Readiness & Mentoring:
Two touchstones for capacity development in evaluation

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Purpose of this session

To share our current experience with **readiness** and **mentoring** as two key elements of our approach

To learn from **participants’ own experiences**

To discover possible **“users” of our research** who may want to join our **“user circle”** (some conditions apply)
We co-lead an action-research project in capacity development through which we mentor researchers in utilization-focused evaluation & research communication.

The project is funded by IDRC (Canada) through the Information & Networks program that supports research teams in the global South.

The first phase of our project focused only on UFE: we completed five evaluations along with case studies and a Primer for evaluators (refer to our presentation during the first day of this conference).

Our current project is called “Developing Evaluation & Communication Capacity in Information Society Research” DECI-2
Project objectives

- To **develop and test-drive** a combined approach to mentoring in evaluation and communication;

- To **build capacity** among regional evaluation consultants (we have a team of mentors based in Africa, Asia and Latin America);

- To provide **capacity development for project partners** in both fields;

- To contribute towards the completion of UFE evaluations and communication strategies for designated I&N flagship projects;

- To communicate the DECI-2 project findings and training approach to practitioners, researchers and policy maker (through a USER Circle).
What does readiness mean to you?
What does mentoring mean to you?
UFE stipulates an early review of organizational and evaluator readiness that affect at least:

- Power & hierarchy
- Organizational, project, and donor culture
- Staff willingness to learn
- Senior management buy-in (funds, time, support)
Our practice....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The I&amp;N project provides:</th>
<th>DECI-2 provides:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The staffing of the evaluation and communication team (be the internal or contracted).</td>
<td>• Introductory briefings.</td>
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<td>• The funds to implement all steps of the evaluation plan and the communication strategy.</td>
<td>• 30 person days of mentoring in UFE and Communication over an agreed project calendar.</td>
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<td>• A commitment to allocate time during the project cycle to both areas.</td>
<td>• Travel for 2 face-to-face sessions to be timed with the partner.</td>
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<td>• Funders’ commitment to UFE.</td>
<td>• Additional mentoring by co-Principal Investigators.</td>
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<td>• Leadership commitment.</td>
<td>• Lesson sharing among projects.</td>
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<td>• Process documentation.</td>
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Our lessons about readiness….

- Readiness is not a one-off event
- Having time to wait for readiness allows us to assist the project in enhancing it
- Having a Memorandum of Understanding is useful but insufficient
- As projects acquire more funders who impose their own evaluation requirements, the UFE readiness can wane
Our view of mentoring....

- We have been experimenting with a combination of coaching (that follows an established set of steps associated with the UFE framework) with mentoring (that focuses on guiding, adjusting, and trouble-shooting together)

- Our project support is delivered through regional mentors who are, in-turn, learning themselves

- We emphasize the context, the conditions and timeliness of a capacity development effort

- Mentoring is a pivotal concept in the capacity development literature, especially the observation that pre-established blueprints tend to fail and that capacity development requires action-research-reflection
Our mentoring practice….

- 15 person days of mentoring in UFE and 15 in research communication, spread over a calendar that is agreed on with the project team.

- Most of the mentoring takes place via Skype, though we fund two face-to-face meetings to coincide with major design and decision-making moments over the evaluation and communication work plan of each project.

- Since DECI-2 brings added challenges in terms of combining mentoring in evaluation and communication, we have added more support at the start to review or encourage readiness.

- While the DECI-1 experience has been amply reported, the DECI-2 process is very much underway as we speak and will continue for at least two more years.
Lessons about readiness & mentoring

- Mentoring also addresses the challenges of implementation during a project – it needs to be ongoing and must supplement one shot training courses to make training useful in practice.

- Training without mentoring and mentoring without readiness lead to poor quality impact of evaluations and generally in terms of project change and adaptation.
Questions for discussion

- Do readiness and mentoring **need to be linked** in your experience?
- To what extent do **project designs at the onset** affect readiness?
- What **features and personal attributes** should we seek when selecting future mentors and evaluators to work in this format?
- What **other dimensions or factors** affect readiness and mentoring that we need to be aware of?
Conclusion & invitation

• DECI-2 has its own Research Communication strategy

• We seek to engage the users of our research (process and outcomes) early on

• We are inviting commissioners of evaluation and others to join a ‘user circle’ and will be invited to a learning lab to exchange experiences
Contact us & share your experiences

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