

National Evaluation Capacities Conference 2024

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION TEMPLATE

Presenter's full name (title, name, surname)	Ms. Camille Spencer
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Title of the abstract	'The 300 Spartans:' The Real Story of Building a Country M&E System in a Small Island Developing State- Lessons Learned and Pitfalls to Avoid.
Conference session	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stream A. Responsive National Evaluation Systems <input type="checkbox"/> Stream B. Inclusive National Evaluation Systems <input type="checkbox"/> Stream C. Future Driven Systems and Approaches
Name(s), title(s) and institutional affiliation(s) of all other authors/contributors	Mr. Andrew Spencer, Programme Coordinator, Implementation, Ministry of Planning and Development
Preferred format:	<input type="checkbox"/> Formal presentation (maximum 10 minutes) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participation in a panel discussion where the experience can be shared <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participation in an interactive session where the example can be shared, without a formal presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____
I will be applying for bursary support (note that there will be a separate application for bursary support, the present template is only to get an idea of the bursary requirement as you submit the abstract).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Language	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> French <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese

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Abstract Text (454 words)

The film '300' is based on a fictional dramatization of the Battle of Thermopylae in which King Leonidas led 300 Spartans to victory against the Persian 'god-King' Xerxes and his invading army of more than 300,000 soldiers. The 300 Spartans provided an inspiring story of heroic persistence against seemingly impossible odds. Likewise, building a national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), a tiny archipelagic country in the southern Caribbean, with a population of only 1.4 million people, is an epic tale fraught with monumental risks, challenges and 'villains' that a small team of leaders can only overcome through their strength of character, determination and sheer willpower to succeed.

From this perspective, the presentation will chronicle the journey embarked upon by T&T over the last 20 years to build its own national M&E system. The presentation will visit the highs and lows, leaving the audience a powerful and central message: *'No matter how small you are, you can still achieve great things!'*

The presentation will showcase the key successes and pioneering efforts towards building a national M&E System in T&T, which include establishing an overarching centre for M&E; creating M&E Units across the public sector; hosting regular Evaluation Conferences; developing the first National Performance Framework to monitor, measure and report on Government performance, and the first National M&E Policy, (both documents being the first of their kind in the Caribbean region). The presentation will celebrate the fact that the push to develop T&T's M&E system was primarily driven by women, which has been an instrumental factor for our success thus far.

The presentation will also explore the challenges encountered along the way including limited human resources, and funding; little to no buy-in; resistance to change; non-existence of an integrated institutional framework; political factors; and even a global pandemic. Notwithstanding, practical approaches taken to overcome these challenges will be shared including the use of a 'Clustering Approach' as a coordinating mechanism; the inclusion of M&E activities in projects and programmes as a requirement for funding; and the recently launched M&E Community of Practice.

Drawing references from '300,' the presentation will provide four (4) key lessons learned in building a national M&E system: (i) Unity Amplifies Strength; (ii) Do It Scared, Do It Unprepared, Then Do It Again; (iii) Be Adaptable In The Face Of Change; and (iv) Focus On Endurance and Not The Instantaneous. In addition to the lessons learned, the presentation will examine several pitfalls to avoid in building a national M&E system from a SIDS perspective. Pitfalls such as, agreement from the ruling party rather than the entire Parliament; constraints imposed by a whole of Government approach; and absence of succession planning to ensure continuity for leadership of the System.