



DECI-2: Research Study

Capacity gains in Utilization Focussed Evaluation and Research Communication: learning with the mentees

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Executive summary

DECI-2 (Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity in Information Society Research) is an IDRC-funded capacity development project supporting Information and Networks Programs (I&N; now Network Economies) in evaluation and communication. DECI-2 has provided this support by mentoring partner-based contacts in Utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) and Research Communication (hereafter referred to as ResCom). The assumption is that the combined approach of UFE and ResCom would enhance the internal *learning culture* within projects and enable projects to focus attention early on communication planning to enhance the reach and uptake of research outcomes. This report is the product of an analytical review and reflection on the extent to which DECI-2 has contributed to the change in capacity of the partnering projects.

Data was collected from evaluation and communication “mentees”, as well as project principle investigators that the DECI project has supported. At the individual level, the study sought changes in knowledge in understanding, designing and implementing UFE and ResCom. At the organizational level, we sought to report changes in the project strategy, plans and performance as a result of using the two approaches. Enablers and barriers to these capacity gains were also explored.

The mentees reported an improved understanding on the concepts and importance of evaluation and communication as well as the ability to apply, adjust and suit UFE and ResCom to their projects’ contexts and needs. The changes at the organizational level included adjustments to the projects’ Theories of Change and using the process for progress/performance reflection. Some outcomes as a result of applying the two approaches are also described.

A crucial enabler to UFE and ResCom capacity was the project teams’ ‘readiness’. This includes, among others the ease with which the project is able to procure and allocate financial resources, human resources and time towards the mentorship program. It also includes the project team’s acceptance to learn while adopting the two processes, and the mentor-mentee relationship. Barriers to capacity gains were mostly related to the complex nature of UFE and ResCom requiring time to understand and accept.

Given the gains reported by the mentored projects, the study team recommends a continued introduction of UFE and ResCom while packaging readiness in a ways that new teams are able to make a decision on whether to take up the approaches or not; or to adopt acceptable variations. The study team also recommends a review of the mentoring relationship and methods, given the given the reported effectiveness of face-to-face sharing, and the use of more affordable on-line resources, time/resources for reviewing progress reports and attendance in progress forums to provide value-laden feedback.

Key words: Utilization-focused evaluation, research communication, and mentoring, capacity development

1. Introduction

DECI-2 (Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity in Information Society Research) is an IDRC-funded capacity development for project evaluations and communication. Its capacity development support aims to provide technical assistance to Information and Networks Program (I&N) – now renamed Network Economies (NE). The project provides support to project researchers, communication staff and evaluators to improve the effectiveness of their evaluation and research communication activities. The I&N projects focus on producing and sharing credible, high-quality evidence on the influence of digital initiatives in governance, science, learning, and entrepreneurship in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. DECI's assistance aimed at supporting the application of Utilization Focused Evaluation and parallel Research Communication for designated I&N flagship projects.

Utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) places strong emphasis on intended USE of the analysis by its primary USERS. Developed by Michael Quinn Patton (Patton, 2008), it is based on utility premises that indicate evaluation should not be implemented unless and until there are primary intended users who will use the information produced. In addition, the primary intended users are involved in the process, which is part of initial program design. It is an evaluation model that emphasizes learning, with project teams becoming drivers of their own evaluation plans, activities and results. UFE thus promotes ownership over process and findings.

Research Communication (hereafter referred to as ResCom) is described as an applied field that services the different outreach and networking functions of projects. It is the basis of communication strategies that combine active listening with targeted dissemination. Its application rests on the premise that successful development calls for the conscious and active engagement of key stakeholders as well as intended beneficiaries at every stage of the development process (DECI 2, 2014)

DECI-2 is a program where capacity in UFE and ResCom was provided to the designated I&N projects by mentoring evaluation and communication contact persons in how to implement them (DECI 2, 2014). The assumption is that the combined approach of UFE and Research Communication will enhance the internal *learning culture* within projects and enable projects to focus attention early on communication planning to enhance the reach and uptake of research outcomes. DECI-2 allocates selected network projects 30 person days of mentoring in both UFE and ResCom over a 2-3 year period, with the mentoring targeted and scheduled to match each project's needs and work plans. DECI-2 has been in operation for about 3 years and some partner projects have been finalized while some are still on going, as at the time of the report.

This report is the product of an analytical review and reflection on the extent to which DECI-2 has contributed to the change in capacity of the partnering projects. The study objectives were specifically to explore the following:

- The capacity that has been gained in UFE and/or ResCom by the partnering projects

- How the mentoring process (and capacity gained) has contributed to shifting/improving the project strategy, performance and/or outcomes
- What the main readiness enablers for the gains and the barriers were for the capacity development
- What could be done to improve capacity gains (uptake and use) in UFE and ResCom?

2. Method/Approach

In this study, evidence of capacity gained (or outcomes) of the UFE and ResCom mentoring are analysed at two levels:

1. Gains reported by the individuals mentored and
2. How this has affected (I&N) projects (or organizations) they work for.

Data was collected from evaluation and communication “mentees”, as well as project principle investigators that the DECI-1 and DECI-2 project has supported. In the findings section that follows, the respondents are indicated as either MRE (Mentee Research Evaluation), or MRC (Mentee Research Communication). The numbers after the codes stand for the different mentees of the same category. At the individual level, we sought to report changes in knowledge in understanding, designing and implementing UFE and ResCom. At the organizational level, we sought to report changes in the project strategy, plans and performance as a result of using the two approaches.

The information was obtained from two primary sources:

1. Literature and video reviews
2. Informant interviews

The information sought to demonstrate evidence of capacity gains and use, enablers and barriers - based on responses given to the set of guiding questions given in Appendix 1.

3. Results

1. Individual capacity gains (as reported by the mentees)

Based on the responses given, there were two types of individual capacity gains reported by the mentees. This study found that DECI-2 mentoring program contributed to the change in mentee's understanding on the concepts and importance of evaluation and communication as well as the ability to apply, adjust and suit the two approaches to their projects' contexts and needs.

Gains in evaluation and communication knowledge

Some of the mentees had limited knowledge of or knew about evaluation based on standardized methods or criteria guided by traditional methods or donor accountability needs. Most of them did not have any experience in designing evaluation plans that had a specific user interests.

"For me the whole world of M&E was completely new to me. I have not previously worked on focus in evaluation so I was interested in working with DECI to build my own capacity so I could contribute that to the network more effectively". (MRE1)

Most of the partners perceived communication as merely a dissemination activity of transferring project information using variety of communication materials/media to as many people as possible. With this limited view on communication, the production of materials/media was not targeted nor aligned to respond to the overall project strategy.

One of the mentees who was in charge of project communication had come to the project with a marketing background and experience, which was quite different from what the ResCom process entailed. According to her, mentoring in ResCom provided her with more specific steps than what she already knew before, enabling her and the project team to better in plan for, implement and evaluate their communication objectives.

"I am more familiar with marketing communication ... more around website and digital marketing, ... but have not really worked on Research Communication per se". (MRC1)

"This mentorship program allowed me to think through how communications were done ... Formerly I was a journalist, so I only had a basic principles on communications. But this mentorship program helped me to make what [was] implicit explicit". (MRC2)

"Often the case for organization when they wanted to do communications, they just chose communications products/outputs, and said [something] like "...let's do the press release." RC helps us to think through before we decide, think about the purpose, walk through different steps/checklists and so on. So it helped us to think more strategically". (MRC2)

With the initial limited or different view of what evaluation and communication were all about, almost all mentees, pointed out that it was challenging to understand the specifics of UFE and ResCom. This was especially the case at the initial stages, and how they (the approaches) would serve program's

objectives and goals. In a number of cases (projects), this confusion delayed the uptake of the two processes (more is said about this in 'enablers and constraints').

"It was really confusing in the beginning because I did not really understand how ResCom came in. But as I said that you have to actually go through the process and you realized at the end of it how UFE links to ResCom and why they are important". (MRC3)

Another mentee mentioned that the most difficult part was understanding why they had to do the different steps and their specific differences.

"I did not remember all the steps. But what I do remember, some steps have difficulties... the first steps, defining the purposes. Or maybe this also due to my inability to communicate those very well [to the team]. Because they were not communications people". (MRC2)

Most of the mentees acknowledged that it was only after they went through the initial processes they began to value the mentoring in UFE and ResCom (MRC1, MRC3). For some, the two processes provided an opportunity for them to learn a new way of doing things.

"[this mentoring is] interesting enough to learn from. Partly to make sense of what we are doing ... Ricardo gave us examples of using different colour of cards to show objectives of communication ... I found this is very useful. I think the workshop was an important moment. It really helps to verify what we will be doing specifically". (MRC1)

Application of UFE and ResCom

When asked whether mentees were able to apply the steps of UFE and ResCom in their own contexts, some of the mentees confirmed so. One of them mentioned that after the face-to-face workshop that defined communication purposes, the team was then able to follow up by developing a strategy with clearer objectives.

They understood that these approaches were not prescriptive, but could be used to help them proceed or implement their plans better. And for some, they adjusted the steps in ResCom to their own contexts.

"Some of the steps [in ResCom] we didn't do. We didn't do the field-testing because the context did not allow us to do so". (MRC1)

"For our purposes, we may have changed some of the phrasing. We adapted for most of the part. We might have changed our words here and there". (MRC2)

One also mentioned that the new ways of thinking he gained from the DECI-2 mentoring can be applied to any other contexts.

"I do not work in communications anymore. However, I still need communications skills for my job. One thing I do now is that I work with an organization that wants to get more media coverage. So that will be a time for me to help them by walking through some of the steps [in ResCom], like what is the purpose of communicating with media and so on". (MRC2)

The change in UFE and ResCom knowledge and use is also evident in some mentees' ability to document and present the learning gained to a broader audience through publications and paper presentations at several national and international conferences. Examples mentioned included the ROER4D presentations at the *Open Education Global 2015 – Innovation and Entrepreneurship*; the *ICT4D Conference in Singapore 2015*; and the *Evaluation Conclave 2015, Kathmandu, Nepal*.

2. Capacity gains in UFE and ResCom and the effect in project strategies and plans

The changes at the organizational level as a result of the UFE and ResCom capacity were also investigated. The mentees' feedback fell into three broad -yet closely related and overlapping- categories: 1. Developing the project's Theory of Change, 2. Using the process for reflection, and 3. improving project strategy. Some outcomes as a result of applying the two approaches are also described.

Enrich projects' evaluation and Theory of Change

Through this mentorship program, some mentees became aware that essentially, UFE and ResCom were useful decision-making frameworks. They revisited their theories-of-change and made some changes as a result of DECI-2 mentorship.

"We had a method but we had not quite gone into details how we will systematically measuring performance (what and how) and how it would tie up with communication but this has changed. The UFE and ResComm approaches have helped to set up the groundwork for our evaluation and communication strategy". (MRE 1)

Another project changed their approaches to getting government's attention and commitment to support their project. Based on a well laid out ResComm approach, they became aware that building an open communication and a good relationship with government, direct or indirect, would contribute to the achievement of the project goals.

For Research International Africa (RIA), an evaluation of the ten-year program using UFE enriched their Theory of Change(s) used in subsequent proposals.

"The use of UFE depends on the donor. "For those interested in how (our) activities will influence our outcomes (in our case policy outcomes) we used the UFE to show how results from house hold surveys could be or will be used for advocacy supported by a broader series of activities including other research programs. Our proposals have drawn on the formalization of our ToC that we did (developed) from the evaluation we did using the DECI-2 team". (MRE2)

UFE and ResCom for improving project strategy

The results of one project's evaluation allowed the project to improve their communication approach. The project was able to use and confidently communicate evidence to broader target audience. Reaching international media was set as part of their communication strategy and the revised strategy

has resulted in media coverage in both The Guardian and Time magazines, significantly increasing the project's visibility.

"We had the evidence, I am confident to share our works to journalists... I was the main contact who took them to the field and fed them with evidence for their stories". (RCM4)

One mentee reported that, after sharing UFE and ResCom principles, they had been able to get buy-in on progress and performance monitoring approaches from their grantee-level projects. They used the understanding to encourage the projects to collect information that could be used to report on the extent to which they were achieving their objectives (both at network and grantee level). UFE and ResCom have helped project teams see the value of why they are engaged in this kind of information exchange because the network is able to go back to them and demonstrate their contribution.

"Following a program meeting workshop where the project teams were introduced to UFE (using a summarized overview) that explained the approaches and the kind of things we were asking them to use to contribute to our project and broader program objectives we got a lot of buy in and willingness to participate because of the greater understanding of how they tied in to a larger strategy. Feeding back on what we are learning as a result of what they are providing to us has helped create a more transparent and accountable with everyone feeling they are involved. It was a good learning all round". (MRE1 and MRE3)

"The (methods) have helped bring in more systematic and regular checking in". (MRE3)

Using UFE and ResCom for reflection

For projects interested in continuous learning, UFE and ResCom provided a valuable reflexive learning framework and process.

"The process of constantly evaluating and reflecting on our practices and how we use the different methods is something that DECI has encouraged and has really supported our own culture of reflexive analysis. We (now) have evaluative questions we had not considered before. We started engaging with DECI-2 after about ten months of operation. Though we had set up an evaluation structure the meeting (with DECI) gave the team an opportunity to think strategically about the objectives we want to achieve through the reviewed evaluation and communication methods we already had in place. It enabled us to connect our existing methods of data collection to more strategic tools and questions". (MRE1)

Outcomes: effect of applying UFE and ResCom to influence change

One mentee mentioned that she had a rich collection of data and evidence generated from the evaluation. Such evidence was used to get the buy in from the government to scale up the (proposed) initiative. She was able to present the data and evidence to their National Technical Working Group, which plays a critical role in influencing government's policy. Moreover, the data was also used for resource mobilization. She successfully gained the funds from other donor to support the scaling up the project to other districts.

Some other mentees were not able to report on the outcomes from the DECI-2 mentoring as the projects were still underway at the time of the study. However, one mentee explained some positive changes, for instance, with only 6 people in the team the project was able to coordinate better with 18 sub-projects. The consistency and coherence in terms of communication, she believed, have helped the project to achieve the desired objectives.

"I oversee other members at the network. The Hub team is also involved in communications. We sit down and talk about a plan as a team. I suppose the steps and methods [on ResCom] are more broadly used by the team .. we did that as a team, ... people buy in.

"At this stage of the project ... seems to be achieving goal. We had visibility of the project ... from mentoring and evaluation ... seems suggest that we are doing quite well". (MRC1)

The kind in capacity gains and application – both individual and institutional levels – was a result of the interaction between mentees and mentors in their efforts to understand their local circumstances through a dialogical process that took place during the mentoring process.

3. Enablers to capacity gains

Readiness is a crucial component for the uptake of UFE and ResCom. At the institutional level readiness refers to the commitment from management to allocate financial resources, human resources and time towards capacity building in both evaluation and communication approaches through this mentorship program.

The level of readiness and contributing factors varied from one project to another. One mentee mentioned that having a great and very supportive team (and especially the Principal Investigator) is critical for easier acceptance to the mentorship. It is a great enabler as it supports acceptance of the new evaluation and communication approaches that will be implemented by an entire project team.

"Even if ... not the whole team is ready, if you have a (majority) helps. Having a willing person to brainstorm issues, ... willing to understand and help make sense of things helps". (MRE1)

"I was the only communication person and so was ready to do it. [But] organization needs to do it too in order for communication to be successful ... I had to push very hard to get this adopted". (MRC2)

Another mentee mentioned that support from the donor, not only in funding but open and encouraging the adoption of such approaches, was also important in contributing to the readiness.

Almost all mentees valued the role of the mentors who, according to them, were very helpful in making evaluation and communication works organized and well targeted.

“Wendy was a very fantastic mentor. I think she was very helpful because this process can be very frustrating ... different people, different ways ... The important thing is the mentor and mentee relationships”. (MRC3)

Mentees also talked about the methods and references provided as enabling factors. Some of them mentioned that they were fine with the mix methods using online and offline interactions. Some preferred the direct (face-to-face) meetings as more effective in mentoring. They pointed out that material such as webinars, checklist, and the posters as being useful. Although they did not follow all the steps both in the UFE and ResCom, they used the progress checklist as the reminder.

From a donor perspective, in this case ISIF, they valued the integrating of evaluation and communication components in the design of the project. For some projects, resources for evaluation and communication components allocated by the projects were limiting. They pointed out that the mentoring should provide an understanding about the importance of increasing resources for the adoption of these components.

“Without evaluation, grantees do not know what they can track ... [resulting in] very poor reporting. Without communication and the knowledge on communication, the reporting tools they used are useless. No impact. They [UFE and ResCom] linked very clearly”. (PH)

4. Barriers to capacity development

A major barrier to the readiness aspect was lack of clarity on what the mentoring would be like and why the project needs to follow these directions. UFE and ResCom are complex processes that require time to understand and accept. A mentor pointed out that online (remote) interactions were useful but for them they could not have served as well as the face-to-face discourse with an experienced trainer and sharing of examples.

“I think, the readiness step needs to be clearer at the time when we started. Ready [could] mean different by different people. It should be more explicit and details what exactly you mean by ready. We thought we were ready but actually not. If we had valued our readiness more thoroughly, we would have been more able to determine and make decision”. (MRC2)

“We took long to work with DECI because we did not quite understand the value addition of engaging with them. It took some time to think positively about it. There was a bit of learning curve that was a barrier”. (MRE1)

At the level of the organization, one mentee mentioned that readiness also needs to include support, not only from the top-management but also from the rest of the team or colleagues. Dependence on only one member to communicate project results (because s/he has developed a renowned reputation, for example as a credible journalist (MRE2), can be a barrier to project-wide uptake; the UFE/ResComm capacity should be targeted to a wider project membership for more accommodative uptake and sharing of ideas, challenges and solutions.

In a similar line of thinking, one mentee advised DECI-2 mentors to take advantage of project team's progress reports and forums to try and see how they applied UFE and ResCom to continuously add value to what they were doing. She requested for a better working relationship with the mentors.

Another mentee mentioned that time was the main concern. The working days and time for this mentoring were not adequate.

"Participatory takes a lot of time. Unless enough resources [are included]". (MRC1)

From the perspective of ISIF, this study found that DECI-2 mentoring should do more work to meet donor expectations. One concern related to the reporting mechanism that made mentoring updates more available and accessible to the mentees as well as the donor.

Another concern is related to the costs of adopting UFE and ResCom which were considered as too expensive for inclusion in budget proposals. This is one reason why UFE and ResCom mentoring were not included in ISIF phase 3, 2015 – 2016. ISIF also emphasized the importance for DECI-2 to include more affordable online mentoring that can be accessed by the mentees. From their experience such approaches could make the mentoring program more efficient.

4. Discussion

Findings of this study show that there have been capacity gains in the projects DECI-2 has worked with, and these have ranged from individual to organizational enhanced understanding of evaluation and communication to how particularly apply them for more effective delivery of project objectives. The DECI-2 program has partnered with projects whose contacts said they had initially limited or different knowledge in the two management aspects, and there is now an appreciation in the extra knowledge that the mentoring has provided. It is interesting that DECI required partnering projects to identify contact persons for evaluation and communication but did not specify the level of expertise that was necessary. However, in all the projects that DECI has worked with, this has not interfered with appreciation of UFE and ResCom. The simplified logic in working with evaluation users and uses, and developing communication purposes, objectives and audiences has made that appreciation much easier.

Previous knowledge and backgrounds in other evaluation and communication approaches by mentees have also not interfered much with appreciation of the difference in what UFE and ResCom presents. There were a couple of instances (reports) where respondents indicated reluctance to their uptake because they, at first, were not sure what value the two methods would add to what they already knew and/or did. These views may have contributed to delayed uptake and be a factor in readiness. However, these views were quickly reversed as the mentoring progressed. The acceptance even became stronger since the same respondents indicated that the two approaches helped clarify what they already did and the knowledge made them review their evaluation and communication strategies for more effective delivery.

The delay in developing knowledge and demonstration of value was reportedly related to the complexity of the two approaches as presented in the mentoring process. For those unfamiliar with evaluation and communication, it was a double burden of learning basic principles and concepts, as well as how to apply UFE and ResCom. For the more knowledgeable and experienced ones, it was a case of how to factor the two approaches in what they already did, communication being a particular case in point. The strategic introduction and demonstration of applied examples reportedly helped clarify the additional value the two methods brought to the projects' management. Continued mentoring support was critical in how the project teams applied the two approaches and what this meant in their Theory-of-Change, progress and observed and reported performance.

The delayed appreciation of evaluation and communication knowledge acceptance of UFE and ResCom as a way of applying them in project management resulted from their simultaneously parallel and joined introduction to the project teams. There is a strong relationship between evaluation and communication (two sides of the same coin) and this is the basis of the joined learning and application. However, this combined approach is also an on-going learning among the DECI-2 project team mentors themselves. DECI-2 is also a research program that is studying how the two approaches (UFE and ResCom) are taken up (singly or combined with the shared notion of "verifying and communicating change" – or 'Vericom') and the mentors may not have ready prescriptive answers to questions posed or challenges faced by the

projects mentored. This meant that in many cases, the exact project benefits from using a combined understanding UFE and ResCom were expected to be realized almost at the same time; and yet, since most projects are still underway, such information is not easily available.

The capacity gains have not been automatic and contextual factors have played a major role. Some of these include acceptance, resource support, and the pace of understanding and application. Other factors have been the complexity of the methods themselves (as already explained) and nature of the mentoring process, which includes the manner in which the information is shared and/or how the mentees are trained. The most supportive enabler is an accommodating donor (or allocation of adequate funds to the mentoring program) and a learning-oriented project team. Reports of the mentoring process being expensive (in terms of the mentoring person days by DECI-2 and associated travel to the sites) have been made and have contributed either to reluctance to partner with DECI-2 or delayed engagement. In one project, the team only has one contact person who could only allocate part of her time to the project's application of UFE and ResCom. This has delayed uptake of the approaches.

Despite the financial resources, all respondents pointed out the importance of an accommodating and supportive project team, and especially at the leadership (Principal Investigator) level. This is understandable since from an administrative point of view, the mentees (who are DECI's contact points) require the freedom (and time) to interact with the mentors, to learn and try the methods. The importance of this management support was pointed out in ROER4D and OpenSci. An additional related enabling factor, also reported by the two projects – a team that was willing to learn using the two approaches. In such circumstances, this factor also contributes to a willing and shared exploration (within the team) crucial to learning new methods and a willingness to accept that the final results are un-certain. Some projects made significant progress in applying UFE and Rescom as a result of a champion's encouragement and support. A case in point is the guiding support a previous mentee (Dr Sonal Zaveri) continues to give the Asia-based.

The relationship between the mentors and mentees forms the framework in which the new knowledge is exchanged and feedback on progress is shared for reflection and decision-making. All respondents interviewed appreciated the materials that the DECI team placed at their disposal, as well as the interactive sessions. However, greater preference was the more direct face-to-face meetings when opportunities arose and were utilized. This must have been due to the ease of quicker expression and feedback and demonstration of value only possible in such meetings. The mentoring contract only provides for two direct meetings between mentors and mentees, with the rest of interactive sessions expected to be indirect using virtual spaces (e.g. email, and Skype meetings). This arrangement has been structured to make the DECI-2 mentoring process more affordable and hence acceptable.

However, the greater use of indirect methods for mentoring have meant limited time to share the full knowledge, and adequate follow-up so that project teams could get on-going real-time value of using UFE and ResCom, given the nature of their complexity. The DECI-2 arrangement, where the PIs (Ricardo

and Dal) were also mentoring regional mentors to learn about UFE and ResCom and support their project mentees at the same time added to this constraint. The mentees shared reports of both very good as well as some wanting mentoring support, and requested for adjustments that would make the relationship clearer and more effective.

It is also clear that the capacity gains have been applied in the supported projects although the differences in performance have yet to be observed – especially in the large network projects. But changes in strategy, plans and practices were shared where the two processes have provided a more informative understanding of the project's progress to delivering their objectives – especially among grantee level partners.

For projects in DECI 1, UFE has made clearer what results the projects were aiming at and helped provide more informative and use-able evaluation products. For DECI-2 a couple of mentees reported that they had reviewed their project Theories of Change or made some adjustments based on a clearer understanding of the results they were targeting and the stakeholders they were interacting with. It was not critical that the mentees follow the UFE and ResCom steps to the letter, but that they use the understanding to have a re-look at their project designs, strategies and plans and find ways of achieving their objectives more effectively. This agility is the essence of the outcomes sought in capacity development projects (Ramirez, Quarry, & Guerin, 2015)

What is useful is the way these changes are presented in the project design template that combines both UFE and ResCom for project logic. One hub-level mentor says that a presentation of this program 'Vericom' template (or the information contained) led to greater appreciation by grantee level project teams and their willingness to share relevant progress and performance information. The mentee reports this as immediate outcome results ('expect to see' behavioural changes), with expectations that, through such sharing) deeper level outcomes (such as sustained use and learning) will emerge.

In summary, readiness for acceptance and use of UFE and ResCom capacity is crucial, since it requires a delicate balancing between complexity of the subject and organizational, project, individual background, resources and time. For the remaining phase of DECI-2, the project will need to review all aspects of readiness and ensure enabling factors are considered for easier capacity development, uptake and application for realizable project benefit.

5. Conclusions and recommendations - way forward

The positive sentiments given about capacity gained in evaluation and communication imply that there is benefit in the two methods and there is opportunity for increased acceptance and uptake to deliver what the approaches originally promise. UFE promises evaluations that have a utility focus, while ResCom promises more effective stakeholder engagement and participation. Combined, the two methods promise participative learning and more effective delivery of projects.

To enhance the understanding and application of UFE and ResCom, the study team recommends the following:

From the observation that there have been demonstrable capacity gains

- At individual: DECI needs to leverage from knowledge application and improved performance
- At organizational/project: reported changes in project strategy available from DECI-1 and acceptance to contribute to UFE/ResCom process and information by grantees-level partners in DECI-2. There is need to consolidate this experience for the remaining phases of DECI-2. Useful case studies require time, but it is a continued story in making.

On project readiness:

- The study team recommends a review of what readiness is and packages it in a way that new projects (and mentees) understand what it is. So that they are able to make a decision on whether to take up the approaches or not; or to adopt acceptable variations.
- The analysis should include resource availability and the supportive project team environment
- A significant contribution is how UFE and ResCom is presented to interested projects. There may be need to simplify the two processes, their combined versions (Vericom) and even how they can be related to other (possibly more familiar) evaluation and communication methods.

On the mentoring process

- There is need to review the mentoring relationship and method. Learning mentors may not be effective at first engagement. However, their role in being immediate contacts still stands and how to work with them should be reviewed.
- There is also need to review mentoring interaction processes given the reported effectiveness of face-to-face sharing benefits. This may imply strategically planning the use of resources and time for more and early face-to-face interactions.
- Given the limited support systems: develop more affordable on-line resources, time/resources to review progress reports and attend forums and provide value-laden feedback.

6. Appendix

1. Questions used to guide data collection

2. Given your interaction with the DECI team leaders and mentors, what is the evidence at hand indicating capacity gained in evaluation and communication among our partners? Expand by ...
 - a. Give specific details on what you now know in UFE & Rescomm (*VeriCom?*)
 - b. Give specific details (examples) of how you have applied the thinking (or principles of UFE & Rescom (*VeriCom?*))
3. How has your project changed (as a result of DECI-2 mentoring) in
 - a. Strategy/Strategies
 - b. Performance,
 - c. Outcomes,
 - d. Any other changes?
4. Describe emerging patterns emerging at the network level Vs the sub-project / grantee levels? (*To come from analysing responses above*). *But that means we have to distinguish (above) those changes occurring at network and at grantee level. If none are clear, we can probe.*
5. What were the main readiness enablers for the gains and the barriers for the missed opportunities? Let's clearly distinguish the following (with examples): ..
 - a. (Enablers for the gains): What factors supported your organizational/partners readiness to take up UFE/ResCom/Vericom?
 - b. (Barriers) Which factors constrained the easy uptake?
 - c. What opportunities did we (DECI/project team) and you (the project team) miss in the capacity development?
6. How long has this project to go before conclusion? What are the readiness requirements or other factors should the DECI-2 mentor focus on for the remaining months of the project?

2. Respondents

Respondents interviewed in this study include communications and evaluation officers from projects and organizations such as Open and Collaborative Science for Development Network OCSDNet, Research in Open Education Resources for Development, ROER4D, Privacy International, Operation Asha, Pajhra, and ISIF.

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