

LEARNING, PLANNING AND ADAPTING UFE AND RESCOM ACCORDING TO EMERGENT NEED.

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IDRC Grant/ Subvention du CRDI: 107064-002-Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity in Information Society Research (DECI-2)

Learning, planning and adapting UFE and ResCom according to emergent need

Case study of the Open and Collaborative Science for Development Network (OCSDNet)

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January 2018



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Introduction and Background

The [DECI-2 Project](#)¹ has been providing mentoring in Utilization Focused Evaluation (UFE) and Research Communication (ResCom) for partner research projects supported by IDRC's Networked Economies (NE) Program. The two management functions (UFE & ResCom) are being tested as closely related and jointly implementable processes using a set of parallel and closely related steps – referred to as a hybrid UFE-ResCom (DECI-2) decision-making framework. The steps in UFE were adapted by DECI-2 from the original steps conceived by Patton (2008), and a parallel set was also derived for ResCom planning.

From the very beginning, it was clear that the Open and Collaborative Science for Development, (OCSDNet) project had limited staff time and resources dedicated to UFE and ResCom. The limited 'readiness' made it unclear to what extent they would be able to implement the full application of the two processes. This context meant that the DECI-2 support was less structured and less intense compared to experiences with other NE partner projects. The DECI-2 team focused its attention on evaluation and communication needs where the UFE and ResCom concepts could best be adapted. As one DECI-2 team member later observed *"We (were) working as a "learning partner" with this project, bouncing off (UFE and ResCom) ideas with them"*.

This case study illustrates how UFE and ResCom were considered and applied as the need arose. Such a simplified approach may be used by projects facing similar limitations of time, money, etc. More important, for DECI-2, the collaboration led to new insights to adapt our approach to a dynamic project and provide timely and relevant support.

A brief on the network, its origins, milestones

The OCSDNet project is a network of research institutions working together on a project titled *"Catalyzing Open and Collaborative Science to Address Development Challenges"*. The project seeks to *"build a community of open science practitioners and leaders in different contexts, by nurturing an interactive research network; identify structural, technical, policy and cultural barriers that constrain participation in OCS and determine how these barriers could be addressed"* (Chan & Okune, 2014: 11-12). The project also aims to contribute to the building of a new field of study (OCS), producing knowledge to inform policy and practice, and a community of researchers who identify themselves as working on OCS for development.

According to the project's June 2015 Interim Technical Report, OCSDNet was launched on October 15, 2014 to support a group of 12 sub-projects based in 26 countries in the Global South (Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Latin America, South-, East- and Central Asia). These sub-projects were to be used to study how open approaches to research and collaboration could lead to development outcomes. This research project is one of several 'network' projects supported by IDRC, where there is a host organization and a number of grantees in the countries that collaborate. What was unique with OCSDNet was that the hub

¹ DECI-2: Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity in Information Society Research.

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team, although affiliated with the University of Toronto and iHub (Nairobi) was based in several countries and time zones.

The project's proposal indicates that the overarching question for its research network is *"whether and under what conditions open and collaborative approaches (including access to research outputs, wider participation in framing of research questions, sharing of technologies and processes, and more collaborative and inclusive approaches to the conduct of research) could contribute to the effective applications of research to achieving development goals at multiple levels, from individuals to institutions, and from the national through to regional and the global community"* (Chan & Okune, 2014: 12).

The original UFE and ResCom plan, its evolution

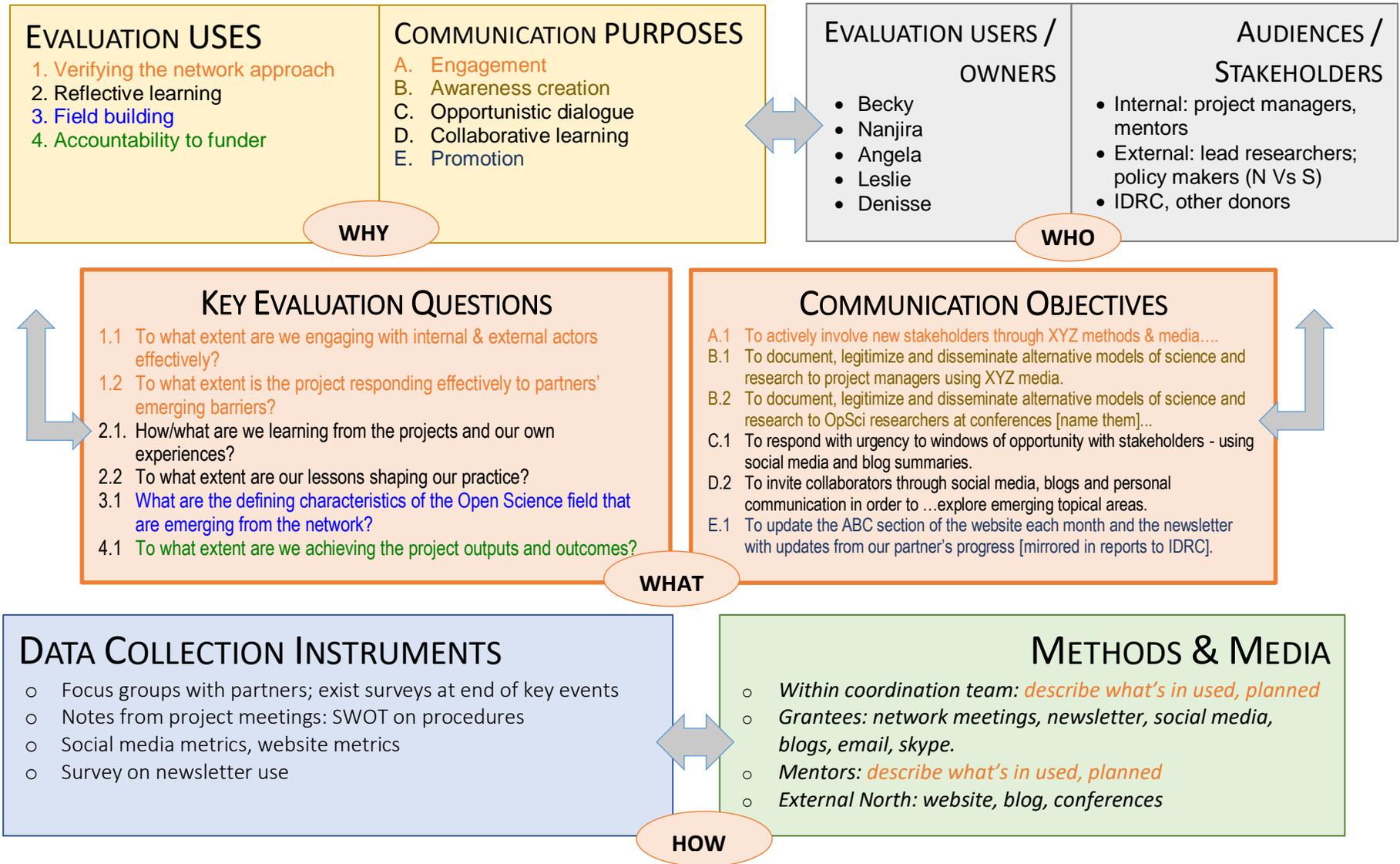
As Becky Hillyer stated in her presentation at the DECI-2 May 2016 meeting, Outcome Harvesting had been considered for their evaluation approach because *"it appeared useful for large and 'messy' projects, employed different mechanisms for gathering data, and allowed for out-of-the-box approaches and reflexivity"*. When the project team began to engage with DECI-2, they were interested in exploring options to design their evaluation and communication plans. Several of the team members were experienced in research, different on-line tools for collaboration, and in participatory approaches for social change, all of which allowed them to see potential in the DECI-2 approach. It was through the second project officer (Raed Sharif) who, keen on supporting the analysis and documentation of the project's progress and results, encouraged the acceptance of innovative evaluation and communication approaches, such as the UFE-ResCom hybrid.

After several iterations of mentoring with DECI-2, the OCSDNet team developed four Evaluation Uses and four Communication Purposes. The Primary Evaluation Users were the lead OCSDNet coordinating team of Becky Hillyer, Nanjira Sambuli (who subsequently left the project), Angela Okune, Leslie Chan, and Denisse Albornoz communicating internally with the project managers (the sub-grantees). The IDRC Program Officer was invited to become a user, but he did not take on this role. Later on, Alejandro Posada joined the team and became another evaluation user. On the Research Communication (ResCom) side, this team was also engaged in designing their communication strategy.

The poster summary in Figure 1 elaborates further on the evaluation uses and communication purposes, as well as the specific evaluation questions, communication objectives, the data collection instruments (for evaluation) and communication media and methods. While the poster summarizes the overall project's evaluation and communication plans, adjustments were made as the project evolved. For instance, a greater focus emerged on the dissemination of the program's Manifesto, and monitoring the outcomes of those efforts.

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Figure 1. Poster summary of the evaluation & communication plan



The compatibility of the OCSDNet openness focus and the DECI-2 process

The OCSDNet efforts in sharing openness on progress made with their approach compatible with DECI-2's objective of making UFE and ResCom a transparent process. The two projects shared a commitment to create spaces where project members could easily and readily share project progress and performance information that inform the next steps.

The OCSDNet project has had a central theme of openness (in its research and sharing of information), which is also a fundamental objective of DECI-2. The same can be said about the project's second objective: *"To build a community of open science practitioners and leaders in different contexts, by nurturing an interactive research network"*.

During a Skype discussion (January 2016), the OCSDNet Principal Investigator (PI) Leslie Chan reported that the project was interested in building the capacity of members *"to make sense of Open Science issues and intelligently explain what is happening"*. The other project staff (Becky Hillyer and Denisse Albornoz) explained that OCSDNet was *"...trying to develop a communication language around collaboration. All OCSDNet members speak different languages and that presents challenges in developing Open Science concepts in all these different languages where words can have different cultural connotations"*. The emphasis on a common language is echoed in the literature on advocacy and field building (Lynn, 2014).

The project has made significant progress towards this openness. In their July 2016 Technical Report, the team reported that they had achieved a *"significant impact on 'field building' at various levels: locally, regionally, nationally, and globally"*. The project team hosted project workshops attended by stakeholders, including community members, NGO representatives, university affiliates and high-level policy makers. OCSDNet stakeholders participated in related conferences around the world, with half of them being held in the Global South. Project members have shared their research results through more than 25 publications.

They have a website which they described as an *"important tool for disseminating emerging content and knowledge produced by the sub-projects, as well as network-level findings and analysis"*. Numerous blogs had been generated by the coordination team, network members, as well as individuals from the wider community (guest blogs). The topics discussed ranged from project findings and events, reflections on emerging topics on OCS in Development to how the community could more effectively work together.

Following a call by the network members for an easier method for sharing information, the team also developed and used a Google Group Forum. According to the July 2016 report, the platform was *"well-received by most members of the network"*, and, by the time of that report, it had hosted over 100 different topic-posts. Most of the information shared was on events, articles and journals relevant to OCS for Development. The OCSDNet social media platforms continued with 971 Twitter followers and over 900 likes on Facebook (by Nov 2017). The project also produces monthly and quarterly newsletters for both internal and external communication.

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The team reported that the interaction had led to “critical debates within the forum, stimulating discussions and new ways of thinking”.

The Manifesto and the hook to ResCom and UFE support

The project lead team had initially used their social media capacity and links to communicate their objectives and progress, based on their principles of openness. The PI mentioned that he started off with the conventional notion that dissemination meant published journal articles and books; and that subsequently he came to see ResCom through a wider lens, to include multiple audiences, methods and media, and looking towards longer term change among the stakeholders. A significant effort by the OCSDNet network was the development of the OCS Manifesto to “articulate a common vision and a set of principles guiding OCS and also a set of recommendations on how best to support its development” (Sambuli, Okune, Chan, & Hyller, 2015)

According to Becky (from the presentation given at the DECI-2 May 2016 gathering in Cape Town), the Manifesto was a good example of consolidating common principles across the network: as well as on what they were aiming to achieve and the standards with which they were working. It took several rounds (and months) of participation/feedback/editing and by the time of the drafting of this report, it was still going on. The process was also analyzed by all the project members, especially during the Bangkok meeting in February 2016. It was a reflexive sharing approach which “really helped to ensure everyone felt they had ownership over the process”, increasing transparency and accountability throughout the entire process.

The Manifesto galvanized the team’s interest in developing a communication strategy for sharing it and tracking its outcomes. With DECI-2 ResCom mentoring, the team defined the different audiences, and sought to confirm the most appropriate methods and media to be used to engage with them. OCSDNet turned to Outcome Mapping to measuring the impacts of this initiative (Earl, Carden, & Smutylo, 2001). The DECI-2 team suggested they frame the outcomes against gradients of change from what had been expected: *Expect-to-see outcomes* that lie within the project’s direct influence; to *Like-to-see outcomes* that would be subject to other factors and would take more time to become visible; and finally, the *Love-to-see outcomes* that would reflect the project overall goal. The latter were understood to be much harder to achieve in the short-term and possibly dependent on the influence of many other non-project factors. The project team developed a very extensive plan for this process, which the DECI-2 team supported and helped in simplifying.

Implementation, outputs

The DECI-2 team has been in contact with the OCSDNet staff on several occasions; Table 1 shows the main contact points, the aim and what was achieved.

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Table 1. Time line of collaboration

Time and where	Objective of meeting and who	Key achievements
- May 2014	- Ricardo Ramírez, Ellie Osir and Leslie Chan - Introducing DECI-2 to OCSDNet	- Presenting the DECI-2 opportunity
- October 2014. The Village, Nairobi	- Julius Nyangaga, DECI-2 regional mentor, attends the final OCSDNet subproject selection meeting	- Introducing DECI-2 to OCSDNet and subprojects. The OCSDNet lead team and subprojects get to know about the DECI-2 project
- March 18th, 2015. Skype meeting	- DECI-2 and OCSDNet team	- Further clarification of how DECI-2 works. DECI-2 confirms interest in finding a way of mentoring the Network at iHub
- April to June 2015. Email exchanges	- The DECI-2-OCSDnet MoU is developed and signed	-
- May 2015, during an ICT Conference at Singapore	- Angela Okune and Becky Hillyer meet the DECI-2 Asia mentors (Sonal Zaveri and Vira Ramelan) for further explanation on how DECI-2 works	-
- July 2015. Skype meeting	- The Africa mentors (Julius and Charles) are introduced to Becky	- DECI-2 starts to mentor Becky for UFE and ResCom
- July 22 nd , 2015. iHub HQs, Nairobi, Kenya	- Angela Okune meets Julius Nyangaga and Ricardo Ramírez	- Exploring how DECI-2 can support the program. DECI-2 is invited to Coordinators meeting that was to take place in LA, USA.
- August 19 – 20 th , 2015. University of Toronto, Canada	- Ricardo Ramírez and Dal Brodhead attend an OCSDNet Co-ordinator Meeting	- They facilitate a session where they develop the program’s communication purposes and evaluation uses
- September to December 2015. Email exchanges	- Becky Hillyer develops and shares OCSDNet’s Communication Purposes and Evaluation Uses -	- First version of OCSDNet DECI-2 poster. This was a template framework for the UFE and ResCom hybrid. DECI-2 helped to review it
- February 2016. Bangkok	- Network-wide learning workshop (not attended by DECI-2)	- Becky Hillyer: <i>“Workshop enabled discussions around conditions of ‘openness,’ and how these conditions may influence research</i> - <i>Presented the opportunity for public launch of the OCSDNet Manifesto.”</i>
- May 2016. Cape Town, South Africa	- DECI-2 project review meeting attended by DECI-2 PIs, all regional mentors, and two of the project mentees (OCSDNet and ROER4D)	- Becky Hillyer presented the OCSDNet UFE-ResCom poster template - Her subsequent blog report shows how OCSDNet would use the hybrid approach
- May 25 th , 2015. Email exchanges	- OCSDNet opt to use their mid-term reports for their mid-term evaluation	- Greater attention is shifted to developing, disseminating and analyzing the impacts of the OCSDNet Manifesto

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Time and where	Objective of meeting and who	Key achievements
- September 2016. IDRC meeting in Zanzibar, Tanzania	- Ricardo Ramírez and Dal Brodhead meet Becky Hillyer for update	- Further clarification of OCDNet progress
- February- May 2017	- Ricardo Ramírez mentored Alejandro Posada and Denisse Albornoz as they prepared the June workshop	- Dissemination strategy for the Manifesto; work plan for the workshop sessions
- June 2017. Limassol, Cyprus	- OCSDNet program review meeting - Ricardo Ramírez and Julius Nyangaga participate to facilitate Network Mapping and Evidence of change sessions	- Network members review their project outcomes and strategies for implementation in remaining phase of the project

Evidence of change

The OCSDNet team has evidence that they had been able to have a “significant impact on ‘field building’ in *Open Science at various levels (locally, regionally, nationally, globally)*”. (June 2016 report).

The DECI-2 contribution has been one of a learning partner. The mentors have shared UFE and ResCom steps and principles and explored where and how the OCSDNet could use them. In particular, by focusing attention on evaluation uses and communication purposes, the DECI-2 team provided a space for reflection, adaptation and some level of course correction. The DECI-2 team also provided publications of relevance in the area of evaluating advocacy and field building. This support helped OCSDNet reflect on the need for the OCS community to first develop a “*common language and principles in discussing concepts of science, openness, and development*”. This shared understanding, a common vocabulary, and set of principles are contained in the OCSDNet Manifesto.

Uniqueness

Working with a team that was spread out geographically

DECI-2 interacted mainly with the lead OCSDNet coordinating team (who took on the role of primary evaluation users), which was supporting several sub-projects (sub-grantees) operating in several countries. As indicated earlier, the team was spread over several countries and time zones. While they had specific roles in the project, the DECI-2 team worked with them flexibly, even as their specific roles and responsibilities evolved.

The UFE and ResCom achievements were the product of the OCSDNet team’s priorities; and they often happened without direct DECI-2 involvement. For instance, using information from the interviews, Becky Hillyer wrote a report and made a presentation at the February 2016 Network Evaluation & Communications Bangkok meeting, on why and how to evaluate. Becky observed that the UFE framework for evaluation: “*has a legitimizing effect for sub-project data collection, there is enhanced transparency, and feedback loops supported accountability. In addition, the evaluation strategy is on-going and iterative as it relies on constant reflection*”.

A case of low readiness at the start that grew

For monitoring and evaluation, the OCSDNet team had initially planned to use Outcome Mapping, with some *“real-time, simple reporting”* from each sub-project – in line with outcome harvesting, OH (Wilson-Grau & Britt, 2012) for the development and sharing of emerging outcomes and cross-cutting themes (Chan & Okune, 2014). The project proposal explained that the aim was to minimize conventional reporting requirements, while freeing up time for more frequent updates, keeping with the OCS approach of sharing results throughout the research life-cycle.

The team had considered this approach suitable to their structure given *“the relative infancy of OCS, the complex situations, the rapid change in networked technologies, and the diversity of actors that were to be involved in the range of supported sub-projects”* (Chan & Okune, 2014: 31). They expected the relationship between actions and outcomes to be highly mediated and situational. The *“forensic”* or retrospective approach in OH would allow for the collection of information relevant to the program’s research questions.

An introduction to the DECI-2 Project (and the use of UFE and ResCom) was given to the OCSDNet team during the project’s Proposal Development Workshop held in Nairobi (by DECI-2’s Julius Nyangaga, October 2014). This event was followed by a short meeting between Ricardo Ramirez, Julius Nyangaga and Angela Okune in Nairobi (July 2015). Later, Ricardo joined in a Coordinators Meeting in Toronto (August 2015) to further explain the DECI-2 approach. These three events created and confirmed an interest within the OCSDNet team for working with DECI-2 on UFE and ResCom. Becky Hillyer observed that, over time, DECI-2 helped them to *“identify and consider what tools they already had in place, and to critically consider **why** they are using them and **to what end”***.

Good management support

Interest by the OCSDNet leadership in the DECI-2 processes has been instrumental in their taking up UFE and ResCom concepts. Despite their initial plans for M&E and communication, the PIs and project staff were willing to find ways of utilizing the DECI-2 concepts and integrating related lessons and recommendations into what they had already planned.

The initial project did not have sufficient resources to support all the DECI-2 readiness requirements. Notwithstanding, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with DECI-2 (June 2015) to begin the process. A subsequent transfer of OCSDNet’s internal funds enabled the team to add staff and dedicate more time to DECI-2 interactions. The project’s new IDRC Program Officer, Raed Sharif, based in Cairo, Egypt, was also very supportive. In other words, a project that had started with low readiness found it possible to improve on it. This adaptation confirms our experience that ‘readiness’ is not a fixed attribute; and that maintaining flexibility to await better conditions of readiness is worth maintaining. For the DECI-2 team this was an important lesson: while readiness at the start appeared limited, the OCSDNet team created a space to work with us, at their pace, and as their priorities shifted.

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OCSDNet engaged a wide variety of researchers globally in a process that included much reflection. The researchers that joined this network had been experimenting with approaches that had elements of 'openness' and 'collaboration' - often described with other names (further complicated by the many languages involved). This meant that as the research findings emerged, the researchers themselves had the opportunity to celebrate their approach and witness a shared 'openness language' (Lynn, 2014). This process was dynamic, and emergent, and the OCSDNet team was aware from the start that conventional evaluation methods would not be relevant.

The project PI attended almost all the OCSDNet-DECI-2 learning and planning sessions and helped the team to be innovative in adapting the UFE and ResCom concepts. The project PI encouraged project staff to stay connected with the DECI-2 mentors. Most of the geographically- distributed OCSDNet team members could organize and/or participate in the exchanges with DECI-2 (via Skype and face-to-face meetings). By giving the DECI-2 team access to their Google Drive Platforms, they enabled the DECI-2 team to read and comment on plans and results - something consistent with their commitment to openness.

Finally, OCSDNet invited DECI-2 (Ricardo Ramríguez and Julius Nyangaga) to the project's final review meeting in Limassol, Cyprus (held June 2 - 5, 2017). The meeting was organized to cover several areas: Project Reflections, Field Building, Network Building, and Planning for the Future (OCSDNet, 2017). The DECI-2 team interacted with OCSDNet to collectively find ways to introduce evaluation and communication reflection exercises during the event. This interaction in designing a learning event was an important innovation for DECI-2 which took on a role as a learning partner.

As a result, the DECI-2 team was tasked with facilitating the conference sessions where the grantees (the sub-projects) presented and analyzed their outcomes. The Network Mapping was done by project teams: they visualized those early outcomes that could be attributed to their research, while reflecting on those longer-term ones that they hoped to achieve in the remaining period of the project. (There had been a request for an extension of the project to March 2018.)

Based on the Outcome Mapping frameworks, the project teams were to able use gradients or domains to track possible and observed behavioral changes. The gradients were categorized into three levels of change. Those they expected to see because of the projects (2-5 years), those that they would like (or would have liked) to see following the project (5-10 years), and those they would have loved to see in the long-run (10-20 years). They were then to relate these gradients with other contributing factors (project and non-project) to determine how these could best be managed in the remaining phase of the program. This process began to elicit their underlying Theory of Change, which the OCSDNet team wanted to compare with the original project one (which they felt needed updating).

Outcomes, lessons and conclusions

The feedback from the OCSDNet team to DECI-2, especially as part of the 2016 Cape Town meeting, was conducive to the simplification of the UFE and ResCom steps. The DECI-2 team

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realized that these specific steps were the fundamental ones to the approach, and they witnessed how the OCSDNet team made use of them as their own project priorities evolved.

Figure 2 below illustrates the simplified approach used.

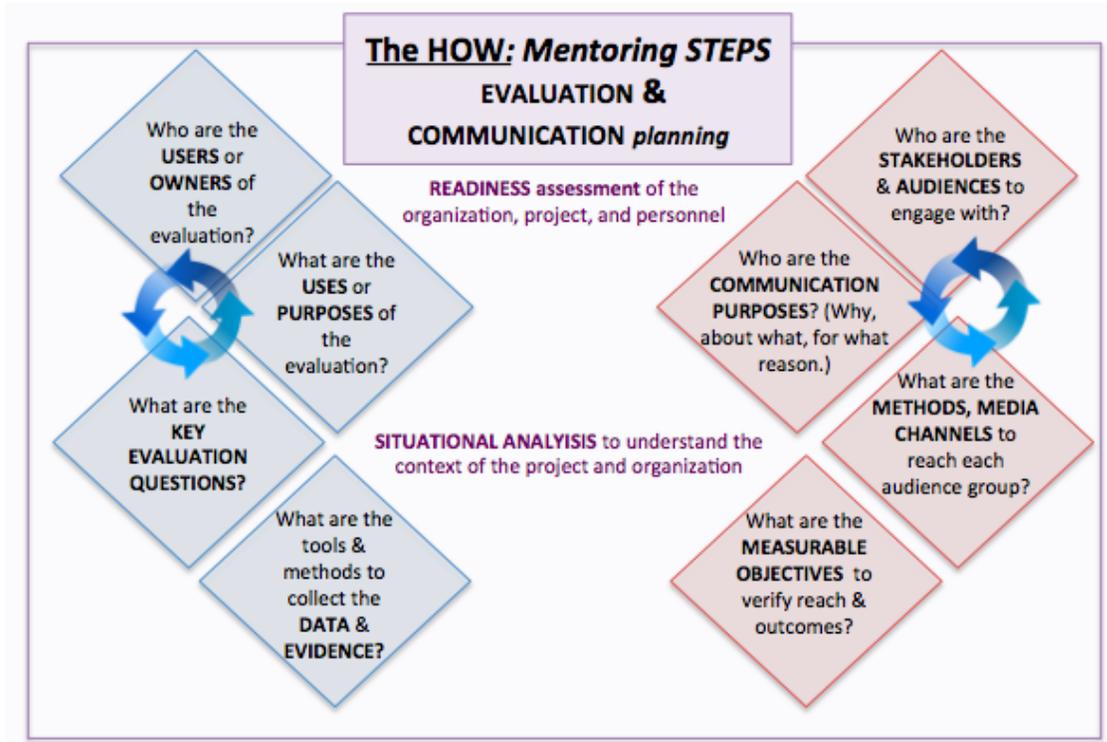


Figure 2. A simplified presentation of the key UFE and ResCom steps

The combined UFE and ResCom approach was expected to be instrumental in developing spaces for easy sharing and reflection. In this way, the project team and its partners/members could agree on the kind of results that would describe progress.

With a greater interest in communication, the stakeholder analysis (a crucial step in ResCom) contributed to the effective development and use of sharing spaces (e.g. website, Google platforms, conferences, newsletters, etc.). The program had a plan for using Outcome Mapping and Outcome Harvesting for demonstrating results of their research on OCS, and how these findings could be used for development. The OM notion of a 'gradient of outcomes' was applied to the dissemination strategy for the OCS Manifesto. This strategy confirmed an understanding of the field, the use of research results to reinforce these concepts and their implications, and how that information could be used in the discourse between researchers and policy makers.

This simplified application of UFE and ResCom was compatible with the network's overall objective of openness and sharing. Most notable, the learning partnership role in the design and facilitation of the Cyprus meeting was significant for DECI-2: it opened the way for an intentional facilitation of learning role which had not been explore before. This case demonstrates why a

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simplified and flexible application of UFE and ResCom steps is practical. It is the aspiration towards being open about project results that matters (Nyangaga, 2017). Therefore, it was demonstrated that a successful UFE and ResCom application is not contingent on a complete implementation of all the steps. The term ‘Utilization-focused Communication’ was suggested earlier (Ramírez, 2011) and may be applicable here, with the understanding that the essence of the hybrid approach is a decision-making framework that enables projects to make course-corrections as the learning and the context evolve.

This case study demonstrates that a simplified DECI-2 process within which key UFE and ResCom concepts can be adapted, may be used by projects constrained by resources (especially time and money), and may still create a valuable space for reflection and adaptation.

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