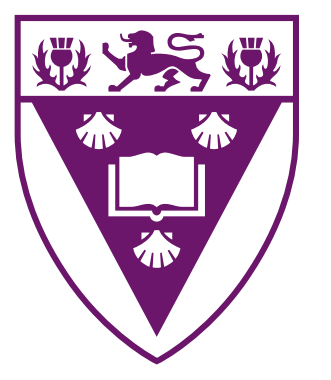# Why do we need to re-think evaluation for skills systems?

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**RHODES UNIVERSITY**
Where leaders learn

WHY DO WE NEED TO RE-THINK EVALUATION FOR SKILLS SYSTEMS?

Skills programmes and providers are now being evaluated like businesses - with simple, countable inputs and simple, measurable outcomes apparently achieved in linear, predictable steps. Not only government but universities and NGOs report against indicators that are aggregated up, but not reflectively interrogated to enable learning. The numbers of indicators and reports are growing, and more and more of what we do is being audited. Thus more time is needed for monitoring and evaluation (M&E), from growing tiers of managers, and from educators. And yet we cannot confidently comment on the impact of skills programmes. We still cannot say whether we are producing real skills, and why (not). Even commissioned evaluation reports do not seem to inform the way forward, and the same questions are being asked by consecutive teams of evaluators, of the same programmes, only to be filed away by consecutive M&E managers.

RESEARCH PROJECT

From 2018 - 2020 Eureta Rosenberg and Mike Ward worked with SETAs and DHET to review their M&E and co-develop a more streamlined and powerful framing and process to evaluate the national skills system. The diagram below shows the nine foci of the research project.
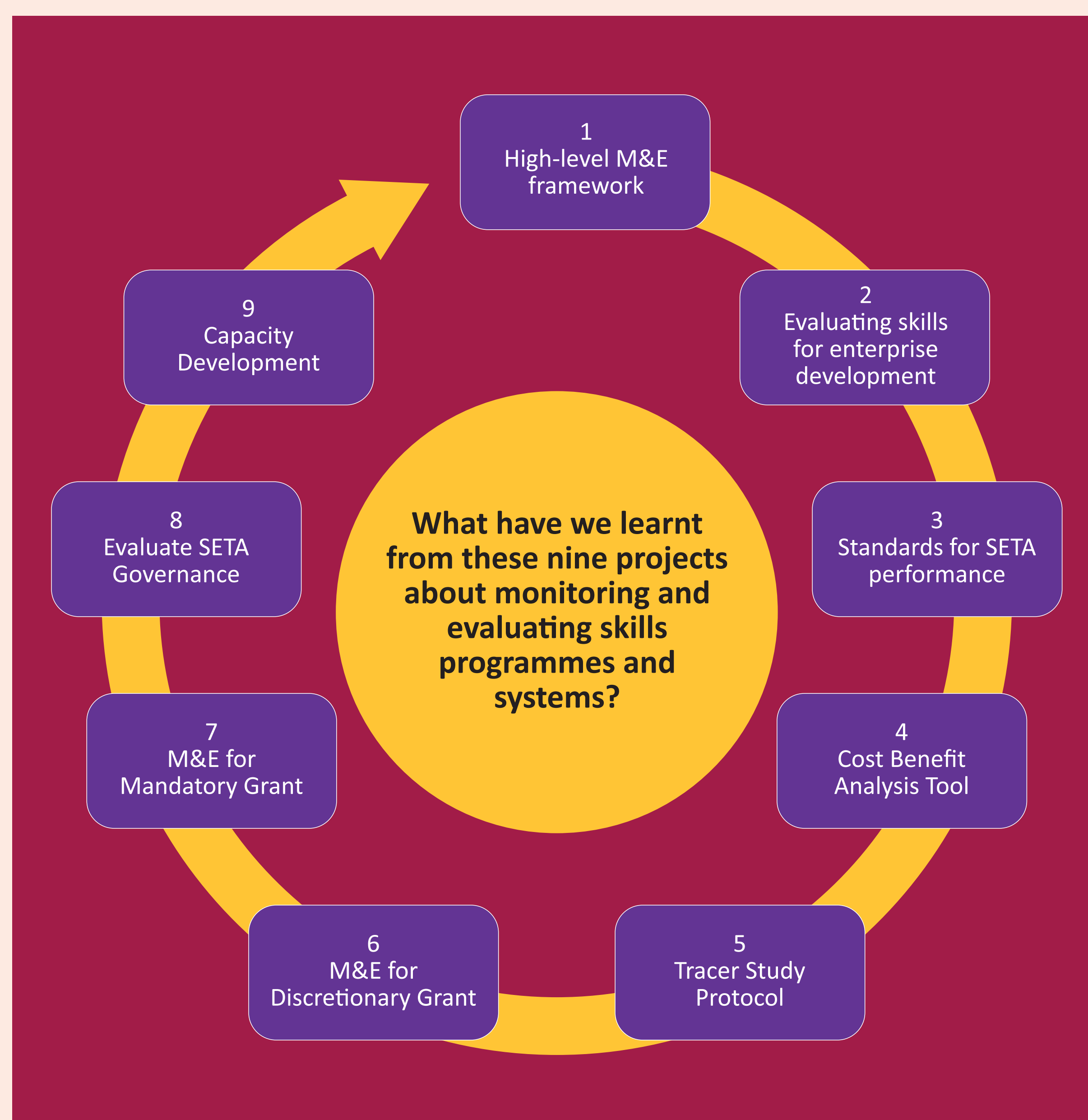
WHAT DID THIS PROJECT ACHIEVE?

We developed new methodologies like a tracer study protocol (by Mike Rogan) to evaluate if learners use any skills gained post-training; and a cost-benefit analysis tool (by Glenda Raven) to determine a realistic cost for skills training benefits. A case study evaluating enterprise development in a township (by Garry Rosenberg) demonstrated the value of viewing skills programmes as activity systems. DHET officials joined in mapping a Theory of Change (ToC) for the national skills system. However, the study showed that systemic constraints prevent SETAs and DHET from doing more meaningful M&E. Government is wedged into a proliferation of indicator-based reporting and auditing. While these do not prevent the mis-use of funding, they do reduce opportunities to learn from evaluation, as also found by Vhutshilo Mudau among partners in water management, and by Rosenberg et al. in SANParks. We recommend a multi-layered model of process as below:

Participatory Monitoring, Reporting, Evaluation and Reflection Support Learning

Monitor
- **Participatory monitoring and reporting (**generating the data)
- Tracking an agreed-upon, realistic set of indicators (based on ToC)

Evaluate
- Informing a choice of **evaluative case studies**
- On selected programme aspects, **undertaken collaboratively**

Synthesise
- Synthesis of findings and **shared critical reflections**
- **Drawing joint conclusions** on what works, and why

Review
- Leads to a **collective review of the Theory of Change (ToC)**
- And co-refinement of a realistic number of indicators to track

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