



Evaluation & communication capacity building: A hybrid decision-making framework

A brief on the DECI-2 project & lessons

IN A NUTSHELL The DECI-2 project uses participatory action research as a capacity building approach and provides mentoring to researchers around the globe to help instill 'evaluation and communication thinking'. We combine planning steps from Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) and Research Communication into a hybrid decision-making tool that often encourages organizations to develop and update their theory of change.

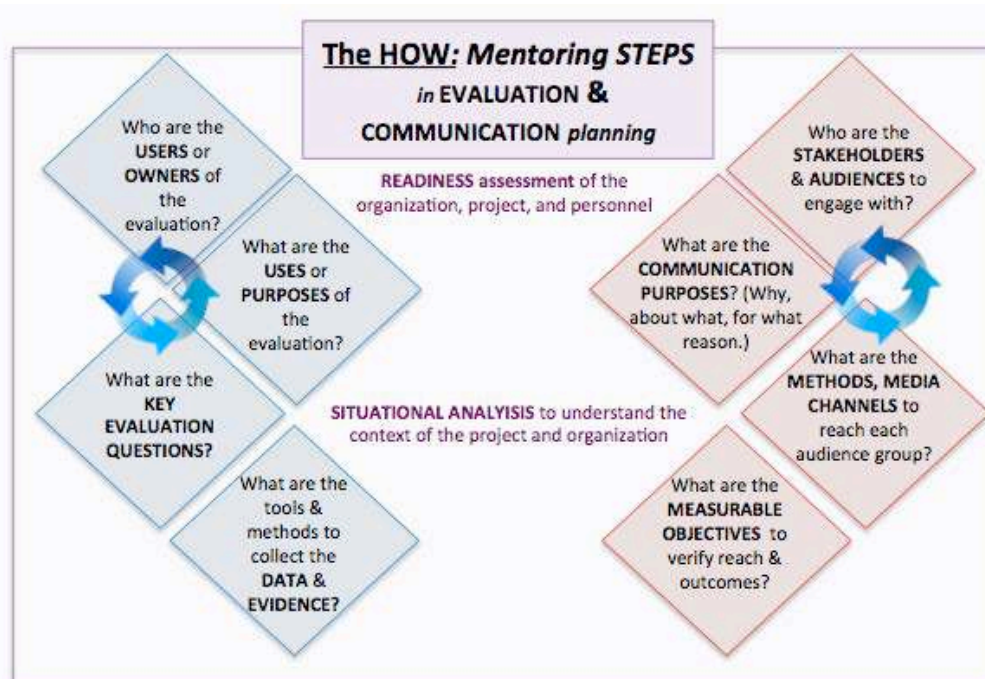
ABOUT US DECI-2 is an action-research project that provides capacity development through targeted and timely mentoring of project partners in both evaluation and communication. Our partners are global networks in information society research, supported by the International Development Research Centre's Networked Economies Program (IDRC, Ottawa) that includes support from UKAid's INASSA program. The DECI-2 project objectives are: meta-level action research; capacity development for regional consultants (in Asia, Africa and Latin America); capacity development for project partners; assistance to project evaluators and communication planning.

Guiding Principles

- Utilization-focused evaluation: a decision-making framework
- Research communication: enhances use of findings for influence
- Attention is paid to readiness from the beginning
- Training through demand-driven, just-in-time mentoring
- Course correction of project strategy is expected and planned
- Utilization is the focus from initial project design to completion
- A collaborative, learning and reflective process is embedded
- Participation and shared ownership are fundamental
- The process builds individual and organizational capacity
- Complexity and evolving contexts are addressed

TWO TOUCHSTONES We have come to see the notion of “readiness” and mentoring as two touchstones: one establishes the conditions for learning and the second ensures that the support coincides with a partner’s evolving needs. Readiness is possibly the least recognized dimension of Utilization-Focused Evaluation - and of Research Communication- and strategically the most important one. The

combined approach also encourages projects to have a communication and an evaluation plan early in the process. Each element adds value to the other, for instance the audience analysis awakens in stakeholders an interest in the research itself, so engaging them early can buy a level of trust and a commitment to its findings.

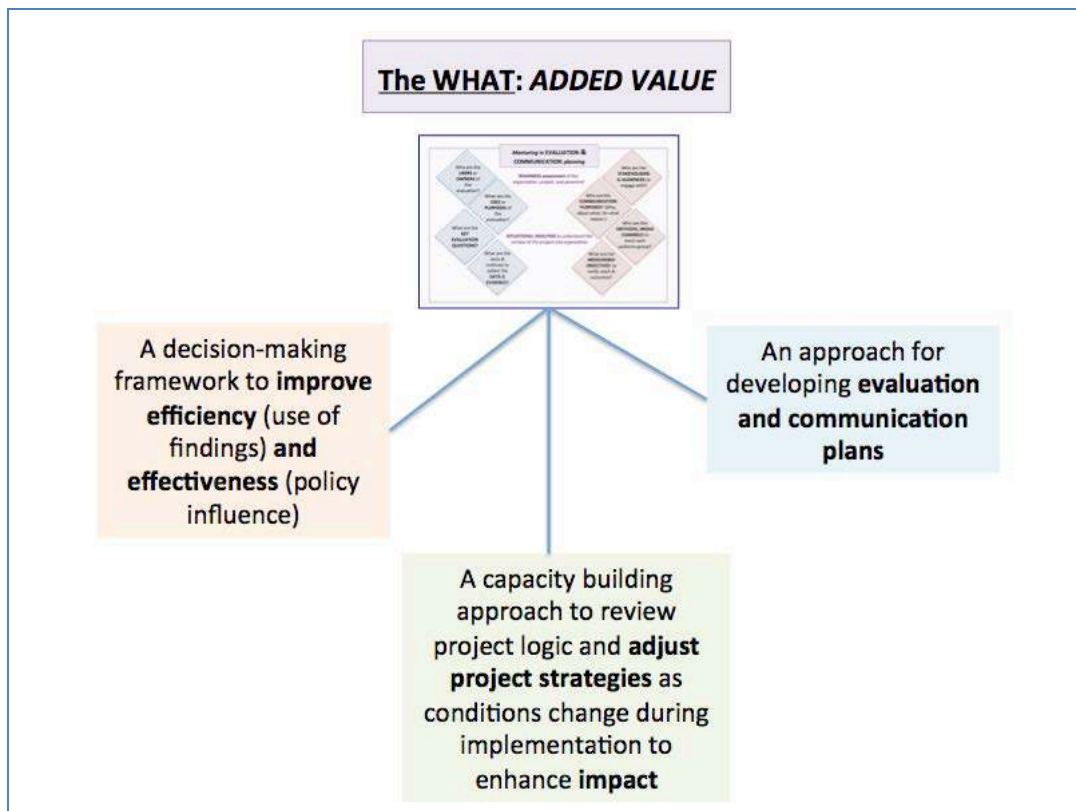


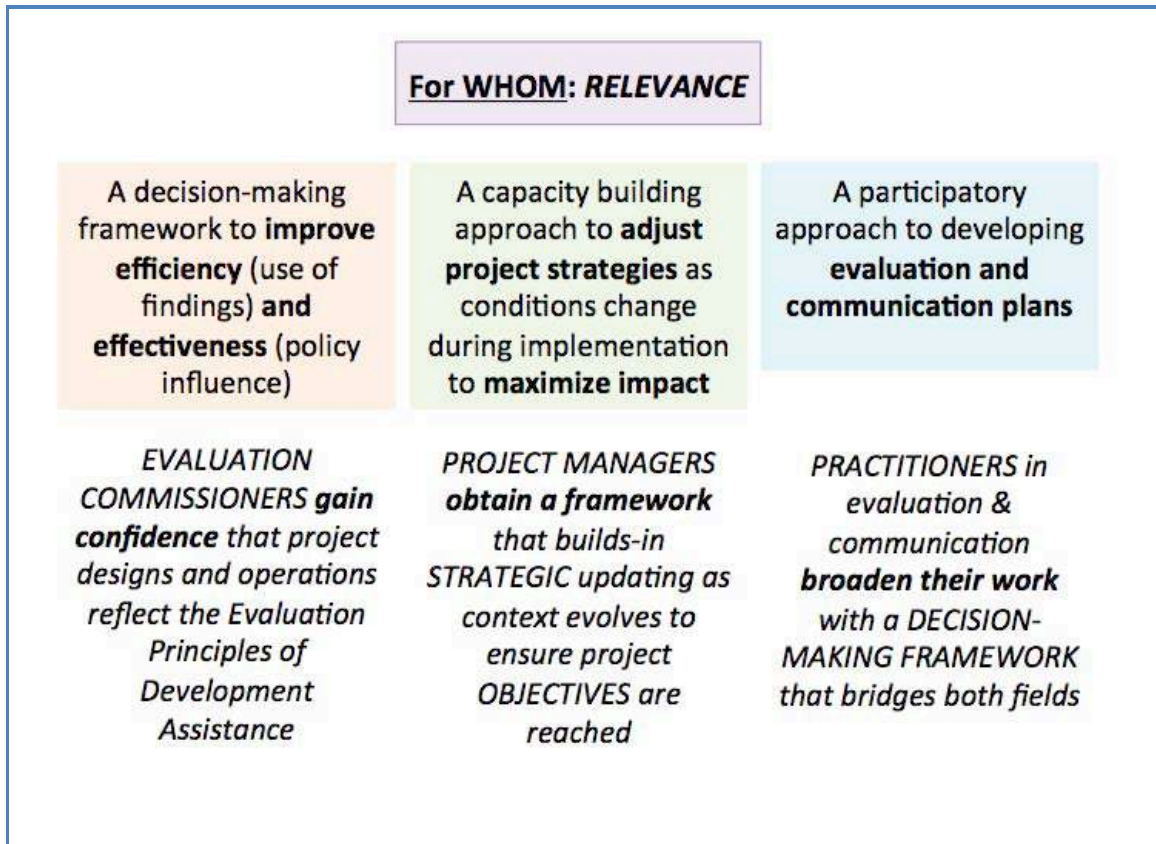
Evaluation and communication inputs: offered as Lego blocks to fit each project context.
While evaluation can generate content to be communicated, communication can also be the focus of evaluation.

THEORY OF CHANGE UPDATING Our mentoring facilitates a decision-making approach in evaluation and communication. Linking evaluation and communication has led to creating a hybrid decision-making tool that helps organizations develop and update their theory of change.

ABOUT DECI-2 AS A PROJECT The DECI-2 project began in 2012 following the successful conclusion of DECI-1, a two and a half year research project that focused on UFE capacity building through mentoring six Asian ICT4D projects funded by IDRC. The lessons learned were captured in six case studies that formed the basis for publication of a UFE Primer for evaluators. The cases and the Primer can be obtained free in English, French and Spanish from the project web site (see footer).

The DECI-2 Team is composed of two Co-Project Leads and one Communications Advisor, as well as three teams of two regional mentors each (one for UFE and one for ResCom), based in Asia, Africa and Latin America. DECI-2 is multi-dimensional project which concurrently builds the capacity of regional mentors who in turn mentor regionally-based research networks and a variety of projects in evaluation and communication thinking through an adaptive approach that allows us to learn and research as we practice.





A CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME

“Practical wisdom is the ability to do the right thing, at the right time, for the right reason. It is a term that refers to the acquired skill of ‘*knowing what to do when facing unique circumstances*’. Practical wisdom *gives a name* to the competence outcomes that we seek to develop: organizations that are able to adjust methods, media and strategy to

ever-changing contexts. Learning organizations with practical wisdom can find solutions from a menu of options, without having to follow blueprints. We have learned that the intuition we seek to nurture emerges over time through trial and error. Mentoring this process requires a competence that is nimble, facilitative, mindful, and able to adjust to dynamic projects and organizational contexts. It is the antithesis of workshop training.



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