The DECI-2 project is described by a number of diagrams about what it has done, its methodology, the benefit to partners, and its capacity development contributions.

DECI-2 has been an action-research project that has combined three objectives:
   1. Service provision to IDRC Research Partners in evaluation & communication.
   2. Methodological innovation in the combination of evaluation & communication to positively influence development practice.
   3. Capacity development of mentors and partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

OUTCOMES

- ✓ **The DECI-2 process has helped partners adjust their strategies as they have witnessed emerging findings and changing contexts.**

- ✓ **The approach has been purposeful: taking time to modify strategies, clarify outcomes, and strengthen relations with stakeholders. The process has been a means of inviting and legitimizing participatory-action-learning.**

- ✓ **DECI-2 has worked well with partners who have been implementing experimental and learning oriented projects – it has helped them adjust the outcomes during implementation.**

SIX dimensions of the process
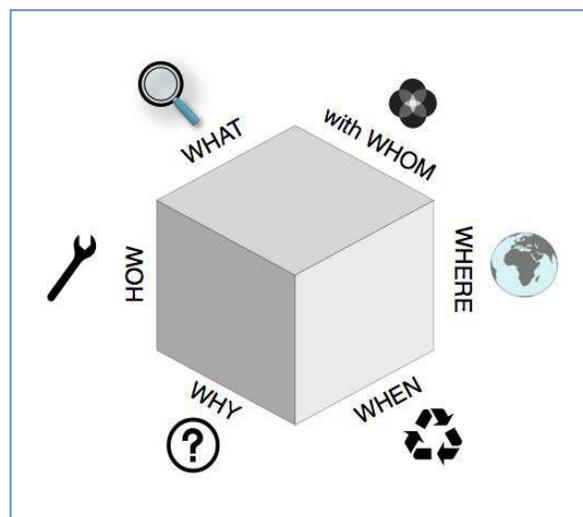
WHY

Most of the partners supported by DECI-2 were experimental and learning-oriented projects; their outcomes often evolved during implementation. The DECI-2 project has provided mentoring that allows projects to clarify directions, collect evidence, learn systematically and course-correct.

WHAT

The DECI-2 Team provided MENTORING in Utilization-Focused Evaluation and Research Communication; we combined these areas like Lego blocks - depending on the project needs. The evaluation mentoring helped projects CLARIFY their OUTCOMES, ASSUMPTIONS, and their THEORY OF CHANGE. The communication mentoring helped the project defined its COMMUNICATION STRATEGY to address: relationship building, networking needs, dissemination efforts, and policy influence. Our support helped our partners become adaptive and more able to manage complex issues or emerging change.
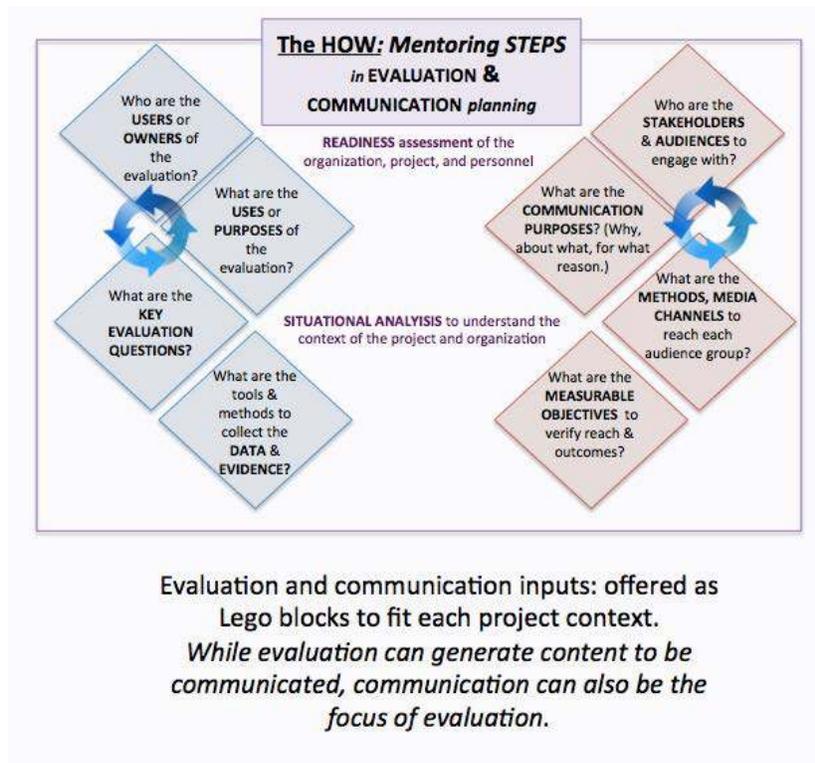
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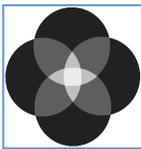
The DECI-2 team worked directly with our partner project staff. These people are professionals who managed RESEARCH NETWORKS, as well as smaller grantee level RESEARCH PROJECTS that were hosted by a wide variety of ORGANIZATIONS including think tanks, universities, and advocacy groups.

HOW

The Team provided COACHING and MENTORING in evaluation and communication. We offered to work with projects from the FORMULATION stage, during implementation and finally in REPORTING RESULTS. Our SKILL TRANSFER strategy was applied by walking with the partner through the steps for utilization-focused evaluation and research communication. The Team actively FACILITATED access to information resources and interaction with other partners. It also leveraged a projects' ADAPTIVE CAPACITY through evidence-based learning to adjust strategies as conditions required.

The following were the MENTORING steps, with emphasis placed on the iterative and modular aspects of this work. Towards the end, the Team allocated time to work with the partner to facilitate the use of the findings and reflect on the process. A Case Study was produced to summarize the collaborative process and outcomes.

The HOW: Mentoring STEPS in EVALUATION & COMMUNICATION planning

Evaluation and communication inputs: offered as Lego blocks to fit each project context. While evaluation can generate content to be communicated, communication can also be the focus of evaluation.

WHEN

The process was best when started as early as possible - beginning at the formulation stage of our partners' projects. The Team agreed with the partner to provide mentoring in UFE and Research Communication at a pace that was based on the partner's schedule of work. We called this approach JUST-IN-TIME MENTORING. This mentoring was iterative, earlier assumptions were often revisited to help the teams adjust to change.

WHERE

The Team aimed to do a site visit to the partner's location at least once, and ideally twice, in order to become aware of the situation and context of the project. Otherwise the mentoring was done remotely, often using Skype. The team used the following guiding principles:
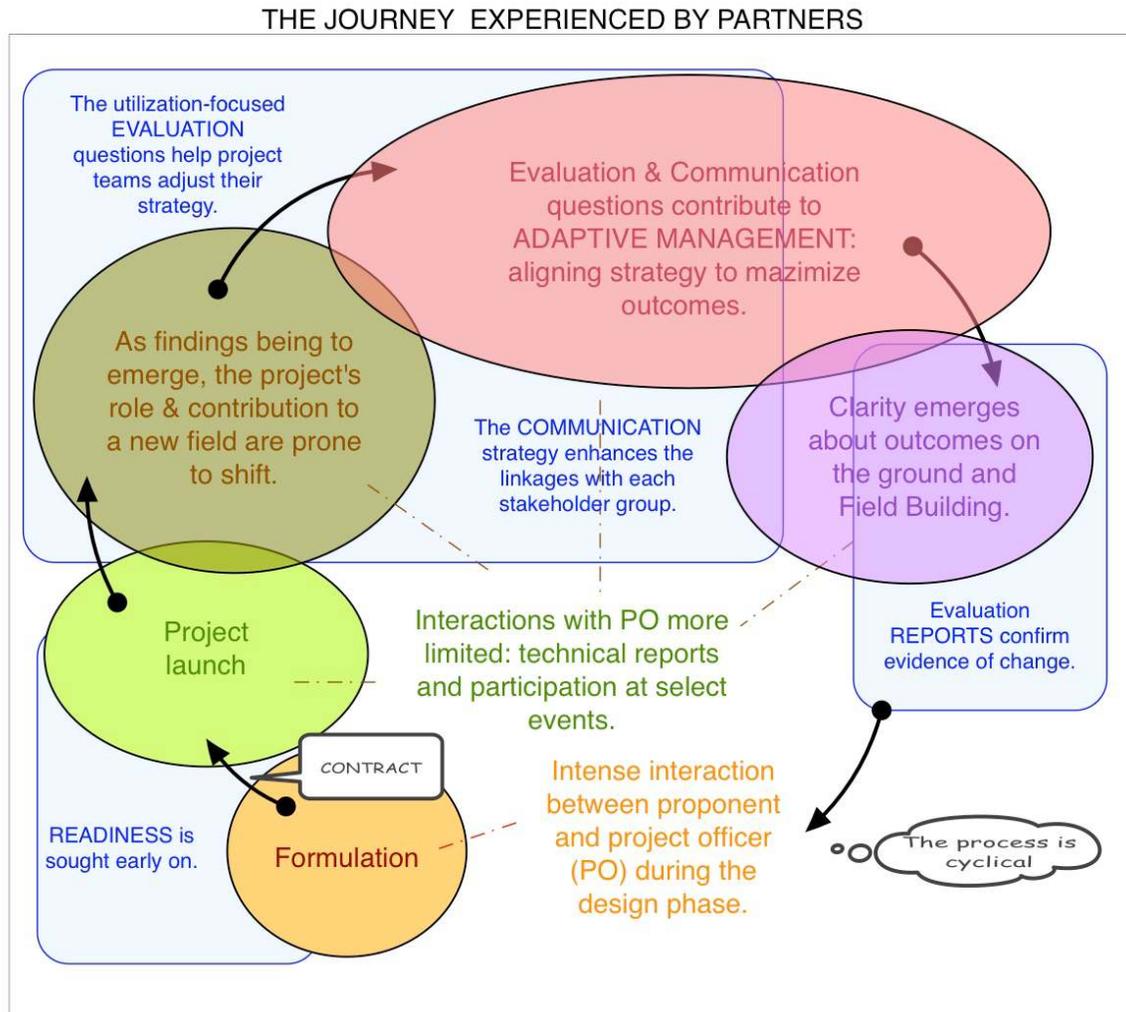
The mechanisms by which change occurs and by which partners and program were strengthened include:

Guiding principle	Mechanism by which it enhances the partner
Utilization-focused evaluation: a decision-making framework	By focusing on evaluation **uses** or **purposes**, and on **key evaluation questions**, partners discussed and refined their own ideas about why their own projects were being carried out and how – and their hopes for verifying their own outcomes.
Research communication: enhances use of findings for influence	By focusing on evaluation purposes and stakeholders, partners discussed and refined their ideas about the different audiences for their research – who was it that will use the research results, and how could they engage with them throughout their program of work.
Attention is paid to readiness from the beginning	The mentoring was most effective when the projects had senior management buy-in, adequate resources allocated to evaluation and communication, and staff who were keen to learn about the approaches.
Training through demand-driven, just-in-time mentoring	Just-in-time mentoring allowed the partners to receive support at the key moments that coincided with their project schedules. The mentors were able to adjust the support to each specific moment and circumstance.
Course correction of project strategy is expected and planned	In research and other experimental efforts, the unexpected arose frequently, and by discussion and refinement, the partners were able to adjust the trajectory of their work for maximum impact.
Utilization is the focus from	The ongoing attention to actual use enabled the

initial project design to completion	mentors and the partners to focus the effort on the purposes that were urgent and of interest to the primary evaluation users.
A collaborative, learning and reflective process is embedded	Person-to-person discussion was a mechanism by which ideas were refined and 'improved'. By embedding reflection, partners enhanced their work and took it forward – especially by clarifying assumptions about how change was expected to unfold.
Participation and shared ownership are fundamental	UFE and ResCom are participatory by nature: they enable the primary evaluation users and the project teams to own the design of their strategy.
The process builds individual and organizational capacity	When project teams 'owned' the decision-making process to design evaluation and communication, they gained capabilities in both areas, which in turn strengthened the organizations that hosted the projects.
Complexity and evolving contexts are addressed	Action research in the real world is based in complexity and changing contexts; by acknowledging this and embracing it as a reality, the partners' research remained grounded, evolving and changing to remain relevant.

The journey experienced by our partners

The DECI-2 process has helped partners adjust their strategy as they witnessed emerging findings and changing contexts. This approach is about being purposeful and taking time to modify strategy, clarify outcomes, and strengthen relations with stakeholders. The process is a means of inviting and legitimizing participatory-action-learning.

THE JOURNEY EXPERIENCED BY PARTNERS

The utilization-focused EVALUATION questions help project teams adjust their strategy.

Evaluation & Communication questions contribute to ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT: aligning strategy to mazimize outcomes.

As findings being to emerge, the project's role & contribution to a new field are prone to shift.

The COMMUNICATION strategy enhances the linkages with each stakeholder group.

Clarity emerges about outcomes on the ground and Field Building.

Project launch

Interactions with PO more limited: technical reports and participation at select events.

Evaluation REPORTS confirm evidence of change.

READINESS is sought early on.

CONTRACT

Formulation

Intense interaction between proponent and project officer (PO) during the design phase.
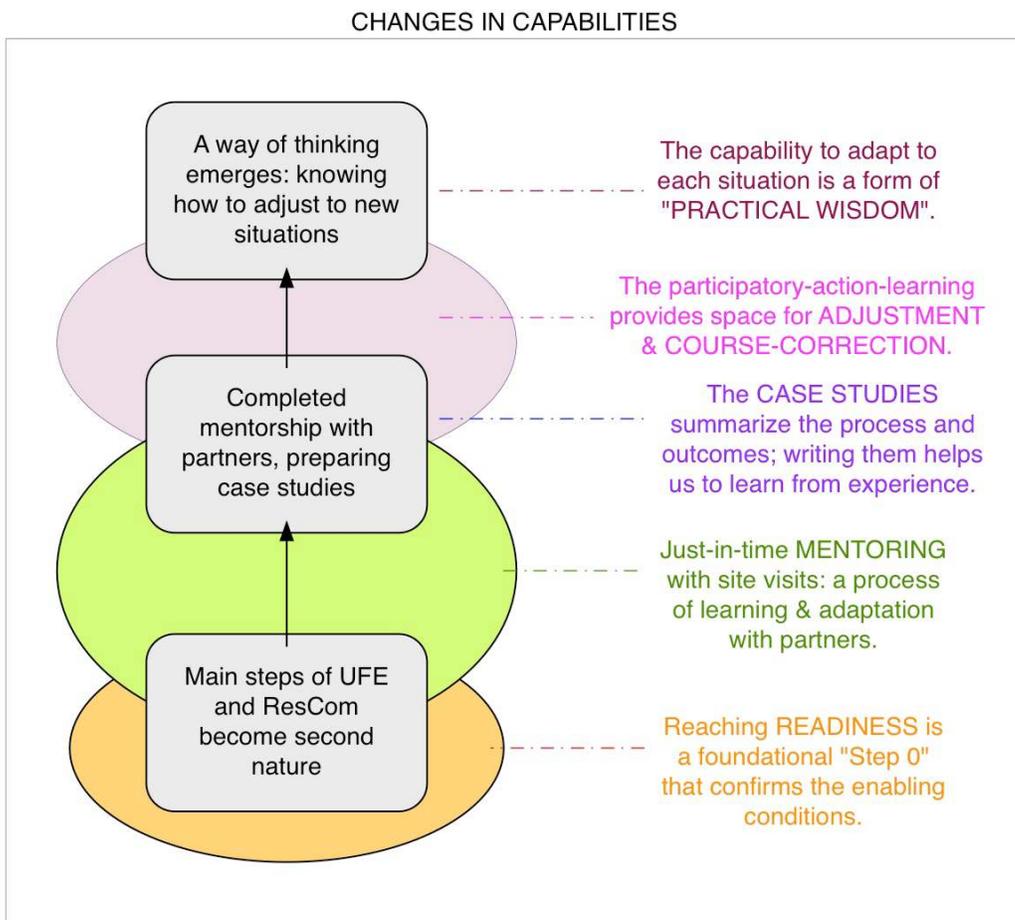
The process is cyclical

Annotations on the diagram:
- By 'proponent', we referred the group or institution that was seeking to work with IDRC and was engaged in a project design phase with an IDRC Project Officer (PO).
- The DECI Team has also learned that, beyond an early discussion about READINESS, it was often best to stand-by during the Project launch -which was a

very intense phase- and to begin mentoring in evaluation and communication soon after, when the project partner was less overwhelmed.

The changes in capabilities

The DECI-2 project provided support to partners through mentors based in three continents (East Africa, South and South-East Asia, North and South America). Throughout the process, the Team became familiar with the steps of utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) and Research Communication (ResCom). A number of case studies have been completed to capture the process and outcomes. As a result, the Team has acquired a way of thinking in evaluation and communication. The MENTORING process has been an enabler, a place to learn and adapt the DECI-2 learning partner style. The participatory action-learning side of the project has provided the space to course-correct. The Team has witnessed how several of the partners have developed the same capabilities.

CHANGES IN CAPABILITIES

A way of thinking emerges: knowing how to adjust to new situations

The capability to adapt to each situation is a form of "PRACTICAL WISDOM".

The participatory-action-learning provides space for ADJUSTMENT & COURSE-CORRECTION.

Completed mentorship with partners, preparing case studies

The CASE STUDIES summarize the process and outcomes; writing them helps us to learn from experience.

Just-in-time MENTORING with site visits: a process of learning & adaptation with partners.

Main steps of UFE and ResCom become second nature

Reaching READINESS is a foundational "Step 0" that confirms the enabling conditions.

The capabilities that DECI-2 sought to enhance emphasized adaptation and flexibility - which was useful when working in complex and emergent areas of action-research. Some of the capabilities listed below were gained by the mentors, and often by the partners as well.

Capabilities that were enhanced include:

◦ The capability to act and self-organize (Vision, Volition, Strategy, Agency)
◦ The capability to generate development results (Programmatic Outcomes, Achievement of Mission)
◦ The capability to relate (Networking, Collaboration, Advocacy Mobilizing Resources, Relevance)
◦ The capability to adapt and self-renew (Learning, Change Management)
◦ The capability to achieve coherence (Innovation, Flexibility, Resilience)
◦ The capability to ask questions that generate hidden answers.

Source [of the first give items]:
    Baser, H. & Morgan, P. 2008. *Capacity, change and performance: Study report.* Wageningen: ECDPM.