DECI-4 – DERECHOS DIGITALES CASE STUDY

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DESIGNING EVALUATION AND
COMMUNICATION FOR IMPACT

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DIGITALES
América Latina

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1. INTRODUCTION

About this case study
This case study is part of a series that describes how five organizations were mentored to take over the design of their evaluation plans and communication strategies. The focus of the case study is on the mentoring process itself. All of the organizations are research think tanks working on applied research on information society research, including topics of cyber security, privacy and digital innovation. The five organizations were part of the IDRC-funded Cyber Policy Centre (CPC) Initiative. The mentoring was provided by a capacity building project called DECI (Designing Evaluation and Communication for Impact).

The Cyberpolicy Program
Over several decades IDRC's Networked Economies (NE) program supported the improvement of governance of cyberspace in the global South. As part of NE, the Cyber Policy Centre (CPC) Initiative sought to strengthen independent policy research institutions through core support to build institutional capacity and sustainability; mentorship and skills building to strengthen research and policy capacity; and global knowledge networking and policy uptake. The first phase began in 2017 and the second in late 2019-2020 for a total duration of four years. The five CPC projects funded in this program included: Research ICT Africa (RIA) in South Africa, the Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law (CIPIT) in Kenya, Derechos Digitales (DD) in Chile, Centro Latam Digital (CLD) in Mexico, and LIRNEAsia in Sri Lanka.

The DECI Project
Since 2009 the DECI project (Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity for Impact) has provided IDRC partners with training in evaluation and research communication. DECI has been a component of IDRC [former] Network Economies' strategy to support capacity building among its partners. Many of DECI's partner organizations will be familiar to researchers involved with information society research.

DECI has provided independent mentoring by a team of experienced evaluation and communications advisors. Our support has emphasized just-in-time mentoring to help partners learn the steps of evaluation and communication planning through practice. The DECI Team includes regional (Africa, Asia and Latin America) mentors and was made available on a voluntary basis to IDRC partners.

DECI is separate from IDRC's reporting processes. In addition to its training services, DECI is a research project: a learning lab in capacity building. The DECI website includes a searchable knowledge base with case studies of past experiences. Each mentoring experience is unique and the DECI team goes to great lengths to adjust to partners' needs and context.

Case study organization: Derechos Digitales

Derechos Digitales (DD) is an independent NGO based in Santiago de Chile. Its main objective is to develop, protect and promote digital rights in Latin America in three particular domains: (i) sustainable and inclusive technologies for social justice, dealing with the impact of digital technology on structural exclusion and inequalities; (ii) autonomy, dignity and control in the use of technology, addressing how public and private practices related to technology can impact the exercise of fundamental rights; and (iii) technology policy from Latin America, responding to the need to promote the inclusion of diverse Latin American voices and perspectives in regional and global debates on technology governance and human rights. . DD has gained regional recognition due to its contributions to digital rights through research, information dissemination and policy influence. Through its involvement in IDRC's Strengthening Cyber Policy Centres in the Global South initiative, Derechos Digitales sought to improve its multidisciplinary capacities and conduct research in economic innovation; cyber security, artificial intelligence, and human rights in the digital environment.

DD was founded in 2005 by a team of lawyers committed to social change. Advocacy was part of their *raison d'être* from the beginning. Its focus has always been to influence public policy through legal research from the perspective of citizens' rights, and less so from an academic perspective. DD learned early on that they had to communicate effectively and discovered the strategic importance of communication. They realized that their communication efforts gave them a lot of visibility among key stakeholders, so when social media came into the scene, external communication became even more of a priority. Nowadays, DD receives many national and regional requests to provide expert advice. This explains why the communication unit was the first one to become formalized within the organization. Based on practice, communication has been mainstreamed within DD because the full team was committed to making technical topics more widely known.

2. STEPS IN THE MENTORING PROCESS

Overall, the DD team was very keen to work with the DECI mentors in both evaluation and communication and there was a strong buy-in from managers. During the inception meeting, the potential communication and evaluation mentees were assigned. There was interest in exploring Research Communication and a number of initiatives were identified as cases of interest for conducting Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE).

The communication mentoring process

It was quite evident that DD had a communication strategy embedded across the organization. From the beginning, the organization has focused on specific audiences and media/methods and language translation. As part of the practice, projects begin with clarifying a product / deliverable and identifying the audience/media for communication; this creates a venue for internal collaboration between research and communication staff members. Over the years, DD has positioned itself as an organization that consistently provides evidence-based information related to digital rights. This explains why it is

regularly engaged in public events/forums and consultations. One of the interesting and major challenges they have had has been the need to communicate legal research in a language that could be understood by their target audiences.

From the beginning, Vladimir Garay, the lead person of DD's Communication Unit, was appointed as the communication mentee. Prior to collaborating with DECI, DD's communication strategy had not been formally described (or made explicit). This offered a good opportunity for the DECI team to introduce Research Communication as a framework. Vladimir was open to explore and use some of the DECI formats for documenting and summarizing communication plans. Initially, one major difference between the communication and the evaluation approach was that the communication approach looked at the DD's overall communication needs and did not focus on a specific project.

In January 2020, Vladimir produced a Communication Strategy document for all of DD. This helped him identify broad themes focusing on activities and products, target audiences, and objectives. In order to make the strategy more specific and measurable, we suggested it should first profile audiences and objectives, rather than products or media. We also introduced the gradient of outcomes (from Outcome Mapping) that had been well received by other CPCs.

In March 2020, Vladimir began working on a new format focusing on the Artificial Intelligence (AI) project. He developed a table with audiences, objectives, methods/media, and evidence of outcomes in the short, medium and long term (see Appendix 1). We emphasized that the mid-term column would be more useful to measure changes for a short project. The reasoning being that short term outcomes are mostly predictable, while long-term ones are often beyond the actual duration of a project and subject to many other factors.

The evaluation mentoring process
Evaluation capacity was less developed or integrated within DD than the communication capacity. Previous evaluation efforts had been driven by projects and by donors who often imposed their own indicators and had mainly focused on accountability to show that objectives were met. In addition, there had not been any systemic evaluation done at the organizational level.

The inception meeting took place at the beginning of October 2019 when the DECI mentors visited Santiago de Chile. This visit was very positive; two DD staff members were identified as potential evaluation mentees and at least three different projects as potential opportunities for learning about U-FE. However, due to a number of unforeseen situations, the mentoring process did not unfold as expected. One week after the inception meeting, violent riots broke in Santiago de Chile and the DD office was closed. The DECI mentors were able to re-engage with DD staff in January 2020 and signed the new MoU with DD agreeing to work towards a May deadline for the evaluation design. However, the

evaluation scenarios that were initially discussed subsequently changed. By then, one of the projects that was to be evaluated had been written-off and the DD team was thinking about evaluating an initiative funded by the Ford Foundation called the "Rapid-Response Fund". As the DECI mentors tried to initiate new discussions about how to engage the Primary Intended Users (PIU), the Covid-19 pandemic began, and this project was also put on hold.

Thereafter, it wasn't until March 2020 that our mentoring work with DD started gaining some traction with the evaluation of DD's CPC project and the appointment of Patricio Velasco as new evaluation mentee. Patricio has a background in Sociology and the media, and at the time he was part of the organization's Research and Policy.

The CPC project contained three components but, to make things more manageable, DD decided to focus on one of the components, which aimed to identify the incidence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on public policy and practice, as well as assess its impact on discrimination in terms of digital rights. As the DECI mentors started working with Patricio, the DECI team invited Mariana as an evaluation mentor trainee who could later support DECI's work in Latin America. She had helped coordinate a research project that Joaquin and Ricardo had evaluated in Argentina between 2009 and 2012 and had gone through the whole U-FE cycle. Mariana shared with the U-FE team how her experience of going through U-FE process as a PUI had helped her team at Universidad Nacional de San Martin (Argentina) stay focused on key areas of the project. Given her interest and enthusiasm about the approach, and the fact that she had relocated to Santiago de Chile, the DECI team saw Mariana's physical presence as an opportunity to offer more face-to-face support to DD to speed up the mentoring process. Unfortunately this was also not possible due to the Covid-19 lock-down as all mentoring session remained on-line.

By May 2020, Patricio had been able to define the primary users and to work with them to define intended purposes and uses. The DECI mentors shared some DECI materials for reference, including the UFE checklist and some slides. Patricio tried them out, he commented that it felt "like jumping into the pool with no previous warm-up!". This led us to realize that we had not provided him sufficient mentoring to clarify his role as the facilitator of the evaluation. Patricio began sharing draft material with the DECI mentors prior to the sessions with the PIUs. As he managed to engage the PIU's in what he called "helpful conversations," the process started to make more sense to him. He also made excellent progress defining evaluation uses and formulating three Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) with some sub-questions. We suggested a few things to consider, including reducing the number of uses because there wasn't a clear connection between some of them and the KEQs. We also suggested that he summarize all components into a single table. This would help observe the coherence between objectives, uses and KEQs. It is important to note that this process helped the PIUs revisit and adjust the CPC's AI project objectives.

As some of the KEQs were related to communication activities, we suggested that Patricio start working on them with Vladimir, the communication mentee, who had summarized the communication strategy into the ResCom table. Patricio followed most of our suggestions and made adjustments to the table to incorporate some elements of the ResCom table. He also incorporated additional columns to include the simulation step, which confirmed his commitment to cover all the design steps of the U-FE process. One drawback to this was that the U-FE table grew its number of columns to the point that it became too complicated. The main challenge became to simplify the table in such a way that it remained coherent. After a couple of rounds of revisions and a final discussion with the PIUs and Vladimir, Patricio came up with a U-FE table that was more manageable. The team was able to reduce the number of KEQ from 10 to 6 and reduce the number of intended uses from 3 to 2. The fact that Vladimir was involved in the final revision of the UF-E table helped integrate communication questions and set priorities around them. Patricio put a significant amount of time and effort in completing the evaluation design and summarizing it in a table. He showed great discipline and commitment to go through the process and to document it thoroughly. He pointed out that it was a painful exercise but acknowledged the value of the process for him and the DD team. A summarized version of the U-FE table is included in [Appendix 2].

3. UNPACKING THE MENTORING PROCESS (the how)
A feature of the DECI project has been its dual purpose: in addition to the mentoring support to partners, there is a research component focused on how best to provide capacity building in evaluation and communication. This second purpose enables DECI to 'learn-by-doing' with partners and makes DECI a living lab to support the adaptation of mentoring practices and, incidentally - as we now understand - grow practical wisdom. This case study is a research output of the DECI research component.

In UFE, "…The evaluator develops a working relationship with intended users and helps them determine what kind of evaluation they need." (Patton & Horton, 2009: 1). These authors noted that research on use has confirmed that: " …intended users are more likely to use evaluations if they understand and feel ownership of the evaluation process and findings; they are more likely to understand and feel ownership if they've been actively involved; and by actively involving primary intended users, the evaluator is preparing the groundwork for use." What we have experienced inside this negotiated process is that the ongoing interactions are at the heart of the mentoring.

Our mentoring places the primary users as decision-makers of the evaluation planning and communication design. The mentor asks questions for clarification, sometimes suggesting, or nudging the partners to consider aspects they had not attended to before. The degree of direction varies with the mentor's own style, the mentees, the stage of the process, and the context.

Each mentoring process is unique. The DECI team includes professionals based in several countries in four continents, each with their own unique background and learning style.

Each project partner is mentored by a team of at least two DECI mentors which builds on teamwork and encourages complementarities and internal reflections.

In the DECI experience, UFE is learned through practice: experiential learning is at its core (Kolb, 1984). It requires an accompaniment that matches learning moments. This timing is one reason why the impact of workshops is limited: people are often neither 'ready' nor able to absorb the information because they lack the knowledge of how to subsequently implement the learning in their project context. Mentoring at the pace of the partner is fundamental in our work. In DECI, we have been experimenting with a combination of coaching (that follows an established but simplified set of steps associated with the UFE framework) with mentoring (that focuses on guiding, adjusting, and troubleshooting together). We have learned that we do a bit of both (Brodhead & Ramírez, 2014).

The principles that have emerged from our practice and that guide our work are the following:
- Utilization-focused evaluation is a decision-making framework.
- Research communication enhances use of findings for influence.
- Attention is paid to readiness from the beginning and can be revisited.
- Training is demand-driven and provided through 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.

The ResCom and U-FE processes at DD faced many obstacles but mentors and mentees were able to adapt and move ahead in the best possible way. In this regard, practical wisdom came in the form of flexibility and perseverance. The cancellation of several projects and the closure of the DD office could have been a good excuse to end the mentorship, but both DD and DECI made their best efforts to continue. Although at times the interaction was not as fluid as desired, the mentees were able to incorporate most recommendations and to complete the communication plan and the evaluation design. On the other side, the mentors were able to keep track of the progress and provide support as required.

The evaluation process progressed to implementation after the design was discussed, reviewed and adjusted. The level of engagement by the mentors declined as Patricio started the data collection and analysis, so it was hard to keep up with the process. The DECI mentors sporadically sent check-in e-mails offering support but we got a sense that Patricio had things under control and no additional assistance was needed. We also learned that the AI project itself had been delayed, which in turn meant that data collection for the evaluation was also behind schedule. According to Patricio's most recent update, *"We had problems with data collection during the first round of CPC case studies, so our*

report will be incomplete. We expect to do a more comprehensive data collection for the second round, so we will be able to do full report on those case studies."

Both Patricio and Vladimir completed the DECI competency self-assessment forms; an attempt to measure the individual changes in evaluation and communication capacities. Patricio reported positive increases in evaluation competencies. However, it is difficult to assess the contribution of the DECI mentorship to the competencies gained, as we did not have a baseline. In general, the evaluation mentee gained practical experience facilitating an evaluation process that was at times challenging because it was limited to virtual interactions. Patricio acquired good understanding of the uses and overall purpose of the evaluation, which is in itself valuable. In his own words, he described the experience as "a highly thoughtful process in terms of approaching the evaluation for the entire DD team involved."

Patricio gave a presentation on the UFE process during the annual retreat, which was well received by his colleagues. This presentation to the team is an important piece of evidence indicating his understanding and commitment to UFE. Patricio mentioned that "the discussion instance was fruitful since it allowed situating the evaluative effort from the existing practices and workflows in the organization."

In terms of communication competencies, the gains are even more difficult to assess because it was a strong area of DD prior to the DECI mentorship. Perhaps there were some gains in the capacity to synthetize and being able to explain the communication strategy outside of the organization.

4. REFLECTIONS & LESSONS

Beside the points mentioned in the previous section, the following elements deserve to be highlighted:

Patience and trust. This mentorship process was cumbersome due to major unforeseen events. However, it helped build trust in the sense the DD team realized how flexible DECI's agenda was and saw that the mentors were ready to wait when necessary, but without letting things fall behind. In this regard, we gained enough trust to nudge them when we needed to speed things up without becoming a nuisance.

An innovation attempt that remained virtual. Inviting Mariana to join DECI's team was an interesting opportunity to innovate within the DECI mentoring model because it allowed us to offer local support with a new trainee. Of course, we did not expect such a long quarantine. Despite this difficulty, Mariana learned about out mentoring approach and became a valuable resource. This experience helped her complete her Master's thesis on a U-FE related subject using the DECI experience, which was positive.

Can too much flexibility cause delays? As mentors we are excited when we find a partner that wants to learn. In DD's case, they were so keen to learn about U-FE that they wanted to work on three different projects, two of which were not related to IDRC's CPC initiative. Although we reminded them of the IDRC programmatic evaluation and the strategic importance of selecting a project within the CPC mandate, we agreed to mentor them on the non-CPC related projects as well. Perhaps it would have been more advantageous for us if we had been less flexible and had insisted from the beginning that we would only work on DD's CPC project for the U-FE mentoring. This would probably have helped us be more focused from the beginning. However, the collaborative focus means that it is the partner's prerogative to decide on how best to make use of the DECI mentoring.

Institutionalization. An important development as the mentoring process draws to a close is a decision at DD to create a new position in Evaluation & Methodology that has been given to Patricio. He has shared with the mentors a step-by-step plan to institutionalize UFE into the organization. In November 2021, the DECI team invited Patricio to share experiences on-line with the evaluation mentee at LIRNEasia (CPC in Sri Lanka) who is also introducing evaluation throughout his organization. This emerging outcome is exciting and the DECI mentors are keen to accompany Patricio in this process over the next few months. From an organizational perspective, Patricio believes that "participating in the DECI project allowed DD to identify gaps in the way we understand the impact of our actions. Based on this, the need to develop evaluative capacities that recognized the history, mission and vision of the organization became clear."

5. CONCLUSIONS

The mentoring experience with Derechos Digitales was unique because unlike other cases, organizational and individual readiness was very high from the beginning. This lead to ambitious goals on the evaluation front, such as wanting to evaluate three different projects as part of the learning exercise. However, a series of external events like the riots in Chile and the Covid-19 pandemic forced the team to drastically narrow the evaluation focus from three projects to the component of only one project. In general, the DECI project has helped highlight the importance of readiness for the success of U-FE process. The mentoring experience with Derechos Digitales shows the importance of external context, something from which sometimes we cannot escape. It also provides a good example of how individual perseverance and organizational adaptive capacity can make a difference in the sense that we went through a series of frustrated, early evaluation attempts to concrete initiatives to institutionalize evaluative thinking and capacity development across the organization.

The communication component faced less challenges because it already had a strong trajectory in the organization. The mentoring process helped to make the communication strategy more explicit and structured. Furthermore, the mentors were able to make a strong connection between communication and evaluation by addressing some aspects of the communication plan through some of the key evaluation questions of the project that was evaluated.

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Appendix 1: Derechos Digitales' ResCom table for their Artificial Intelligence project

Target audience	Objetive	Media	Indicator of change – short term	Evidence of change – mid-term	Evidence of change – long-term
Policy-makers	**Influence policy-makers so that the resulting policies will reflect:** • The impact of the algorithmic systems' implementation. • Good practices in terms of evaluating the use of such technologies on human rights. • The benefits of participatory processes in the implementation and analysis of algorithmic technologies.	Information sessions	• Number and relevance of policy-makers reached. • Number of sessions	Policymakers provide feedback and make comments on inputs.	Policymakers utilize the knowledge generated by DD to implement policies for algorithm-based technologies that protect human rights.
		Public Policy Brief Reports	• Number of policy-makers that receive the reports.		
		Publications	• Number and relevance of policy-makers reached.		
Government officials	To raise awareness among government officials on good practices and tools that can help improve their performance and assess the impact of specific technologies on human rights.	Workshops	• Number and relevance of government officials who attend. • Number of public agencies that participate.	Government officials provide positive feedback on the material shared by DD.	Government officials adopt the good practices and tools shared by DD.
		Publications	• Number and relevance of government officials reached.		

Target audience	Objetive	Media	Indicator of change – short term	Evidence of change – mid-term	Evidence of change – long-term
International organisms	Influence the agenda of regional decision-makers so that they will adopt our recommendations and tools to formulate policies related to the use of artificial intelligence	Seminars and other activities	Number of international organisms that attend seminars and other activities	International organisms receive information and provide positive feedback.	International organisms take into account and recommend the trends, tools and good practices identified by Derechos Digitales in regards to the implementation of algorithm-based technologies for decision-making by national governments
		Publications	Number of international organisms that receive the publications		
		Information gatherings	Number of gatherings with participation of international organisms		
		Newsletter	Number of international organisms that receive and respond to newsletter		
Civil society organizations	To inform and raise awareness among civil society organizations about available tools and mechanisms to measure the impact of artificial intelligence on human rights and to protect personal data from AI systems.	Publications	Number of civil society organizations that receive the publications	Civil society organizations receive the information generated by DD, participate in the activities and open the possibility of collaborating with DD.	Civil society organizations use the knowledge generated by DD to raise public awareness on the risk on AI technologies and participate in the formulation/implementation of policies related to the use of AI and to the protection of personal data.
		Seminars	Number of civil society organizations that attend seminars and other activities		
		Workshops	Number of workshops		

Appendix 2: Derechos Digitales' U-FE table for their Artificial Intelligence project (Component 1 only)

Project objectives	Intended Evaluation Uses	Key Evaluation Questions	Required data	Data collection instruments	Sources / informants
1. Increase knowledge about trends and patterns of algorithmic discrimination in Latin America. 2. Enhance the capacity among regional decision-makers for assessing how AI technologies can impact economic, social and cultural rights. 3. Identify policy-making opportunities for strengthening transparency in the use of algorithms in automated decision-making processes, as well and for integrating participatory processes in their design and implementation.	1. Identify changes in knowledge and capacity of decision-makers in regards to the impact of AI technologies in the region.	1.1 To what extent were the case studies used by academia as well as national and international institutions?	• Work plan for case studies; • Dissemination plan for case studies; • Number of people who attend the activities.	Document review / Surveys	Records of conducted tasks
		1.2 To what extent were there changes in the level of knowledge of decision-makers in regards to algorithmic discrimination?	• Number of decision-makers who receive and/or read the case studies; • Number of decision-makers who respond the survey; • Number of citations in official documents.	Document review / Surveys	Decision-makers
		1.3 To what extent have public servants used the documents (briefs, posts, etc.) sent to them? How have they used them?	• Capacity development work plan; • Number of people who attend the capacity development activities; • Number of organizations that attend the capacity development activities.	Surveys	Participants in capacity development activities; list of government organizations that attend activities;
	2. Document changes and evaluate internal capacities within DD in terms of management and implementation of methodologies and contents for developing new projects.	2.1 How effective were DD's internal management processes and research methodologies of Component 1 of the Project? What innovations emerged, if any? 2.2 What innovations emerged in regards to policy-influence and intervention mechanisms on DD's side during the implementation of Component 1 of the Project? 2.3 2.3 How did DD's Project management strategies help identify new themes for proposing new research or intervention projects?	• Work plan for case studies; • Capacity development work plan; • List of tasks done by DD; • Number of decision-makers who receive and/or read the case studies;	Focus groups / Semi-structured interviews with researchers /	