CASE STUDY: ISIF — The Information Society Innovation Fund (ISIF)

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1. Utilization Focused Evaluation

"Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use", stated well-known evaluation expert Michael Patton in his book Utilization-Focused Evaluation (2008, p. 37). In UFE evaluators facilitate a learning process with attention on how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experiences. The focus of utilization-focused evaluation is on intended use by intended users.

UFE does not prescribe any specific content, method or theory. It is a framework that can include any purpose of interest to the user and it is a process for making decisions in consultation with those who can benefit from the evaluation. It is based on the observation that intended users are more likely utilize an evaluation in which they have a sense of ownership.

About the DECI Project
DECI stands for Developing Evaluation Capacity in ICTD (Information and Communication Technology for Development). It is an IDRC-funded evaluation research and capacity development project. This case study is one of the five UFE experiences supported by DECI. The project built an evaluation capacity among IDRC-funded projects in the field of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICTD) across Asia. The project provided researchers and evaluators with coaching and mentoring in UFE using the expertise of a team of regional evaluation mentors. The mentoring team introduced the concepts and practices of UFE and facilitated the design and completion of evaluations across five ICTD projects. These five case studies capture the mentoring team's experiences and reflections as a way of sharing what was learned by facilitating UFEs.

2. The UFE Framework

The following are an abbreviated representation of the 12 steps of UFE:

1. **Programme/Organizational Readiness Assessment** — Those who want the evaluation conducted need guidance to understand utilization-focused evaluation (UFE). This requires active and skilled guidance from an evaluation facilitator.

2. **Evaluator Readiness and Capability Assessment** — Facilitating and conducting a UFE requires that both managers and evaluators review their skills and willingness to collaborate. The facilitators' effectiveness will be judged on the basis of actual evaluation use.

3. **Identification of Primary Intended Users** — Primary intended users (PIUs) have a direct, identifiable stake in the evaluation and its use. The facilitator assesses the characteristics of primary intended users and sustains a climate of openness.

4. **Situational Analysis** — Evaluation use is both people- and context-dependent. Use will be enhanced when the evaluation takes into account situational factors, which the facilitator reviews, such as timing, resources, culture, turbulence, power and politics.

5. **Identification of Primary Intended Uses** — Intended use by primary intended users is the goal of UFE. A number of evaluation options are reviewed, screened and prioritized.

6. **Focusing the Evaluation** — The focus follows the intended uses of the evaluation by PIUs who need assistance identifying and confirming the uses. The fine-tuning of key evaluation questions is a critical component of the UFE. This process is difficult, however, it is critical for the richest research results.

7. **Evaluation Design** — The selection of methods is based on data needed to respond to the key evaluation questions. The facilitator ensures that the methods will yield findings that respond to the uses as intended. This step calls for coaching and design support.

8. **Simulation of Use** — Before data are collected a simulation of potential use is done with fabricated findings to verify that the expected data will lead to usable findings.

9. **Data Collection —** Managed with use in mind. It is important to keep the primary intended users informed and involved throughout all the stages of the process.

10. **Data Analysis** — Accomplished in consultation with the primary intended users. This involvement increases their understanding of the findings while adding to their sense of ownership and commitment to utilization.

11. **Facilitation of Use** — Use does not just happen naturally — it needs to be facilitated. This action includes priority setting among recommendations. This step is central to UFE requiring that time and resources are allocated to this activity from the project's inception.

12. **Meta-evaluation** — UFEs are evaluated by whether primary intended users used the evaluation in intended ways. This step tells the story of how the UFE process evolved. It allows the users and the facilitator to learn from their own experiences. This case study is the product of Step 12.

3. UFE — Background

The Information Society Innovation Fund (ISIF) is a small grants and awards programme. It is aimed at stimulating innovative approaches and creative solutions to the provision of ICT access. These innovative approaches to ICT support social, cultural and economic development needs in the Asia Pacific region. Small grants create opportunities to expand core knowledge that may result in future technological advances and applications. The awards acknowledge the contributions already made. ISIF places particular emphasis on the role of the Internet in social and economic development in the region with a goal of the effective development of the Information Society. ISIF works jointly with the Asia Pacific Network Information Centre (APNIC); the International Development Research Centre (IDRC); and the Internet Society (ISOC), with support from the DotAsia Organization (www.isif.asia).

The specific objectives of the ISIF programme include the goal of Encouraging innovative approaches to the extension of Internet infrastructure and services in the Asia Pacific region. As well there is a desire to address issues of Internet sustainability and business models in challenging market circumstances. Another objective is to foster innovation and creative solutions to development problems by supporting new and creative uses of ICT applications. The programme also wants to help development and public agencies identify new trends and actors in the ICT area for development in Asia and the Pacific. It is also a mandate of the programme to generate awareness and foster sharing of innovative approaches to these challenges.

APNIC, the Asia Pacific Networking Information Center, serves as the ISIF secretariat located in Brisbane, Australia. It is in charge of the administration of the funding provided by IDRC, ISOC and APNIC itself. There is also sponsorship provided by the DotAsia Organisation. Through the years 2008 to 2011 the funding of ISIF partners and sponsors directly supported project grants and awards. Administration costs were supported by the IDRC through a separate grant. Since the programme's inception in 2008 partners and sponsors have contributed a total of AUD $640,000 to the grants fund. Administration costs have been supported by the IDRC through a separate contribution of AUD $500,000. Starting from 2012, contributions will not only support the grants plus the awards pool, but also a percentage of the administration costs and additional activities such as mentoring and capacity building. The ISIF partners provide guidance, advice and definition through two committees: the grants evaluation committee (GEC) and the steering committee (SC). The GEC reviews grant applications and makes selection decisions by consensus. It includes two voting members appointed by each partner. The SC is

composed of one representative of each funding partner. The SC members review the programme's objectives, methods and documentation to ensure that the programme is aligned with ISIF objectives.

All proposals submitted to ISIF go through a rigorous review process and various evaluation stages (see below). The different stages of the selection process offer the opportunity to identify ways to coach or improve the applications received. This process helps them develop into complete project proposals. During this process the GEC guides the secretariat's identification of areas of support for the potential grantees such as for capacity building, networking or promotion.

Funding is limited a maximum of 12 projects per cycle. The proposals that are considered highly innovative, are the ones selected for funding. Step One is the Pre-screening basket. At this stage the ISIF secretariat reviews the proposal's alignment with ISIF objectives and eligibility criteria. Approved applications are moved to the Initial assessment basket. Step Two is called the Initial assessment basket. At this stage GEC members assess the proposals working in teams (two GEC members per team with three teams in total). Team members must accept or reject the proposals at this stage. Proposals accepted by two GEC members are moved to the Full review basket. Rejected proposals stay in the Initial assessment basket and can be reassessed at any time. Step Three is the GEC assessment basket. Only proposals with two votes pass the GEC assessment. During this step, all six GEC members have to comment on and rank the applications based on the eligibility criteria. Finally, GEC members vote for the projects they have selected for in-depth analysis during the face-to-face meeting. The final selection is then moved to the Shortlist/Winners basket (the online system with the shortlisted proposals). Step Four is the Shortlist basket and is the final selection stage. The organizations responsible for these applications will be contacted by the secretariat to finalize their proposals. They have to provide clarification on any GEC questions. GEC members will approve funding based on the feedback provided.

The ISIF programme has conducted two successful calls for proposals and one awards nomination. The first call for proposals, conducted in 2008, received 148 applications with 11 proposals selected for implementation during 2009. Projects were chosen from a wide Asia Pacific base. They supported topics such as health; disaster management; capacity building; and low-cost solutions for ICT access. The grant recipients attended a workshop where they presented and discussed their ideas with the GEC. Recipients received feedback from their fellow applicants and ISIF partners' representatives (APNIC, IDRC and ISOC) about their proposals. The intention was to support potential grant recipients to strengthen their proposals. Emphasis was placed on focusing on the stronger proposals for selection. In this case, however, all applicants who rewrote their proposals according to the feedback they received were funded. The selected grant recipients submitted two reports during the grant period. They detailed their activities following templates designed to capture information that promoted ISIF. As well specific projects were showcased at both a regional and national level. Interim reports for the first year were received through the months of June to August of 2009. Final reports were received from February to July of 2010. These final reports were edited and then published on the ISIF website on 21 October 2010.

The second call for applications was conducted in 2009. A large number of applications were received with 207 submissions received from 25 different economies[1]. The competition was very strong. Eight projects were selected by the GEC following a strict and rigorous selection process. Projects were selected from the following economies: Australia (to be deployed in Timor-Leste), Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. These successful projects showcased innovation, cooperation and technical knowledge. They also showed a potential to contribute to social change in their communities in areas such as IT infrastructure, health and multilingualism. The projects also reflected current issues discussed in technical and professional circles. Two of the projects, for example, focused on Internet Protocol Version 6 (IPv6) research and deployment. This presented opportunities for developing economies to get ahead by participating in the IPv6 challenge. Another two projects focused on the deployment of wireless technologies to serve isolated communities. It provided alternative services and made communications cheaper and more accessible. These projects' implementation began during the months of February and March 2010. Final reports are available for download on the ISIF website.

ISIF builds on lessons learned from the ICT R&D grants programme for Asia and the Pacific. It operated during the years 2001 through 2005. It was supported by IDRC, APNIC and ISOC, among other participants. APNIC was also a funding partner in this programme. It participated in the selection committee. During this time APNIC's senior management developed the necessary awareness about the needs of funding partners to maintain their support and the requirements to manage such initiatives. This provided an opportunity for a more structured analysis. There was also an opportunity for greater openness in supporting the Utilization Focused Evaluation (UFE). It also enabled knowledge creation due to the feedback obtained during the UFE process *(UFE Step 1)*.

Individual expectations about UFE were varied. Both the APNIC marketing manager and the UFE researcher (also the ISIF project officer at APNIC) wanted to obtain useful data. The marketing manager had limited knowledge of the UFE process. However, the marketing manager was explicitly looking for an independent data analysis of the first round of funding. The manager wanted to obtain data that could be used to support the resource mobilization strategy (RMS) and to provide some insight for future rounds of funding. The marketing manager also wanted to learn more about ISIF performance. The manager was very satisfied that the data obtained from the UFE both met and exceeded expectations *(UFE Step 4 and Step 5)*. The UFE researcher wanted to improve her skills in professional evaluation. She recognized the opportunity UFE offered as a learning opportunity and understood the knowledge development IDRC would support. The researcher understood that the proposed UFE would be the framework. She understood, as well, the philosophy behind the design of the evaluation plan. A goal for the data collected was that whatever use ISIF had for the evaluation it was important to ensure that after the evaluation was completed its findings would not be "stored and forgotten". It was

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[1] APNIC does not use the term "countries" because it works with economies that are not recognized as countries by the United Nations (UN).

important that the findings would continue to have ongoing future applications *(UFE Step 3 and Step 3)*.

The expectation at the ISIF Secretariat was to evaluate the programme itself and not the small grants projects allocated. The UFE method would be used to focus on learning about grant making and grant administration. The UFE researcher's expectation was that the UFE would provide clarity regarding the effectiveness of the secretariat. She also expected to learn how well it addressed the needs of applicants. By early 2010 it was apparent that IDRC support and other funding for the small grants programme was itself in question. This was due to restructuring processes and the global financial crisis. From the years 2008 through to 2011 the IDRC's support covered administration expenses and contributed to the grants pool with enough funding for three projects. The remainder of the partners' funding support went directly to the grants projects. This ranged from one to three projects, depending on the size of the contribution. ISIF faced a genuine challenge should IDRC administration support be ended. This was due to doubt around the programme's ability to continue. It became clear that ISIF would have to raise funds in order to continue its work. Additionally, new organizations would have to be approached for new potential partners and sponsorships other than those currently supporting the programme. For this reason, the UFE focused on assessing the secretariat. It was hoped that this would provide support for a resource mobilization strategy and a communication campaign to voice what value it brought as a secretariat to the programme. Only then would a potential partner or sponsors be willing to support the secretariat along with the small grants. At this stage, the UFE efforts did *not* focus on evaluating the grants allocated. This was due to the fact that it was too early in the recipients' project cycles. It should be noted that it can be challenging not only to identify but also to attribute the specific lessons learned and the resulting impacts that a specific grant contribution can have during a limited project cycle.

4. UFE Journey — The What

The evaluation planning took place from 16 January 2010 until 20 January 2011. Data was then collected and analyzed with the report being submitted in June of 2011. The evaluation plan's development took longer than expected. This was because the UFE research area changed from assessing innovation to assessing the secretariat's work. This shift was due to the need to diversify the contributors' base. As well, a resource mobilization strategy (RMS) had to be prepared to support the continuation of the programme *(UFE Step 4)*. The use of the evaluation findings was intended to strengthen the RMS. The PIUs identified were the APNIC director general (DG), the ISIF Steering Committee and the marketing manager. The role of the APNIC DG was to inform and involve members about UFE processes. The role of the marketing manager was to provide assistance to the ISIF project officer on how to use the findings effectively as part of the RMS. The funding partners were aware that in the current funding scenario it was important to "open" the programme to other partners and sponsors. They endorsed a proposal submitted to the IDRC Partnerships Department. The proposal's purpose was to develop a RMS to secure funds for project administration, workshops and grants

provision. The main use of the evaluation's findings was defined as a key input to support the RMS and the evaluation structure for the supported projects *(UFE Step 3 and UFE Step 5)*.

The DECI mentor conducted a workshop from April 26th to April 29th 2010 at APNIC headquarters, in Brisbane. The workshop's purpose was to inform the designated UFE researcher and other PIUs about the 12 step UFE process. In addition the workshop was to explain how to design the evaluation and how to develop the key questions. The workshop also explained how to involve users and develop uses in the UFE process *(UFE Step 1 to UFE Step 12)*. At the workshop, the overall evaluation plan was finalized and this included a calendar of activities. It also included a set of three key evaluation questions that were to guide the process. With the DECI mentor's support, sub-questions were drafted. As well, target groups to collect information from were identified. An initial list of evaluation questions was shared with the Steering Committee (also a PIU, see below) for their input *(UFE Step 6* and *UFE Step 7)*. The three evaluation questions were as follows. The first was: "How effective was ISIF approach/methodology to encourage innovative projects to apply?" This question was to be posed to all applicants that competed in round one (148) and round two (207) The second question was: "How effective was ISIF mentoring practices and administrative support during the implementation process?" It should be noted that this question was to be posed only to shortlisted applicants. The third question wanted to find out: "What were the lessons learned from this investment?"; "What worked and what did not work?"; and "What were the reasons for the successes and for the shortcomings?" These questions were to be asked to only to selected and funded recipients.

Soon after the UFE workshop ISIF was invited by IDRC to attend the Resource Mobilization Planning Workshop. The workshop was held in Cebu, Philippines, from the 27th to 29th of May 2010. This workshop worked well with the planned UFE study. During this workshop Venture for Fundraising supported two IDRC funded programmes to plan their own resource mobilization strategies. A complete proposal, plan and budget were submitted to IDRC Partnerships' Development Department[2]. The plan was to enable ISIF to develop a prospectus to reach potential sponsors. The APNIC communications area team (today replaced by the Publications Unit and the Marketing and PR units) was entrusted to develop the marketing materials. These materials would include a new set of banners, brochures, flyers, presentations and press releases. Their purpose was to target potential partners and sponsors for ISIF's future development. The UFE findings generated data that supported all of these new communication materials after the Cebu meeting and after the UFE was finalized. Due to the "use" focus every opportunity was sought to introduce UFE and generate suggestions to strengthen data collection. During the proposal's evaluation meeting for the second set of grantees (held on the 25th to the 27th of November 2010) the grantees were introduced to the UFE and the key

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[2] Partnering for development to create healthier, more equitable and more prosperous societies, along with strong partnerships with other donor organizations is essential. IDRC's donor partnerships division helps develop relationships with research funders and international organizations. These relationships are critical to building knowledge and local capacity (that is skills and experience) to conduct research and to foster innovation in developing countries around the world.

evaluation questions. The grantees shared what they wanted the evaluation to be. They stated what they wanted to learn about ISIF secretariat's role. They also discussed the secretariat's activities that were identified as useful and meaningful for all partners. This feedback contributed to the UFE data collection. It also helped refine the questions for the online survey. To find answers for each question, the ISIF secretariat engaged in two major evaluation tools to support the evaluation plan. The first was a data analysis of the applications received. The second was an online survey. Both activities were designed in-house, with support from relevant APNIC departments *(UFE Step 7)*.

Data analysis was applied to applications received *(UFE Step 9)*. In total 355 application forms were submitted during the course of the two calls for applications. They were analyzed to identify various contributing factors. The first was the number of applications submitted by each country. The analysis also looked at legal status, human resources (number, skills level and gender) and current and future sources of funding of organizations applying for ISIF funds. The third group of factors analyzed involved the major difficulties faced in the region where ICT projects are expecting to contribute to improvement and change. Additionally, the major focus areas and topics targeted by the project for each country were examined. Finally, the primary use of the funds requested was considered.

An online survey was designed. Its purpose was to compile feedback about the ISIF secretariat's performance including the application process. It focused on the administrative support the ISIF secretariat provided to the grant recipients. The survey included questions about the following issues. First, the speed and the ease of the application process itself. Second, the feedback turnaround time from the ISIF secretariat. Third, the quality of the feedback was reviewed. As well, the use of various capacity building resources provided by the secretariat in comparison with other grant seeking applications was determined. The simulation helped to make the questions clearer. It also changed both the order and processing of data. Additional questions were added to the survey. Their purpose was to define which application process the survey participant is referring to. The questions were also to measure level of satisfaction with the application process by adding qualifying questions. Questions regarding qualitative documentation such as case studies, story, examples, letters of reference and background were added. Questions that aided in determining: how ISIF funding support has affected their own work as well as relationships with other organizations, clients and beneficiaries. The online survey was open from August to September of 2010. Electronic invitations were sent to the contact information available for all former applicants. This included those who were rejected for funding. Electronic invitations were also sent to the organizations that requested support but did not submit applications. The survey received a large number of responses, 90 in all. Most of the response came from former applicants of the 2009 call for applications. The 90 responses included current grant recipients and prospective applicants *(UFE Step 9)*.

5. UFE Journey — The How

The UFE process started in Penang, Malaysia, in June of 2009. At that time the ISIF project officer attended a meeting hosted by the IDRC evaluation unit and the DECI project. Over the next six months, through Skype and emails, she was appointed as the UFE researcher. During

her tenure she became acquainted with the UFE process and reviewed the "voluminous" UFE book by Michael Patton (*Utilization-Focused Evaluation* (2008)). She also discussed its contents with the ISIF committees (grants evaluation committee and steering committee). The APNIC marketing manager noted that she was a strong "advocate" for UFE. Various topics were discussed for the UFE. The focus did change, however, when the external environment was uncertain. This did help to orient the UFE researcher to what the 12 steps of UFE were. This decision point, brought into the project from an external source, helped to focus the UFE researcher *(UFE Step 1 and UFE Step 2)*.

Situational analysis *(UFE Step 4)* was attempted, although it was limited and was a challenge. It drew upon and used all the evaluative processes and knowledge available within the previous R&D programme and APNIC human resources department. Being involved in the first evaluation process conducted for the ISIF programme, the UFE researcher used the book *ICT4D Learnings: Best Practices and Roadmaps from the Pan Asia ICT R&D Grants Programme*[3]. The book was an important resources and was used to inform processes through the lessons learned and reported from an earlier R&D programme which operated from the year 2001 to 2005, That programme had been supported by IDRC, APNIC and ISOC among other contributors. The evaluation was useful. It highlighted the aspects that the partners wanted to improve and innovate in the new and re-branded programme. All these aspects were key elements in the definition of the secretariat's role. Additionally, APNIC used regular evaluations at different levels in the organization. These evaluations assessed the performance of both staff and teams. Thus using the UFE worked well with APNIC's commitment for evaluative processes *(UFE Step 1)*.

The UFE process required that there be one PIU. However, discussions with the team confirmed that APNIC functioned in a collegial management style. It was decided that the APNIC DG would be one of the PIUs. The DG would act as a strategic link to the rest of the SC. Another key PIU was the marketing manager as she was directly responsible for crafting the fundraising and marketing strategy. Her background in market research provided her with valuable evaluative skills. These skills included, for example, how to develop key questions for survey applications. As well the skills included an ability to link the questions and determine the sample. She also had critical thinking skills needed for the analysis and interpretation of the evaluations. Prior to the UFE evaluation the UFE researcher's experience with an evaluation process had only been as a recipient of an external evaluation. During the process the marketing manager's evaluative skills proved to be very valuable as the UFE process moved through the 12 UFE steps. Initially, the UFE researcher had expected to take full responsibility concerning the uses and findings as she had considered it to be her "job". However, there was a discussion as to why it was important to keep the roles and individuals fulfilling the positions of PIU and UFE researcher separate. As a result it was decided that the two PIUs, one of whom was the DG and thus was operating at a senior management level, should be included in the process. The fact that these

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[3] Mohan Rao, M. & Raman, N. 2009. *ICT4D Learnings: Best Practices and Roadmaps from the PAN Asia ICT R&D Grants Programme*. Singapore: Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) and Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information Nayand Technological University (WKWSCI-NTU).

users would be responsible to translate the study to use was an important decision point and innovation in the UFE understanding and process *(UFE Step 3)*. Although the UFE process was initially delayed because of the change in focus described previously, the change/adaptation was supported. This support came from decision makers in APNIC, ISOC and IDRC (ISIF partners) and by the ISIF secretariat staff as well as by the ISIF steering committee. The UFE researcher called it a "practical" alternative. The new UFE topic was considered to be more relevant as it would support the resource mobilization strategy efforts (RMS) *(UFE Step 4)*. The UFE was intended to provide inputs for a RMS required to secure the continuation of the small grants programme. The UFE was also to help in the development of complementary activities such as workshops, training and support for conference participation and awards. The analysis about processes and procedures focused on the role performed by the secretariat in terms of efficiency and transparency *(UFE Step 5)*.

To focus the evaluation *(UFE Step 6)* three key evaluation questions were chosen. These questions were identified during the April 2010 workshop with the UFE mentor. They were further developed to include sub-questions and incorporated into the online survey. They were also introduced into the analysis of the data collected during the application processes *(UFE Step 7)*. The evaluation design used two data collection tools: an online survey and an application data analysis. The PIUs were actively involved in the design with both committee members reviewing the survey questions and template sheet for data analysis. The Survey Monkey design offered a simple, clear way to visualize the data collected. It was also used to produce graphics and diagrams to summarize the trends identified. Although it was not planned for initially, the secretariat hired a temporary assistant. The assistant helped with the transfer of data from the original application forms to a database to be used for the applications data analysis. Hiring the assistant solved a time challenge and provided an efficient data transfer process.

The simulation *(UFE Step 8)* was conducted soon after the design of the online survey was finalized. The simulation was conducted with support from the ISIF committee members. The collected feedback was used to finalize the design of the survey questions and format. A few test runs with the members refined the order of questions and how to process the data. One of the data collection tools used in the UFE was a review of data from 355 grant applications. The second tool was an online survey. It proved to be a simple, but powerful tool. The large number of responses received (90) was beyond expectation especially since organizations not selected for funding were actually interested in the process. Their comments and suggestions proposed ways to improve the communication with potential applicants. These points were also included for analysis *(UFE Step 9)*. The PIUs involvement in the UFE process proved to be a very useful adaptation. They contributed actively as the data emerged *(UFE Step 9)*. They provided suggestions such as the type of graphics they would like to see included in the reports. As a result the data analysis was structured to have illustrations of what partners and sponsors are looking for when deciding on the continuation of financial support. The PIU support continued during data analysis. They suggested, for example, alternatives to interpret the data available due to the limitations and challenges posed by the use of different application formats. They also drew attention to the lack of clarity and document structure found in some of the

applications from the first call. The ISIF committees highlighted the areas where a comparison was possible for common streams of data.

The voluminous data and the difficulty of sorting it out electronically made the review a time-consuming challenge. This delayed the UFE timeline. As a solution APNIC stepped in to support the researcher who worked only part-time as ISIF project officer. APNIC appointed an assistant to expedite the process. The budget was reviewed and the solution was to reallocate AUD $4,000 to cover evaluation related expenses. An assistant was hired in September of 2010 to support the data analysis to compensate for the time constraints experienced by the project officer who worked part time, two days a week *(UFE Step 10)*. According to the ISIF project officer, the ISIF committees had often discussed why certain sets of data were being captured and what the intended use was. The UFE process triggered the revision of the application forms. This was an unintended outcome. The well planned analysis of the applications using data from the first and second set of applicants helped to contribute to the progress reports for IDRC. It also helped with the development of marketing materials. The information was used to provide evidence to support the ISIF programme's relevance to prospective sponsors and partners. Representations of the data in graphics helped to illustrate the research's findings. These graphics would be useful in progress reports and presentations to prospective sponsors *(UFE Step 11)*. The FAQ section on the ISIF website was redesigned to address the issues raised by former applicants. This innovative response to users' needs will facilitate future applicants' understanding of the application and selection process. Additionally, future applicants will have a clear idea about what to expect from the ISIF secretariat in case they were not selected for funding *(UFE Step 11* and *UFE Step 10)*. This process was found to very useful.

During a workshop on administrative and reporting procedures and strategies for new grant recipients, organized in Brisbane in November 2010, the concept of utilization focused evaluation was introduced. As a solution to meet reporting challenges this concept included revised reporting strategies. This ensured that future reports would be written with a clear "use" focus. It was hoped that if the DECI project continued ISIF would be able to introduce UFE to some, if not all, of the 2009/2010 grant recipients. The 12 steps of UFE were useful for directing evaluative thinking. It ensured that work was done in a methodical, logic manner. The UFE researcher's intent was that each grant recipient learns to implement the 12 steps and uses the findings emerging from the process. This was an unintended outcome *(UFE Step 11)*.

The use *(UFE Step 11)* had started even before the final report was out. The results from the data analysis and the survey were included. Progress reports were submitted to IDRC and shared with all ISIF committee members. This action allowed the ISIF secretariat to position all the data in the context of the programme's implementation. Once the report was submitted and approved, the ISIF secretariat started preparing a publication to be distributed to potential donors and sponsors. The publication focused on the following elements: programme management and the advantages of the small grants funding model. It also looked at the benefits of complementary activities such as travel grants and workshops. The evaluation findings were used spontaneously from the time the evaluation process was finalized early in 2011. A variety of uses have occurred naturally but have always been linked to the main

intended use *(UFE Step 11)*. The data analysis of the applications received provided important feedback to the ISIF secretariat. The secretariat also benefitted from the feedback provided by current and former grant recipients. The result of the feedback was the development of solutions that addressed how to improve the application and selection process and how to provide better support to grant recipients. Additionally it provided solutions as to how to improve the reporting strategies used. This, in turn, provided validation for the programme needed by potential donors and sponsors to secure funding for support. The effectiveness of ISIF's efforts to secure financial pledges has been confirmed. As well negotiations to secure funding from donors and sponsors have been concluded. As a result ISIF has secured funding for the years 2012 through to 2015.

6. UFE — Outcomes

An unexpected outcome was the amount of data generated. The marketing manager (one of the PIUs) reported that there was no need for a marketing angle or "spin". This was due to the demographic data available and due to but the rich qualitative data from applicants. All of which could be used to promote (or advertise) ISIF with sponsors.

The UFE successfully developed the ISIF RMS as it had intended. The RMS was further facilitated by Venture for Fundraising. In the beginning the RMS was initially supported by the IDRC's partnerships and business development division. It was to seek a new approach for attracting donors and sponsors to enable ISIF to continue providing funds after 2011. One achievement was that new sponsorship materials were developed and distributed. However, the strategy has not been implemented completely as there has been no confirmation from the IDRC's partnerships and business development division that funding will be allocated for this campaign. However, a new grant from IDRC and renewed support from ISOC, DotAsia and APNIC have been confirmed. The ISIF secretariat approaches potential donors and sponsors on an ongoing basis. Proposals, using the UFE findings, have been submitted. As yet no additional funds have been secured. APNIC is certain that the findings will provide support for fund requests to potential partners and sponsors. Negotiations, in such matters, take time. Additionally, negotiations are dependent upon the availability of resources. Negotiations also depend on the interest of those organizations and individuals who are willing to support the work ISIF does. The prospectus document, which is the main resource mobilization tool, is in place. It is continually used a reference material to guide fund raising activities. This prospectus was an achievement made possible because of the UFE and due to the analysis of data from the application processes as well as the online survey responses. This is an outcome that has worked well for the project.

The UFE findings were included in the progress reports to IDRC. The findings were very well received by IDRC officials. An unintended outcome was the report's content and evaluations being used to discuss the development of a new umbrella programme called the Seed Alliance. The programme will be launched on 31 March 2012. It will be aimed at strengthening and

articulating the small grants and awards programmes conducted by LACNIC and APNIC. It will also aid the establishment of a brand new programme to provide similar support in Africa, to be managed by AfriNIC[4]. The proposal preparation of this grant depended heavily on the UFE findings. The IDRC project manager noted many benefits from the findings. These benefits included greater clarity about what they wanted from the grants programme. As well as an understanding of what potential sponsors are comfortable with. An additional benefit was how to secure the best pool of grant recipients. As important as a benefit was establishing what processes worked and what did not. A final benefit was the importance of face-to-face workshops. Related to this is the need for a budget allowing for workshops in the new proposal. The Seed Alliance was an unexpected outcome and an innovative, exciting emerging use of the UFE. The Seed Alliance will provide a foundation for future achievements.

ISIF plans to continue using what they have learned about UFE in the future. ISIF will look for ways to conduct similar evaluation processes with their grant recipients. The website was redesigned as a result of what was learned during UFE. The FAQ section that provided responses to the survey's findings received special attention. This work was a result of the UFE survey. The evaluation findings and the framework provided by the UFE approach were used to update the reporting templates for the 2010 grant recipients. The findings also helped to develop the agenda for the 2010 workshop for the second group of grant recipients. In this agenda the UFE concepts were introduced specifically for analyzing results and reporting to ISIF. These outcomes helped improve reporting efficiency and clarity. Another important objective of UFE was the increase in the UFE researcher's evaluation capabilities. The IDRC project manager found this added value to be very helpful. The overall "smooth" delivery of the UFE process stood in contrast to a previous experience of an earlier external evaluation. The UFE process was also considered "healthy" by the IDRC project manager. This "health" could be seen in the sense of ownership created. This ownership sense was substantive in nature. Another indication of "health" was the ability to set clear boundaries as to how the evaluation was going to be achieved and used. The UFE process was also inspiring. The UFE researcher was strongly motivated to do UFE. She wanted to learn about the evaluation process and how to assess outcomes.

An intended outcome of the evaluation process was that it enabled ISIF to review and update its systems and practices. This ensured consistent and reliable monitoring of funded projects. These projects included the development of relevant templates for grant recipients to submit reports, both technical and financial. The projects also included grant recipients workshops. Additionally, effective private web services that would allow the partners to be kept informed of the progress of projects was another element that resulted from the evaluation process. An unexpected outcome of the evaluation was the international attention it drew. The UFE findings about small grants programme for ICT generated interest from a well-known Irish

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[4] Asia Pacific Network Information Center (APNIC); Internet Address Registry for Latin America and the Caribbean (LACNIC); Regional Registry for Internet Number Resources for Africa (AfriNIC).

author, Seán Ó Soichrú. The author would contribute a chapter entitled "Benefits of Small Grants", for the ISIF review booklet[5].

Insights and unexpected data also emerged through the UFE process. The key questions were prepared during the April 2010 workshop with the UFE mentor. But just as important were the discussions with the PIUs, especially the marketing manager. These discussions led to the inclusion of additional data. This was reflected in the number of additional columns in the spreadsheet analysis. Information that 90% of the skills required to implement the ISIF proposed projects were sourced from the region (and not internationally) was an unintended outcome. Another unintended outcome was that the pool of ISIF applicants did not receive funding from any other sources. This was a surprising result. The marketing manager, one of the PIUs, mentioned that her assumptions about the proposal development process for the small grants underwent an important change. This change occurred when the data came in about the effectiveness of the proposal development workshops. The workshop was available for the first round of grantees but was cancelled for the second round due to lack of financial resources. When funding was secured for this activity, the implementation of the supported initiatives had already been stated. As a result the resources were used to support a workshop focusing on administrative and reporting requirements for grant recipients. The feedback received about the proposals preparation workshop indicated that sharing common problems was important. What was also important was that the potential grant recipients were not in competition with each other but were supportive of each other's efforts. This was an unintended outcome and a revelation. Consequently the proposal quality was improved overall. These findings led to the inclusion of such workshops in future rounds of funding. Similar feedback was received after the administrative and reporting requirements workshop was conducted. The ISIF secretariat is looking for ways to support both in the future.

7. UFE — Lessons Learned
The UFE work plan triggered an interesting reflection process at the ISIF secretariat. This process produced a number of lessons learned were identified about programme management during the programme's lifecycle. These lessons were included in progress reports submitted to IDRC and were identified due to the UFE process. Regarding the secretariat's responsibilities it was realized that it is important to have both involvement and responsibility from senior management and staff with decision making capacity as well as finance and accounting knowledge. Office and administration skills are important. Technical knowledge is also critical to perform the ISIF secretariat's activities, especially in the initial stages. The integration of the programme's administrative, financial and technical procedures to the hosting organization is key as it aides working relations with supporting staff and it helps to produce deliverables according to defined deadlines. Support for other areas and teams from the hosting organization should be granted through specific requests using the internal channels available. This avoids conflicts regarding time allocation, priorities, planning etc. Additionally, the project office should facilitate internal communication so that the hosting organization's staff understands the programme's objectives. Reporting at staff meetings is critical to gain internal

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[5] http://isif.asia/groups/isif/wiki/fdbd2/Small_grants_inspiring_innovation_a_program_review.html.

support. Active participation from APNIC's senior management is crucial to keep the process focused. Their engagement in selection procedures, evaluation programmes and resource mobilization activities is vital to maintain the programme. Additionally, any requests to senior management should be clear and specific.

There are many communication issues that can be made easier and will, in turn, make the UFE process smoother for all involved. Former grant and award recipients have indicated their preference for open communication with responses provided as soon as possible. Mailing lists spaces rather than direct email, when appropriate, should promote communication and participation all involved parties. The secretariat should be proactive in all matters. This is especially true when addressing participants' needs and difficulties during the application, selection and implementation processes. To avoid misunderstandings the secretariat must be very clear when requesting responses, decisions and/or specific actions from any participants. Deadlines must be clearly set with reminders sent at least two days before the deadlines. They should also allow time to prepare appropriate responses. Participants must be notified of server outages and maintenance to avoid losing web page updates and document uploads etc. Alternatives to integrate the public website with social media pages and other relevant online content should be provided encouraging grant recipients to document and share their work using direct and informal mechanisms. The ISIF secretariat has learned that in order to produce relevant and timely marketing materials for both onsite or offsite events it is important to have easy and direct access (preferably in-house) to human resources, equipment and software. This allows all promotional activities and campaigns to be tailored to specific needs without additional costs. Customer Relationship Management software has been critical to develop electronic campaigns and follow-up on press releases. Based on the UFE findings and the online survey as well as staff and grant recipients' evaluations it is recommended that secretariat consider participating in at least three communications/IT events, in the future, in the AP region to promote the ISIF programme.

In the future standardization of formats for reports and communications would promote openness, trust, and would promote transference of information in various forms. Additional lessons learned concerned the final reports of the 2009/2010 grant recipients published under a Creative Commons License. For consistency these reports should be disseminated using a common template. The support of the APNIC communications team was important for ensuring a consistent style for the reports which increased their readability. The ISIF secretariat extended the consultation process to include the purpose; scope; templates; and style of the requested technical reports. Financial report templates should be revised annually. These templates should incorporate former grant recipients' feedback. The ISIF programme's financial information should be made public such as in an annual report to ensure transparency and accountability. Only one template should be used for both interim and final reports to avoid misunderstandings. Reports should reflect both local currency and declare currency fluctuations. It was found that grant recipients were eager to report when their suggestions regarding reporting procedures where incorporated into the formal mechanisms. It was learned, as well, that simplified language for instructions worked best. The programme should also continue to actively reach out to other donor agencies; business incubators; government

agencies etc. It should also support former ISIF grant recipients to develop their own projects further and to receive additional funding.

To produce and showcase relevant and lively documentation material it is important for organizations, which receive support, to choose a project leader based on his or her willingness to document, collaborate and share his or her experiences. The project leader should have confident use of social networking tools and fluent English language skills. The secretariat has found that the more confident project leaders are in these areas the better the monitoring and follow-up process is. Grant recipients have recommended, as well, that the secretariat organize project visits. It is recommended that the ISIF secretariat should hire external facilitators with extensive technical knowledge to conduct workshops and other training events. It should also continue to seek additional support from other IDRC projects/areas and other donors, partners and sponsors to conduct the programme evaluation and resource mobilization strategies. Both of these processes have provided significant insight into the grant making process and the contributions to Internet development in the region. The secretariat should, additionally, seek volunteer and external help to analyze data collected to support the evaluation process. This would ensure that the process flows smoothly without interrupting the programme's daily operation.

The data generated was rich and credit for this should be attributed to the UFE researcher's communication skills. The personal relationships developed by her during the grant making period were critical. The survey helped to build relationships with grant recipients and prospective recipients — many of whom had kept in contact even though their grant lifecycle had ended. One of these grant recipients, unsolicited and in the spirit of collegiality, referred to ISIF's work on their organization's website. These examples are representative of the collaborative environment fostered during the project.

The first two steps in the UFE process indicate the need for readiness within the organization as well as the evaluator's facilitative skills to launch the UFE is easily replicable. The ISIF's experience indicated that a successful UFE requires an "advocate" within the organization. In ISIF's case, it was the UFE researcher. The advocate would facilitate the process and build relationships to continuously and consistently support the UFE. What was unique for ISIF, and perhaps more difficult to replicate, was the great effort of the UFE researcher to build the UFE "mindset". The researcher regularly gave briefings on the progress within APNIC across all stages of the UFE. This was a difficult task as one of the PIUs was the DG, a very senior staff member. Great care had to be taken to optimize information and provide feedback about the UFE in a succinct manner. The initial apprehension about involving such a senior person as PIU proved unfounded as inputs from him and the board, to which he was directly connected, were essential. Other APNIC staff had responsibilities that did not include participation in the UFE but the UFE researcher took every opportunity at staff meetings to brief them about the process. Her efforts created an enabling environment. What may be difficult to replicate is the time that is required of other staff members for the UFE process. UFE is not their core work and unless the time is factored in, staff needed for a supportive role may not be able to provide timely help. Supportive roles might include developing the Survey Monkey or assisting in coding and

analysis of the applications. For example, one of the PIU was also responsible for market research and the time spent by her on the UFE had to be negotiated with the board. She, in turn, had to reschedule her work plan to accommodate UFE timelines. The APNIC communications team helped in developing the Survey Monkey. Their time, as well, also had to be negotiated aside from their core responsibilities.

It is also important for the organization to be "open" to evaluation. It has to be willing to think critically and to support the UFE researcher. It also has to involve other staff as and when the UFE work progresses. For example, the Survey Monkey details were worked out with the help of the APNIC communications team. The organization also allotted money and human resources to the UFE researcher in response to the evaluation's needs — although the expense had not been planned for. The UFE process may not work in organizational cultures that are less "open" such as where staff waits for the manager to speak first and seek direction from that communication. Within the cultures of the Asia Pacific region this is a common cultural practice.

An opportunity lost was that DECI partners could not meet face-to-face because of lack of funding. Group virtual exchanges, and not just with the designated mentor, would have helped the five DECI partners to learn from each other. The UFE process had many challenges. These challenges involved advocating the UFE approach in the organization. It also meant determining the research area and identifying potential users and uses. Other challenges included addressing unintended outcomes and facilitating use. Each of the five DECI partners had unique ways of addressing the UFE steps. Sharing would have helped UFE researchers to understand the nuances of the UFE approach and its interpretation. UFE researchers had developed evaluative and facilitating skills so that sharing across projects would have helped to reinforce and inspire other skill building activities.

Evaluation needs expertize. Unless the UFE researcher is committed to the process and the volunteers donate a lot of time, the ISIF's success with UFE could not be replicated. As critical was the complete trust of the IDRC funders in the UFE process and their willingness to have the UFE researcher in the "driver's seat" as well as the strong mentorship provided by DECI. In terms of replication, the mentorship should be evaluated and costed out. This would ensure that it can be realistically built into other programmes. It is important to stress that there must be an understanding that good evaluation needs to be resourced adequately. The UFE brought greater visibility to ISIF's work although it is only a small project within APNIC's larger portfolio and the UFE became an item for discussion in staff meetings.

Appendix: Case Study ISIF Acronym List

AfriNIC: Regional Registry for Internet Number Resources for Africa

AMIC: Asian Media Information and Communication Centre

APNIC: Asia Pacific Network Information Centre

DECI: Developing Evaluation Capacity

DG: Director General

GEC: Grants Evaluation Committee

ICTD: Information and Communication Technology for Development

ISISF: Information Society Innovation Fund

IDRC: International Development Research Centre

IPv6: Internet Protocol Version 6

ISIF: Information Society Innovation Fund

ISOC: Internet Society

LCNIC: Internet Address Registry for Latin America and the Caribbean

PIU: Primary intended users

RMS: Resource Mobilization Strategy

SC: Steering Committee

UFE: Utilization Focused Evaluation

UN: United Nations

WKWSCI-NTU: Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information Nayand Technological University