



DEVELOPING EVALUATION AND  
COMMUNICATION CAPACITY IN  
INFORMATION SOCIETY RESEARCH



Supporting South-based cyber security  
scholars, advocates, and practitioners.

**CYBERSTEWARDS**

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## Mentoring the CITIZENLAB & Cyber Stewards Project in evaluation and research communication

### **DECI-2 Case study**

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## About the Series

This series of case studies emerged from an action-research project entitled Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity in Information Society Research ([DECI-2](#)). The predecessor DECI-1 project focused only on evaluation mentoring in Asia. The subsequent DECI-2 project collaborated with research networks and grantees supported by the International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) Information & Networks Program between July 2012 and 2017. This particular case summarizes work with the Cyber Stewards project, hosted by the Citizen Lab, at the University of Toronto.

The DECI-2 Team started off by helping this project develop evaluation plans and communication strategies. The initial DECI-2 road map consisted of a sequence of planning steps in evaluation and communication, some of which were clearly complementary. During the preceding DECI-1 project, we witnessed how utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) works as a decision-making framework within which numerous evaluation approaches can co-exist. The communication steps turned out to be quite similar as the planning sequence challenged project managers to be clear about their communication purposes, audiences and expected changes.

As evaluation and communication were linked together in DECI-2, we discovered that both processes created a decision-making framework for project partners to express and agree on their assumptions, expectations, and outcomes. The approach creates a pressure on stakeholders to make the implicit, explicit and consequently helps teams clarify their Theory of Change. With research projects and with experimental initiatives, this process can take time as emergent outcomes can provide feedback to cause stakeholders to adjust project objectives and strategies. We think of it as a hybrid decision-making framework where evaluative and communicative thinking work as two sides of the same coin. All this work to re-discover human nature: as soon as you encounter exciting news you feel compelled to share it.

DECI-2 was developed as an action-research project in capacity development. We tested mentoring as a way of providing evaluation and communication support to our partners. Regional mentors based in Asia, Africa, and Latin America provided the bulk of the mentoring. While our main partners were IDRC-funded research networks (part of the Information & Network Program), we have also tested the approach with projects in other fields.

## Introduction

We have developed an integrated approach that combines Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) and Research Communication (ResCom) as complementary processes that can help research projects increase their long-term outcomes.

## ***U-FE***

In simple terms, U-FE is an evaluation approach proposed by Patton (2004)<sup>1</sup> that seeks to generate useful evaluation. In order to attain such a goal, U-FE follows a series of iterative steps from the early stages of a project that needs to be evaluated. The purpose of the steps is to help the evaluator facilitate a process that enables her/him to implement the key elements of the approach that includes:

- Identification of primary evaluation users;
- Identification of primary evaluation purposes and uses;
- Formulation of key evaluation questions (KEQ) in a systematic way;
- Identification of relevant/cost-effective data collection tools and analysis processes;
- Facilitation of findings use.

Although Patton, the original proponent of the U-FE approach, recently increased the number of U-FE steps to 17, for the sake of simplicity the DECI-2 team preferred to follow the original 12-step process (Patton, 2004).

## ***ResCom***

ResCom refers to the use of communication strategies for making research findings available, in a timely, relevant and useful way to policymakers as a means of more effectively influencing public policy. Although there wasn't a step-by-step ResCom process as in the case of U-FE, the DECI-2 team proposed a similar 12-step process for ResCom that would cover similar topics on the communication side. Such a process is based largely on the RAPID framework (2004)<sup>2</sup> and on the common and complementary aspects of ResCom and U-FE. In the same ways that U-FE tries to make evaluation "useful", ResCom focuses on "useful policy-influencing communication". It is worthwhile mentioning that as in the case of U-FE, the flow between steps is iterative rather than linear. Table 2 summarizes the proposed ResCom process steps.

## ***Why combining U-FE and ResCom makes sense?***

As indicated earlier, DECI-2's central assumption for combining U-FE and ResCom is that such a combination can help programs improve their long-term outcomes. As described on the DECI-2 website, from a practice perspective DECI-2 combines U-FE and ResCom because:

- They share a number of common planning steps (e.g. situational analysis, stakeholder analysis) that can enable complementary preparatory efforts.
- Making explicit what to evaluate focuses on the essential purposes of a research project, and this work in turn clarifies communication objectives.
- Both approaches call for researchers to "listen" to what partners need - what is relevant to them.
- The emphasis on "use" in UFE is comparable with the emphasis on targeted messages in communication planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation*, Sage, 2012

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/198.pdf>

- The emphasis on “facilitating use” in UFE, where the evaluators ensure the evaluation findings get utilized (as opposed to being left to chance), reminds us that communication activities and products need follow-up to heighten their effectiveness.
- The integration of evaluation and communication processes ensures that we focus on communication objectives that are realistic, and measurable in terms of reach and short-term outcomes.

Despite these complementarities, there are also some significant differences that can make it difficult to utilize the U-FE – ResCom combination. The main difference is that while ResCom has a very specific purpose – using communication to influence policy, U-FE is quite flexible in terms of its purpose and use. In this regard, it is easier to find the required project readiness level for conducting U-FE than for conducting ResCom. Another practical difference is that U-FE requires less technical knowledge for people who want to learn how to use it. It does not require a background in evaluation to learn how to conduct U-FE. In contrast, ResCom is quite difficult to implement for someone who does not have a background in communication and who does not understand the dynamics of influencing policy.

## Case Study Background

The Citizen Lab is an interdisciplinary laboratory based at the Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto, focusing on advanced research and development at the intersection of information and communication technologies, human rights, and global security. It comprises a small group of researchers and fellows who employ a “mixed methods” approach to engage in evidence-based research on problems relating to human rights and information security. This team combines the disciplines of political science, sociology, computer science, engineering, and area studies. Citizen Lab was founded in 2001 by Professor Ronald Deibert who remains the current Director. He is a tenured professor of political science at the Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto, a position he has held since 1996.

In 2012, the Citizen Lab launched a program called the Cyber Stewards Network (CSN), “an IDRC-funded initiative aiming at providing support to cyber security scholars, advocates and practitioners of the global South in order to help them articulate a vision of cyber security in which rights and openness are protected on the basis of shared research and empirical knowledge.” The program participants are located in Asia, Latin America, Middle East/North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>3</sup>. Some of the issues that the CSN sought to address were: Internet governance; Internet censorship; Internet surveillance; Data privacy and retention; and Information security.

### *Mentors’ expectations*

In 2013, DECI-2 started providing UFE and ResCom mentorship to some of the Citizen Lab staff to help them evaluate the Cyber Stewards Network and strengthen the program’s policy-

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<sup>3</sup> A full list of participating countries is available at <https://cyberstewards.org/browse-by-regions/>.

influencing capacity. For the DECI-2 UFE mentor, the expectations at the beginning of the project were to see the person he was mentoring gain enough capacity to facilitate an evaluation process that would yield enough value for the Citizen Lab to adopt UFE as a key element of its organizational culture. His main hesitations were around: (i) how to make a remote mentoring model work; (ii) the level of engagement of the person he was to work with; and (iii) the real interest of the organization in using the evaluation findings. One of the key factors that made the UFE mentoring work was that the person he worked with was a PhD student who was in a learning mode and who also saw in UFE a great data collection tool for her dissertation and professional development.

On the ResCom mentoring side, there was an initial interest by the communication contact person in focusing attention on the network itself. The DECI-2 ResCom mentor emphasized the need for the project to review and confirm that it was in fact coordinating a network. On his side, there was less of a focus on the process, and more on helping the project reflect on the communication activities necessary to engage its grantees that were spread around the world. In contrast with the UFE contact person, the communication person had other responsibilities within the project over and above the communication role.

From the point of view of the combination of UFE and ResCom, what emerged from the beginning was an interest in evaluating communication activities aimed at consolidating the network. At the start, there was less interest in the project in setting the scene for policy communication, something that became more prominent a year later.

### Situational analysis

In August 2013, both DECI-2 mentors sat with the Cyber Stewards project team to understand the overall project situation, with attention to the different parties or stakeholders involved. The table below summarizes that review.

Stakeholder group	Stakeholder	Role
Network partners	Citizen Lab	Project Manager / Network facilitator
	Cyber Stewards	Participants / potential network members
Funding institution	IDRC	Funder
Peer	IDRC/I.N.N.	Provide peer support
Consultants	DECI-2	Provide evaluation and communication support
Interested audience	Policymakers	Not defined
	Civil society	Not defined
	Local communities	Not defined

### **Direct project beneficiaries**

1. Cyber Stewards will directly benefit from the project as their initiatives will be strengthened.
2. The project partners (assuming that a network will form).
3. Citizen Lab will directly benefit because they will learn how to be more effective.

### **Indirect project beneficiaries**

1. Local communities could potentially have a more secure cyberspace.
2. Digital activists and researchers could draw lessons from the project.

In addition, there was a review of opportunities and challenges that the project faced in general, and when interacting with DECI-2. The following were the Opportunities of working with DECI-2:

- Working with DECI2 can help Citizen Lab better define the scope of the CSN project.
- Working with DECI2 can help improve communication.
- Working with DECI2 can help increase delivered value to our partners and beneficiaries.
- Working with DECI2 can help develop new capacities.

The challenges:

- Defining the work scope.
- Managing the balance between U-FE and ResCom.
- Understanding how U-FE contributes to concrete actions.

## **The UFE Journey**

The main goal of the Cyber Stewards Network program was to create a collaborative network of cyber-security researchers, advocates and practitioners who share concerns about Internet information security and governance. When the DECI2 mentorship began, initial discussions focused on understanding the program's context, participants and leadership. One of the first realities that became evident was that a network as such had yet to be created. Instead, there was a group of advocates and researchers who were participating in the Cyber Stewards program and who presumably wanted to become a network. This situation was important to understand in order to visualize where and how UFE could fit into the program. Another important element of the initial conversations was related to stakeholders, as it was necessary to understand the different actors who were involved in the project and their respective roles.

### ***Selecting the evaluator and the primary intended users***

Because the DECI-2 team was only providing mentorship, one of the first action points was to select the evaluator and the person in charge of the UFE component within the project. The team leading the Cyber Stewards program within the Citizen Lab was quite small. The Evaluation Contact person who was designated was a PhD student who was involved in the

program. She was the best-suited person to take on the evaluator's role and receive the mentorship. As we started to cover the initial UFE steps, we needed to identify the primary intended users (PIU). The PIU group that was selected was restricted to the project's manager and one of the leadership team members.

### *Defining the evaluation purpose and primary intended uses*

Knowing the program's goal and the state of the envisioned network was helpful to guide some of the decisions around evaluation purpose and primary intended uses. The PIU's decided that the primary intended uses of the evaluation were:

1. To generate data to help develop the CSN;
2. To provide on-going feedback in order to make adjustments throughout the program's implementation phase.
3. To identify patterns of effectiveness (what works / what doesn't work).

Since several of the uses were aimed at improving the design and coordination of the project, the UFE took on a **developmental evaluation** emphasis: In addition, accountability was selected as an underlying use as the evaluation could generate data to report back to IDRC on program achievements and setbacks. However, since the project would generate technical and financial reports to IDRC every 6 months, the evaluation findings could be used to inform these reports that address the accountability use.

### *Formulating Key Evaluation Questions*

Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ) are a critical component of the UFE process as they help define the kind of data that needs to be collected<sup>4</sup>. The two PIUs and the project evaluator formulated the following KEQs:

1. How can network partners support one another to maximize influence and impact at their local, regional, and/or international level?
  - What is the role of the citizen lab, as a network facilitator?
  - What is the role of the cyber stewards, as network partners?
2. How can communication be improved between network partners for the sharing of skills, knowledge, tools, etc.?
  - What is the role of the citizen lab, as a network facilitator?

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<sup>4</sup> The DECI-2 mentor provided the following guidelines for the evaluator to work with the PIUs on the formulation of the questions:

- Questions needed to be directly and clearly related to the program's objectives and to the evaluation's purpose and primary intended uses.
- There should be a maximum of 4 questions.
- Questions needed to address a combination of issues related to the program's results: Inputs; Outcomes; Process, Cost-effectiveness; Quality; Impact, etc.
- In order to integrate UFE and ResCom, at least one question needed to be related to communication.



- What is the role of the cyber stewards, as network partners?
3. How can security and resilience be assessed and developed in a networked project?
- What is the role of the citizen lab, as a network facilitator?
  - What is the role of the cyber stewards, as network partners?

The second set of Key Evaluation Questions embraced the projects' communication activities, which in the main were directed in the early days towards consolidating a network.

## The ResCom Journey

On the ResCom side, the following issues were noted (in August 2013):

- Cyber Stewards is a research project, but it is not yet a network. Communication within the group tends to be bilateral – between CL and the projects. Despite CL's efforts, there is little peer-to-peer networking outside of the face-to-face meetings. There is some collaboration between Stewards working on similar themes.
- With support from another funder, CL was about to embark on the establishment of a small complementary group of four partners who were focused on projects related to information security and rights. The Citizen Lab would focus on providing mentorship in technical research methods (e.g., network measurement, information security analysis) to these partners to begin the process of developing out this capacity in south based groups overall. These members would join the CSN.
- We noted that establishing a second network to support the first network would leave CL in the middle, prioritising bilateral communication and inhibiting peer-to-peer networking between the Stewards and the techies.
- Other Citizen Lab led projects had created other "networks", but none of them has been sustained over time and in general they may not be networks but spontaneous groupings created to meet project requirements. Again, CLs role often as the sole point of contact between these groups may actually have inhibited the exchange of knowledge and expertise and the development of a community of practice.
- Nevertheless, CL did have a significant but unintended *de facto* network consisting of participants in past events, ongoing contacts in private, public and civil society sectors, former project partners, interested funders, researchers, etc.

Given this background, the DECI-2 mentor proposed that rather than build a Cyber Stewards network, it would be more productive to make use of the Cyber Stewards project to build and support the development of a broader Citizen Lab network. The Cyber Stewards project would help establish the foundation of that network, but other actors, including those who are already part of CL's *de facto* network and also future collaborators would be invited to join and participate in activities.

The mentors helped visualize the CL communication 'way of doing things', with underlying purposes & audiences. It was clear the priority lay in the area of networking and capacity

building. It is worth adding that the DECI-2 ResCom mentor's own style turned out to be more action-oriented as opposed to facilitation-oriented. Since, in addition, the ResCom contact person had additional duties within the project, this combination led to a reduced focus on systematic ResCom planning, with more attention on the immediate task of improving the networking side of the project.

### COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES AND PURPOSES ANALYSIS – CITIZEN LAB



## UFE & ResCom Outcomes

### UFE Outcomes

From the UFE perspective, DECI-2 had interesting achievements providing mentorship to the CSN program. The main achievements were:

- Capacity development;
- Organizational learning; and
- Gaining understanding of the UFE/ResCom integration.

### Mentorship as capacity development approach

The evaluator of the CSN project acknowledged that the mentorship she received was one of the most important enabling factors for successfully conducting UFE. According to her, *“it was incredibly valuable because it made the process come to life and more do-able.”* This contribution was perhaps DECI-2’s most significant achievement and may be related to the fact that the mentor provided practical insights that made the process more manageable. Overall, the mentorship was effective at helping the evaluator gain practical knowledge on how to conduct UFE. For example, the evaluator said that the mentorship helped her gain deeper insights about the UFE steps rather than just going through the theory. The mentorship also helped her gain confidence on how to do UFE, to the point that she gave a presentation to an academic audience on her experience. A positive unintended outcome was the fact that the evaluator was planning on using much of the collected data and findings for her PhD dissertation. Although it was not one of the primary intended uses, UFE became a useful research tool. This practical application was an important incentive for the evaluator to learn how to apply UFE. At the organizational level, the mentorship was also positive in the sense that some of the staff got exposed to the UFE process and they learned about it. The evaluator produced a summary of the process that was presented at a conference in Toronto:

- Phillips, J. 2014. Debunking Utilization-focused evaluation (U-FE): Lessons learned applying UFE theory to practice. Presentation made at the **25<sup>th</sup>. Edward F. Kelly Evaluation Conference**, Nov. 7, OISE, Toronto, Canada.

### UFE as a valuable organizational learning tool

Although the evaluation findings had limited use (see next section), the Citizen Lab staff who were involved in UFE saw significant value in the process as a means of reflecting on the activities that they were undertaking and on the program’s goals. For example, formulating the KEQs helped them understand that the Cyber Stewards Network was not an established network, but rather a group of practitioners wanting to become a network. From this perspective, the main role of the Citizen Lab was not managing a network, but helping develop one. This insight was fundamental to leading the program in a more realistic manner. The KEQs also helped the Citizen Lab design activities for engaging the Cyber Stewards. For instance, UFE was regarded as a key success factor of the first workshop held in Bali in October, 2013. The workshop included a focused session on finding ways to foster collaboration among the Cyber Stewards (KEQ#1) and gaining awareness of the concept of resilience.

### ***ResCom Outcomes***

In April 2014 one of the DECI-2 co-PIs made a brief presentation on ResCom to a gathering of the CSN grantees in Toronto. The DECI-2 presentation was well received by participants from Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Indonesia and Pakistan indicating that the ResCom ideas had allowed them to reflect on a practice that they mainly pursue via intuition. The table that was summarized from the DECI-2 ResCom mentor's inputs received positive comments. At this event, it appeared as if the ResCom readiness of the Citizen Lab team had blossomed. It meant that the DECI-2 session was useful only in creating awareness about ResCom both among the partners and the hub. The Citizen Lab team kept on reminding the Cyber Steward partners about the importance of ResCom, especially as this would apply to the project extension. Moreover, in late 2015 the project invited DECI-2 to collaborate with 3 grantees, and in the end two agreed to receive mentoring: Asociación de Derechos Civiles - ADC (Argentina) and Justice Forum (UK). Subsequently in Phase 2 of the project, partners were asked to draft research communication plans as part of new project proposals and to view ResCom as an essential part of project planning. In addition, the ResCom mentor assisted in drafting a series of questions for ResCom strategy plans that we included in the concept note proposal template.

### ***Gaining understanding of the UFE /ResCom integration***

The DECI-2 team was testing the assumption that UFE and ResCom could have a natural overlap and that integrating them would be relatively easy. However, this integration required organization readiness, and the right context. Organization readiness not only refers to the willingness to do UFE and ResCom, but also to allocating enough resources, including time. In the case of the CSN program, there was limited readiness in the sense that both the UFE and the ResCom people did not have enough time to fully concentrate on their respective processes. In the case of ResCom, readiness emerged only once the grantee research began to show relevant findings (April 2014). In terms of context, the CSN program had the right conditions for conducting UFE, but many Cyber Stewards activities in the first phase of the project focused more on advocacy than on research, so the context did not lend itself to do ResCom. Thus, the UFE/ResCom integration was limited to having several UFE questions referring to communication dimensions. However, there were also the lessons learned from working with a group of partners with strong communications experience and building upon some DECI presentations and ResCom workshops. The emphasis that we built up on the ResCom and rapid framework concepts with the partners, who were sometimes more focused on advocacy and public interest litigation helped them see their work as research connected to an overall research cycle. This understanding was a very valuable learning and helped build the bridges between research and advocacy for which the CSN was intended.

### ***Main challenges and solutions***

At the start of the project, mentoring someone who had no background in evaluation seemed a relatively big challenge. However, the main challenges emerged afterwards and they mainly related to:

- Time constraints of the evaluator.

- Limited facilitation role played by the evaluator
- UFE/ResCom integration.
- Limited use of evaluation findings
- Relevance of the evaluation focus
- Impact of multiple evaluations.

### **Time constraints of the evaluator**

Time constraints of the evaluator: The person receiving the evaluation mentorship grasped the basic UFE principles quickly. However, the lack of time was an issue due to the many tasks that she had to undertake as part of the short-staffed team leading the CSN program and as a PhD student doing her research work. This situation was aggravated by the fact that within the UFE framework, the PIUs opted for doing a Developmental Evaluation (DE). Although it seemed to be the right choice from the perspective of usability, it raised additional concerns around the evaluator's availability, as DE is a time-consuming form of evaluation.

The main solution to deal with the evaluator's time constraint was based on three factors: (i) flexibility; (ii) informal reporting; and (iii) task complementarity. Instead of trying to impose a fixed schedule for engaging the PIUs and collecting data, the mentoring was done in a flexible way according to key events.

For example, the preparation of the first workshop required a lot of attention because it was a unique window of opportunity for engaging most of the cyber steward partners in person. Therefore, for that particular event, the mentor and the evaluator worked quite intensively, as well as for reporting and reflecting on the workshop. However, after the workshop, the activity was limited to sporadic updates. Another example of inflexibility was that instead of following the DE concept of providing "continuous, real-time feedback" that Patton (2011) suggests, the mentor gave the evaluator the option of providing feedback only when deemed useful. This was possible due to the fact that the evaluator was accountable only to two PIUs who were part of the same team and shared the same office. The task complementarity enabled some of the data of the evaluation reports to contribute to the technical reports for IDRC and for preparing the call for proposals by the cyber stewards for the second phase of the program.

### **Limited facilitation role by the Evaluator**

In the case of the Cyber Stewards Network program, the evaluator was working with two PIUs, one of whom was her supervisor. Given that UFE was a new experience for all parties, it was a challenge for the evaluator to independently establish her role as a group facilitator of the discussion which is a key element of the iterative learning process and is the crux of the UFE approach. The mentorship was an important support to share ideas, as well as some facilitation techniques that gave the evaluator more confidence to assume her role as independently as possible. Additionally, the pressure to deliver the report quickly near the end of the process meant that unlike the review of the early drafts which was characterized by several rounds of discussion between the evaluator and the mentor, the final report was not discussed with the mentor before it was submitted.

Lesson: Establishing a clear facilitation role for the evaluator within an existing institutional structure is a significant challenge for in-house evaluators, especially when their evaluation tasks compete with other tasks of high priority in their day-to-day job.

### **UFE / ResCom integration**

The UFE and ResCom integration was the central challenge of the DECI-2 project, so the members of the DECI-2 team were quite intentional about testing its practicality from the initial stages of the mentorship. One of the first strategies that the UFE and ResCom mentors implemented was supporting both processes to develop independently and at a different pace, but establishing some kind of linkage that the team hoped would lead to the UFE/ ResCom integration. One bridge between the two was the situational analysis where we identified the project stakeholders, something of relevance to both topics. Another “natural” linkage was to formulate at least one KEQ through which the UFE process could somehow evaluate some aspects of the ResCom component. The second KEQ met this requirement in this case, although in the context of this question the mentors were open to remove the research-to-policy influencing nature of ResCom. Instead the focus was on evaluating “communication within the network”. In the last meeting between the mentors and the Citizen Lab staff, it was agreed that KEQ #2 would lead to the design of the program’s communication plan for the next phase. Another strategy to foster the UFE/ResCom integration was to have the UFE and ResCom mentors jointly facilitate all the face-to-face meetings and inform each other about the progress of their work. It was hoped that this strategy would allow the team to find common ground for further integration. Although these two strategies should have good chances of working in most cases, they did not work well in the case of the CSN program; the main reason being that the organization only began achieving readiness to move forward with the ResCom component towards the end of our collaboration. Thus, although the UFE process went reasonably well, there were very limited opportunities for integrating with the ResCom component.

### **Limited findings use**

Based on the nature of UFE, the success of an evaluation can mainly be measured based on the use of its findings. From this perspective, the success level of the UFE process was limited. As indicated earlier, the primary intended uses of the evaluation were to help develop the Cyber Stewards Network and identify patterns of effectiveness. For the evaluator, there was lack of clarity on how the primary intended users used the evaluation findings. The program struggled to develop a network *per se*. At the end of the program, the Cyber Stewards looked more like an aggregation of people trying to do certain activities together rather than functioning as a network. Therefore, the role of UFE in helping develop the network does not seem to have been very significant. In terms of helping identify patterns of effectiveness in building the network, there was not much to report either. This conclusion does not mean that the findings were not used, it only suggests that their use did not lead to the expected project outcomes. However, the UFE/ResCom process did contribute to clarifying Cyber Stewards project goals. It also contributed significantly to the development of its next stage grant application to IDRC.

The evaluator was able to identify three concrete uses of the evaluation findings:

- KEQ #1 helped identify collaborative projects among Cyber Stewards as the central element for launching phase 2 of the program and as a means of helping build the network.
- KEQ#3 helped the Cyber Stewards gain understanding on the concept of resilience and its importance within a network.
- The UFE findings provided inputs for writing the IDRC reports (which was not an original 'use').

### **Relevance of the evaluation focus**

One of the lessons learned was ensuring the KEQs and evaluator were integrated into the overall evaluation objectives, particularly those that formed the basis of the project and project reporting. At the onset of the DECI project, having the evaluator engaged in UFE and incorporating the data into her PhD work was seen as mutually beneficial. In hindsight, this setup created challenges as the KEQ that the evaluator focused on for her PhD thesis - "How can security and resilience be assessed and developed in a networked project" - was not consistent with the primary aim of the network. The project was not intended to achieve this goal even though the question is interesting and the activities the evaluator developed to explore it were engaging for the project partners. However, the KEQ was outside the main objective of the Cyber Stewards which is to develop research products and capacity for groups within the global south. Furthermore, having the evaluator working on a PhD thesis at the same time created ambiguity concerning what was useful for her research and what was relevant and useful for the overall evaluation of the network.

### **Impact of multiple evaluations**

The project also underwent multiple levels of evaluation outside of DECI, including regular grant reporting to IDRC and an external evaluation of the information and networks project. The external evaluation and regular reporting took up the majority of the time of the project Lead's leaving very little available for engagement with DECI beyond following what the evaluator was doing.

### **UFE lessons**

#### ***Enabling Factors***

The main enabling factors that made the UFE achievements possible were:

- The right conditions for mentoring
- DECI-2's learning mode
- The funder's support
- Available resources

#### **Right conditions for mentoring**

In the context of the CSN, the usefulness of the UFE mentorship was the result of the combination of at least the following three elements: The practical knowledge of the mentor;

the background and interest of the person receiving the mentorship; and the organization's buy-in to try UFE. The mentor's experience conducting UFE helped make practical decisions that were helpful and that made UFE less overwhelming for the evaluator. For example, a sound decision was to present UFE as a collaborative learning initiative and not so much as a conventional evaluation project. This approach reduced resistance from participants and helped build support from most of the people who were involved in test-driving UFE. The mentor's experience with UFE also helped avoid some traps, such as over-documentation and over-reporting throughout the evaluation cycle. The background and personal interest in UFE of the evaluator was also a key factor. One of her main motivations for learning UFE was that she saw its potential as a research tool, so she usually was ready to take risks and follow through on most of the recommendations. She was a very good listener. The third success factor of the mentorship was the Citizen Lab's buy-in to try UFE and to assign resources towards it. This investment was an important part of the organization's readiness and it was also important that the level of interest on UFE remained high during most of the evaluation cycle.

### **DECI-2's learning mode**

The DECI-2 team's learning mode was an enabling factor for UFE because it gave the team members enough flexibility to try whatever strategies made sense to make UFE and ResCom work as an integrated approach. In the case of the Citizen Lab (and in other cases), the team was flexible enough to accept that UFE and ResCom processes could work at different paces and that it was acceptable to have different readiness levels to move forward. An alternative attitude could have been to demand the same readiness level for UFE and ResCom in order to move through the steps at a similar pace, but this stance would have hindered the UFE process as valuable windows of opportunities would have been lost.

### **Funder's support**

IDRC's funding was important for the Citizen Lab - and perhaps other organizations - to accept DECI-2's mentorship services. It has proven difficult in other instances for projects to allocate funds from limited resources. Additionally, after engaging in the initial steps and agreeing on conducting UFE, following through with the mentorship became useful as a way of strengthening its accountability towards IDRC, which encouraged the process completion.

### **Available resources**

DECI-1 was an important precursor of DECI-2 in the sense that there were some UFE success stories to share with prospective users. This knowledge was a good motivation factor for organizations to see the value in learning UFE. There were also available resources – such as the UFE Primer and the evaluation in practice website that helped people make sense of the UFE process and get a basic understanding on how it could bring value to their work. Most of these enabling factors could be replicable in future projects. IDRC's funding is the only enabling factor that seems difficult to replicate. This lack of dedicated resources would undoubtedly limit the chances of making mentorship models such as the one used in DECI-2 available to organizations.



## *Lost opportunities*

### **UFE and ResCom integration:**

Although the DECI-2 team did everything possible to make the UFE and ResCom mentorship work as an integrated approach, things did not unfold as anticipated. The main reason why the UFE/ResCom integration did not work well in the Citizen Lab case was the lack of readiness for ResCom plus the apparent lack of time and available staff resources to provide oversight for the person who was being mentored on ResCom.

In addition, the DECI-2 team modified its ResCom mentoring later in 2014 after having test-driven a variation with the I&N Program itself. In this variation, the focus was on organizing the existing communication practices into groups of purposes and audiences. This process would have benefitted this project had we started it from the beginning, in that it would have meant that the lack of ResCom readiness would not have become a stumbling block. Instead, we would have helped the team make sense of an existing way of communicating and could have improved it strategically.

### *Changed evaluation perceptions*

Both the evaluator and the PIUs discovered how evaluation can be an organizational learning tool, and for the evaluator in the particular, a valuable research tool. For the mentor, the Citizen Lab experience mostly changed his perception regarding external and internal evaluation. Although the mentor valued the effort of building in-house evaluation capacity, going through this mentoring experience raised some concerns. The first one is the impact of organizational dynamics on the role of the internal evaluator. There may have been room for the evaluator to have had a clearer independent facilitation role relative to the PIUs. This point is relevant as the evaluator needs to be able to provide candid feedback on a program development.

The second perspective is related to competing activities. Most programs were short staffed, which led to competing activities and in this case the late requirement by IDRC for an external evaluation caused additional time pressures on the team. This additional load caused the internal evaluator to become too distracted to focus on UFE activities and it hindered the overall quality of the process. In the case of the Citizen Lab UFE process, it became somewhat fragmented rather than continuous due to the challenge that the PIUs had their time consumed by external evaluations which were seen as separate from UFE learnings. The result was limited time to engage in UFE reflections and learnings

## Appendix 1: Summary of the UFE steps

Step	Name	Purpose	Evaluation Phase
1	Program / Organizational Readiness Assessment	Make sure that key program participants understand UFE and its implications. Confirm that there is buy-in (i.e. organization is willing to assign the time and resources that the evaluation process requires).	Design
2	Evaluator Readiness and Capability Assessment	Identify potential challenges and assess the evaluator's capabilities and willingness to deal with them.	Design
3	Identification of Primary Intended Users	Identify and engage primary intended users (PIU) - program participants who have a direct, identifiable stake in the evaluation and who will be the main users of the evaluation findings.	Design
4	Situational Analysis	The evaluator needs to understand the evaluation context in order to effectively facilitate findings use Therefore, it is important to learn about previous evaluation experience, resources availability and stakeholder roles and interests in the program and in the evaluation process, among other factors.	Design
5	Identification of Primary Intended Uses	Define the purpose and the primary intended uses early on in the process.	Design
6	Focusing the Evaluation	Formulate key evaluation questions according to evaluation purpose and primary intended uses.	Design
7	Evaluation Design	Review and adjust the KEQ to make sure that they align with program's objectives and primary users' expectations. Identify the type data that needs to be collected to answer KEQ.	Design
8	Simulation of Use	Fabricate dummy data and simulate its potential use. Adjust questions and designed evaluation system as required BEFORE start the actual data collection.	Simulation
9	Data collection	Collect data required to answer the KEQ; engage primary intended users in the process as much as possible.	Implementation
10	Data Analysis	Analyze data and respond to KEQ.	Implementation
11	Facilitation of use	Help primary intended users interpret the analyzed data and use the findings according to the evaluation purpose. Make sure that the evaluation becomes useful.	Enabling use
12	Meta-evaluation	Reflect on the evaluation experience and identify how the findings and the process contributed to personal and organizational learning.	Reflection & Learning

## Appendix 2: Summary of the ResCom steps

Step	Name	Purpose	Communication Phase
1	Organizational readiness assessment	Ensure that there is organizational buy-in and resource commitment and the ResCom is addressing a felt need of the organization.	Design
2	Communication team readiness assessment	Verify that the ResCom facilitator is committed and budgeted to lead the process. Assess the facilitator's experience in regards to any potential challenges and his/her willingness to learn new methods and skills through practice.	Design
3	Stakeholder analysis	Identify, analyze and group the stakeholders who will be involved and/or affected by the project. Assess their level of influence and learn more about their interests by investigating about them.	Design
4	Situational analysis	Assess the media context: policies, media directories, pricing and coverage information, contacts and linkages. Identify key intermediaries, hubs, networks and sources of influence.	Design
5	Defining communication purposes	Identify communication purposes and functions. Group the purposes using the communication functions.	Design
6	Defining communication objectives.	Formulate "SMART" objectives according to a baseline, a set of indicators and a framework to organize the indicators.	Design
7	Methods and media.	Select the materials and media that seem to best suit the intended audience(s). Assign production responsibilities and distribution mechanisms.	Design
8	Field testing.	Test communication materials and messages. Adjust them as required.	Simulation
9	Implementation of strategy	Implement designed strategy and adjust along the way as required.	Implementation
10	Assess effectiveness	Assess the effectiveness of the communication strategy based on objectives' outcomes measures and the program's theory of change.	Implementation
11	Institutionalization of ResCom	Assess the degree at which ResCom becomes part of the organizational culture in terms of new attitudes, skills, procedures and overall capacity to influence policy based on research findings.	Enabling use
12	Tell the story	Reflect on the ResCom experience and share the learning within the user group and other people.	Reflection & Learning