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Message from the President



Valerie Gordon

Well! 2020 was quite a year, and we are certainly happy to be on the other side of it!

I would like to take the opportunity to extend our gratitude to Ivan, our hardworking editor, and Nadini Persaud, one of our most prolific newsletter contributors. They both work in their individual ways to ensure that our newsletter content is interesting and informative despite the challenges of work schedules and the distraction of this virus which affects us all in more ways than we realise.

This edition, the first for 2021 and the articles collated by Ivan are just as interesting as in former editions. I hope you will take the time to read them and provide comments and feedback. We will shortly be convening informal dialogues in which we can voice our opinions on these pieces and other topics of interest to this body.

2021 has started with a number of changes to the CEI family. First is the seating of the new executive of the Jamaica VOPE. It is, in fact, the first full elected executive of the Jamaica group which was established soon has been around since the start of the CEI in 2015. Prior to now, the group had been led by Country leads Paulette Griffiths (2015-2018) and Dianna Davis Smith (2018-2020). We want to thank both these colleagues for their service and the small support team - Una McPherson and Curline Beckford - who supported them, albeit not as an officially named executive.

It is certainly a sign of progress that the group has been able to have its first election and now have a President, Vice president, Treasurer and Secretary, who are introduced in this edition. We offer our congratulations and our support to them individually and as a group, and look forward to their continuing to move the Jamaica VOPE to new levels of achievement.

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In CEI Board news, we want to announce the confirmation of Jan Voordouw as Director of Communications and Marketing. Jan has already been working in this capacity for many months, and we are very pleased that he has accepted the confirmation.

We want to thank Dennisha Maxime, Country lead for Trinidad and Tobago, who has held that position since 2018. Dennisha has had to relinquish the position due to increased workload and new study commitments which, as we know, can be very taxing particularly at this time. Our Director of Professional Development and Training, Alan Mackie who has served since early 2019, has also stepped down from that position due to work pressures. We thank him for his work with us, and are very happy that he is eager to support the new Director in every way he can. We do look forward to that continuity being maintained.

Finally, our Immediate Past President, Lennise Baptiste has taken a leave of absence due to family commitments. We expect to have her back on board as soon as she is able to resume.

Yes, there are a lot of changes, but we have realized in very profound ways recently, that change is the only constant there is, and so we continue.

There are a number of new and exciting developments we are working on for which we will provide details in the near future. Suffice it to say, I believe the membership will be very pleased with the implications for their personal development.

I want to wish everybody a Happy Easter when it comes and urge you all to stay safe and stay well.



Notes from the Editor

Ivan Gyozo Somlai

As our CEI continues to mature, VOPEs are being considered in different countries. Jamaica is already well-organized in this respect and presents its active and enthusiastic committee in this issue. A couple of interesting articles by Nadini Persaud, my own opinion piece and sundry reports comprise this first edition in 2021.

Members and readers are reminded that your personal opinions, testimonials, reports and written inputs are always welcome: so prepare something today for the next issue of Eval Chat!

May you and families and colleagues all stay safe and healthy!

~

“The curse of modernity is that we are increasingly populated by a class of people who are better at explaining than understanding, or better at explaining than doing.”
Nassim Taleb in Skin in the Game

Why a Respectable Institution May Balk at your Quite Reasonable Assessment?

By Ivan G. Somlai

One’s monitoring or evaluative work may be required by a donor or executing agency’s policies, but without any obligation to heed any or all recommendations. This much is understandable, in that as an outside assessor your final recommendations are just that: suggestions that may or may not be heeded.

A project may naturally be impermanent, as it may be time-bound by planning; but certain monitoring or evaluative activities may also point to a need for an early ending of the work because of excessively serious issues.

Illustratively, serious issues can arise if, despite good intentions, an inappropriate implementation process has been used without comprehensive understanding of local culture, including political culture and decision-making. Sociocultural contextual knowledge is essential not only for a foreign evaluator alighting in a Caribbean town, but as well for a local urbanite unfamiliar with her or his own country’s rural society.

As well, debilitatingly short time horizons within which goals cannot possibly be reached can severely handicap effectiveness and chances for sustainability. Even if properly planned and approached, certain socio-cultural changes need several generations to become embedded.

For a monitor or evaluator, not understanding the context within which the work to be assessed is situated is a recipe for a domino effect of problems, now or post-project. Key areas of friction with locals or with a government office or some not-so-obvious technological mismanagement might never become known to the head of a project, let alone to an outside evaluator, because nobody wishes to lose the commonly generous salaries provided by the project. Nor do implementing organizations –be they (I)NGOs, universities, private firms—wish to lose their overhead profits from the donor funds. Thus, in ignorant bliss, many projects continue.

While termination based on irresolvable problems may be desired, it could also be irresponsible unless there has been a truly serious effort at acknowledgement of issues and then reconciliation or beneficial realignment of efforts. From my experience, however, even with demonstrable inability to fulfil its mandate, there have been cases of international projects unwilling to stop useless or ineffective work so as not to lose overhead and profits, leading to potential ethical conundrums.

Members’ thoughts on the above would be interesting!

Ethical Concerns With Electronic Surveys



Nadini Persaud, PhD, CPA, CGA, Lecturer in Project Evaluation, Department of Management Studies, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados

The COVID-19 global health pandemic has devastated the world economy, created unprecedented levels of unemployment, and considerably increased suffering, anxiety, and uncertainty about the future. Instead of celebrating the arrival of 2021, our global population is stressed and insecure. Additionally, the manner in which we now go about our daily lives have drastically changed and will likely be with us for the immediate future.

As countries struggle to survive, they are confronted with stopping the spread of this raging virus, stabilizing their economics, and providing a safety net to assist the most vulnerable in society. In the face of increased expenditure and reduced revenue, evidence-based data is more critical than ever in policy-making. In this environment, most evaluators have little choice than to turn to electronic data gathering. However, keep in mind that you must continue to observe international best practices protocols for data collection—particularly informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and general protection of human subjects.

Issue	Advice for Addressing
<p>Informed Consent/ Freedom to Answer Questions</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that the reason for data collection is clearly and sufficiently articulated. ▪ Let participants know how the data will be secured/protected and the period of retention. ▪ Design survey with a consent form to obtain participants consent. ▪ Design survey so that participants can skip questions which they do not wish to answer.
<p>Confidentiality/ Anonymity</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Store data in secure databases; use a secure platform for administration. ▪ Encrypt data files; use rigorous passwords. ▪ Do not leave data opened on computers for unauthorized persons to view. ▪ Avoid collecting personal data unless it is absolutely necessary. If collected, take reasonable and diligent precaution to protect, store, and transfer information. It is also advisable to remove personal information and cross-reference with a code and keep this information in a separate password protected file. ▪ Keep in mind that some software collect IP addresses. These should be removed prior to data storage. ▪ Ensure data is only used for purpose collected. ▪ Report aggregate data. ▪ Include a warning statement on consent form to alert participants that absolute anonymity/confidentiality cannot be guaranteed since hacking is outside of the evaluator's control. However, reasonable efforts will be taken to secure/protect data. ▪ Keep in mind that most data must be retained for a period of time (generally 3-5 years). All data must be properly stored and protected.
<p>Information in Public/Private Space</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure legal compliance with legislated country laws on privacy and international best practice protocols. Useful guidelines include:- • Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0 https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf • The British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines file:///C:/Users/N/Downloads/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-for-Educational-Research_4thEdn_2018.pdf • Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/P-8.6.pdf
<p>Self-Installing Software</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Avoid using survey software which will self-install on participant's computer without their express consent. If used, simple instructions for removing the software must also be provided.

In conclusion, the best advice is to use professional judgment. Consider your own privacy and how you would feel if it is violated. Carelessness and negligence can cause serious harm to participants, so be diligent and meticulous. Remember electronic data is transferrable in seconds. A fundamental criteria for data collection is to do no harm to participants.

And here's some fresh news: a new book by our long time member Nadini Persaud and her Canadian colleague Ruby Dagher is available now as an eBook ISBN 978-3-030-70213-7 or Hardcover ISBN 978-3-030-70212-0, published by Palgrave MacMillan, Canada 2021.

THE ROLE OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN THE UN 2030 SDGs AGENDA

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VOPE Activities - Jamaica

The Jamaican Chapter of the Caribbean Evaluators International (CEI) is a voluntary community of monitoring, evaluation and related development professionals focused on advancing evaluative practice. The Chapter has started its two- year journey under a Board of Directors who will execute a lean and nimble strategic plan to leverage shared knowledge, experience, and innovation.

Andrea Livingston-Prince, Board Chair

For the past decade, Andrea has honed her private sector development skills as the head or as part of the leadership of projects valued at over USD 200M in varied countries where monitoring and evaluation are critical, and monitoring is owned by the Project Manager or coordinators. Andrea initially thought she was an interesting option for this role but we know that she is the best choice to take JaVOPE to the next level. She plans to leverage her business acumen and project management knowledge, skills, and competencies to increase the value and impact delivered for and by the chapter. and in so doing, the M&E movement in general. Every good leader understands the importance of balance and she achieves this by dedicating an



entire day to comedy each week.



Othneil Hemans, Board Secretary

Othneil has been involved with project work for over 15 years where he has served as a senior project analyst, M&E specialist and project manager among several other roles. His formal training in M&E includes a post-graduate course at UWI which served as part of a Development Studies programme, as well as training through the World Bank in Evaluation and Impact Assessment. This chess-player and financial investment enthusiast also displays an unwavering passion for M&E and believes there is great potential to advance this underrated discipline. Encouraged by his interactions with CEI and reception by JaVOPE, Othneil feels motivated to contribute to the development and propagation of a discipline that he loves within the Jamaican space first, then to the Caribbean and globally.

Dr Shelly Trim, Vice Chair

Shelly has worked in M&E for over fifteen years. First trained in M&E at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School Public Health, she has since implemented research and evaluation activities related to women's health, adolescent reproductive health, poverty, HIV and sexually transmitted infections. During her time at the United Nations, first at UNDP and now at the Resident Coordinator's Office, she has been providing technical guidance in the development of M&E systems across the UN Country Framework. This beach bum with wanderlust in her soul has been a proud member of CEI since 2018 where she has assisted JaVOPE in the development of the vision, mission, strategic framework and the M&E forum. As Vice Chair, she will strengthen her contribution to the implementation of the organizations' strategic plan.



Zahra Miller, Board Treasurer

Zahra has always loved working in data and though epidemiology is her first love, since being introduced to M&E 10 years ago, she has not looked back. Following training by the (then) Caribbean Health Research Council, she has since obtained 10 years of specific M&E experience in government, civil society, and now the private sector. She worked at a managerial level in the M&E Unit at the Ministry of Health, as an M&E specialist on a youth development project in an NGO and is now the co-owner of a consulting firm that specializes in programme evaluation. She joined CEI in 2017 and has attended several seminars, was the successful applicant to a job circulated by CEI, and has contributed to the publications committee under the launch of the Eval4Action campaign. This lover of all things beach and music believes strongly in giving back and saw this opportunity as an ideal way to give of herself and time doing something that she loved.

The Jamaica Chapter of the CEI will provide a professional network which strengthens each community member on the M & E body-of-knowledge for knowledge, business, and national development. At the end of our tenure, the number of meaningful conversations around “monitoring”, “evaluation” and “M & E” that are held in the open public media will be significantly increased. The first meeting for general membership where we dived into the exciting plans to enhance the benefits for members was held on **February 10th at 5:30 p.m.**

Evaluation in Our New Normal Environment: Navigating the Challenges with Data Collection

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Background

Data collection is a critical component of all evaluations. However, it often presents a number of challenges under the best of circumstances. For instance, the evaluation budget and time frame both have implications for the quality and type of data that is collected. Additionally, adherence to high quality international ethical best practices is necessary when collecting data for any purpose, methodological rigor is important for ensuring the credibility of the evaluation, improving access to important documents and stakeholders, as well as decreasing excessive evaluation anxiety on the part of critical stakeholders, when possible, is vital. These challenges have now been considerably exacerbated by the COVID-19 global health pandemic which has changed our world in fundamental ways. In what is now considered as our new normal environment, evaluators will need to make profound changes to the manner in which they plan and undertake data collection.

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