

Watch this space!

In only ten years, Zeenat Ishmail has translated a theoretical framework on monitoring and evaluation into an internationally recognised and implemented model. By Maret Lesch



Benin, Thailand, Jordan, Canada, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and the United States – these are only some of the countries that Zeenat Ishmail's internationally recognised work has taken her.

Many of us know Zeenat as the driving force behind MPAT, and she even admits that at one stage people started calling her “Aunty Patty” because of her dedicated involvement.

“I got a lot of opportunities because of the effort and additional work that I’ve done and because I went beyond the call of duty and scope of my work.”

However, Zeenat is responsible for much more than just the Management Performance Assessment Tool.

As the Chief Director for Strategic Management Information, Zeenat leads province-wide monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and ensures the production of

relevant and accurate data and information. The different types of data and information produced through various monitoring and evaluation processes are then used as evidence to inform better planning, policy development, stakeholders, and ultimately better decision-making.

When Zeenat started her journey in Strategic Management Information, she made it clear that she’s not going to be a paper report pusher, but wanted to see her work deliver real, measurable results. “For me it was never about just making sure a report is submitted timeously. I’ve always wanted to generate relevant, accurate data and information. I also wanted to drive objective analyses of performance. In 2006 when I started here, the Department of the Premier was busy with a 300 page conceptual framework on M&E. I’ve taken M&E from theory and put it into practice and institutionalised it. Today we have frameworks, guidelines and directories in place and the Western Cape Government is known for its sound methodologies. My team is working very hard with our partners to get the BizSystems to work even better. I believe there is still work to be done in that space.”

In order to take M&E from theory to a practice that works in an organisation, Zeenat has designed a model that allows for assessing the province’s contribution to development results. “I was instrumental in the design of the results-based M&E model adopted by the WCG. In 2006, M&E in the Department of Premier was in a conceptual stage. I took up the space to develop and sustain custodianship of M&E in the WCG. This was initially done based on the World Bank and Malaysian models. Ten years down the road we now operate within the fundamental elements of a province-wide M&E system using a results-based approach. There is a community of M&E people in the WCG and now we talk about data availability and quality, analysis and evaluation, information use, decision-making, and sustaining an M&E system to evaluate the impact it makes on people’s lives. In terms of quality, I also participated in the different versions of the development of the South African Statistical Quality Assessment Framework.”

Zeenat’s ground-breaking work in the field of M&E has been recognised internationally through various opportunities. She has written and published a number of papers on province-wide M&E and in 2009 led a team to Malaysia and Bangkok to compare our results-based M&E model with the Malaysian results-based budgeting system. She also represented national colleagues in particular on the National Evaluation System.

“With the establishment of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), I became quite involved in the design of their M&E processes and especially the National Evaluation System (NES) and the MPAT. They used the WCG to pilot their policies, frameworks and methods. The existing M&E work that I have led in the WCG since 2006 became the framework for the DPME focus areas that DotP needed to institutionalise.

“Through this work I received a bursary from 3ie International Initiative for Impact Assessment to do an international course in the UK on impact evaluation. I was invited by the DPME to join a delegation to Canada to share knowledge on MPAT.

I was invited to share the WCG story on the Provincial Evaluation System with the American and Canadian Evaluation Societies. I was recently invited to participate at the Benin Evaluation Week to talk on evidence based policy and implementation.

“Because of these engagements, our stakeholder base includes key international stakeholders with continuous engagements to ensure that we remain relevant. We are now

working with the Netherlands to review our M&E processes.”

Zeenat says she believes in giving her team recognition for keeping the vision alive; and that humility and hard work will always stand her in good stead. “I got a lot of opportunities because of the effort and additional work that I’ve done and because I went beyond the call of duty and scope of my work. I could see how it would be beneficial to the WCG. It was always about what the WCG could gain from the experience and how we will be able to use it to our benefit. I’m grateful to HODs who gave me the opportunity to work with their departments and for my team and stakeholders.”

She admits that she can drive her team very hard sometimes, but there is always a good reason – her motivation to achieve high standards.

“I’m very passionate about my work. I don’t see it as work but as a journey that is required for the Western Cape Government and one I want to take. It is about continuous improvement in each of the streams that we are working with and to know that our work can be compared internationally. You can’t stop me now, the adrenaline is pumping. I need to improve continuously. Watch this space – the road ahead is about ‘better data and information, for better decisions, known to all’ ●

FIVE THINGS YOU DON’T KNOW ABOUT ZEENAT

1. She’s run the Comrades and Two Oceans Marathons and used to swim 40 laps in the morning before work and then run 20 km after work. Since 2002, she has scaled down on the physical activity and now only runs a “fast 2 km in under 10 minutes” in the morning on her treadmill.
2. Zeenat reads newspapers and makes sure she is always up to date with the news. She likes following all the high profile murder trials, and admits that she can get very involved.
3. Humility and simplicity are the characteristics she values most.
4. The Canadian author Ray Rist, who wrote *Ten Steps to a Results Based Monitoring and Evaluation*, complimented Zeenat and her team by saying “In a public forum, watch the space on the Western Cape Government front”. Later during an interview that was broadcasted in Canada, she said “Hi Ray, we’ve done it! We have translated your book into practice!
5. Zeenat likes watching Zee TV and kykNET. She watches *Binnelanders* with her mom and *Jou Show* with her sister.