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3 June 2026 | 12h00 SAST

The Role of AI in Building Evaluation Capacity in Resource-Constrained Settings

Panel Discussion

Presented by the South African Monitoring And Evaluation Association's Emerging Evaluators (Cohort 4)

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SAMEA
South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association

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Nation Builder

Co-moderator

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FirstRand Foundation

Technical moderator

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PANELISTS

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Nikita Makhuvha,
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Benita Mukoni,
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SETTING THE SCENE/ ICE-BREAKER QUESTION

From your perspective as an Emerging Evaluator, How doyou relate to the topic of using AI to strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation capacity in resource-constrained settings?

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CURRENT CHALLENGES

Evaluation in resource-constrained settings is not just slowed by limited tools ,
it is shaped by them, demanding resilience and creativity at every step.

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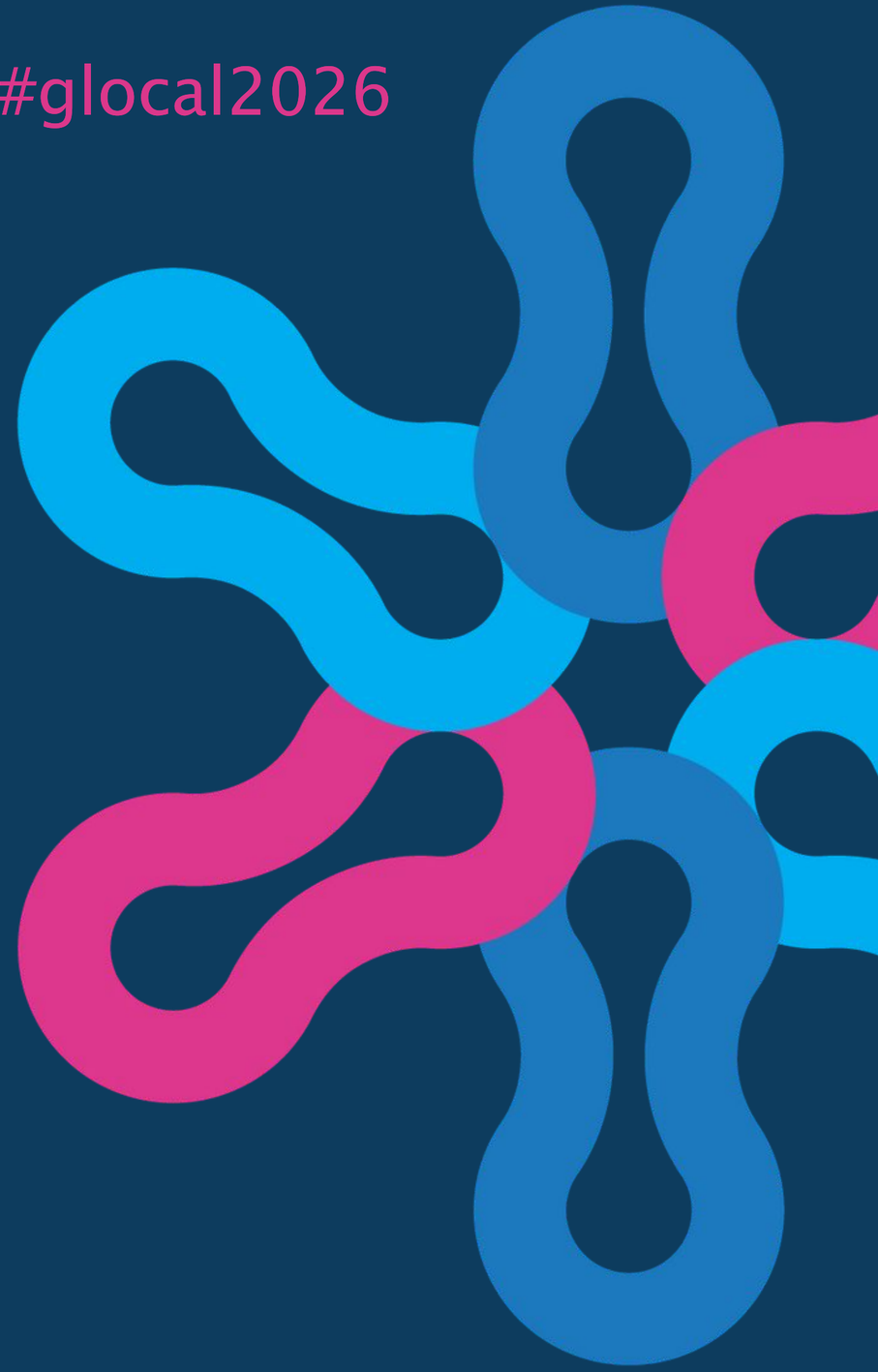
Current Challenges

- Financial Constraints
- Staff and specialised skills shortages
- Limited infrastructure
- Limited stakeholder engagement
- Broader contextual pressures



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OPPORTUNITIES

AI offers evaluators the chance to move from drowning in data to driving decisions with speed and clarity.

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Capacity Challenges in M&E

- Limited budget
- Lack of technical skills
- Shortage of evaluators
- Weak data management systems

Efficiency challenges in M&E

- Delayed reporting
- Inefficient manual processes: data collection, data capturing, data cleaning, transcription, consolidation of reports and presentations.

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What AI solves/ opportunities

- Reduction of manual workload
- Closes the technical skills gap
- Improve data collection efficiency
- Enhance reporting and communication

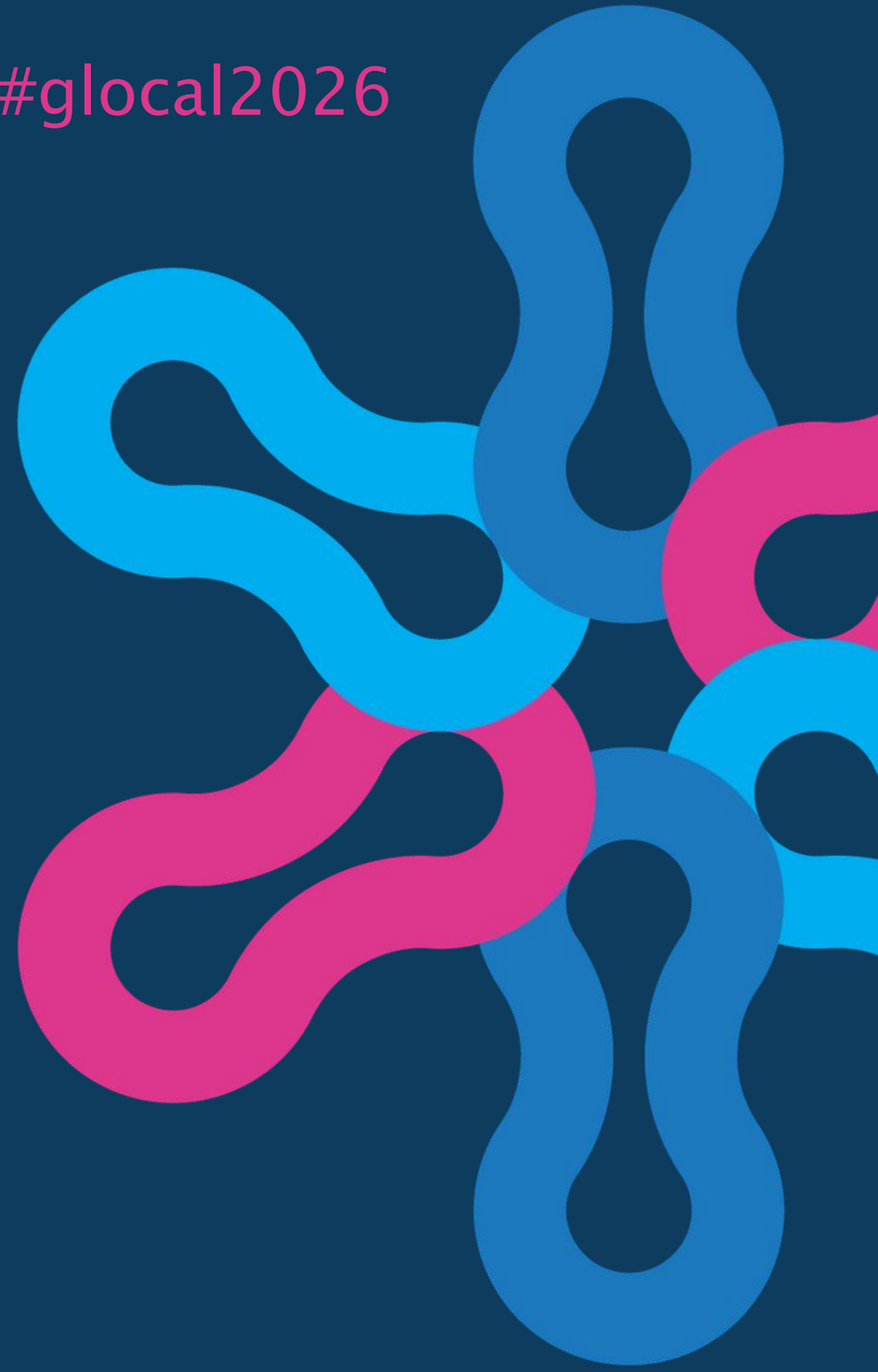
Impact of AI on Emerging Evaluators

Empowerment

- AI opens up access to evaluation knowledge & analytical tools
- Closes the technical gap for emerging evaluators

Dependency

- Can limit foundational M&E skills



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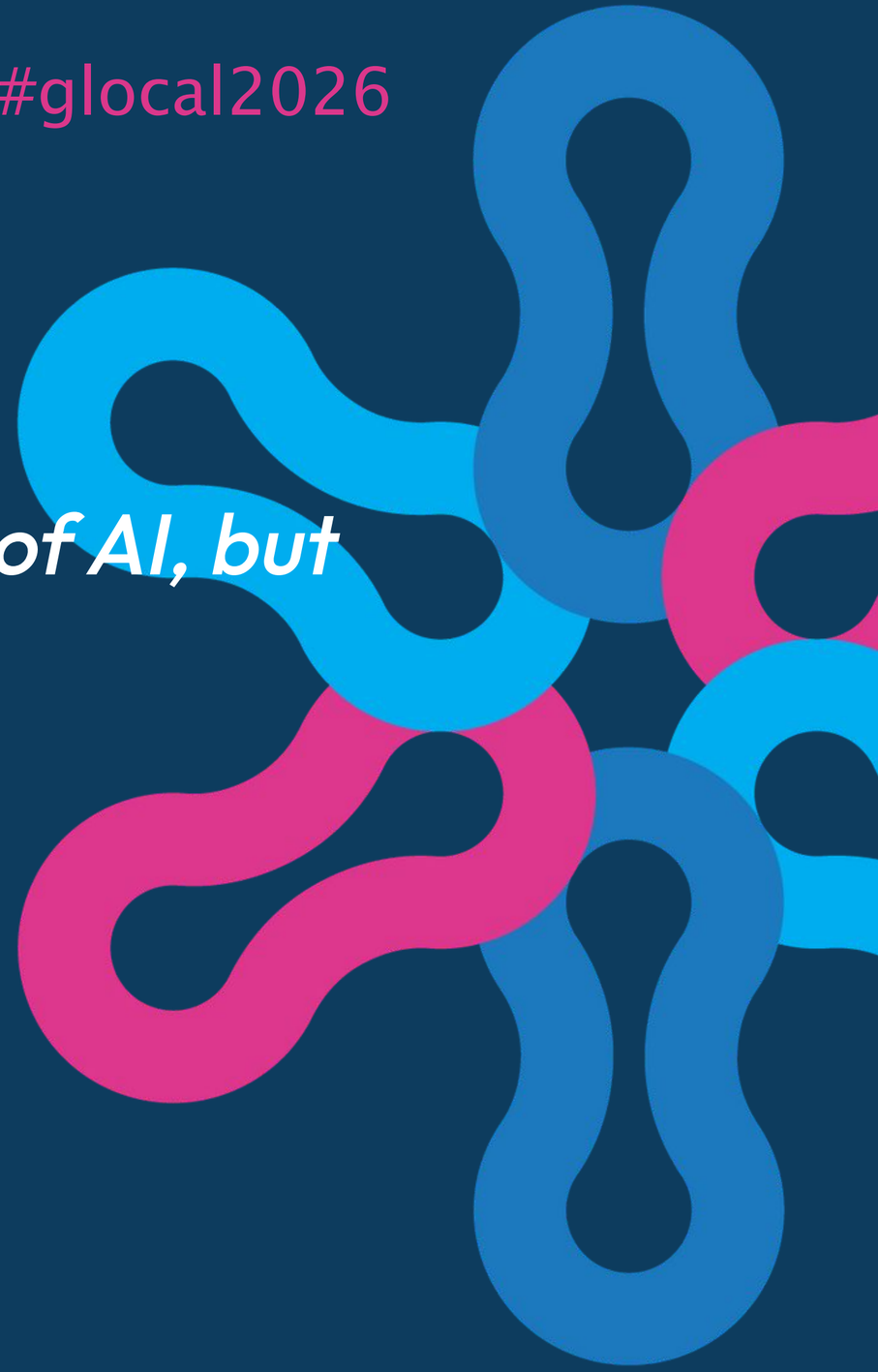
The danger is not the existence and use of AI, but the irresponsible integration.



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PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The most powerful AI applications are not complex, they are accessible, affordable, and already reshaping evaluation practice.

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) by making data collection, analysis, reporting, and decision-making faster and more accurate. AI helps organisations reduce manual work, identify patterns, and strengthen evidence-based planning. Governments and social sector organisations can use AI to improve programme monitoring, service delivery, and real-time decision-making.

AI Tools for Data Collection

KoBoToolbox- Used for digital surveys and field data collection, especially in remote areas.

Practical Example:

A Department of Social Development programme collecting information on undocumented children can use KoBoToolbox on tablets or phones instead of paper forms. Data is uploaded instantly, reducing delays and missing information.

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AI Tools for Data Analysis and Evaluation

Microsoft Copilot

Copilot works within Excel, Word, and PowerPoint.

Why Copilot is important:

- Analyses datasets quickly
- Drafts reports and summaries
- Saves time

ChatGPT Useful for summarising documents, analysing qualitative responses, and drafting evaluation reports.

AI Tools for Monitoring Dashboards and Presentation

Power BI

Creates real-time dashboards and monitoring reports.

Practical Example:
A provincial department monitoring grant delivery can use Power BI dashboards to track applications, approvals, and payment delays by district.

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AI Tools for Diagrams and Programme Design

Canva AI

Used to create theories of change, stakeholder maps, and programme diagrams.

Practical Example:
When preparing a new intervention for children on the move, teams can use Canva AI to map stakeholders, risks, and programme pathways during workshops

AI Tool presentation tool

Mentimeter is an interactive presentation and audience engagement AI-supported tool that allows presenters to ask questions and get live responses from participants, often anonymously.

Example a presenter asks: **"What word comes to mind when you hear digital transformation?"**Participants type answers like:

- Innovation
- Technology
- Change
- Fear

Mentimeter displays these as a **live word cloud** on the screen.
This makes presentations more interactive and helps everyone participate, even shy audience members.

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AI is no longer a future concept—it is already improving Monitoring and Evaluation. Tools such as Copilot, ChatGPT, Power BI, and KoBoToolbox help organisations collect better data, analyse information faster, and communicate findings more effectively. For government and social sector organisations, success lies in starting small, building staff capacity, and using AI responsibly to strengthen accountability and improve programme outcomes. AI should not replace people but rather support them, because M&E still depends on human judgment, context, ethics, and empathy to make informed and accountable decisions. The goal is not to replace human expertise, but to use AI as a tool that strengthens and enhances it.

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ETHICS AND RISKS

AI may guide decisions but ethics must command the compass, steering every path toward truth, fairness, and accountability.

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RISK 1

Algorithmic Bias

Algorithmic bias refers to systematic errors or imbalanced outcomes produced by algorithms due to prejudicial assumptions present in the programming process.

Mitigation Strategies

Context Stress-Testing

Validate AI tools against local language, culture, and communication styles before deployment.

Triangulate Outputs

Verify AI findings against community-level qualitative data and local evaluator interpretation.

Evaluate the AI Itself

Assess whether the model distorts patterns, excludes groups, or produces systematic errors.

Co-Develop with African Practitioners

Invest in AI systems built with African communities, linguists, and practitioners — not imported tools.

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RISK 2

Data Privacy, Consent & Ownership

“He who controls the data controls the narrative, and he who controls the narrative controls the people.”

Mitigation Strategies

African-Owned Infrastructure

Reduce dependency on external systems and keep data value local.

AI Transparency Logs

Maintain structured records of what data was processed, what outputs were generated, and what human changes were made(Creates traceability).

Community Data Agreements

Use plain-language consent that explains how data is used, shared, and protected.

Return Findings to Communities

Share results in accessible formats, local languages, and community feedback sessions.

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RISK 3

Over-Reliance & the Erosion of Human Judgment

“Trust the machine enough, and you forget how to think.”

Mitigation Strategies

Treat as Draft Evidence

AI outputs are starting points — never final conclusions.

Build Structured Review Points

Embed mandatory human review stages into all evaluation processes.

Encourage Professional Disagreement

Actively challenge AI findings rather than passively accepting them.

Create Deliberate Pauses

Build time for reflection and interpretation outside automated systems.

Invest in AI Literacy

Train teams not just to use tools — but to understand their limitations.

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AI Will Not Decide the Future of Evaluation in Africa. We Will.

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Question & Answer Session

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As AI continues to shape development practice, what should the future could evaluation look like?

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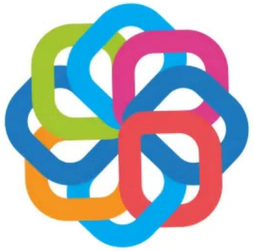

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Thank you!

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