PLANNING,
WORKING AT, &
HOSTING
**EVIDENCE 2020
ONLINE:**
A REPORT BY THE
AFRICA EVIDENCE
NETWORK

23-25 September 2020

Engage ▪ Understand ▪ Impact

EVIDENCE
2020 ONLINE

Hosted by:
**AFRICA
EVIDENCE
NETWORK**

Africa
Centre for
Evidence

UNIVERSITY
OF
JOHANNESBURG

Contents

TOGETHER, OUR ACHIEVEMENTS ARE LIMITLESS

An opening message from the Africa Evidence Network chairperson

The EVIDENCE events have a long history of responsively adapting to members' needs; the year 2020 was no different. Shortly after we had begun planning an exciting working event to take place in Uganda, the COVID-19 pandemic touched home shores. We were faced with a choice: postpone this meeting until the AEN members were able to gather physically again or adapt to this new situation as we always have. I'm proud to say we chose the latter.

EVIDENCE 2020 was transformed into EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE and another unique event took shape. The eight webinars, 21 working group meetings, and 12 blogs leading up to the meeting as well as EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE itself were planned and executed within the space of roughly five months. This was a massive effort for the entire team. Not only were we ourselves working remotely, adapting to new platforms, and grappling with a shift in the design of this event, but we were also faced with the collective toll of COVID-19 on us all. I cannot express how proud I am of what we have accomplished with EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE.

This event was designed to allow active engagement and participation and, in some ways, going online allowed us to extend an invitation to more people than we would have been able to if the physical event gone ahead. We wanted to maintain the elements of what had made previous EVIDENCE events so successful. We thought hard about how we could retain our informal and friendly environment. We researched innovative approaches to facilitating networking and knowledge exchange. And above all, we pulled together in one of the most difficult periods the world has experienced in a long time.

In this report, we capture some of the planning, design, and highlights from EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE. I hope you will find this report more than a collection of information about an online working meeting. I hope that when you read about the planning, design, and highlights of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, you will be struck by how limitless our achievements are when we work together. I am honoured to be the chairperson of a network of people who prove this every day.

With humble thanks,

Ruth

Ruth Stewart
Africa Evidence Network (AEN) chairperson
Africa Centre for Evidence (ACE) director

What did we want to achieve with EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE?

Two goals have remained consistent throughout the three EVIDENCE events hosted biennially since 2014. First, this gathering is meant to connect people who work in different areas of the evidence ecosystem and share a common dedication to using evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) to end poverty in Africa. The second, is that these events have always aimed to share learning between people that may advance them closer to that ultimate objective of ending poverty.

Each EVIDENCE event has actioned these objectives in nuanced ways: throughout the years, participants at EVIDENCE events have experienced innovations such as poster pods, EIDM landscape maps, or programmes designed to allow for meaningful networking to take place. EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE contributed to these objectives by focussing on being a working meeting, shedding its former identity as a conference.

In putting on a new identity, the Africa Evidence Network (AEN) secretariat intended for EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE to achieve five goals. These goals of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE were to facilitate:

1) Sharing of participant experiences and stories with each other, bringing their unique perspectives to working for a common purpose;
2) Networking and exploring opportunities for collaboration between participants;
3) Sharing and enhancing participants' own capacities for supporting EIDM in Africa;

4) Collectively advancing and finalising various engagements and processes conceived in working group-driven activities preceding EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE; and
5) Sharing and learning from EIDM in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With these objectives in mind, there was a key difference between EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE compared to previous EVIDENCE events. While the event retained its overarching theme of 'Engage, Understand, Impact', the content of the event drew on the workstreams the AEN secretariat uses to organise its work to achieve its strategic goals.

These workstreams were 'Understanding the art and science of EIDM in Africa', 'Enhancing evidence capacities', and 'Making connections and building collaborations'. Each workstream was led by a programme officer who was in turn supported by an internal advisor drawn from the AEN secretariat and external advisors drawn from the AEN membership. Together, each programme officer led a working group made up of members from the AEN reference group and other key partners. Together, the programme officers, their internal advisors, and the working group members designed and executed pre-activities within each workstream. Each group was also responsible for designing the working sessions at the event which culminated in collective working on key outputs during EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE.

Who participated in EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE?

Of 604 participants who registered to attend in EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, a total of 403 delegates from across the world logged on and participated over the course of the three-day event. Of these, 321 (80%) were from 44 countries within Africa (Figure 1, Figure 2). The three countries with the highest number of attendees were South Africa, Uganda, and Kenya respectively.

A large proportion (38%) of attendees at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE described themselves as being employed in an academic institution (Figure 3), followed by those working in non-governmental organisations (23%). Other affiliations included funders, government agencies, think tanks, and multilateral organisations such as the UN.
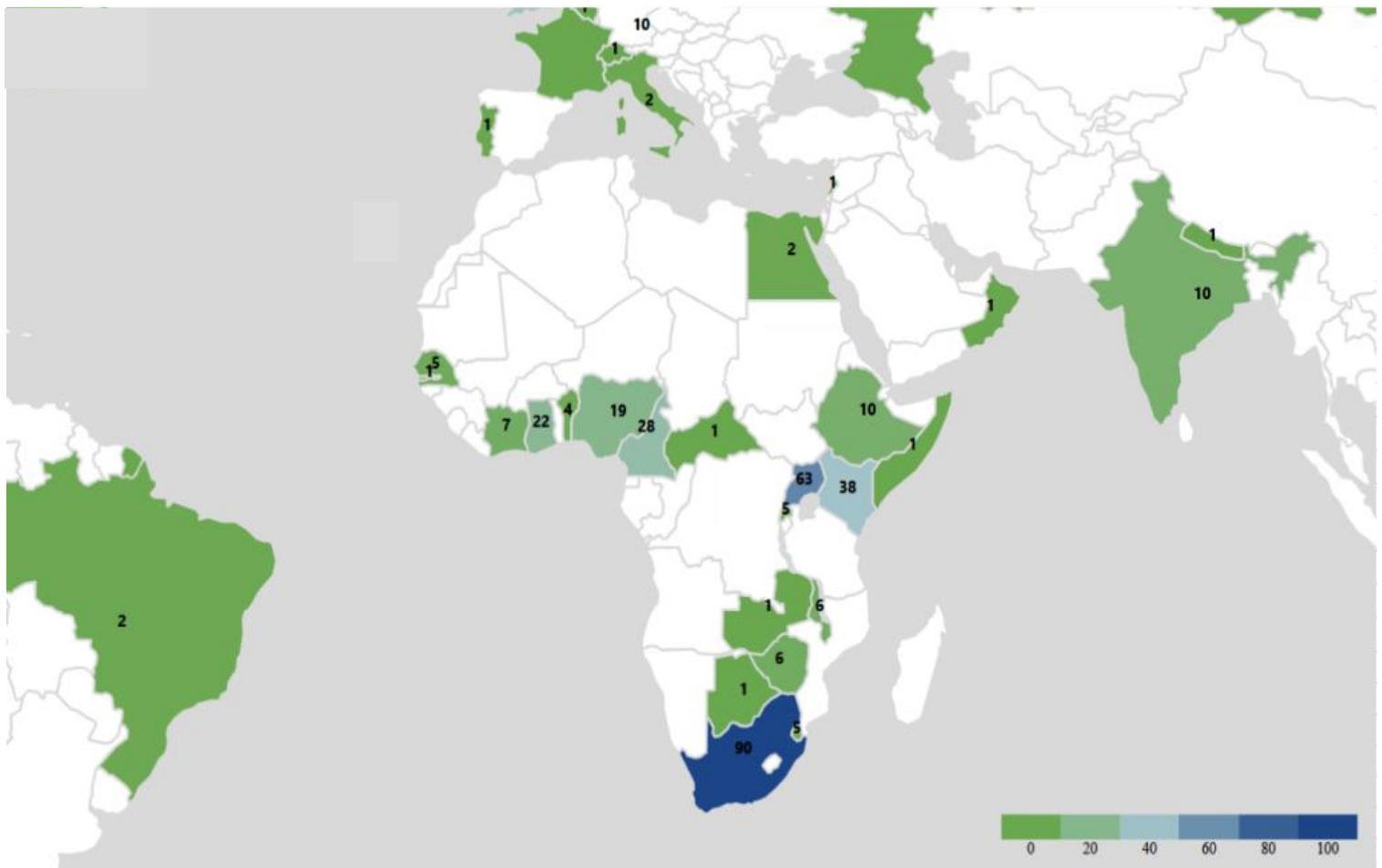

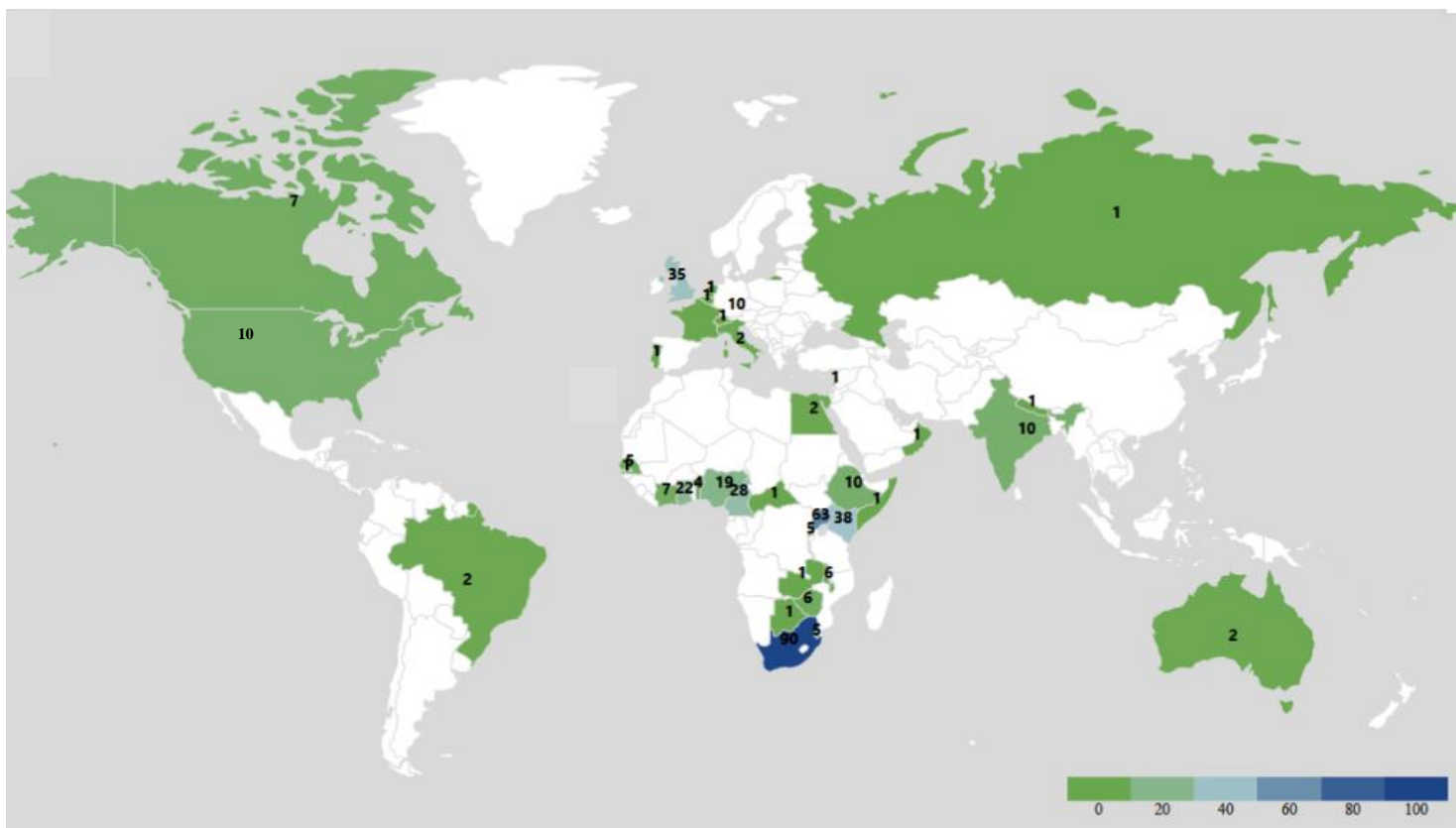*Figure 1 Distribution of participants across Africa*

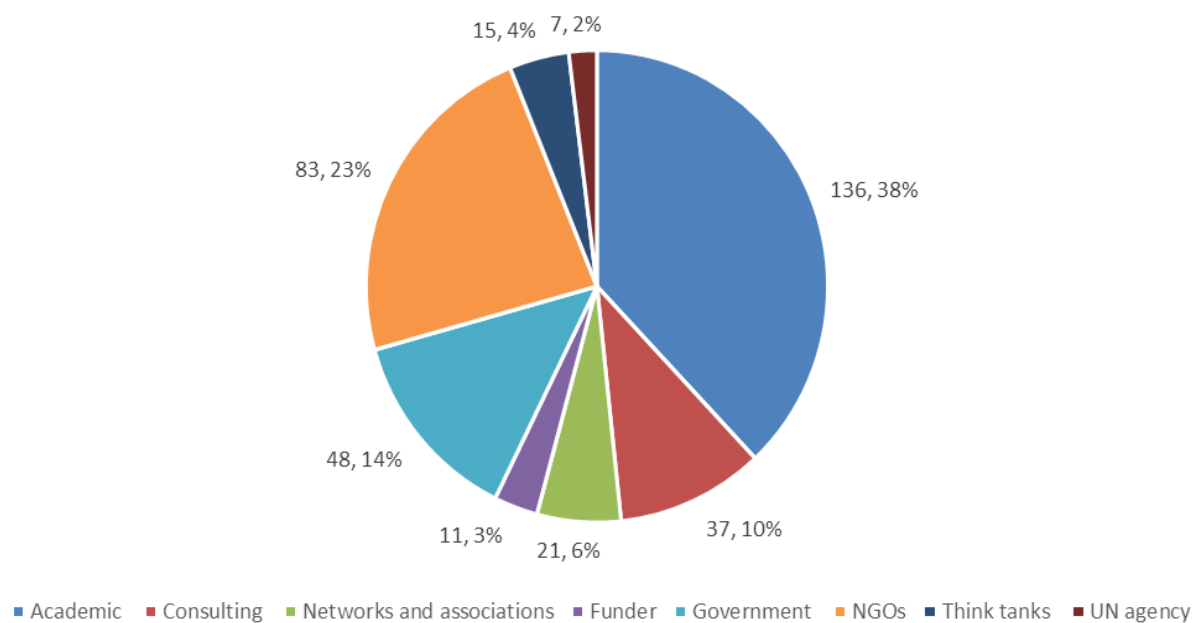*Figure 2 Worldwide distribution of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE participants*

Figure 3 How participants at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE described their work roles

From EVIDENCE 2020 to EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE: transforming to show solidarity, hope, and adaptation

EVIDENCE 2020 was always going to be a working meeting. Initially, the meeting was planned as an intimate, invitation-only event that fulfilled two commitments made by the AEN secretariat at the end of EVIDENCE 2018. The first promise was to host numerous, small-scale events in the lead up to EVIDENCE 2020, and the second commitment was to host EVIDENCE 2020 in an African country that was not South Africa. The intention was for up to 100 participants to gather together and actively advance work related to the strategic direction and three workstreams of the Network. The outputs and outcomes from this meeting, it was planned, would be shared more widely after EVIDENCE 2020 in October at an online event similar to EVIDENCE 2018 ONLINE.

Then in January 2020, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Following this, South Africa went into a hard lockdown on 26 March 2020 – all borders were shut, movement within the country limited to emergencies, and time- and product-limits placed on all trading. Staff of the AEN secretariat was confined to their homes, never mind South Africa, for the foreseeable future. The secretariat needed to make a decision about whether to go ahead with EVIDENCE or not, and fast.

On 3 April 2020, AEN chairperson and ACE director Ruth Stewart addressed the members and friends of the AEN. In an online address filmed from her home during the South African lockdown, she announced that the AEN was ready to heed the call for solidarity, hope, and adaptation during COVID-19 by transforming, stating that it is our "collective responsibility to reimagine what EVIDENCE 2020 will be to protect the most vulnerable amongst us" (Figure 4). Announcing that "our biennial in-person event will be transforming to a digital event", she assured members and friends of the AEN that the innovation and excellence associated with EVIDENCE events would be maintained to the highest standard. "Our EVIDENCE events have brought together Africa's evidence community since 2014, and my team and I are determined to ensure that this will continue despite our current challenges".

Figure 2 Ruth Stewart, AEN chairperson and ACE director, announces that EVIDENCE 2020 will happen as EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE.

Making this decision would not be a straightforward task. Delivering an event the size and with the reputation of EVIDENCE is challenging when this is done in-person. Trying to execute this event while physically distancing under a lockdown scenario would require extensive capacity enhancement of the AEN secretariat, and the use of tools we had never used before.

Once the decision had been made, the AEN secretariat set about upskilling its team and designing the structure of the event keeping essential features in mind: 1) enhancing a sense of togetherness despite physical distance (Figure 5), 2) making space for making connections, and 3) ensuring different ways to actively participate.

Getting ready to host EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE

The secretariat's first action to equip our team to deliver EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE was to learn more about digital facilitation. The AEN programme officers collectively read *Digital habitats: Stewarding technology for community*, written by Etienne Wenger, Nancy White and John D Smith as an introduction to innovative ways of building a community in digital spaces.

From as early as May, the programme officers also set about establishing their working groups. These groups – discussed in detail later on in this report – were pivotal to the extensive engagement that happened both leading up to and during EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE. This was the first time in the AEN's history were members were called on to co-develop a Network event; the success of this initiative is the crown jewel in the crown of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE.

We also worked closely with Reboot, a leadership coaching company, whose team assisted the AEN programme officers, managers, and other team members involved in delivering EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE with various elements of coordinating the event. Reboot colleagues were teamed up with AEN programme officers to regularly guide and support them through the planning of the various EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE sessions. The Reboot team assisted the secretariat in equipping notetakers with templates to capture notes from sessions, as well meetings to prepare facilitators for facilitating various sessions. Reboot also assisted in the reflection after EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, and some of the recommendations we share further down are drawn from their report.

Figure 5 Music was designed to create a shared sensory experience for EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE participants to enhance their sense of togetherness.

Enhancing a sense of togetherness despite physical distance

The meeting platform (OnAir, Figure 6) had three design features built into it to enhance a sense of togetherness among participants at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE. The first was to invite participants to experience unique features of Africa similar to if they had been present at a physical event in Africa. Each morning a melodious performance by a dynamic music duo Bahati (Figure 4) filled participants' screens. The soothing vocals, jazzy sounds of a saxophone, and vibrantly-lit performance transported participants away – from COVID-19, from 'just another online event', from work – and brought them to the shared experience of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE. This shared experience was also through the camera feed from Thembe Elephant Park which played during the breaks between sessions.

The second design feature intended to enhance a sense of togetherness was the gamification of engagement that was built into the platform. With this feature,

participants received points for activities (such as making connections, answering polls, meeting an exhibitor) and could monitor who had accumulated the most points throughout EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE. By the end of the three-day event, the winner of the competition was Rigobert Hanny Pambe Miong from Effective Basic Services Africa (eBase-Africa) in Cameroon with 105 500 points.

The sense of togetherness was also enhanced by the conscious design of networking sessions built into the programme, as well as the collective reflections sessions which took place at the end of each day. Both of these features of described in detail later in this report.
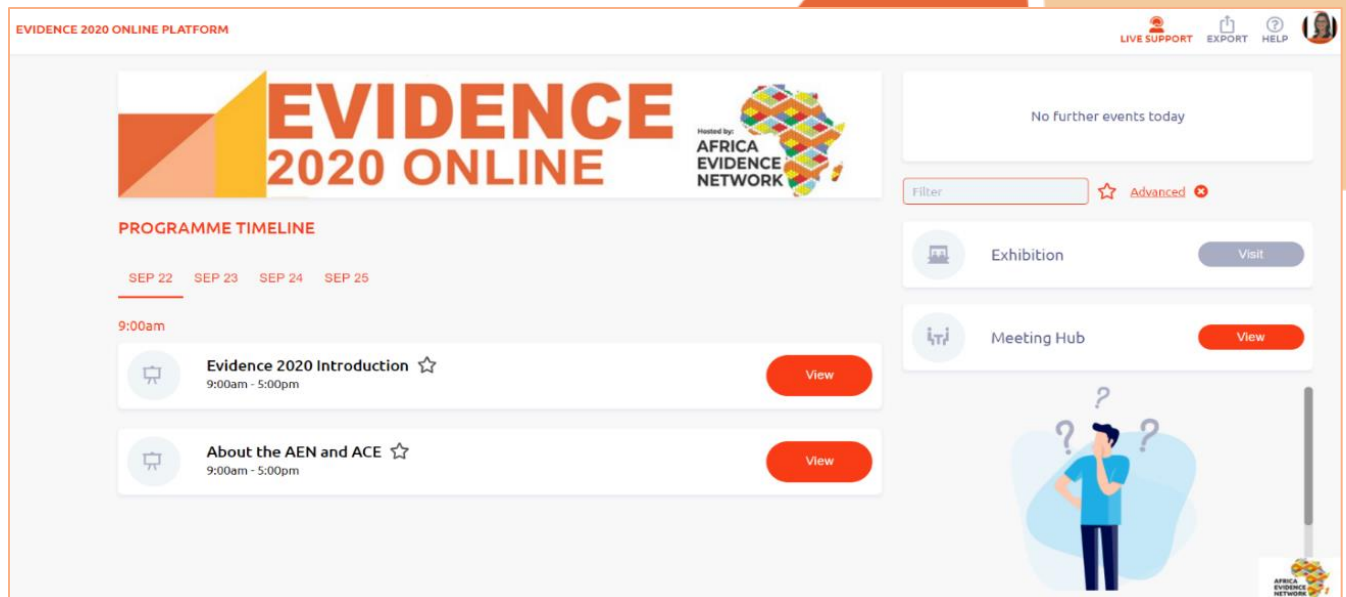

Figure 6 Landing page of the EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE portal.

Ensuring different ways to actively participate

Active participation in advancing the work within the three workstreams of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE was pivotal to the success of the event. Apart from designing working sessions to be engaging, it was essential to recognise and respect that not all participants would want to or be able to contribute in the same way. This fact led to including synchronous and asynchronous sessions in the programme.

Synchronous sessions were facilitated and coordinated live through a collective meeting platform where participants were encouraged to share their contributions in real-time with one another. Asynchronous sessions facilitated participants' contributions to 'living' documents and access to pre-recorded content at one's own convenience.

To ensure synergy in the programme, the secretariat ensured that each synchronous and asynchronous working session built on from one another; every working session whether live or not was a key step leading to the culmination of each workstream.

Another way of integrating engagement into the programme – and specifically engagement that continues beyond the event – was to rely on storytelling (Figure 7). Stories appeared at the event through the collection of AEN Stories of Change and the
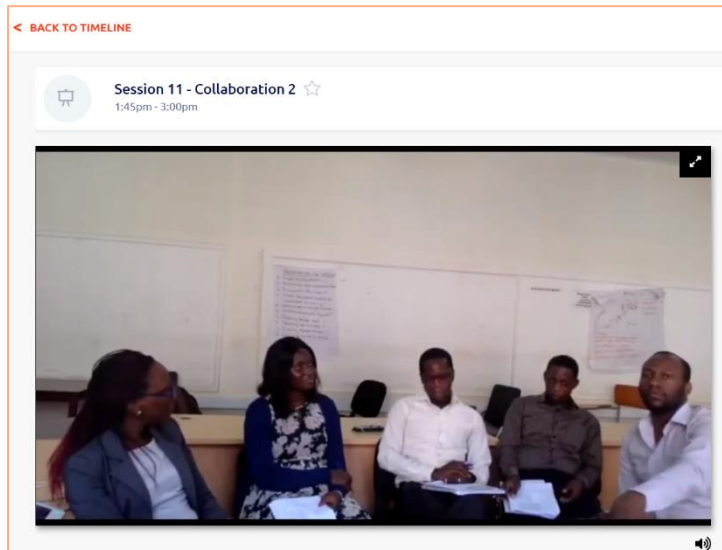
Figure 7 Africa Centre for Rapid Evidence Synthesis director Rhona Mijumbi-Deve (far left) sharing her team's story about collaborating through a crisis.

development of the Evidence Matters series.

AEN Stories of Change (SoC) form part of the Network's monitoring and evaluation activities to better understand the impact of the AEN on members' personal and professional lives. During EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, 17 SoCs collected in 2020 were showcased in the EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE gallery available via the exhibition section of the platform. We hope to continue to collate and curate these beyond the event.

The Evidence Matters series captures eight stories of evidence-use, six stories of how African organisations engage in EIDM capacity enhancement, and three stories of networking and collaboration from across the African continent. These will all be showcased on the AEN EIDM website.

Sessions in the EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE programme

EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE was rooted in three workstreams that align with the strategic goals of the AEN. The workstreams were deliberately designed in this way so that work taking place at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE advanced the Network as a whole toward its larger objectives. The workstreams of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE were:

- Advancing the art and science of evidence-use in Africa
- Enhancing evidence capacities
- Making connections and building collaborations

Given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in which EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE took place, evidence-use during and related to the pandemic was a common thread that ran throughout the event. A common objective throughout the pre-event activities, as well as the actual event of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, was member and participant engagement. All activities around EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE were designed to afford members of the African evidence ecosystem multiple points of entry into the conversations happening at the event.

To achieve this participant engagement, different types of event sessions were scattered throughout these workstreams. These session types each had a different purpose (see Box 1) and contributed to the overall objective of each workstream.

Below, we discuss the activities of each type of session in the EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE programme.

Box 1: Types of sessions at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE	
Inspiration sessions	The idea behind inspiration sessions is that these presentations are inspirational and provocative to stimulate discussions and ideas about specific aspects of the AEN's workstreams. Speakers in these sessions included Maha Bali (international speaker and researcher on building communities online for learning together), Frejus Thoto (2020 Africa Evidence Leadership Award (AELA) winner), Mapula Tshangela (2019 AELA winner), Sisonke Msimang (professional storyteller), and the Africa Centre for Evidence (ACE) Evidence Synthesis team.
Working sessions	The working sessions were for the use by the working groups to progress collaborative activities that seek to contribute to concrete outputs. Such outputs included: • Reflecting on success stories of evidence-use in Africa to arrive at key principles for supporting evidence-informed decision-making in Africa; • Engaging with success stories of alternative capacity development efforts for EIDM in Africa; • Exploring communities of practice as a way to build collaborations between members of the AEN.
Networking sessions	Two active networking sessions group participants over four rounds with three other participants attending EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE. This grouping allowed dedicated time for networking between participants. These sessions were built into the programme because of the AEN Secretariat's value of relationships and networking. The objective of these sessions was to create networking opportunities and enhance how the AEN fosters collaboration between its members.
Collective reflection sessions	At the end of each day, all participants were invited to share their reflections on the day's activities. These sessions allowed us to adapt how the event was delivered and effectively troubleshoot any emerging issues.

Inspiration sessions

The inspiration sessions at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE were designed to be deliberately provocative and inspirational. Four speakers and a panel were featured in these sessions: professional storyteller Sisonke Msimang, Maha Bali (international speaker and researcher on building communities online for learning together, the Africa Evidence Leadership Award (AELA) winners from 2019 and 2020, Mapula Tshangela and Frejus Thoto respectively, and the Africa Centre for Evidence Evidence Synthesis team. These are the second and third winners of the AELA, which was launched in 2016.

Sisonke Msimang | If a story moves you, act on it

In the opening inspiration session of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, professional storyteller Sisonke Msimang (Figure 8) reminded us about the power and place of stories in catalysing social justice action.

Sisonke explored how stories are only as beneficial as the social justice action they

Figure 8 Sisonke Msimang discusses the power – and limitations – of stories for social justice.

catalyse. First, she described how listening – while important – is insufficient if making a difference to a problem. Second, while stories are effective because we can empathise with protagonists, they can be impotent if we do not. Finally, if we don't link personal stories to larger narratives we miss the true power of stories to affect change.

"Alice Walker has said, 'Look closely at the present you are constructing. It should look like the future you are dreaming.' Storytellers can help us to dream, but it's up to all of us to have a plan for justice."

We cannot divorce the role that stories play from the credible facts of information used to make decisions, Sisonke continued. Justice – not stories – are what makes the world a better place. But justice takes action. What can audiences do, questioned Sisonke? Three things the storyteller suggests: be critically curious, recognise that storytelling is intellectual work in need of support, and step away from the virtual and into real worlds where you find discomfort so that you will act.

Maha Bali | Assessing capacity development with a social justice lens during COVID-19 and beyond

The objective of this inspiration session led by Maha Bali was for participants to recognise social justice as a key element for capacity development in African EIDM. For her talk Maha drew on an article she co-wrote with Catherine Cronin and Rajiv S

"Make sure that everyone is able to participate in the educational experience that you create".

Jhangiani, called 'Framing open educational practices from a social justice perspective'.

Maha urged participants to be explicit about two things in our capacity development efforts, namely what it is we value (and the frameworks that inform us in valuing), and how we measure this. For her our pedagogies for capacity development must be informed by social justice – both in content and process. Maha highlighted Nancy Fraser's work on social justice as participatory parity. Nancy Fraser indicates economic, social and political dimensions of social justice. Maha further reminded us that Fraser asked whether the impact of socialyl just capacity development is actually transformative (by addressing systemic issues), or whether it's ameliorative (just providing temporary solutions).

Maha indicated how she is using Liberating Structures as tools for socially just engagements in training and capacity development. She demonstrated the use of TRIZ, a liberating structure, with four volunteers from Evidence 2020 Online participants.

Laurenz Langer, Promise Nduku, Nkululeko Tshabala & Andile Mandonsela | The art and science of using evidence in Africa – panel discussion

Colleagues from ACE engaged in a panel discussion to allow participants at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE to deep dive into an evidence map that shared the latest empirical research with 122 studies on what works, how and why, to support evidence-use by African decision-makers. The panel discussion indicated what this map showed and how this evidence can be used to support decision-makers in Africa to use

evidence when making decisions. The session kicked off with a 10-minute video covering the research process and methodology followed to produce the map.

> "The map is a way of organising a knowledge base; looking at a single study alone does not help [EIDM]. It is better to have a bigger picture from multiple studies."

Panellists then zoomed in on the overall goal of answering the question: how can we get government departments in Africa to use evidence? Parts of the answers showed by evidence map included designing linear and replicable pathways to evidence-use. But this is not the whole story. Of fundamental importance are the experiences and knowledge around EIDM that have not been documented. For one panellist, the essence of this project was about trying to use an evidence map to bring both published and unpublished knowledge together, so that the art and the science of supporting EIDM could be represented in a complete evidence base with equally emphasis on both types of knowledge.

At the time of the panel, important gaps in the knowledge base need to be filled. Indices that foreground issues of gender and equity in the evidence base are planned to be developed and integrated into the evidence map to give a more complete and socially-just picture of what we know about supporting EIDM among African decision-makers.

Mapula Tshangela | No one does this alone

Mapula Tshangela (Figure 9) is the 2019 recipient of the AELA and works as the Director of Climate Change Mitigation Sector Plan Implementation within the

South African national government Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF). The key idea from Mapula's talk during the Inspiration session was that success in the EIDM sector in Africa is not a solitary race.

She shared her journey in EIDM which started back in 2008: "When I got into this work, to some extent…it was accidental…I was not planning to be a leader. It was just me trying to do my work". She continued: "We met different people along the way, and through that by 2012 as we published our very first environmental sector research-evidence framework which we were hoping to use to engage with the evidence generators to say 'as policy-makers, these are our evidence needs'".

"As much as it's a leadership award, it is a collective effort. I was never alone in it. There are many people behind me"

Mapula described the work of supporting EIDM within government as having grown 'organically' and that the relationships grew from a shared intention to ensure that environmental sector policies were informed by evidence. Mapula explained that while science is a core component of the environmental sector in South Africa, the interfacing between evidence producers and users was a unique. We learned from Ghana, Uganda, and Benin about different attempts to support evidence-use by policy-makers. "Keep those networks together, collaborate more, we learn together. There were times when we had to come up with our own solutions", she says.

"As much as it's a leadership award, it is a collective effort. I was never alone in it. There are many people behind me"; Mapula mentioned her colleagues Louise Shaxson, Imran Patel, and Kiruben Naicker, all dedicated to the EIDM field in Africa and all playing different roles both within the evidence ecosystem and within her own EIDM journey.

Mapula encouraged young people starting out in EIDM in Africa to find and reach out to others they could collaborate with, and to participate in the evidence ecosystem from wherever they found themselves: "It is through the engagement process that you can learn about how evidence is being used in different spaces".

Frejus Thoto | Think differently to support EIDM

Frejus Thoto (Figure 10) is based in Benin at Actions pour l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (ACED), a policy research organisation that "builds connection between science policy and

action to improve food and nutrition security". This award recipient challenged attendees at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE to question whose capacity should be developed in support of evidence-use for decisions. Frejus argued that the implementors – "the organisations that conduct concrete development activities on the field" – are a key stakeholder to focus capacity development initiatives on. When venturing a guess as to why organisations supporting EIDM in Africa focus on the policy-maker, Frejus suggested that perhaps there is an assumption that the if the policies and plans that implementors are executing are informed by evidence, then the "action implemented on the field should also be successful".

Frejus explained two reasons implementors are crucial stakeholders to focus capacity development efforts on. First, "those organisations that we considered as implementors are in fact hidden actors who influence policies and plans at local and national level." He cited an example from his work in Benin to illustrate this point: "In our work for example in Benin with local governments, we noticed that many of the decisions [of local government] are informed or based on reports produced by end-use or advisory firms". This presents a challenge, argued Frejus, in ensuring that the advisory firms developing such reports are familiar with EIDM and capacitated to build it into their reporting processes.

"Implementers also make a myriad of decisions that influence the lives of the population"

Frejus asserts that he second reason implementors, as opposed to policy-makers,

should be the focus of capacity development efforts in Africa is that "implementers also make a myriad of decisions that influence the lives of the population. They…choose among the many options to operationalise the guidelines… given by national policies". It is these choices that should be considered in light of evidence on the different options, argued Frejus.

Figure 10 Frejus Thoto: Africa Evidence Leadership Award winner 2020.

Working sessions

The working sessions consisted at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE consisted of both synchronous and asynchronous sessions across three different workstreams. Each session built-on and contributed to the last, and they all culminated in a final product or products to be finalised beyond 2020.

Workstream one | Advancing the art and science of evidence-use in Africa

This workstream aimed to advanced discussions about evidence-use in Africa. It was led by AEN programme officer Likhwa Ncube with support from Nasreen Jessani as the internal advisorseen in Figure 11.

The working group was focused on the undocumented art of evidence-use by

> The principal objectives of this workstream were to:
> 1) Reflect on the six different mechanisms of evidence-use and distil from these principles for supporting evidence-use in Africa.
> 2) Capture stories of supporting evidence-use in Africa that exemplified the emerging principles for supporting EIDM in Africa.

collecting stories of successful EIDM, building on the work of the ACE evidence synthesis team which focused on the documented art and science of EIDM in Africa through the development of an evidence map about interventions to support EIDM in Africa. During two working sessions at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, a set of principles for how to support EIDM in Africa was developed and used as a way to bring both areas of work together.

In the lead up to EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, and as part of working towards its objectives, the working group hosted two webinars, produced two blog posts, and collected eight stories related to its work. These are listed below.

1. In the first webinar titled *'Stories from Africa: experiences around the 'Art' and 'Science' of evidence use'* (26 August 2020), viewers heard stories of innovative evidence-use in Africa, listened to speakers distinguish elements that spoke either to the 'art' or the 'science' of doing evidence-informed decision-making, and uncovered innovations and tools used to support evidence-use in decision-making. More on the webinar and its key nuggets can be found in this related blog post: Opare-Kumi J. *Stories from Africa: experiences around the 'Art' and 'Science' of evidence use: webinar*. 18 September 2020. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/79/.

Figure 11 Working group members of the Art and Science of Evidence-use in Africa workstream.

2. In the second webinar titled '*Replicable strategies for institutionalising evidence-use: stories from Africa'* (2 September 2020) speakers shared with viewers their stories of institutionalising evidence-use in a research and government organisation in Africa. Going beyond this, they extracted and shared with replicable processes for increasing the use of evidence in decision-making. This blog provides more details: Asahngwa C & Ncube L. *Replicable strategies for institutionalising evidence-use: stories from Africa*. 21 September 2020. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/80/. https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/80/https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/80/.

During EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, members of the working group, the ACE secretariat, and participants at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE worked on a draft document of key principles for supporting evidence-use in Africa over the course of nine dedicated sessions. This document draws together evidence from 122 studies captured in the evidence map, the stories collected by this working group, and the stories and inputs from participants at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE to arrive at a proposed 17 principles to support EIDM in Africa.

Beyond EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, this workstream plans to collate all inputs received during the event to take this work forward by 1) collaborating with ACE's CEDIL project to look into evidence-informed principles for supporting evidence-use in Africa, 2) collecting a range of easy-to-access resources on EIDM that explain what EIDM is and what it can achieve in Africa, and 3) publishing blogs and Evidence Matters stories of development impact through evidence-use

Workstream two | Enhancing evidence capacities

This five-member working group was led by Charity Chisoro with support from Carina van Rooyen as an internal advisor and Kirchuffs Atengble of PACKS Africa as external advisor. The working group members for this workstream are presented in Figure 12.

The **primary objectives** of this workstream were to:
1) Collect, share and reflect on stories of successful alternatives of capacity development in Africa.
2) Capture alternative ways of advancing evidence capacities for various stakeholders in Africa.

This workstream predominantly intended to engender interest in and support participant engagement to advance discussions and imagine a new agenda for capacity development for African EIDM, taking further the models already used, by sharing and discovering different ways of looking at how to develop capacity.

Leading up to the actual event, this workstream hosted three webinars and published six blog posts.
1. The first webinar took place on 15 April 2020 and was titled '[What do we know about impact evaluation capacity in Sub-Saharan Africa?'](). The webinar shared the findings of a research project by the Africa Centre for Evidence about what

capacity for impact evaluations exists in Africa. This research project found reporting – amongst other things – that African capacity to undertake and lead impact evaluations outweighs the use of this capacity. A blog reflecting on this webinar was written by Enock Musungwini and can be accessed on the AEN EIDM hub: Musungwini E. *Impact evaluation capacity in Africa: scoping study*. 13 April 2020. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/50/.

2. The second webinar hosted by this workstream happened on 9 September 2020 in partnership with Effective Basic Services Africa (eBASE-Africa) and was titled 'Getting research into households (GRIH) through the eBASE family-centred evidence toolkit for disability'. More about this webinar can be found in the accompanying reflection blog: Yuh N & Okwen P. *Episode 1: Improving livelihoods of children with disabilities (CWD) using innovation and best practices*. 13 March 2020. Available:

Figure 12 Working group members of the Enhancing Evidence Capacities workstream.

https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/48/.https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/48/.

3. The final webinar hosted by this workstream was on 16 September 2020 and featured eBASE-Africa's work to use evidence to improve the educational attainment in children, titled 'We attain: using innovation and best practice to improve educational attainment in Middle Africa'. The accompanying reflection blog provides more detail: Akofu A & Okwen P. *Our journey towards contextualizing a relevant evidence portal: the role of networking and collaborations.* 30 September 2020. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/82/.

The remaining four blog posts written as part of this workstream were:
1. Ramasobana M & Kone N. (2020) Elements of a successful evaluation capacity building intervention in Africa: A landscape of participant's perceptions. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/46/
2. Chisoro C. *Enhancing capacities amidst the stress of COVID-19*. 19 May 2020. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/53/.
3. Yuh N & Okwen P. *Episode 2: Stories on disability.* 3 June 2020. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/55.
4. Yuh N & Okwen P. *Episode 3: Engaging policy-makers in evidence implementation.* 18 September 2020. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/le

arning-space/article/78/. Over four working sessions organised **during EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE**, participants in this workstream reflected on stories of alternative capacity development for Africa, considered the implications for various stakeholders of doing capacity development differently, and drafted a manifesto about what alternative capacity development for Africa would look like.

After EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, the workstream lead and the AEN leadership, will coordinate a workshop with the working group members and AEN members to discuss the next steps to advance this work. In a preliminary step to progress the manifesto for alternative capacity development in Africa the inputs received during EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE has been integrated and AEN members will be asked to provide input on the document during December 2020 and January 2021. The working group lead will also indicate the process going forward for how to involve interested individuals and organisations and maintain a database of who works on capacity development for EIDM in Africa.

Workstream three | Making connections and building collaborations

AEN programme officer Precious Motha – supported by Natalie Tannous as internal advisor with Beryl Leach as external advisor – led the working group of six members who executed the activities of this working group both before and during EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE. The working group members for this workstream are shown in Figure 13.

The **primary objectives** of this workstream were to:
1) Capture different approaches to fostering connections and collaborations in Africa.
2) Create networking opportunities between participants at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE.
3) Collect and reflect on stories of successful connection and collaborations in Africa.

Figure 13 Members of the Making Connections and Building Collaborations working group.

Leading up to EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, this workstream hosted one webinar and published four blog posts.
The webinar was hosted on 4 September 2020 and titled 'Exploring communities of practice for evidence-informed decision-making in Africa'. The speakers for this webinar shared their experiences of successfully establishing and maintaining communities of practice. The discussion ended with key risks and opportunities of using communities of practice as a way to enhance collaboration. Two working group members wrote a reflection blog: Gatsha G & Nyamukachi P. *Exploring communities of practice for EIDM in Africa: prospects and*

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challenges. 17 September 2020. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/77/.

The two remaining blog posts produced by this working group were:
1. Motha P. *Partnerships and collaborations: how a global pandemic served as a catalyst.* 19 May 2020. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/52/.
2. Etale L. *Keeping a network engaged and vibrant: methods, tools, and good practices.* 30 June 2020. Available: https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/57/.

During EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, this workstream spent two working sessions on brainstorming and refining key elements of successful collaboration. Participants in this workstream also engaged a session hosted by Rhona Mijumbi and colleagues from the Centre for Rapid Evidence Synthesis at Makerere University on successful and sustained collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic. These elements and the case study formed some of the basis of a working paper about innovative methods of establishing and building collaborations for EIDM in Africa. Participants spent two working sessions picking up the conversation about communities of practice as one possible way to enhance collaboration between members of the AEN. This culminated in the development of a draft document about what participants believed to be the top considerations to think through before implementing communities of practice within the AEN.

After EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, this workstream lead, the AEN leadership, and

internal advisor will work together to progress the work started at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE to explore whether the AEN establishes communities of practice. A draft paper about the different practices and elements of successful collaboration to support EIDM in Africa will be drafted for publication. And finally, an open access GeoMap of EIDM organisations in Africa will be updated and publicly launched in 2021.

Asynchronous capacity-enhancing sessions | Academic writing and publishing support

There were two writing support sessions in the EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE programme. These sessions were to support those busy with, or planning to engage with, academic writing. The editor-in-chief and one of the associate editors of the *African Evaluation Journal* – namely Mark Abrahams and Kambidima Wotela respectively – facilitated these responsive sessions with participants at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE.

The first session on was titled 'Writing your journal article: Why you need to'. In this session Mark Abrahams indicated how the *African Evaluation Journal* (and other international evaluation journals) provide an opportunity to document, through peer-reviewed publication, the monitoring and evaluation learnings of why (and why not) various types of interventions are working on the continent. Especially for emerging evaluators there is a capacity development component build into the review process of *African Evaluation Journal*, a bi-lingual journal of French and English. Issues emerging from this session included the lack of proficiency in English or French as a barrier to publication, processing/page fees as publishing inhibitors, and the danger of fake journals. Participants gained insights

directly from the editor about how to write and structure their articles, and how to improve your chances of getting your work published. The content of this session was guided by questions asked from the participants.

The second session was facilitated by Kambidima Wotela and entitled 'Converting a research or evaluation report into an academic publication'. In this session, Kambidima shared practical step-by-step ways to convert a research or evaluation report into an academic article. These steps included considering which outlet/journal to publish with, what editors and reviewers expect in an academic article, how to brainstorm a structure or outline for the article before you start writing, what information should go in the abstract, how to ensure a cohesive argument line in an article, and how to draft a conclusion. One of the participants in this session expressed how excited she was to apply these steps in

converting her PhD work into academic articles.

Networking sessions

Making space for connections was an important aspect of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE. There were two design features the secretariat used to enhance these connections.

The first design feature enabled participants to meet one another through the Meeting Hub (Figure 14). This was a space on the EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE platform that allowed participants to see shared information about one another and tailor-make their networking strategies accordingly. Designed to support one-to-one connection between attendees at their own pace and in their own time, the Hub could be used at any time but also had allocated time in the programme at the end of each day.
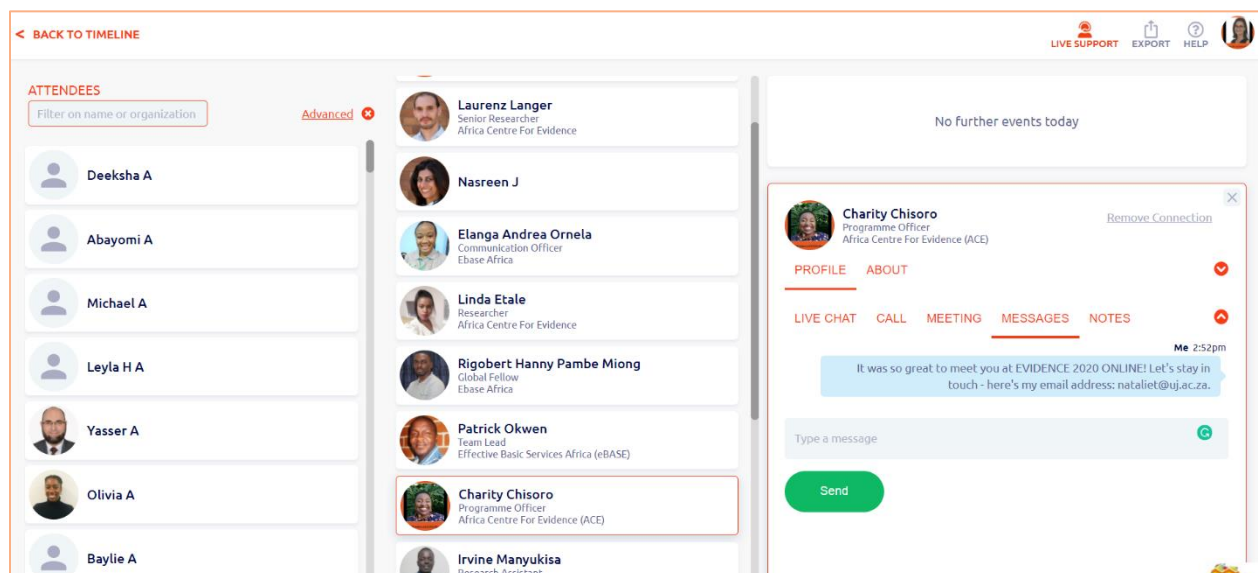

Figure 14 The EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE Meeting Hub was designed to allow members to informally network, in much the same way one would reach out to a fellow attendee during a coffee break; the Meeting Hub allowed for strategic networking.

The second design feature was that we built two dedicated networking sessions into the programme of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE Their purpose was to make sure people took time to connect with others, and we structured those sessions purposefully with specific activities.

The first session on day one was designed as heart-warmers which saw participants randomly placed into groups. For ten minutes, participants could engage via video call, getting to know one another better. After ten minutes, participants were rotated into different groups; this rotation lasted for four rounds. The engagement with one another in this session was via picking a profile photo frame that depicted what animal in the evidence ecosystem participants identified as. This became a fantastic way to break the ice during the networking session as a failsafe question, 'So, what evidence animal are you?' People appreciated learning more about the reasoning behind the avatars and the animals on offer, and where they sit in the evidence ecosystem. And of course, Twitter conversations followed about meeting various evidence animals, such as #EvidenceAnts and #EvidenceEagles (Figure 15, Figure 16).

The second networking session was about how we further collaborations. Groups we self-selected, and we had two rotations of 20 minutes each (Figure 13). In the first round, attendees were asked to talk about two prompts, namely:
1) I would like to work more closely with others on…
2) One idea for how some of us could collaborate is…

In the second round of this networking session, the prompts were:
1) One thing I will be doing after EVIDENCE 2020 is to reach out to reconnect with…
2) It would be great to get advice from others about how I could collaborate on….

Attendees were asked to capture their ideas in the chat as well.

In addition to the two planned networking sessions, a third networking session was included on last day of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, responding to a request from participants for a French-speaking networking session.
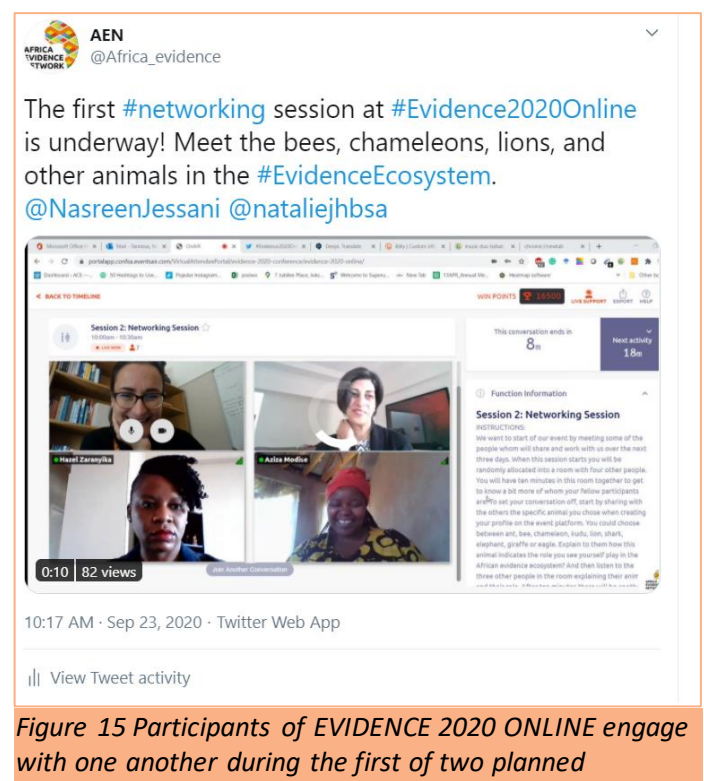

Figure 15 Participants of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE engage with one another during the first of two planned

Collective reflection sessions

As part of a daily wrap-up of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, collective reflection sessions were held. During these, notetakers from the various sessions fed their notes to dedicated facilitators who reported on themes from sessions, and feedback from participants. These sessions were also used by participants to share any issues they'd encountered during the day, which allowed the secretariat to respond quickly. These sessions were about reflecting on the day – in terms of both content and technical issues – to take forward changes into next day.

"I was only able to attend briefly at the time, but have been catching up on lots of the sessions. By the far the best online conference I've been to!" – Jonathan Kay, Education Endowment Foundation

However, the reflections extended beyond the timeframe of the EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE programme to include a diversity of experience and voices through numerous formats. These include AEN secretariat and ACE collective reflections, post-event evaluation surveys, session evaluation surveys, technology team reflections, facilitator reflections, and a member-led reflection webinar held on 18 November 2020 titled 'Virtual conferences are better than physical ones: yes, no, maybe?'. We indicate our learnings from these later in this report.

EVIDENCE 2020 [ONLINE] demonstrated to the world how a conference can become personal, even virtual.ly" – Harsha Dayal, Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation.

Figure 16 Conversations about the evidence animal avatars were alive and well on social media.

Exhibitors

Exhibitors for EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE were handpicked by the AEN from a research study into EIDM organisations operating in Africa. There were a number of invited exhibitors, as well as those which requested to exhibit their organisations, in our dedicated exhibition space on the online platform. From this platform, exhibitors were able to upload communications materials, descriptions about themselves, and contact details. Going into the exhibition space at dedicated times in the programme meant that attendees were able to meet organisation representatives and engage in conversation, in much the way they would have been able to during a physical event. The exhibitors at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE were the African Capacity Building Foundation, Collaboration for Environmental Evidence, Effective Basic Services Africa (eBASE), Evaluation Society of Kenya (ESK), INASP, Independent Development Evaluation, African Development Bank (IDEV), International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), Provide & Equip Uganda Ltd (P&E), the Strengthening the use of Evidence for Development Impact (SEDI) programme, and the South African Human Sciences Research Council (HRSC).

What did we learn from hosting EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE?

The year 2020 was a tumultuous year for everyone across the globe as organisations sought to pivot on the plans they'd developed for the year. It was no different for the AEN. And while we consider the execution of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE to have been a success, we recognise also the many lessons we can draw from delivering this event for future events, such as EVIDENCE 2022.

At the start of planning an EVIDENCE event is always the question about whether the secretariat will have the resources to pull off an event of this scale. Yet year-on-year since 2014, we have managed to succeed in bringing the African evidence ecosystem together. The year 2020 has renewed our dedication to hosting a gathering and has pushed us to reimagine what these gatherings might look like in the future. So while for the time being, much about what EVIDENCE 2022 could be remains undecided, our dedication to the community of people and organisations dedicated to supporting African EIDM is sure. And as an evidence-informed Network, we always begin by reflecting on what we have learnt along the journey so far.

After the EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, the secretariat hosted a number of reflection sessions with staff, our conference

"Evidence 2020 was one of the earliest conferences that moved online in response to the pandemic – it was pioneering, and other larger organisations are looking to learn from this experience."
– EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE participant

consultants, participants, and a webinar with AEN members. With the support of REBOOT who facilitated a two-hour long workshop with various EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE stakeholders (such as working group members, facilitators, note-takers, exhibitors, and participants), a report was developed about recommendations for future events. The text below shares those recommendations, the insights that are the foundation of those recommendations, and some examples of specific actions the AEN could take in preparing for EVIDENCE 2022.

Recommendation one: remain dedicated to the participant experience through networking and improved access

Acknowledging the strong reputation of the EVIDENCE brand across the continent, reflections from multiple stakeholders emphasised how it important it remains that as the AEN secretariat, the core focus of EVIDENCE events remains ensuring an informative, collaborative, and transformative participant experiences.

REFLECTION INSIGHT | Feedback from participants suggests that networking is a key element to retain for future EVIDENCE events, stating that "while networking can be much more difficult online, it is still vital for participants to feel like they are engaging with their peers and learning from their experiences". Participants described the connections they made during EVIDENCE 2022 as 'gold'; a priority for the secretariat team is to ensure that future formats of EVIDENCE events – virtual, in-person, or a combination – **retain the ability to connect people in the evidence community** together.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS
- The conscious design of alternative networking activities (e.g., database of participants who are attending the event; virtual 'speed networking').

- Exploring opportunities for additional networking opportunities for participants post-event.

"Networking sessions were gold and enabled participants to connect and talk to each other." – EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE participant

"I enjoyed the working sessions a lot! A core group of people tended to be in the same working stream, and I got to know those way better, especially through discussing and working on the Google Doc." – EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE participant

REFLECTION INSIGHT | While hosting the event through a virtual platform addressed some issues of equity (e.g., high costs of travelling to an in-person event), other social justice issues emerged. Based on feedback from participants and stakeholders, we need to focus on designing future events to be inclusive through both **digital and in-person access**. Reboot captures this by saying that, "By focusing on internet accessibility and the inclusion of a variety of practitioners, [the] AEN can ensure that critical voices are uplifted and included in key opportunities".

SPECIFIC ACTIONS
- Design future events as hybrids that integrate both face-to-face and online elements.

- Research and explore low bandwidth technology platforms.
- Incorporate more asynchronous engagement into the programme that can counter technical challenges at a particular moment.

"In Cameroon internet connection was challenging and frustrating, especially in workgroup preparation." – EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE participant

REFELCTION INSIGHT | For many stakeholders of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE and members of the AEN, English is a second **language and can inhibit access** to future events. As the AEN secretariat, there is a need to explore and integrate what Reboot terms "bi or tri-lingual access points" throughout future events. This is fundamental to the participant experience created by EVIDENCE events as being able to understand the positions put forward and contributing in a language that is comfortable, is so fundamental to participating in an EVIDENCE event. The AEN secretariat, in preparing for future events to support engagement in multiple languages, should draw on its members more.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS
- Simultaneous translators for key sessions.
- Working materials available in selected languages.

- Involving francophone organisations or leaders in the process of planning.

"It could have been better if the platform and discussions had been available in both English and French. Personally, I am a francophone and it was a bit challenging to follow along." – EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE participant

Recommendation two:
focus on uplifting the wider evidence community through CoPs, space to share stories, and co-design

Since its inception in 2012, the AEN's core focus has been to bring together the members of the evidence ecosystem in Africa, drawing out their sense of being a community. Feedback from EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE stakeholders suggests that future EVIDENCE events should build on mechanisms to bolster this sense of community.

REFLECTION INSIGHT | Emerging from EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE and based on member feedback of many annual member surveys throughout the years, a concrete expression of how to foster the shared sense of community among AEN members is the idea of **establishing Communities of Practice**. As part of preparing for future events, the Reboot report suggested "it would be key [for the AEN secretariat] to do research to ensure…that a Community of Practice is the best way to [uplift the wider evidence community]." Exploring this would allow the Network secretariat to offer members something they want to be part of.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS
- Conduct design-led research with the broader evidence community to identify gaps in knowledge and needs.
- Undertake surveys and brainstorming sessions around what kind of community-bolstering mechanism the larger field is missing.
- Test how communities of practice may work for the AEN.

"The exhibition space worked well because partners were given an opportunity to showcase their work and AEN showcased the stories of change." – EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE participant

REFLECTION INSIGHT | Stakeholders at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE appreciated the multiple and extensive opportunities for **peer exchange of stories**. Participants mentioned the their "excitement at being able to listen, learn, and share how evidence was being used in their own contexts" and other contexts. Planning future EVIDENCE events, the AEN secretariat should be aware that the peer panels, gallery of stories, and working group's pre-event activities "added colour and purpose to a topic that can feel static".

SPECIFIC ACTIONS
- Explore ways to give individuals who share their stories with the AEN the opportunity to tell these stories themselves and capture these as short videos in future events.

- Support those who share their stories in refining their stories for maximum engagement.

"There were great opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, which resulted in learning more about the prevailing evidence trends in Africa." – EVIDENCE 2020 participant

"The activities really worked because that encouraged participation and allowed us to get working towards our outputs." – EVIDENCE 2020 participant

REFLECTION INSIGHT | One method for fostering a sense of community that Reboot uses in its work and recommends the AEN secretariat considers is co-design of future event programmes. Describing co-design as "a process for developing products, initiatives, and strategies directly with stakeholders—both the eventual users and the partners and staff who will deliver them" can be difficult. One way that EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE trialled this approach to some success was the **establishment of the working groups** for EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE which focussed on specific workstreams of the event's programme. Participants at EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE agreed that "having clear goals and working towards the outcomes together fostered a sense of community and accomplishment not often seen in these

"Kudos to the working groups and POs for the continuity and scaffolding of the working sessions. Having outputs at the end of the event made my participation feel so productive." – EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE participant

types of events", although some found it difficult to cross workstreams.

"The webinars and blogs in advance of the event was really appreciated and assisted with content as a springboard for the event." – EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE participant

SPECIFIC ACTIONS
- Conduct co-design workshops to help design what future engagement looks like.
- Engage a wide range of stakeholders in the decision-making process, both within AEN.

Recommendation three: commit to long-term planning and effective event design using early alignment, tested technology, and careful timing

"As EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE was one of the first events of its breadth and depth to switch to a fully digital format, the AEN team has a leg up on other similar events," reads the Reboot report. The experience of hosting EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE points to the necessity of continued investment in the process of developing these events with a cohesive approach to both the planning and programming design. In addition to the below reflection insights, this includes finalising concept notes to give clear direction around the objective of the event.

REFLECTION INSIGHT | Outside of the chaos of pandemic years such as 2020, **aligning goals and programming far in advance** will be pivotal to the success of future EVIDENCE events. This yearly alignment is an essential component that allows other elements to

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fall into place, such as participant communications and agenda design.

- Co-create event agendas with the wider evidence network.
- Create an advisory of peers and practitioners who can weigh in on event needs, goals, etc.
- Develop and own tools that can be reused for each event (e.g., participant trackers, checklists, etc.) for each aspect of the event.
- Identify and design sessions within the scope of the technology available, in collaboration with facilitators early on in the planning process.
- Be explicit about roles and responsibilities for during the virtual sessions, particularly amongst note takers and co-leaders of sessions.

REFLECTION INSIGHT | The short timeframe in which EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE was executed meant that "much reduced time was available to set-up the online platform, and produce and disseminate to attendees more pre-support about how the new technology would work". This challenge was reflected in much of the feedback from stakeholders. Even so, online tools that allowed for asynchronous co-work, such as Google Docs and pre-recorded content, were welcomed and used well. Reboot has recommended the **testing of different virtual platforms** during "down-time" in the years between EVIDENCE events.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS
- Plan and deliver a comprehensive roll-out of the event programme for participants.
- Test digital platforms during everyday meetings, activities, etc. such that AEN has a better understanding and use of a variety, and can thus make the best choice for future events well in advance.
- Integrate Mural and other new tools into AEN's practices in working groups, webinars, etc.

REFLECTION INSIGHT | An important insight from the reflections of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE stakeholders is that "time in the virtual space doesn't equate to time in person". Obviously, time runs the same irrespective of where one is, but important from this reflection insight is that **the experience of time** when attending a virtual event feels quite different to the experience of time during an in-person event. This has become known as 'Zoom fatigue' during the COVID-19 pandemic and this is something for the AEN secretariat to guard against in future events. Reboot notes that the norm of a constant flow of sessions during an in-person event does not translate well to a virtual environment where such a flow "fosters a feeling of intensity that comes at the cost of reflection and reorientation". This was a common experience for participants, despite the shortening of the event days, incorporation of 10-minute breaks between sessions, and ensuring no session ran longer than 90 minutes.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS
- Lean into asynchronous aspects of the conference, so that those who

miss parts of the event due to conflicts or competing priorities can catch up and participate when they can.
- Plan the sessions with more time between them. This can include to have shorter and less sessions per day, stretches over a longer period.
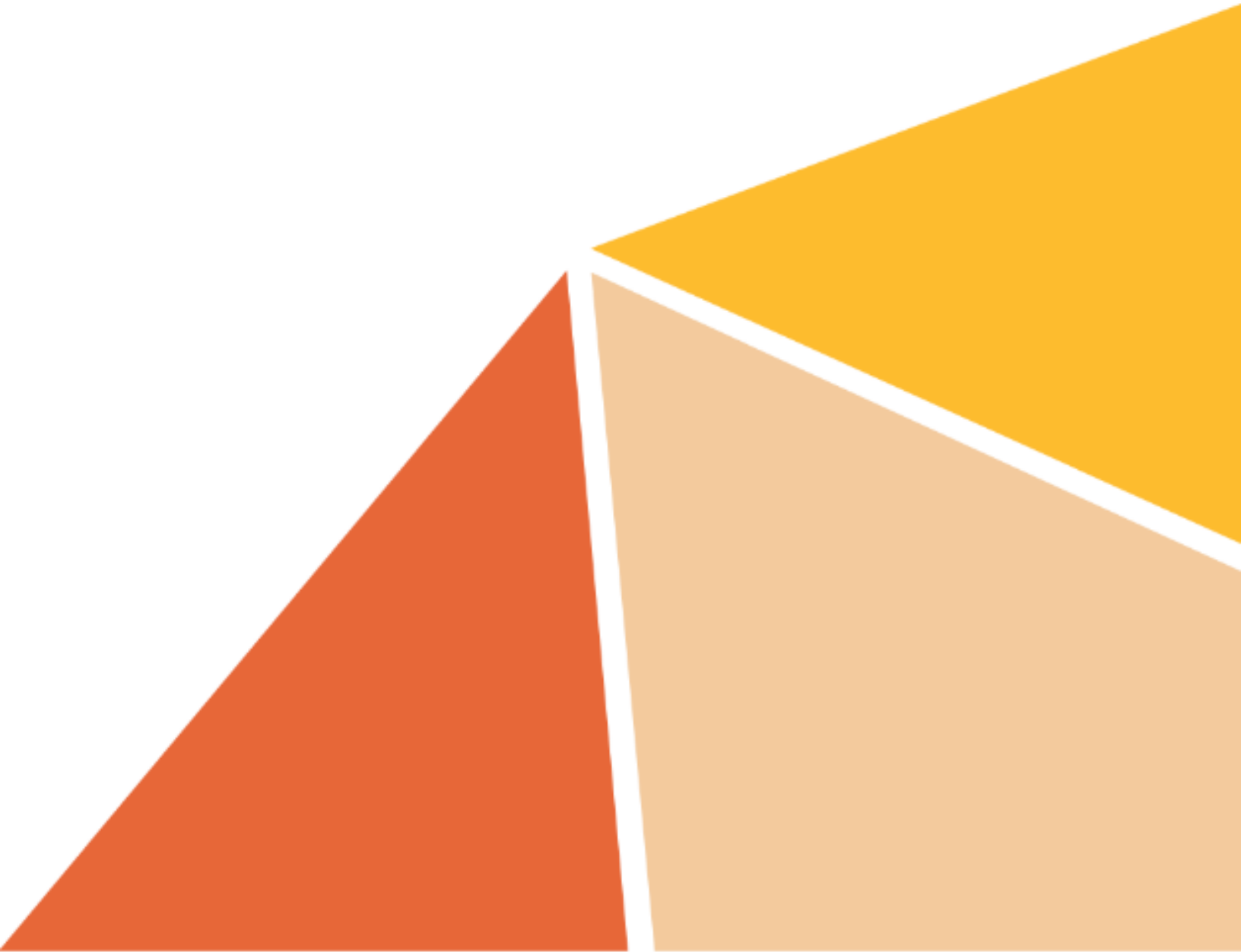
Where to from here?

In a culminating [blog](#), the then AEN strategic manager Nasreen Jessani summed up eight themes emerging from EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE (Figure 18). These themes – all underpinned by a commitment to social justice – are equity, voice, stories, authenticity, relationships, language, crises, and systems. These themes emerged across sessions, in all workstreams, and in discussions in-between all these during EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE as touch points for an active, thriving evidence ecosystem in Africa. These themes are also mirrored by the strategic goals of the Network.

The AEN is guided by its strategic goals, developed in 2018 for the period of 2019-2024 (Figure 17). There are five goals that the AEN uses to align all its work to. These goals are what guided the formation of working groups, the conceptualisation of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE, and will continue to guide the steps we take to move this work forward. Below, we categorise each next step in advancing the work from EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE in terms of the strategic goal it contributes to.
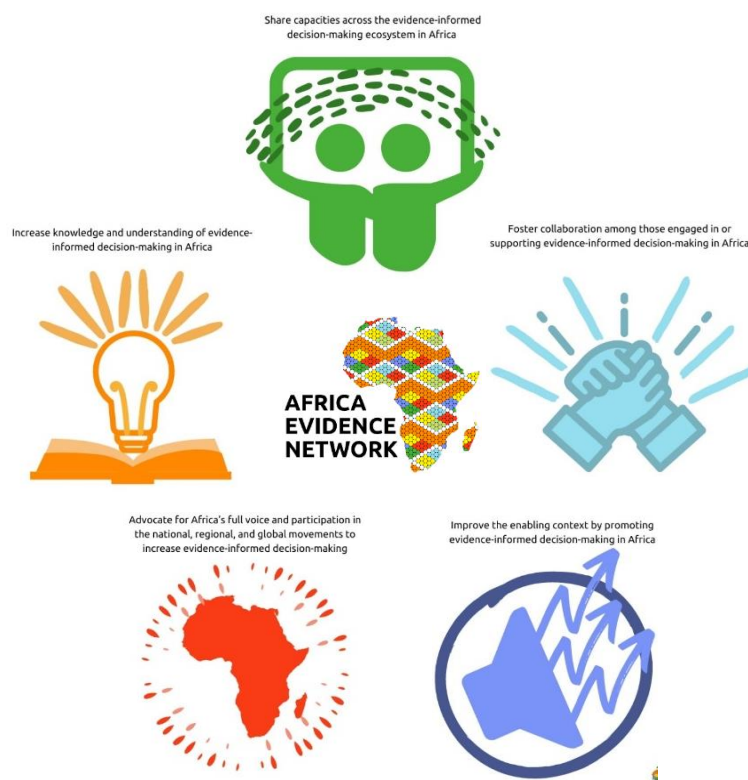

Figure 17 Strategic goals of the Africa Evidence Network

Figure 18 Image from the summary blog post written by Nasreen Jessani

GOAL 1: Increasing knowledge and understanding of evidence-informed decision-making in Africa

- Publish the key principles for supporting evidence-informed decision-making in Africa.
- Updating and publishing an open-access GeoMap of EIDM organisations in Africa.

GOAL 2: Share capacities across the evidence ecosystem in Africa

- Completing and publishing a manifesto of alternative capacity development in Africa.
- Creating and maintaining a database of organisations working on EIDM capacities in Africa.

GOAL 3: Foster collaboration amongst those supporting African EIDM

- Ensuring the published GeoMap of EIDM organisations is launched and accessible to all members of the AEN.
- Refining and publishing a working paper on the elements for successful EIDM collaboration in Africa.

GOAL 4: Advocate for Africa's full voice in the local, regional, and global EIDM movements

- Create a gallery of stories embedded on the AEN's EIDM hub to showcase the EIDM champions within the AEN, the incredible evidence-use stories from Africa, the stories of innovative capacity development, and the difference the AEN has made in the lives of its members.
- Launch and award the Africa Evidence Leadership Award in 2021.
- Provide African presenters a platform to showcase their work in EIDM at global platforms.
- Spotlight individuals and organisations through different mechanisms, such as twitter, newsletter, use of website/hub to support members to make connections and build their own communities.
- Identify evidence advocacy organisations for learning and benchmarking.

GOAL 5: Improving the enabling context by promoting EIDM in Africa

- Identify and spotlight members in order to promote and communicate their work through the monthly newsletter and social networks.
- Produce relevant resources on EIDM and made the available on the EIDM hub.
- Raise awareness on these through blogs and other social media activities.

TAKING ACTION TOGETHER
A closing message from the Africa Evidence Network chairperson

Hopefully after reading this report, it is clear that while EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE is over, its legacy is very much alive within the core work of the AEN secretariat. Work that started before and progressed during EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE will form the basis of the team's work going into 2021.

Using these ideas and experiences we've been privileged to gather, we will continue to support meaningful connections in the EIDM ecosystem in Africa, we will continue to dare imagine alternative ways to enhance EIDM capacity in Africa, and we will continue to learn about and understand how to better support EIDM in Africa. Of course, we cannot do this alone. The success of our initiatives depends on how we the secretariat serves its members.

So, I invite you to join us on this journey as we travel towards the future where we've contributed to building the Africa we want. I encourage you to share your ideas, your work, your successes, and your failures with us all. I welcome you to a network where your needs as a member of this community are respected and where we do everything we can to ensure that the AEN continues to be a responsive and supportive place to gather with likeminded individuals.

The success, lessons, and experiences of EVIDENCE 2020 ONLINE are not ours alone to claim. This event is a demonstration of the power we have as a collective to shape narratives, challenge assumptions, and contribute to the changes we want to see in the EIDM ecosystem in Africa and the world. Thank you for journeying with us.
With gratitude,

Ruth

Ruth Stewart
Africa Evidence Network chairperson
Africa Centre for Evidence director

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