively high degree of prestige and status**
There is demand for professional services; there are substantial monetary rewards, respectability and a recognized place in the upper regions of the occupational ladder for those in the profession.
Is this happening in South Africa? To some extent

Key Findings Situational Analysis

Theory 1

- Poor evaluation -- evaluations not being usable, lacking a research methodology, lacking an evaluation approach, or all three.

- Anyone can call themselves an evaluator, for many commissioners it is not clear what constitutes a "good" evaluator, and there is "plenty of work", all leading to very little incentive to strengthen evaluation knowledge and skills.

Theory 2

- Poor evaluation -- evaluations not being usable, lacking a research methodology, lacking an evaluation approach, or all three.

- Anyone can call themselves an evaluator. This most often leads to "shoddy evaluation", research masquerading as evaluation, and often the lack of a valuing framework; people just give their opinion. This leads to people not finding evaluation useful and lowering the credibility of evaluation, evaluative processes and ultimately those that refer to themselves as evaluators.

Why Strengthen Evaluators---Why the Road to Professionalisation?

- Many respondents stated that the likelihood of poor evaluations will increase. As the demand side continues to grow, the likelihood of more people calling themselves evaluators to obtain contracts will increase.

- For a country that is still developing, where service levels are often poor, and funding is finite, good evaluation can offer much needed empirical information to make informed management decisions. Capable evaluators can fulfil an import societal role, while incompetent ones can be a detriment.

General Perceptions of Evaluation Practice

- When questioned about the quality of evaluations, there was often one response; whiles it is mixed, the quality is mostly poor

"it is very much a mixed bag."

General Perceptions of Evaluation Practice

These data suggest that improving the quality of evaluation does not rest solely with strengthening evaluators in South Africa.

General Perceptions of Evaluators

- Nearly all respondents think that there is a small core of 'good' evaluators in South Africa, with some specialising within different sectors (e.g. education, environment, health) and others being generalists.

- Core group retiring/nearing retirement and new cadre emerging from degree programmes—not ready to do evaluations.

- These data suggest a changing, and perhaps evolving, context.

What Should Evaluators Bring to an Evaluator Process
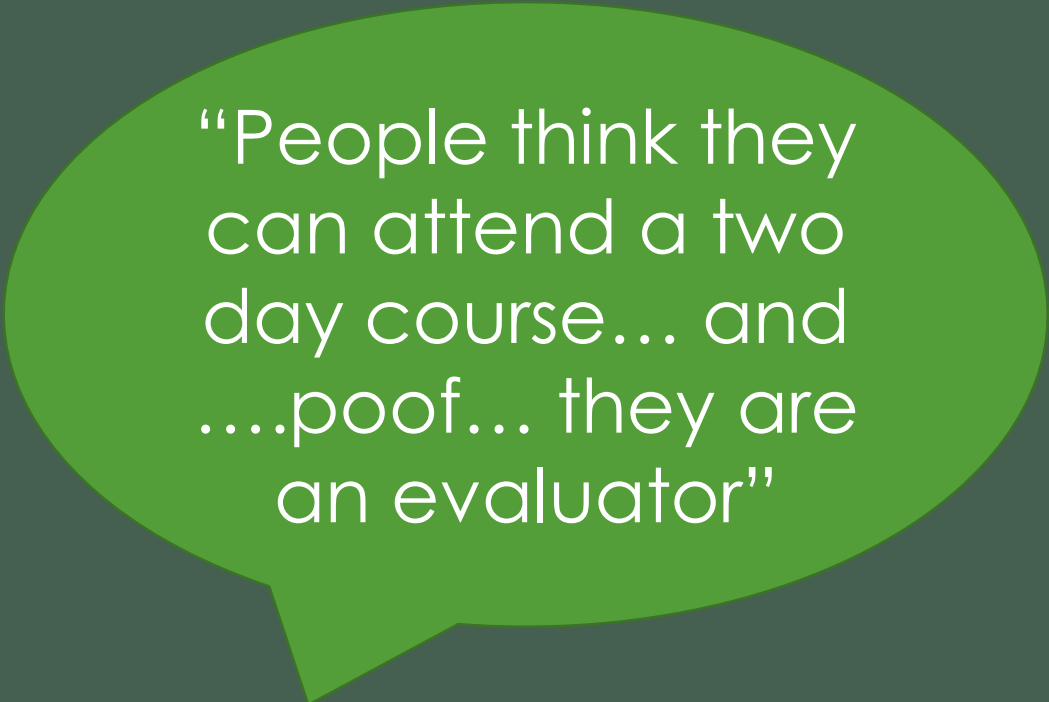
- Useful findings for self-identifying, or having others identify someone, as an evaluator.

- Practicing evaluations listed three: (1) research skills, (2) evaluation methodology and (3) 'softer' skills.

- Writing skills, communication, political "savvy", working independently and contextual knowledge.

- These data also strongly indicate that reaching agreement on thematic areas for basic knowledge and skills necessary to be an evaluator, are close at hand.

Professionalising ---What's in a Title

- Regardless of the title, nearly all respondents spoke about an approach that would result in having stronger evaluators.

- Not one respondent suggested that credentials, mentoring, or any other process would guarantee a 'good' evaluation. Contrarily, most respondents who engaged in this conversation clearly acknowledged that having minimum knowledge and skills (whether credentialed or self-applied) would help "root out the bottom feeders."

- Common sense however suggests that, for example, if one person has research skills and another person does not, the one with research skills is more likely to have empirical results.

Opportunities to Improve Knowledge and Skills

- Opportunities exist – short, long, degree, internet, in person.

- Short courses imply (or are interpreted) that evaluation is not difficult, and one can learn to be an evaluator in two days.

"People think they can attend a two day course… and ….poof… they are an evaluator"

Opportunities to Improve Knowledge and Skills

- SAMEA, SAMEA list serve (free) and the SAMEA conference.

- Academic programmes, on line course, books, M&E courses by local and international providers…

Strengthening Evaluators in South Africa

- (1) Establish standards and/or criteria and provide a clear pathway for people to reach that, or

OR

- (2) Have an inclusive process and exclude no one, allowing anyone to continue to identify and practice as an evaluator, and provide them with a clear self-motivated path on how to improve their knowledge and skills.

However this dichotomy is nuanced and a bit more complicated

Setting Standards/Criteria

"An evaluator should understand how to gather data and use that to make a finding and make a value judgement and then to develop a recommendation and I think being able to sustain that throughout the conceptual pathway is a rare talent...to make a judgement on something is a big ask.

Setting Standards or Criteria

Have standards

- Min. level of knowledge, skills (and attitudes) and experience that any person practicing evaluation should have

- Agree to an ethical statement

- Min of Masters degree or RPL equivalent in a research

Discussion Points

- What would KSA be based upon (competency crosswalk)

- Who would set this, and the levels, and who would assess this

- Those that will likely not meet min. standards will derail this process

Some Arguments for Standards and Criteria

- Evaluation is highly complex and challenging, and the "bar should be set high." Not everyone can be a doctor, professor or accountant---not everyone should be an evaluator

- Good evaluation has an important role to play in improving South Africa's poor service delivery.

- Poor quality evaluations lead to poor quality evidence, and South Africa cannot endure this. There is a strong need for generating credible evidence to understand which social development programmes and interventions work, which do not, and how to improve them. Sub-standard evaluations (and evaluators) will not deliver this evidence.

- Lastly, poorly implemented processes and products "eat away at the credibility of evaluators…and people do not value evaluations because they are not finding them valuable."

No Standards- Anyone Can Practice

"Do it in a way that people are not excluded…if people think they are excluded…there will be pushback…[we need a process where] everyone can enter and feel better about themselves"

Not Setting Standards

Do Not Have Standards

- Mentoring programme

- Internships

- Self Study – expert group identify gaps

Discussion Points

- Who is doing the mentoring? Who qualifies? How is that paid? (Small core group-perpetuate elitism/privilege)

- Who identifies emerging evaluators and the more experienced ones? Who qualifies? Who sets what expectations? (Power and privilege)

- Who identifies experts? Who qualifies? How are they paid?

Not Setting Standards

Competency list

- Competency list for guidance to anyone that chooses to use it

Discussion Points

- Challenge is in use—meant to be used by evaluator or academics
- Limit who is hired, could lower quality
- Boundaries on evaluation
- Who updates that list?

The Irony?

What at first looks like the most inclusive process (no standards or criteria) is most likely the process that will support power and privilege

Other Considerations for the Road Map

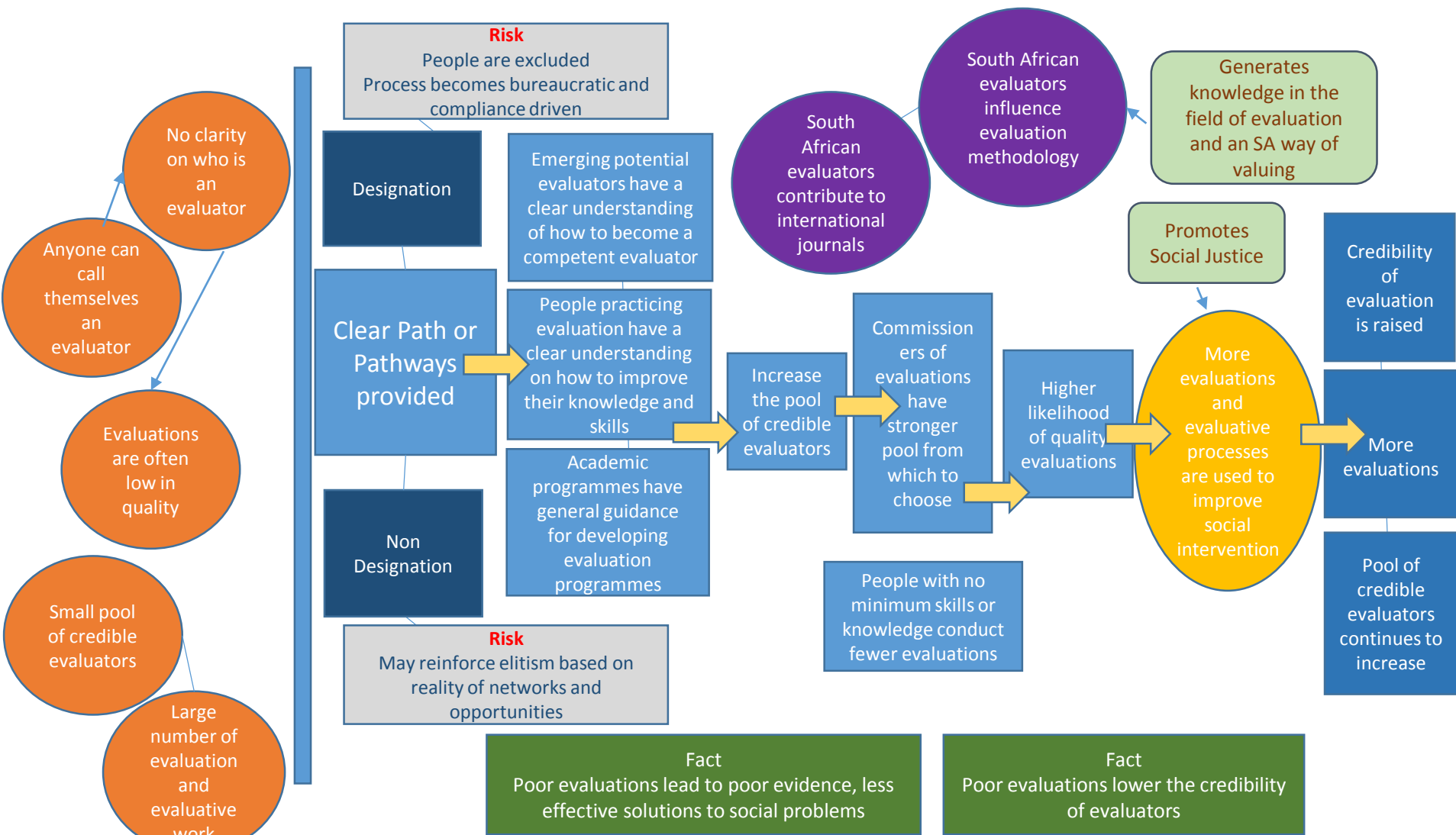- Separate road maps/development for those that only monitor than those that only evaluate, and those that do both (SAMEA— what's in a name!)

- This process aims to strengthen evaluators, not public managers (though they benefit by having access to stronger evaluators)

- Having ethical standards as a next basic step

Who Should Lead the Process?

Need to strengthen

The SAMEA Board is not constituted with evaluators

SAMEA

People are excluded
Process becomes bureaucratic and compliance driven

No clarity on who is an evaluator

Anyone can call themselves an evaluator

Evaluations are often low in quality

Small pool of credible evaluators

Large number of evaluation and evaluative work

Designation

Emerging potential evaluators have a clear understanding of how to become a competent evaluator

South African evaluators contribute to international journals

South African evaluators influence evaluation methodology

Generates knowledge in the field of evaluation and an SA way of valuing

Clear Path or Pathways provided

People practicing evaluation have a clear understanding on how to improve their knowledge and skills

Increase the pool of credible evaluators

Commissioners of evaluations have stronger pool from which to choose

Promotes Social Justice

Credibility of evaluation is raised

Non Designation

Academic programmes have general guidance for developing evaluation programmes

Higher likelihood of quality evaluations

More evaluations and evaluative processes are used to improve social intervention

More evaluations

Risk
May reinforce elitism based on reality of networks and opportunities

People with no minimum skills or knowledge conduct fewer evaluations

Pool of credible evaluators continues to increase

Fact
Poor evaluations lead to poor evidence, less effective solutions to social problems

Fact
Poor evaluations lower the credibility of evaluators

Thus…

Most respondents suggested that we are on a long road to get to professionalising in any form, however strengthening evaluators in some way, is imminent.

The Road to Professionalisation or…The Road not Taken?

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