FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT / RAPPORT TECHNIQUE FINAL

DECI-3 FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT

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IDRC Grant / Subvention du CRDI: 108811-001-Designing Evaluation and Communication for Impact (DECI-3)
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About DECI-3

Effective research for development is difficult: there are no blueprints, and each project requires a strategy that suits its own changing context. The external evaluation of the preceding DECI-2 project confirmed that NE partners benefited from having a learning partner that provided a space for pause, reflection and strategic planning during implementation – in other words, an adaptive management process. Building on the lessons from this evaluation, the Designing Evaluation and Communication for Impact (DECI-3) project provides support to help Networked Economies’ partners become adaptive managers and more effective change agents. The DECI-3 methodology brought together a combination of evaluation, communication and learning methods, providing capacity development through ‘just-in-time’ mentoring during the full project cycle. In contrast to DECI-2, this project focused on institutional level capacity building rather than project capacity building. DECI-3 began by working initially with Centro Latam Digital (CLD, Mexico) and Research ICT Africa (RIA, Cape Town) in the fall of 2018. In the fall of 2019, as they began their start-up work, we began supporting LIRNEAsia (Colombo) and Derechos Digitales (DD, Santiago de Chile). The support for Centre for IP and IT Law (CIPIT, Nairobi) was delayed due to a lack of readiness. At the request of IDRC/NE, DECI-3 participated in the January 2019 gathering in Sri Lanka, where the new Cyber Policy Centres (CPCs) (including CIS, India) participated. Also at the request of IDRC/NE, DECI-3 completed an inception mission to visit Open Burkina, yet this project lacked the readiness requirements and the support was discontinued.

DECI-3 General Objective

To help research for development projects improve their impact as change agents.

Specific Objectives

1. To build the capacity of partners (projects and institutions) in evaluation, communication and learning methods, as the building blocks for adaptive management;
2. To learn from the action-research experiences and share understanding of the theoretical and practical dimensions of improving the effectiveness of research to policy initiatives.

Implementation Update

Confirming Collaboration with NE Partners

Table 1 summarizes the activities that were completed as DECI-3 drew to a close, plus some comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Activities completed</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centro Latam Digital (CLD) – CPC (Mexico)</td>
<td>A UFE design was completed and efforts were focused on data collection. The ResCom plan is advanced and integrated with the UFE (one evaluation use focuses on the outcomes of the communication strategy). The Theory of Change suggestions have yet to attract the team’s interest.</td>
<td>CLD spent much time mapping out the specific research topics and settling on a research plan. The evaluation &amp; communication process provided a backdrop to narrow down outcomes, audiences and implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Activities completed</td>
<td>Remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research ICT Africa (RIA) – CPC (South Africa)</strong></td>
<td>A first draft UFE table is in progress while the research communication plan remains to be developed. RIA still uses the original ToC from the evaluation and there was little progress in updating it.</td>
<td>RIA faced significant delays in confirming staff assigned to work with DECI and also lost key staff members during the process. On the positive, the progress on UFE was welcome with keen interest by a senior researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIRNEAsia – CPC (Sri Lanka)</strong></td>
<td>The early stages of UFE are in place with a selection several institutional topics to focus on. The ResCom element will focus on formalizing the existing communication strategy and findings select outcomes to track. One key staff member announced her departure, which is disappointing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Derechos Digitales (DD) – CPC (Chile)</strong></td>
<td>The early stages of UFE are in place with a selection of 1-2 projects to focus on. The ResCom element will focus on formalizing the existing communication strategy and findings to select outcomes to track.</td>
<td>DD was directly affected by the political unrest in Chile, which meant delays across all of their program areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law (CIPIT) – CPC (Kenya)</strong></td>
<td>Following several Skype exchanges, and pending the approval of the project and the arrival of new staff, it was agreed that an inception mission should take place in Feb or Mar 2020.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Centre for Information and Society (CIS) – CPC (India)</strong></td>
<td>Government approval of CIS was denied, leaving this CPC without IDRC support. DECI reached out in December 2019 to explore whether our services may be of interest during at some point during the current transition. Our conclusion is that readiness is not present at this stage.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The DECI team also participated in two CPC gatherings (Sri Lanka, January 2019 & Berlin, November, 2020). The DECI team worked closely with IDRC/NE in the design of the agenda and the facilitation of the Sri Lanka event. The first event was productive in continuing to build trust with CLD and RIA and begin to establish a relationship with DD, LIRNEAsia and CIPIT. It also gave them a better idea about the DECI offering which often only becomes clear through several exchanges that allow the partners to appreciate the opportunity. The Berlin gathering was an important moment to consolidate the relationships, witness the growing interest among the CPCs to collaborate on some topics, and further explore the mentoring process by DECI. It was also a
key moment to share an update on the possible continuation of the process beyond the end date of DECI-3.

At the request of IDRC/NE, DECI-3 agreed to an inception visit with Open Burkina in June of 2018. The outcome was disappointing in that readiness was lacking, namely around the need for the partner to learn their way into UFE and ResCom. Their approach was incompatible with our mentoring process and collaboration was discontinued. The project produced evaluation and communication plans on their own, which did not meet the standards of evaluation that the DECI team adheres to. The collaboration was discontinued a few months after the visit. A positive side of this effort was that all DECI mentoring support materials were translated to French.

**Mentors’ Responsibilities**

Table 2 summarizes the mentoring responsibilities across the CPCs.

**Table 2. Mentor Responsibilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLD</td>
<td>Ricardo Ramirez and Joaquin Navas</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIA</td>
<td>Wendy Quarry and Julius Nyangaga</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD</td>
<td>Joaquin Navas and Ricardo Ramirez</td>
<td>Proposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIRNEAsia</td>
<td>Ricardo Ramírez (and possibly a second mentor)</td>
<td>Proposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIPIT</td>
<td>Julius Nyangaga and Dal Brodhead</td>
<td>Proposed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 1 and 2 are indicative of an unusually slow progress for DECI-3 (relative to DECI-2) for several reasons: Only two out of anticipated three CPCs were funded and able to start collaborating. In addition, both CLD and RIA were busy with internal strategy and structural issues, which meant a delay in the mentoring process and the planning steps. Moreover, the Burkina Faso partner did not meet the minimum readiness requirements and there were no outcomes to report on from the DECI mentoring.

This turn of events meant a lighter mentoring workload for many DECI team members, especially those based in Asia, and the one based in Harare. Consequently, there was less engagement by some of our team members than planned, which, combined with the early stages of evaluation and communication planning, led to fewer research achievements. For instance, while there is a draft Case Study summarizing the mentoring work with CLD, it has not yet been finalized.

**Research Lessons**

DECI-3’s first objective was to build capacity among the partner institutions in evaluation, communication and adaptive management. However, relative to the four phases proposed in the DECI-3 Project Proposal, it was parts of Phase 3 and most of Phase 4 that were not completed due to the delays experienced. Thus the mentoring process is still ongoing and in our view it is premature to document love-to-see, capacity building outcomes. Nevertheless, lessons within CLD and RIA can be identified.
Readiness remains a priority

Readiness remains a priority. A lesson from the Burkina experience is that a partner may claim to have readiness and is unaware of how far they are from DECI expectations. The DECI Team introduced a self-assessment tool to gauge readiness during the Sri Lanka workshop and continued using it to guide the discussion with each partner. In future, IDRC/NE could enhance readiness by requesting partners to include a budget allocation for UFE, and also include a budget allocation to increase staff or staff time for the mentoring process.

Creating a space for reflection

Creating a space and time for the CPC teams to design their evaluations has been helpful for two reasons: the definition of evaluation USES creates pressure to clarify what a project or institution wants to do, how, and to what end. Second, it creates a funnel to narrow down the many early (implicit) ideas and explorations, down to the (explicit) tangible priorities that are worth pursuing.

Formalizing existing communication practices

The ResCom process provides a means to structure communication, defining its purposes and audiences. Ironically, it allows communicators to communicate what they do, which is otherwise a skill set and expertise that is only found implicitly in few staff and is often not explicitly stated. In addition, ResCom challenges the CPC teams to be specific about the different outcomes that they seek when they produce dissemination materials and campaigns. It equips them to move from intuitive thinking, to strategic thinking.

Mentoring style and role

The on-time mentoring style, where the mentor awaits the moments when the CPC staff are able to connect with DECI mentors and which encourages simplification, has created a mutual trust. Given that DECI does not fund projects and is itself a research project, allows DECI Team members to work at times as a coach/mentor, and at times as a peer. Our research agenda in the capacity building field means that DECI has a dual role: for the CPC partner, DECI is a service provider; but at the same time each partnership provides DECI a place to combine action with research.

Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (ToC) component of the DECI methodology has received limited interest so far. The possible reasons may include the start-up process pressures and the significant workloads that each team is managing. Adding the evaluation and communication components to the projects feels like a stretch. In this context, the value added of the ToC can be difficult to appreciate, and as the tool is flexible and open to many design variations, it creates uncertainty. With the CLD case, the DECI mentoring has resulted in a collection of ToC diagrams that the DECI mentors generated and shared with them. It has provided the project with a form of process documentation of their evolving strategy. The challenge for DECI is to demonstrate the value of the ToC as an internal learning and adaptation tool, and not allow it to be perceived as an additional external requirement.
Collective Impact

Two DECI-3 mentors participated in a Sustaining Collective Impact training workshop in Toronto from 19-20 March 2019. A summary of this approach was shared with IDRC/NE during a meeting in Ottawa on 26 June 2019, as there were elements of possible relevance interest to an evaluation of the CPC program as a whole. However, the readiness requirements could not be met, especially as the approach requires a substantial long-term commitment that was not possible at the time.

Gender considerations

At the Sri Lanka workshop in January 2019, the DECI team agreed not to do gender training because this is the responsibility of Gender At Work. However, and as stated in the DECI-3 proposal, as gender is relevant both in evaluation and communication work, the approach taken is to review and celebrate any gender considerations that the CPC teams introduce into both evaluation plans and communication strategies.

Theoretical insights

The CPC program has several characteristics that are typical of complex systems. The program constantly evolves, with emerging issues that could not be forecasted. In addition, there are many connections between the different organizations involved. These features need to be taken into consideration, especially from an evaluation perspective where cause and effect relationships are neither linear, nor predictable. The CPC program can also be described as a complex adaptive system (CAS) as it exhibits the characteristics of CAS: dynamic, entangled, scale dependent, transformative and emergent. Appendix 1 elaborates on these insights, (which have also been included in the proposal for the follow-up project).

Knowledge Sharing

The DECI-3 Communication Strategy had three purposes: to explain the DECI methodology (the ‘what’), to convey ‘how’ it is implemented, and to disseminate the capacity building approach. Even though DECI has produced publications and made presentations at conferences (see below), the limited progress achieved means that DECI has not yet established an audience-based strategy as was planned originally.

Publications

The following is a summary of the DECI-related publications that have been produced from current and previous phases of DECI. They have appeared in refereed journals and books in the fields of evaluation, communication and knowledge management.


**Other dissemination initiatives**


• UFE Primer – downloads from the website and from ResearchGate are continuing (over 2,000 on the latter, over 100 in French, and 50 in Spanish).

• Child Helpline Cambodia. Vira Ramelan and Sonal Zaveri (DECI mentors in Asia) collaborated directly with ISIF-Apic in applying the DECI hybrid approach to advise this project. This demonstrates the earlier DECI project objective of enhancing regional capacities in communication and evaluation.

• INASP, UK. The DECI project was interviewed by a consultant charged with documenting different organizational structures for the future of INASP.

**Clearing-house blogs**

A *blog series* was launched in September 2018. The blogs synthesize current issues at the crossroads of evaluation, communication and adaptive management. One of DECI’s main target audience groups were the CPCs, as DECI encourage the teams to review the blogs ahead of our inception visits. Currently the following blogs are posted:

1. Research Communication – building on existing footprints
2. Knowledge brokering – what is needed to make it work?
3. Policy influence – playing neutral or taking sides?
4. Achieving policy impact is not just an add-on
5. What is it the makes adaptive management work?
6. Researching the use of research evidence
7. Theories of change: easier said than done
8. Evaluating policy impact: An arena for practical wisdom
9. Embedding the sustainability predicament in a Theory of Change
10. Lessons from DECI on adaptive management
11. What is impact?
12. Can scenario planning help evaluate the impact of research?
13. Narrative and storytelling: A meeting place for communication and evaluation.

The Web metrics showed the blogs as one of the most popular elements of the website, followed by the e-Primer.
Appendix 1

The CPC program has several characteristics that are typical of complex systems. The following summary by R. Ramirez is based on propositions about complex systems and their evaluation as proposed by Preskill et al. (2014).

1. They are always changing, often in unpredictable ways.
   The CPC program began with three partners (one in each region), two of which were able to start operations; and later three more were added (leaving Asia with one partner, Africa with two, and Latin America with two). The program was originally defined as a 2-year pilot and the commitment for an extension remained unconfirmed until November 2019.

   Evaluation response: evaluation design and implementation need to be adaptive, flexible and iterative. Tool/approach to use: UFE and Developmental Evaluation – also referred to as UFDE (Ramírez et al., 2015).

2. Many parts are connected; one part of the system affects the others.
   The CPC partners meet regularly and share common research themes. There are opportunities to have a CPC organization specialize on a given topic that is its already familiar with and have the other CPC organization in the same region focus on other ones. There is the precedent collaboration between RIA, LIRNEAsia and DIRSI in the context of the After Access survey that may be worth documenting further.

   Evaluation response: there is a need to understand the whole system, including connections and components. Tool/approach to use: Theory of Change.

3. Information drives learning and helps the system thrive
   The CPC program is informed by regular technical reports, plus a number of CPC research outputs and associated social media announcements related to engagement events.

   Evaluation response: the evaluation design should support the learning capacity of the system by enhancing feedback loops and interconnections. Tool/approach to use: The CPC list-serve can become a platform for further interaction about evaluation designs and emerging outcomes that can be fed into strategic decisions.

4. Context matters
   Each CPC organization is housed in a unique context, with different organizational structures and stages of evolution; not to mention dynamic and often disruptive political backdrops that affect the work directly.

   Evaluation response: the evaluation needs to be attentive to context and be responsive to emergent changes. Tool/approach: UFE pays much attention to readiness and situational analysis.

5. Best principles are more relevant than best practices because each situation is unique.
   Each CPC organization is unique, and while some common elements are required in the CPC (three topics of research), each partner integrates the CPC program elements differently depending on staff and teams already in place, other existing research priorities, and local circumstances (such as policy windows of opportunity).
6. There will be different levels of energy and convergence over time.
   The experience during DECI-3 confirms this characteristic; each CPC organization has moments when there is ‘oxygen in the system’ and the capacity to work with the evaluation and communication planning effort. Then there are lulls, as each team is absorbed by other commitments or phases of adaptation and adjustment.

**Evaluation response:** the DECI ‘just-in-time’ mentoring approach allows the DECI Team to adjust to the ebbs and flows and to support the CPC teams accordingly, when they have the time.

7. Relationships between and among partners are as important as the partners themselves.
   In the early stages of the program, the CPCs have mostly worked independently, however, as the process matures, the regional scope of each CPC will require more attention to relationships in order to maximize complementarities and avoid duplication. During the Berlin meeting (November 2019) the relationships among the CPCs showed progress with common interests becoming more palpable.

**Evaluation response:** the nature of the relationships and the interdependencies can be mapped and evaluated, if such an evaluation use emerges. **Tool/approach to use:** collaboration assessment.

8. Cause and effect relationships are neither linear nor predictable; iteration is more common.
   The two CPC projects supported by DECI-3 were able to produce evaluation and communication plans late in their two-year projects for a number of reasons. Among them, the research agenda and strategy required significant early scoping / mapping exercises before settling on specific research objectives and engage relevant researchers. The UFE planning helped focus on a gradient of outcomes that set a plausible impact trajectory, with the understanding that higher level outcomes may be difficult to attribute to the CPCs given the complexity of policy development.

**Evaluation response:** Explain the non-linear, multi-factor nature of the work, the inter-relationships and the importance of also documenting unintended outcomes. **Tools/approaches:** Outcome Mapping, Theory of Change, Contribution Analysis.

9. Patterns can emerge from the different and mainly independent organizations which are part of the program.
   The first phase of the CPC program (2018-2019) mainly supported two CPCs and a few patterns have emerged so far; more are expected once the other three CPCs join in. One common denominator that did emerge was the significant effort that it took for each partner to incorporate the CPC program –and the DECI support– into its strategy. The January 2019 meeting in Sri Lanka may have helped the new CPCs avoid this, and other exchanges (Berlin, November 2019) will have allowed for more exchanges among them.

**Evaluation response:** Document common patterns, as well as outliers, across the five organizations and along different topics (e.g. capacity building, Research Communication strategies). **Tools/approaches:** Outcome Harvesting, Most Significant Change, narrative.
The CPC program can also be described as a complex adaptive system (CAS) as it exhibits the characteristics of CAS: dynamic, entangled, scale dependent, transformative and emergent.

- It is ‘dynamic’ in that the partners’ research and capacity building efforts evolve over time; they do not often follow a predictable pattern.
- It is ‘entangled’ in that each partner organization works in interdependence with other actors, staff retention, managing different funders, having existing research agendas that feed into new ones; the parts of their system evolve in unpredictable ways.
- It is scale dependent in that there are individuals, teams within the organization itself, its networks, and its multiple partners (within a country and a region) that are in constant interplay and interdependence.
- It is transformative in that the effort seeks to strengthen/ transform the CPCs, and their research, in turn, has pro-poor policy influence objectives. The program behaves like an open system where boundaries are defined arbitrarily (e.g. the status of CIS that is not funded yet participates in gatherings).
- It is emergent in that, while “…The near-term future can be relatively knowable; mid-term will be less predictable; and far-term future will be uncertain at best….” (Eoyang & Berkas, 1998: 319), one can set indicative change markers, track them, monitor their necessary adjustment, and acknowledge the reduced level of attribution towards higher level impacts.

On the one hand (as explained above), in evaluation terms there are no linear cause-effect relationships because multiple variables intervene. On the other, hand, a developmental evaluation can provide useful and powerful feedback loops. The evaluation process can become a player informing the program.

“Prediction and controlled performance toward a goal, like those assumed by traditional evaluation methods, are two behaviors that cannot be expected from a complex adaptive system (CAS). For this reason, new tools, techniques and methods must be designed to meet the needs of constituencies that request evaluation of organizations while they are in the more dynamic phases of complex adaptation.” (Eoyang & Berkas, 1998: 315)
References


