

PROJECT BRIEF

Rationale

- DECI-2 provides capacity development in both evaluation and communication for IDRC research projects in the Information & Networks Program (I&N).
- DECI-2 offers mentoring in Utilization-Focused Evaluation – an approach to evaluation that focuses on producing evaluations that are actually utilized. At the same time, DECI-2 offers mentoring in Research Communication, to assist projects in developing and implementing their communication strategies.
- DECI-2 is a research project aimed at test-driving capacity development in these two fields. An assumption is that the combined effect of UFE and Research Communication will enhance the internal *learning culture* within projects; and it will enable projects to focus attention early on communication planning to enhance the reach and use of research outcomes.

Scope

- A 4-year project starting in July 2012.
- An initial engagement phase to become familiarized with, and select approximately five I&N projects that are interested in capacity development in both evaluation and communication (Phase I to end in early 2013).
- The selected projects will be provided with 30 person days of mentoring in both topics over a 2-3 year period. The mentoring will be targeted and scheduled to match each project's needs and work plans.
- The selected projects will be required to provide their own staff in both topic areas and budget allocations to cover the design and implementation of evaluations and communication strategies.

Combining UFE and Research Communication

The evaluation and communication fields share common elements: •the importance of engaging users from the beginning, •the notion of pretesting data collection tools and communication materials alike, and •the emphasis on users taking ownership over evaluation and communication activities and outcomes.

UFE is an approach to evaluation that emphasizes the *use* of the findings and the process itself. *The central premise of Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) is that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use.* In UFE, evaluators facilitate a learning process with attention to how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experiences. In designing a utilization-focused evaluation -- the attention is constantly on the intended use by intended users. UFE does not prescribe any specific content, method or theory. It is a framework, as opposed to another methodology. UFE can include a wide variety of evaluation methods. It is a process for making decisions in consultation with those who can benefit from the

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evaluation. It is based on the fact that intended users will more likely utilize an evaluation in which they have ownership.

Research Communication rests on the premise that successful communication of research calls for the participation of multiple stakeholders in all stages of the research process: design; data gathering; analysis, dissemination and follow-up. Research communication involves understanding the nature of the issues being addressed; mapping out who needs to be involved and what each group already knows along with their preferred communication channels; introducing communication functions that respond to the needs; working with affordable, accessible, and tested methods and media; pretesting materials before dissemination; determining a range of outputs and outcomes; implementing, monitoring, and revising.

Research *dissemination* –making research results available to a wider audience– is only one component of research communication. Our approach to research communication is grounded in communication for development: “...*the use of communication processes, techniques and media to help people toward a full awareness of their situation and their options for change, to resolve conflicts, to work towards consensus, to help people plan actions for change and sustainable development, to help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their condition and that of society, and to improve the effectiveness of institutions.*” (Fraser, & Restrepo-Estrada, 1998. *Communicating for Development*. Tauris. p.63)

DECI-2 research questions

1. To what extent can the introduction and UFE and Research Communication happen in a combined manner?
2. What are the factors that shape the operationalization of an integrated UFE and Communication mentoring, (e.g. the nature of the projects, the readiness by staff for UFE and Communication, the nature of the ‘key evaluation questions’, the range of communication functions incorporated into a Communication Strategy, etc.)?
3. To what extent can mentoring and implementation happen in an integrated manner (for instance: the same project staff learned UFE and Research Communication) Vs. in a parallel manner (similar steps were introduced between UFE and Research Communication but were implemented by separate teams)?
4. What are the outputs, outcomes and (ideally) impacts that demonstrate the added value of an integrated approach to UFE and Research Communication mentoring?

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<http://evaluationinpractice.wordpress.com/> migrating to <http://betterevaluation.org/>