

# A primer for evaluators

A circular stained glass artwork featuring a variety of colorful, abstract shapes and patterns. The design is composed of numerous small, irregular pieces of glass in shades of yellow, orange, red, green, blue, and white. These pieces are arranged to form larger, complex shapes, including spirals, concentric circles, and geometric patterns. The entire circular composition is set against a solid green background. The artwork is framed by a dark, possibly black, border.

**U**tilization Focused Evaluation (UFE) facilitates a learning process in which people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experiences to their work. The focus is on intended users. UFE does not prescribe any specific content, method, or theory. It is a guiding framework, rather than a methodology. UFE can include a wide variety of evaluation methods within an overall participatory paradigm. Decision making, in consultation with those who can benefit from the evaluation, is an important part of the process. Intended users will more likely utilize an evaluation in which they have ownership. This Primer is for practitioner evaluators and project implementers who have heard of UFE and are keen to test-drive the approach.



# **Utilization Focused Evaluation**

## **A primer for evaluators**

**Ricardo Ramírez and Dal Brodhead**

*with contributions from*

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# Acronyms

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CPR <i>south</i>  | Communication Policy Research South is a capacity building activity to develop Asia-Pacific based policy intellectuals on ICT policy regulation among junior to mid level scholars. CPR <i>south</i> is part of the LIRNE <i>asia</i> program. |
| DECI              | Developing Evaluation Capacity in ICTD.                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| DREAM-IT          | The “Mega Mongolia” project is a countrywide research program on the inter-relationships of policy, innovation, and the socio-economic effects of ICT.                                                                                         |
| ICTD              | Information and communication technology for development.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| IDRC              | International Development Research Centre.                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| ISIF Asia         | The Information Society Research Capacity Program.                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| KEQs              | key evaluation questions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| LIRNE <i>asia</i> | A regional information and communication technology (ICT) policy and regulation think tank active across the Asia Pacific.                                                                                                                     |
| PANACeA           | Pan Asian Collaboration for Evidence-based e-Health Adoption and Application.                                                                                                                                                                  |
| PO                | Project Officers (at IDRC).                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| SIRCA I           | The Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia Program.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| UFE               | Utilization focused evaluation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

# Foreword

By Michael Quinn Patton

## Utilization-Focused Evaluation

Wisdom emerges when theory meets practice through deep reflection and honest, in-depth inquiry. This Primer is packed with wisdom. That wisdom can inform both future applications and further theory development. Indeed, it already has. I have already drawn upon and benefitted from the insights in this Primer in my teaching, evaluation practice, and writing.

The Primer's authors observe:

In our experience, evaluation professionals using UFE for the first time require mentoring support. . . . [DECI supported] a team approach where evaluation mentors coach and mentor project-based evaluators and project implementers — and everybody learns together.

That is called *walking the talk*. The *talk* (theory, if you will) is all about genuine collaboration, mutual understanding, shared ownership, and engaged learning. The *walk* (practice) is about engaging in evaluation processes to achieve the desired outcome of intended use by intended users. Walking the talk requires knowing the theory and putting in into action through reflective practice. This book illuminates and exemplifies the importance of evaluation capacity building through engaged reflective practice and action-oriented, learning-focused inquiry as a team. Thus, while the Primer offers important, even critical, insights into how to undertake utilization-focused evaluation, it also offers a model for how to engage in serious reflective practice as a community of learner-practitioners.

The Primer notes: “Utilization focused evaluation (UFE) is not new, but it was new to us when we started!” This comment provides me with an opportunity to place this Primer in the larger context of the evolution of UFE. The research on use on which UFE was based began in the early 1970s. The first edition of *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* was published in 1978; the second, revised edition was published in 1986; a third, expanded edition in 1997; and the fourth edition, on which this *Primer* is based, appeared in 2008. Each new edition drew upon emerging research on evaluation and knowledge use, case examples of UFE in practice, and advances in the theory and practice of evaluation. The profession of evaluation has grown tremendously in the four decades since we conducted our initial research on evaluation use. Especially noteworthy, as represented by this volume, has been the growth of evaluation internationally.

While a great deal has changed, and both the theory and practice of UFE have evolved in adapting to those changes and the knowledge generated by practitioners like those featured in this Primer, one thing remains constant: In designing a utilization-focused evaluation, the attention is constantly *intended use by intended users*. This Primer explains what that means and how to undertake UFE with situational and contextual sensitivity to support and achieve *intended use by intended users*.

My kudos and deepest thanks to all those involved in this work and putting together this important publication – *Utilization Focused Evaluation: A primer for evaluators*.



# Preface and Acknowledgements

Throughout this primer we share lessons from the IDRC-funded project Developing Evaluation Capacity in ICTD (DECI). We test drove Utilization Focused Evaluation (UFE) with five research projects in the Asia region in the field of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICTD). We covered each of the 12 steps of UFE, including the last one that calls for a meta evaluation. This work resulted in a case study for each of the evaluations that are available at the project website: <http://evaluationinpractice.wordpress.com/>.

Our lessons are illustrated by examples presented through quotes from the different project stakeholders. The examples illustrate what it was like to learn to use UFE. In those examples we indicate what we have learned by coaching and mentoring five research projects in ICTD across Asia. For the reader of this Primer we extracted the principles that we think will be applicable beyond the subject matter and the region. We also reflect on the achievements of the projects and aspects of the projects that should be improved in future.

This Primer is the result of a group effort. The text was prepared by Ricardo Ramírez and Dal Brodhead. Much of the content and all of the examples are based on the case studies produced by the DECI evaluation mentors: Chelladurai Solomon, Shubh Kumar-Range, and Sonal Zaveri. The section, What benefits does UFE bring for the commissioners of evaluation, was prepared by Sarah Earl and Matthew Smith of IDRC.

The case studies were reviewed by: the project evaluators, the primary users of the evaluations, the IDRC project officers, and ourselves.

We are grateful to the following individuals for their support in this project: Ann Mizumoto, Yvonne Lim Yin Chum, Ang Peng Hwa (SIRCA I), Matthew Smith and Sarah Earl (IDRC), Afroz Sajwani, Hammad Durrani, Shariq Khoja, Richard Scott (PANACeA), Chaitali Sinha (IDRC), Nilusha Kapugama, Rohan Samarajiva (LIRNEasia), Laurent Elder (IDRC), Sylvia Cadena, Paul Wilson (APNIC/ISIF Asia), Phet Sayo (IDRC), Batbold Zagdragchaa, Batpurev Batchuluun, Bazar Chimed (DREAM-IT), and Maria Ng Lee Hoon (IDRC). We thank J. Lynn Fraser for her editing work of this Primer as well as the case studies that it is based on.

## Who is This Primer For?

**T**his Primer is for practitioner evaluators who have heard of UFE and are keen to test drive the approach. Throughout this Primer we refer to the value of having a mentor to assist an evaluator who is using UFE for the first time. Our collective experiences with UFE indicated having a mentor was, for many UFE participants, an essential support and it reflects how we learned and mentored UFE.

Evaluators may use elements of a UFE in their work naturally, for example by engaging users in planning the process or in assisting them in the utilization of findings. This Primer, however, walks the reader through UFE by systematically covering all of the 12 steps. It reflects deeply on the UFE evaluation practice and builds from it.

A second audience for the Primer is project implementers. In the five UFE experiences that underpin this Primer, the primary users of the evaluations were the research projects' implementers — although other users could have been selected such as funders or beneficiaries. This qualification is important as the Primer will also interest funders of research and commissioners of evaluation. Funders frequently have resources to commission evaluations. Funders have the power to support useful evaluations. They can, as well, choose not to support the evaluations. Supporting useful evaluation using UFE requires working differently than in the past with regards to both evaluators and the evaluands. This Primer offers some insights into how to do this.

While this Primer is based on UFE experiences completed with five research projects in the field of ICTD, there is scope for the lessons to apply to a wider variety of project in other sectors.

This primer is not a stand-alone manual. For that purpose readers are referred to the fourth edition of *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* by Michael Quinn Patton, as well as his most recent *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation* (2012). This primer is also not a training module. Readers interested in that use are referred to the UFE Curriculum. It provides modules that were developed and adapted to different audiences. They are available at: <http://evaluationinpractice.wordpress.com/>.

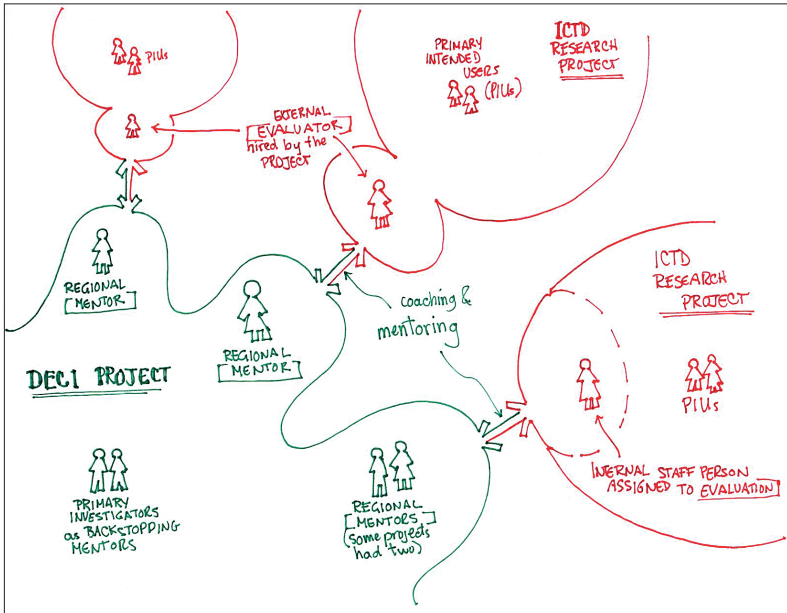


# Mentoring as a Way for Evaluators to Learn UFE

In our experience, utilization focused evaluation is best learned through practice. The DECI project had an international team of mentors composed of two international-level mentors working directly with three regional evaluation mentors based in South Asia who supported each of the five projects. The mentors were evaluation professionals who test drove UFE for the first time.

Each project secured the services of an evaluator, either by hiring external consultants or by assigning staff to undertake this role. The regional evaluation mentors coached the evaluators (at times the primary users of the evaluation joined these conversations) by introducing the different steps and tasks of UFE. In addition, the mentors provided peer support to the project evaluators, as both parties shared a common learning journey. The diagram on the next page illustrates this relationship.

In our experience, evaluation professionals using UFE for the first time require mentoring support. It gives them a sounding board as well as the confidence to experiment. The presence of a mentor also offers a regular opportunity to reflect. This Primer is meant to support a team approach where evaluation mentors coach as well as mentor project-based evaluators and project implementers. A team approach ensures that everybody learns together.



# Utilization Focused Evaluation



*UFE does not prescribe any specific content, method, or theory. It is a guiding framework, as opposed to a methodology. UFE can include a wide variety of evaluation methods within an overall participatory paradigm.*



# What is Utilization Focused Evaluation?

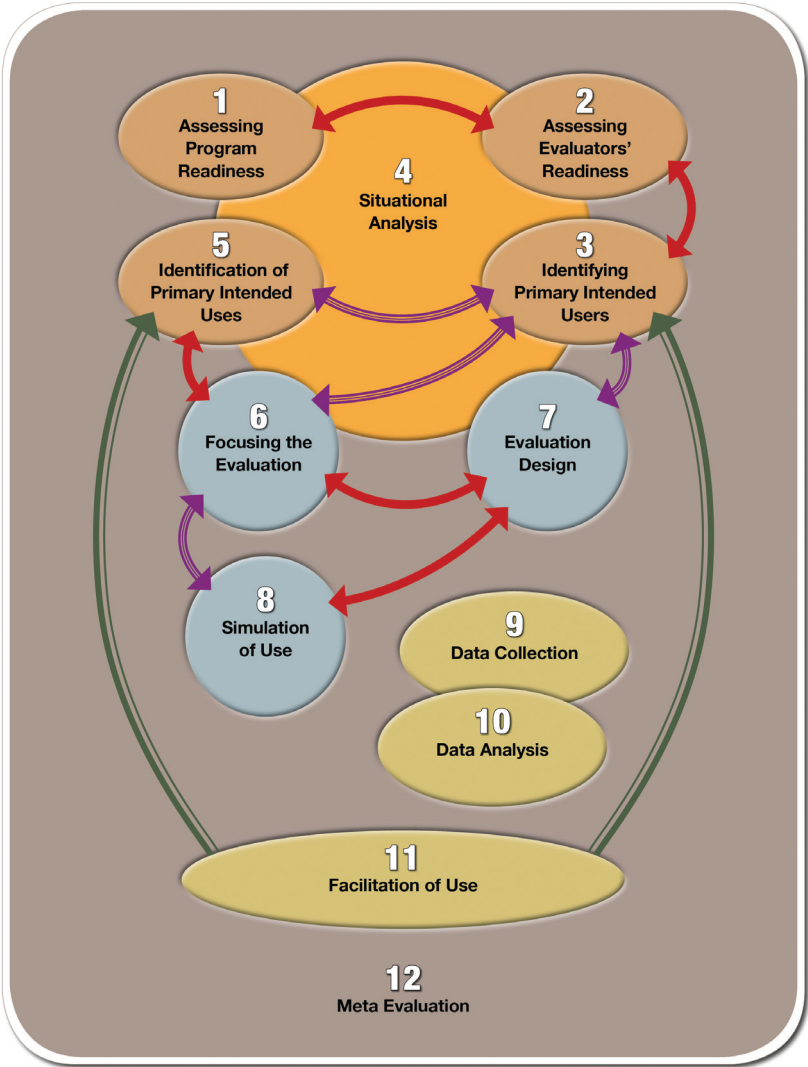
*Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use*

Patton, 2008, p. 37

**I**n UFE, evaluators facilitate a learning process with attention to how real people in the real world might apply evaluation findings and experiences. In designing a utilization-focused evaluation the attention is constantly on the intended use by intended users.

UFE does not prescribe any specific content, method, or theory. It is a guiding framework, as opposed to a methodology. UFE can include a wide variety of evaluation methods within an overall participatory paradigm. Decision making, in consultation with those who can benefit from the evaluation, is an important part of the process. As important is the fact that intended users will more likely utilize an evaluation in which they have ownership.

While UFE is summarized into a series of steps, the process itself is not linear. This is a point that Patton has emphasized in his most recent book *Essentials of Utilization-focused Evaluation* (2012). Drawing from our experience, we produced the diagram below to capture the overlap among the 12 UFE steps. The shaded areas refer to a *conversation* among steps, where the exploration goes back and forth as adjustments are made.



**LEGEND**

- |                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  Typical interactions between sequential steps      |  Preparing for evaluation      |
|  Strategic interactions across non-sequential steps |  Analysing the situation       |
|  Feedback from findings and process                 |  Designing evaluation          |
|                                                                                                                                        |  Undertaking evaluation        |
|                                                                                                                                        |  Reflecting on evaluation done |

# The UFE Framework

## Summarized in Steps

1. **Assessing Program Readiness** — Those who want the evaluation conducted need guidance to understand utilization focused evaluation (UFE) and to decide whether they are ready for it. This process requires active and skilled guidance from an evaluator to facilitate a step-by-step process. It starts with a readiness assessment and a definition of primary intended users and uses.
2. **Assessing Evaluators' Readiness** — Facilitating and conducting UFE requires that both managers and evaluators review their skills and willingness to collaborate. In the end, the effectiveness of the UFE will be judged on the basis of actual evaluation use.<sup>1</sup>
3. **Identifying Primary Intended Users** — Primary intended users (PIU) have a direct, identifiable stake in the evaluation and its use. They are required to be engaged with the evaluation on an ongoing basis during the entire process. The evaluator assesses who the PIUs are, and their objectives and needs. It is important to establish a climate of participation with PIUs from the start.

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1. Not to the exclusion of the other program evaluation standards — utility is balanced with feasibility, propriety, and accuracy.

4. **Situational Analysis** — Evaluation use is people- and context-dependent. Use will be enhanced when the evaluation takes into account situational factors. The evaluator reviews organizational aspects such as previous evaluation experience, resources available for, and priority given to the evaluation, its relationship to overall organizational development, and if key issues are being faced. Other contextual aspects that also need to be considered are: timing, organizational resources, culture, turbulence, power, and politics.
5. **Identification of Primary Intended Uses** — Since intended use by primary intended users is the goal of UFE — these uses are identified at the outset, and will guide the evaluation questions and methods. It is possible that these uses could include a combination of process and finding uses.
6. **Focusing the Evaluation** — The focus follows the intended uses of the evaluation by PIUs. It involves constructing a set of manageable key evaluation questions (KEQs) for the evaluation. As with research, fine-tuning key evaluation questions is generally harder than expected, and the exchange with PIUs on this topic is a pillar of UFE.
7. **Evaluation Design** — The selection of methods is based on data needed to respond to the key evaluation questions. The evaluator ensures that the methods will yield findings that respond to the intended uses and the intended user(s).
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 useable findings by PIUs. In many cases, the KEQs and methods are modified at this stage.



9. **Data Collection** — Managed with use in mind. It is important to keep the primary intended users informed and involved throughout all stages of the process.
10. **Data Analysis** — Done in consultation with the primary intended users. This involvement increases their understanding of the findings and adds to the sense of ownership and commitment to utilization.
11. **Facilitation of Use** — Use does not just happen naturally; it needs to be facilitated. In UFE, the evaluator is committed to facilitating the use of the evaluation, recognizing that other factors will inevitably play a critical role in facilitating or inhibiting the use of findings. Facilitating use — this activity includes drawing connections with evaluation findings and the original uses (or purposes of the evaluation), prioritizing among recommendations, as well as developing the dissemination strategy for the evaluation to facilitate use. This step is central to UFE as it requires that time and resources are allocated to facilitating use throughout the process from the beginning.
12. **Meta Evaluation** — UFEs are evaluated by whether PIUs used the evaluation in the intended ways. This step tells the story about how the UFE process evolved and allows the users and the evaluator to learn from their own experience. The case studies, noted above, are the products of Step 12.

In Patton's latest book, *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation* (2012), Patton describes 17 evaluation steps. While we find that the additional steps provide guidance for possible variations (such as introducing a theory of change), this Primer is based on the original 12 steps that guided us in the DECI project.

# The DECI Project

**U**tilization focused evaluation (UFE) is not a new concept. However, it was new to us when we started! Through the DECI project, we proposed the UFE approach to the five project managers of ICTD research projects across Asia.

What we had in hand at the time was Michael Quinn Patton's book *Utilization-focused Evaluation* (2008), which is the fourth edition, is 667 pages long and came with an appended three page UFE checklist. The DECI initiative called for two efforts in tandem: learning what the approach was all about, while at the same time finding ways to make it relevant to five very different research project teams. This Primer is the publication we wish we had had at the start of DECI Project. In this Primer, we tell the story of what it is like to learn UFE.

This Primer captures our experience. It demonstrates what we learned from UFE's practical application. In the example of the DREAM-IT project in Mongolia, the team at first could not get a sense of the UFE process — notwithstanding our initial presentations where we explained each step. They had many questions about the role of the evaluator and about the time and resources required for the evaluation. One of the project managers observed that perhaps case studies like the ones that we prepared at the end of each evaluation could help future managers visualize what the UFE process was all about.

DECI was an action-research project with an evaluation capacity development objective. It was a platform that allowed us to offer

ICTD researchers the option of learning UFE by applying it to their research projects. DECI offered to help the ICTD researchers develop their own evaluations using UFE, which was an added incentive for them to volunteer to participate. Our offer of support meant that they could work with us and be the primary users of the evaluation instead of implementing evaluations that were imposed by a funding organization. In DECI, we test drove UFE with an orientation towards project evaluators and implementers who were interested in learning UFE through application.<sup>2</sup> In the DECI project, the regional evaluation mentors coached the evaluators assigned to five partner projects. They, in turn, produced five evaluation reports based on the specific uses identified by the primary intended users. Each evaluation report was used by the managers and researchers in each project. This application was possible, not only because Step 11 of UFE calls for coaching in the use of the evaluation findings, but also because the primary users took ownership and had a stake in the findings as well as the whole process itself.

Our experiences involved five varied research projects in ICTD in Asia:

1. *LIRNEasia* was inaugurated in 2005 as a think tank to conduct policy and regulation research on ICT and related infrastructure development in 13 Asian countries. The evaluation centred on one of its projects, Communications Policy Research South (CPR*south*), a capacity building effort that holds an annual conference in the region. For additional information visit: <http://lirneasia.net/capacity-building/cprsouth/>.
2. Since August 2007 the PAN Asian Collaboration for Evidence-based e-Health Adoption and Application (PANACeA) has enabled a network of health researchers and institutions to conduct collaborative research on

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2. UFE could also be applied very differently. If for example, a donor was the primary user with an interest in the evaluation products rather than in the process.

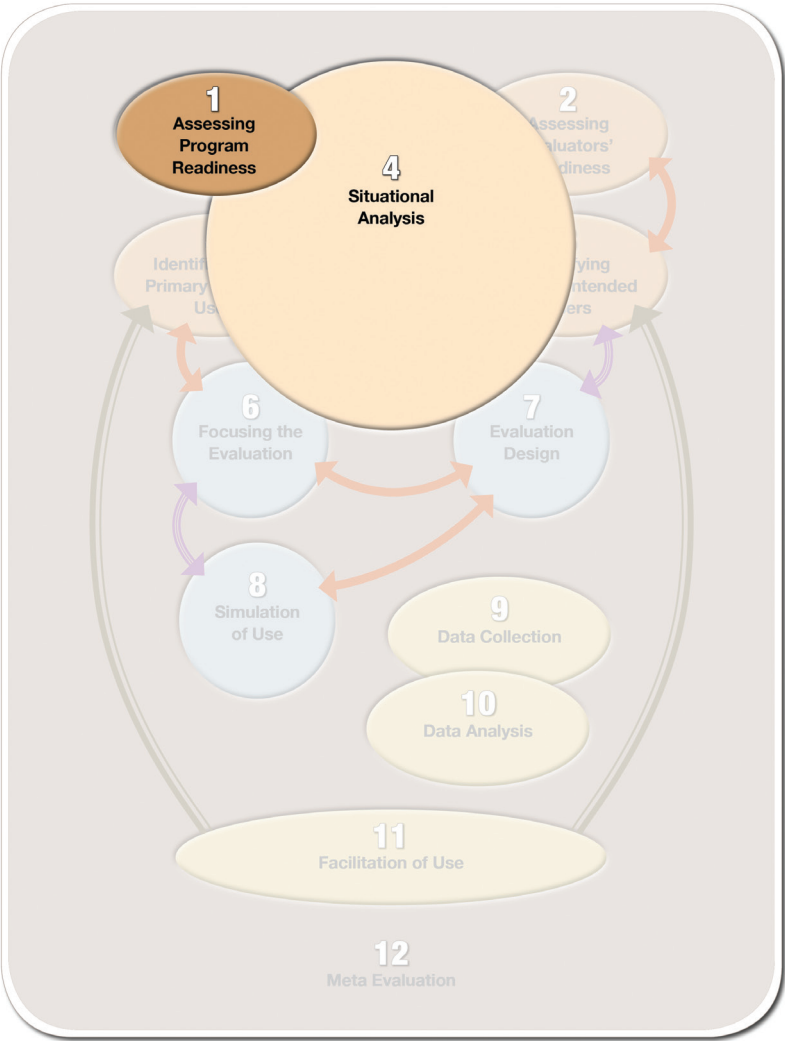
e-Health applications in the Asian context. The thematic areas of the projects of PANACeA, led by the Advisory and Mentoring Team, are Systematic Reviews on Tele-health and Health Informatics; Free and Open Source Software; Readiness and Change Management; Policy and Influence; Network Management and Gender Analysis. Further discussion is found at: <http://panacea-ehealth.net/>.

3. The Information Society Innovation Fund (ISIF) is a grants and awards program aimed at stimulating creative solutions to ICT development needs in the Asia Pacific region. ISIF places emphasis on the role of the Internet in social and economic development in the region with a goal of effective development of the Information Society throughout. See <http://www.isif.asia/> for additional information.
4. The Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia program (SIRCA I) identifies future research leaders, particularly emerging researchers who are relatively new to ICTD and Information. The researchers benefit from concerted capacity building and mentorship arrangements with established researchers and grant recipients. This grant focuses on social science research, in particular, the relationships between ICTs and information society. Visit <http://www.SIRCA.org.sg/>.
5. The DREAM IT Mega Mongolia project is a countrywide research program on the inter-relationships of policy, innovation, and the socio-economic effects of ICT. It provides competitive grants to the sub-projects in different sectors including education, health, governance, and the environment. For more information access <http://www.dreamit.mn/index.php>.

# The UFE Steps Illustrated with Project Examples

**W**hile this section is organized according to the 12 steps of UFE, our experience shows that the steps typically evolve in an iterative non-sequential manner. Our diagram (on page xii) is another way to emphasize the overlaps among the steps. We often returned to a step after completing subsequent ones. For instance, Step 2 seemed to yield new insights throughout the process. The same can be said of other early steps. We have included select vignettes and quotes from the five project cases to give a voice to our partners as they learned their way into UFE.

Step I Assessing Program Readiness



Those who want the evaluation conducted need guidance to understand utilization focused evaluation (UFE). This step requires active and skilled guidance from an evaluation facilitator.

Utilization focused evaluation (UFE) is premised on evaluation processes that are designed, implemented, and utilized by carefully selected users who take ownership over the evaluation process by active involvement throughout the process. For this action to take place, the organizations involved need to be ready. Step 1 assesses the organizational readiness to take on such an approach. The users' readiness to participate, own, and learn from the evaluation is a necessary condition for a successful outcome:

In the case of the DREAM-IT project, the Board Members attended our introductory workshop during a conference in Penang (2009) where they were introduced to the concept of UFE. At the time the Project Manager mentioned that the word 'evaluation' created stress among people since they expected that their performance would be evaluated. But the expectation emerging from the Penang UFE sensitization was that it was 'different', a new approach to evaluation where DREAM-IT participants would be involved and be able to contribute to the analysis of their own work.<sup>3</sup>

The tasks included in Step 1 cover a range of activities including: awareness creation about the principles of UFE; an assessment of the readiness to take on responsibility for evaluation and embrace it as a learning process; and a review of what can be done to facilitate the readiness if it is not yet evident. In UFE, the evaluator becomes a proactive participant in the process, rather than an external judge. It could also be the case that some of these early tasks may be covered by an organization or project before it engages with a UFE evaluator, as part of a self-readiness assessment.

Three interrelated principles are central to Step 1: proactive facilitation of evaluation, capacity building, and commitment. The same principles apply to Step 2 where the evaluator reviews

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3. It is worth noting that a user may decide just as well to focus on judging performance if such a use is a priority to her or him.

his or her readiness and capabilities to facilitate UFE. These first two steps progress in tandem with topics that keep being revisited as the nature and essence of the approach or topic is discovered through practice.

## Proactive Facilitation of Evaluation

During Step 1, the project evaluator, ideally supported by an external mentor if he or she is new to UFE, provides active support to the organization's leaders and staff. This support will enable them to gain insight into and to prepare for, their new evaluation roles as well as to manage their expectations. This is an important step as evaluation has many interpretations and there will be assumptions about roles that need to be reviewed as is illustrated in the following examples from the case studies:

In the case of DREAM-IT, it was initially expected that the DECI mentors would not only 'come and do' the project evaluation, but also train and closely support the project in carrying it out.

In the case of SIRCA I, at first the staff expected the whole evaluation process to be like an audit, with the evaluator playing the role of an auditor who summarizes and prepares the findings.

LIRNEasia was interested in building its own evaluation capacity and assigned a junior researcher to work with the DECI team of mentors and initially expected them to play a major role in the evaluation.

The above observations reflected the perceptions and expectations of the Project Managers and staff at the beginning of the UFE process. Their initial perception of the process was based on the assumption that the evaluation was traditional with predictable parameters and results. Their initial enthusiasm for the process was based on this expectation. This perception was challenged by the process, and was rejuvenated as the process, and



their understanding grew. Traditional approaches to evaluation produce rigid role expectations. UFE, on the other hand, encourages sharing and more flexible relationships as is seen in this example:

SIRCA I also valued the evaluator as part of the team and did not treat her as an outsider. The lesson is: do not let the evaluator be an outsider.

The process of UFE facilitates inclusiveness among the team members and creates a support system.

## Capacity Development

UFE is best understood by practicing it. The potential of UFE becomes real through experiential learning. Central to the capacity building effort is to encourage all parties to take on the UFE experience as action research. Changing perspectives, an element of the UFE process, encouraged participation as seen in these two project examples:

What was unique for ISIF was that the UFE evaluator took a lot of effort to build the UFE ‘mindset’ (the constant focus on users and uses) and to regularly brief the project managers on the progress.

For LIRNEasia it was the early involvement of its Primary Intended User (who was also the CEO) that helped galvanize the UFE orientation and interest in the whole process.

One reason this preparatory step is challenging is that it requires a fundamental change in mindset that only takes place as other UFE steps are explored. To overcome this challenge merits arranging a face-to-face, on-site meeting where the UFE mentor walks the evaluator — and the likely primary users of the evaluation — through the steps and principles of the approach. The two pillars of UFE, Evaluation Facilitation and Capacity Building, are in fact two sides of the same coin but can be challenging to understand when the concepts are first being applied:

SIRCA I had better clarity only after the visit by the mentor to SIRCA I in the beginning of the process and after seeing the slides on [the] 12 steps of UFE prepared by the DECI team. This lack of understanding surprised us as we had provided an introduction to UFE during an earlier conference; clearly that event was not a good teachable moment.

Experiential learning, therefore, is a necessary component of UFE to reinforce the teachings of the 12 UFE steps.

## Commitment

Organizational readiness means there is a willingness to take ownership of the evaluation. This change in attitude requires a commitment from the leadership and staff to participate actively throughout the evaluation process. Ownership of the focus of the evaluation, its methods and utilization of the results, increase the odds of internally driven changes. This is in contrast to external evaluations that typically recommend changes. Exemplifying commitment and inviting others to do the same is part of the work of the UFE mentor. The focus is on facilitating in-house capacity to understand and commit to working inside a collective learning environment. The following two examples highlight the importance of the evaluator's background and commitment as well as that of the organization involved:

DREAM-IT was committed and ready to spend time and resources after the conference in Penang. A Board member was designated for the UFE exercise as he had some evaluation experience in Outcome Mapping.

The DECI regional mentor was invited very early in the process to attend the annual conference of CPR*south* (the LIRNE*asia* component in the evaluation). This visit allowed the mentor to clarify the key role of Principal Intended User in shaping the evaluation, and helped generate a higher level of organizational commitment.

The readiness of an organization to effectively undertake UFE depends partly, and not surprisingly, on the timely allocation of financial and human resources, including the early identification of an evaluator and a dedicated budget. An explicit time commitment from the leadership and PIUs is essential if organization-wide learning and change is to take place.

Openness to the learning implies willingness on the part of the evaluation participants to set aside time and to make meaningful engagement possible. Careful planning is necessary to ensure that the timing of a UFE evaluation is strategic and useful. This preparation could include prior work on the focus of the planned evaluation. For large network projects, it will take time to decide on whether to concentrate on evaluating the network or the project level. In the example of the *CPRsouth*, project timing and providing attention to new funding strategies were intertwined in importance. It is advantageous to have a supportive environment; this context may include having access to external UFE expertise/mentors (when available) and openness on the part of donors and other senior stakeholders to allow for a UFE process:

For *CPRsouth*, the timing of this UFE was a good one. The leadership was aware that a re-tooling and new fundraising strategies were needed.

Implicit in this openness is a willingness to relinquish control over an evaluation process by the donor and others, and to invest in a project's commitment to be accountable for its home-grown primary goals and objectives that are likely within the donor's overall program framework.

The implications for donors are potentially significant in that they need to be comfortable with a hands-off approach. They must be careful not to subvert the process, such as through commissioning parallel assessment initiatives that have the effect of adding to the workload of the projects to the extent that it detracts from the UFE.<sup>4</sup>

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4. This point is further elaborated in the section entitled "What benefit does UFE bring to commissioners of evaluation?"

If the donor has additional evaluation requirements, then the donor should act transparently at the outset and the donor should put its issues on the table so that project leaders may define the uses of UFE taking into account these external requirements as noted in the following examples from the PANACeA and LIRNEasia's examples:

When it comes to evaluation, UFE requires a different mindset: one where the primary users assume control which in turn entails responsibility over all aspects of the evaluation.

LIRNEasia's leadership expressed that they got far higher value from this UFE compared to previous external evaluations. They concluded that as long as the evaluation methods were well identified, there was no reason why external evaluations would have more credibility with donors.

Donors' openness, cooperation, transparency, and full commitment of time and support facilitate the UFE process.<sup>5</sup>

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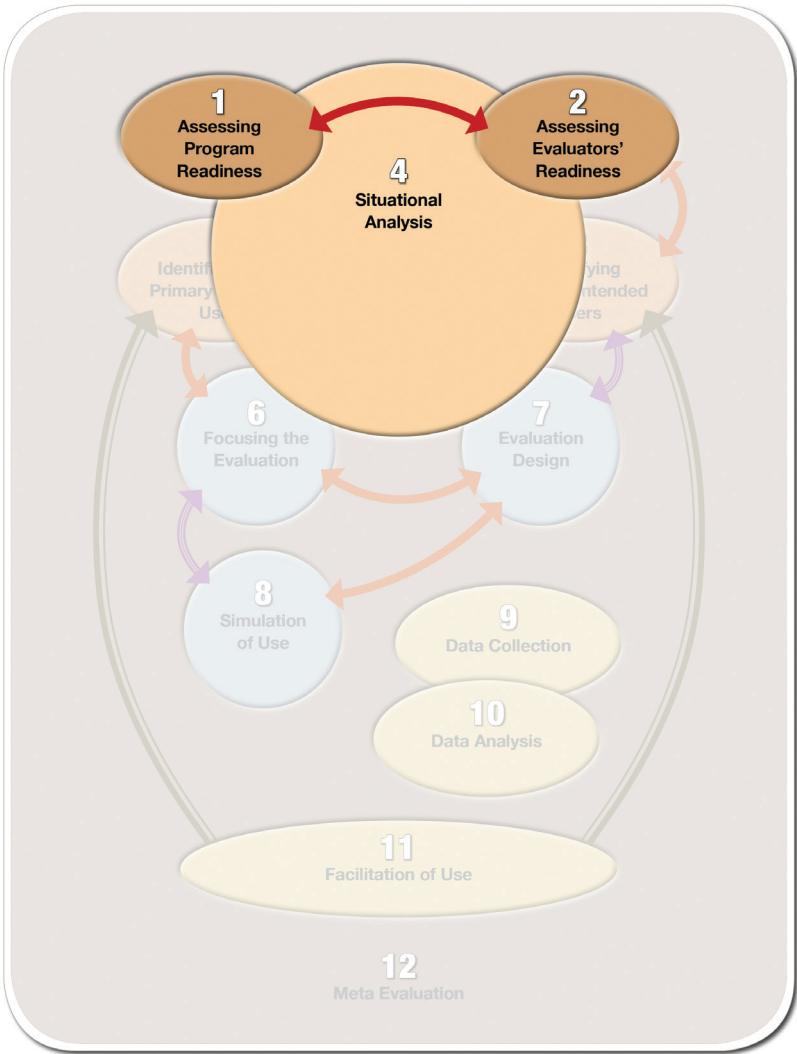
5. A situation may arise where the donor discovers new requirements along the way; and once again as much transparency as possible is desirable.

## Step 1 Summary

Traditionally, evaluations have been done to and on organizations, projects or programs mainly for upward accountability purposes. Thus, a commitment by the organization, a willingness to participate in the exercise, while desirable, has not typically been a prerequisite for undertaking an evaluation. In contrast, in UFE, a commitment by the leadership to take ownership is central. In doing so, the potential for them to learn from the process and the outcomes increases because they are engaged in every aspect of the evaluation. Making sure the organizations are ready for this approach is important. The essential aspects of organizational readiness can be summarized as:

- A redefined role for an evaluator with emphasis on facilitation;
- An investment in time and resources to build UFE capacity particularly at the start of an evaluation process;
- A clear commitment to the exercise by the leadership and primary users (staff) to allocate their time and a budget to the work; and
- A shift in the role and expectations of the donor(s) and senior managers where a focus on use by primary users takes priority.

Step 2 Assessing Evaluators' Readiness



**F**acilitating and conducting a UFE requires that both managers and evaluators review their skills and willingness to collaborate. In the end, effectiveness of the UFE will be judged on the basis of actual evaluation use.

Patton (2008, p. 78) observed “Stakeholder involvement in evaluations has become accepted practice in the profession,” and in UFE this involvement is central. The specific tasks for this step include: an assessment by the evaluator of her or his knowledge and skill; a commitment to focus on intended use by intended users; and a willingness for the evaluation to be judged on the basis of the actual use. As a consequence of this step, experienced evaluators discover that the role they are expected to assume in UFE is one of a facilitator of a learning process. The UFE evaluator is no longer the major decision maker in charge of the evaluation. Moreover, his or her effectiveness will be judged on the basis of actual use. This unique process calls for a fundamental change in roles during which, in our experience, the different parties come to appreciate through practice. This discovery takes place during the negotiation of the tasks in Step 1, especially as a commitment to this approach calls for an agreement between the evaluator and the potential PIU(s).

The same three interrelated principles listed for Step 1 are relevant here: proactive facilitation of evaluation, capacity building, and commitment.

## **Proactive Facilitation of Evaluation**

Step 2 requires a self-assessment by the evaluator of his or her readiness and capability. For those who are familiar with conventional evaluation approaches, this step is important in shifting attention towards a coaching and facilitation role and away from an outsider-as-judge role. The sooner the evaluator assumes a learning mode to take on this new role, the better. Such self-reflection needs to continue beyond this step because UFE is best learned through practice and UFE needs to respond to the context.

However, there is an in-built challenge at this stage that does not get resolved until later in the UFE process. Self-assessment of a process that is learned by doing is difficult to achieve for at least two reasons. First, an evaluation professional who has been contracted to carry out an evaluation will expect to be in an expert mode, not in a self-assessment one that may reveal weaknesses. A second reason is that the self-assessment tasks require an understanding of the roles and commitment of UFE that only become real later on in the process. One way to address this apparent dilemma is to acknowledge that Step 2 is iterative. It gains significance in many of the subsequent steps. The benefit of having an evaluation mentor, as is emphasized throughout this Primer, is that such a reflection can take place as the mentor and the evaluator interact. The mentor, as noted in the following instance, will encourage the reflection and assist the evaluator in finding resources to complement her or his skills profile:

The presence of the evaluation mentor helped confirm the engagement of the researcher from LIRNEasia with limited evaluation experience, and created a safe learning environment.

Beyond the fact that being in a learning mode is conducive to self-reflection, it has implications for how the UFE approach is introduced into a project or organization. The relationship between evaluator and the likely PIUs needs to be trusting. There needs to be an open communication with all the participants acknowledging the nature of a collaborative learning process, in contrast to a conventional top down consulting role.

Facilitation skills for evaluators include, but are not limited to:

- Listening and asking questions;
- Forming a good organizational assessment for facilitating stakeholder and decision making analysis;
- Building a good relationship for open and clear communication. Establishing this up front is important to help a smooth progress;



- Understanding and being responsive to needs; and
- Appreciating and seeking to build on local strengths and assets.

We underline the importance of face-to-face meetings between the project partners and the evaluator. These encounters allow the evaluator to explain the UFE steps, while also learning to appreciate each project context (Step 4). During these encounters it is necessary to clarify expectations about the new roles required for UFE. A great way to create trust with the project partners is to discuss these changes. A contributing reason to why this worked was that the DECI mentors, in regard to the research project, could say to the partners “Look, this is our first time at this, let’s try this out and see how it goes — DECI is a research project so we can figure this out together.”

While a commitment by the evaluator is fundamental, PIUs will also become advocates as soon as they begin to witness the power of the process. While this new behaviour is relevant throughout the process, its foundation is set in the early steps of UFE, especially when the respective roles are understood with the focus on use-by-users.

Among the challenges to anticipate is the late hiring of the evaluator as it can lead to further renewed briefing (about Step 1) and a need to review a re-definition of roles and relationships. Another related challenge is the turnover and replacement of the PIU which can also be challenging, especially if it happens after Steps 3 and 5 when the users and uses have been agreed upon.

## Capacity Development

The capacity building theme overlaps with the previous theme of facilitation. Learning UFE together with PIUs creates a relationship of collaboration between them and the evaluator. It sustains an environment where the evaluator feels part of a team and becomes immersed in the project.

An ideal situation is when evaluators receive mentoring from other evaluators as they develop their first UFE experience, as was the case in DECI. The relationship between mentor and evaluator works best when it is open and flexible, which tends to be the case when the mentor is also in a learning mode.

Effective capacity development takes place when mentors work directly with both evaluators and project staff, which is hard to do at a distance. Face-to-face work with the mentor is important as many UFE steps can be explored during a project visit and the resources needed for the process can be established. The evaluation will require an attitude of sharing and of pooling resources, both personal and practical, for the benefit of the evaluation and its outcome.

## Commitment

Commitment to the UFE process is key and, while it applies to all parties, the evaluator often becomes the first champion of the UFE process. Commitment by users emerges during the subsequent steps of UFE, especially as its potential is discovered during the conversations that take place among PIUs, evaluators, and mentors. The personal qualities of the evaluator, as is seen in this PANACeA case study example, facilitate positive UFE outcomes:

A huge factor in achieving the outcome from the UFE was the significant motivation and commitment by the evaluator. She took on her role responsibly; her sense of accountability to the job assigned, and to the university, were important contributing factors to the positive outcomes.

Mutual commitment is also more likely when roles and responsibilities are clear. Since the onus is on PIUs to utilize the evaluation (with the evaluator's support), it means that the pressure is not only on the evaluator. The DREAM-IT case study provides an example of the importance of shared ownership in the UFE process:

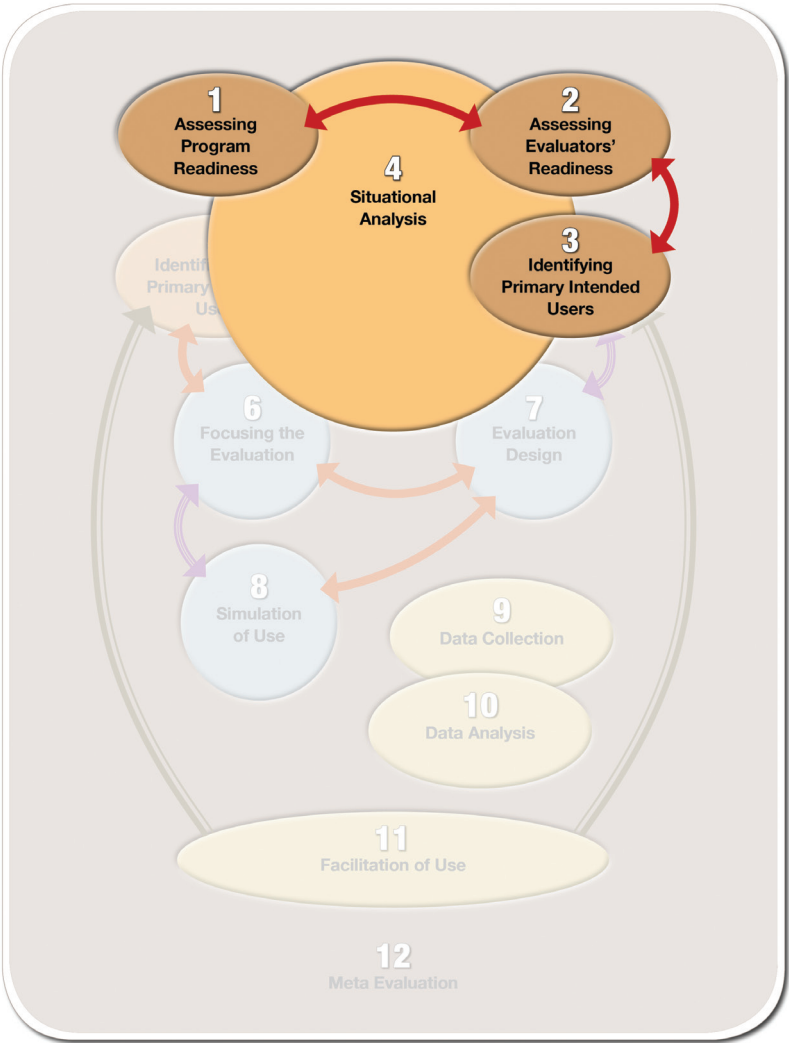
The UFE process demands reflection, critical thinking and analytic ability. These are ‘research’ skills that are inherent in a researcher or evaluator but may not be among implementers or those who have never been involved in evaluations. It was fortunate that among the Board members, there was a person who had some background in evaluation and understood these ‘research’ skills. It is important to have such ‘advocates’ among the PIU as the UFE process is long, cumbersome and its immense value recognizable only when the findings are put to use. Although a UFE researcher is important to conduct the research, the ‘advocate’ plays an important oversight role and acts as a ‘bridge’ between the researcher and the PIUs.

Commitment, motivation, skill sharing, and a willingness of individuals to champion and advocate for team members during the UFE process contribute to an evaluation’s success.

## Step 2 Summary

Commitment, Capacity Building, and Proactive Facilitation of Evaluation are the main principles that characterize the journey through Step 2. Our diagram emphasizes the overlap between Steps 1 and 2. These activities do not happen in isolation, but rather in conjunction with the other steps that will now be described. A challenge for evaluators is to acknowledge that the self-reflection required for this readiness step can be awkward. When an evaluation mentor is available, the reflection can happen during their interaction, where the mentor challenges the evaluator to make use of his or her facilitation skills. An evaluator working on UFE for the first time, without a mentor, will need to make a conscious decision to review his or her readiness over several of the subsequent steps.

Step 3 Identifying Primary Intended Users



**P**Primary intended users (PIUs) have a direct, identifiable stake in the evaluation and its use. They are required to be engaged with the evaluation on an ongoing basis during the entire process. The evaluator assesses who the PIUs are, and their objectives and needs. It is important to establish a climate of participation for PIUs from the start.

In Step 3 of the UFE checklist, the primary task is the identification of people who are: interested; knowledgeable; open; connected to an important stakeholder constituency, credible; teachable; and available for interaction throughout the evaluation process, as far as possible. The checklist adds the caveat: “These judgements [choices of possible users] are necessarily subjective and negotiable.” (UFE Checklist, p. 2)

The selection of PIUs is part art, part strategy, and part intuition by the evaluator and the PIUs themselves. The identification of the PIUs is explored among the staff, the evaluator, and the mentor. A reality is that this selection happens in tandem with Step 1, Step 2, and Step 5. In Step 1 as the project staff, or other users who may not be project staff, will become aware of the steps and will express readiness to take on UFE. In Step 2, the evaluator becomes more keenly aware of the facilitation role she or he has to assume. In Step 5 possible uses are contemplated. The overlapping nature of UFE steps and the roles of individuals during the UFE process are illustrated in the experience of participants involved in the LIRNEasia case study:

Given that LIRNEasia was looking at a way to enable fundraising for CPRsouth and also to use the evaluation to help it to assess its most valuable contributions and strengthening them, it was determined that a senior decision maker would be an ideal Primary Intended User (PIU). The CEO of LIRNEasia and originator of CPRsouth was approached and he readily agreed. However, as key management decisions were taken by the nine-member Board of CPRsouth, he wanted the Board to also be part of the PIU configuration. Finally, in terms of the implementation of recommendations stemming from the evaluation — it was decided that

project managers would need to be involved. . . . This three-level User identification did not diffuse the User category and helped to retain a clear focus for the topics to be covered in the evaluation.

Choosing enthusiastic and committed PIUs is important to the UFE process as is an ability of the participants to work with overlapping and iterative steps.

## Skill Sets

There are a number of skill sets that are valuable for PIUs to possess:

- Knowledgeable about the organization, project, and context;
- Strong interpersonal skills;
- Evaluation experience and/or knowledge of research, or critical thinking ability;
- Basic comprehension and understanding of UFE;
- A degree of legitimacy amongst key stakeholders as well as an ability to help make things happen; and
- Being in a position to act on and make decisions based on the evaluation.

While it is unlikely that any one individual will have all these attributes, these attributes may exist within a small number of potential PIU candidates. The work experience of a candidate, his or her education and management skills as well as his or her commitment to the UFE project are all elements that contribute to the suitability of PIU candidates as is illustrated in this example from the ISIF case study:

The UFE process requires that there should be a specific person or group as PIU(s). However, discussions with the team confirmed that APNIC functioned in a collegial management style and the APNIC DG would be the strategic link to the rest of the Board. A very important PIU was

the Marketing Manager as she would be directly responsible for crafting the fund raising and marketing strategy. She also had a background in market research and therefore had evaluative skills that included: how to develop key questions, linking the questions, determining the sample as well as critical thinking skills so necessary for analysis and interpretation in evaluations. The UFE project evaluator's previous experience had only been as a recipient of external evaluation and the Marketing Manager's skills proved to be very valuable as the UFE process moved through the 12 steps. Initially, the UFE researcher had expected to take full responsibility of the uses and findings, considering it to be her 'job' job, but a discussion on why PIUs need to be different from the UFE evaluator helped to include the two PIUs, one of who (the DG) was at a very senior level. The fact that these users would be responsible to translate the study to use was an important breakthrough in the UFE understanding and process.

Some additional considerations are the positive attitudes of PIUs that are equally important to contributing to the success of the evaluation. These positive attitudes include:

- Commitment, dedication, and engagement;
- Openness to critical reflection, learning, and dialogue;
- Willingness to gain a new outlook on evaluation; and
- Willingness to help make program and/or organizational environments more conducive to achieving desired change.

While it can be difficult to shape attitudes, the evaluator and mentor can actively seek them in candidates and emphasize their importance. Attitudes can also be strengthened as the UFE process progresses, as occurred in the PANACeA case study:

The PIUs committed themselves to, and owned the process. Through their involvement a sense of ownership was strengthened gradually. The determination of "whether we like it or not, since we committed

ourselves to it, we take the ownership” also was a contributing factor to the achievements.

The PIU identification approach itself needs to be transparent, inclusive, multi-level, and participatory. The selection of PIUs is a very critical choice as UFE gives them much decision making power over the evaluation. The qualities and importance of the PIU(s) in the UFE process was underlined when the first candidate for a PIU in the SIRCA I case study had to be replaced with a new PIU:

When SIRCA I stakeholders and the evaluator were ready, the Primary Intended User (PIU) was identified. The choice of PIU was based on her knowledge of the organization, her commitment to the evaluation, and her decision-making power to carry out recommendations. However, this first PIU was transferred soon after her identification and initial orientation to another department within the same School. The one who subsequently filled the position as Project Manager of SIRCA I also became the PIU and she inherited the responsibility left by the previous Manager. To her credit, the new PIU took time to understand her job in SIRCA I, the areas which needed focus for evaluation, and the implications of being PIU. The evaluator who had come in much earlier in the process and had been placed in SIRCA I, played a facilitative role in the preparatory process of the PIU. While this was happening the evaluator was in constant consultation with the mentor. . . . This analysis confirmed that the primary intended user (Project Manager) represented the major interests of the management, which was an important stakeholder.

The selection process inevitably needs to respond to internal organizational dynamics, especially with large programs that already have established governance systems. This fine-tuning places attention to the project’s context and raises questions such as: “Is engagement possible?”; “What training and support is needed?” and “What processes are needed to deal with organizational cultures and structures that are top-down?”.



While UFE assumes a single user or a small team of users, the composition will vary depending with the project and nature of the organization. Large, network projects may require multi-level representation from different types of individuals who provide senior guidance, approval of results, and other management decisions. The size of the PIU group matters and a degree of balance is important: a large group requires significant support, communication, and regular monitoring of the members' ability to stay on top of the tasks, which may be unrealistic. There will always be a number of other stakeholders who will be interested in the evaluation's findings, but they are not involved to the same extent, nor do they take responsibility in the same way as PIUs do. The PANACeA project's evaluation report noted the importance of considering the broader effects of a UFE evaluation when choosing PIUs:

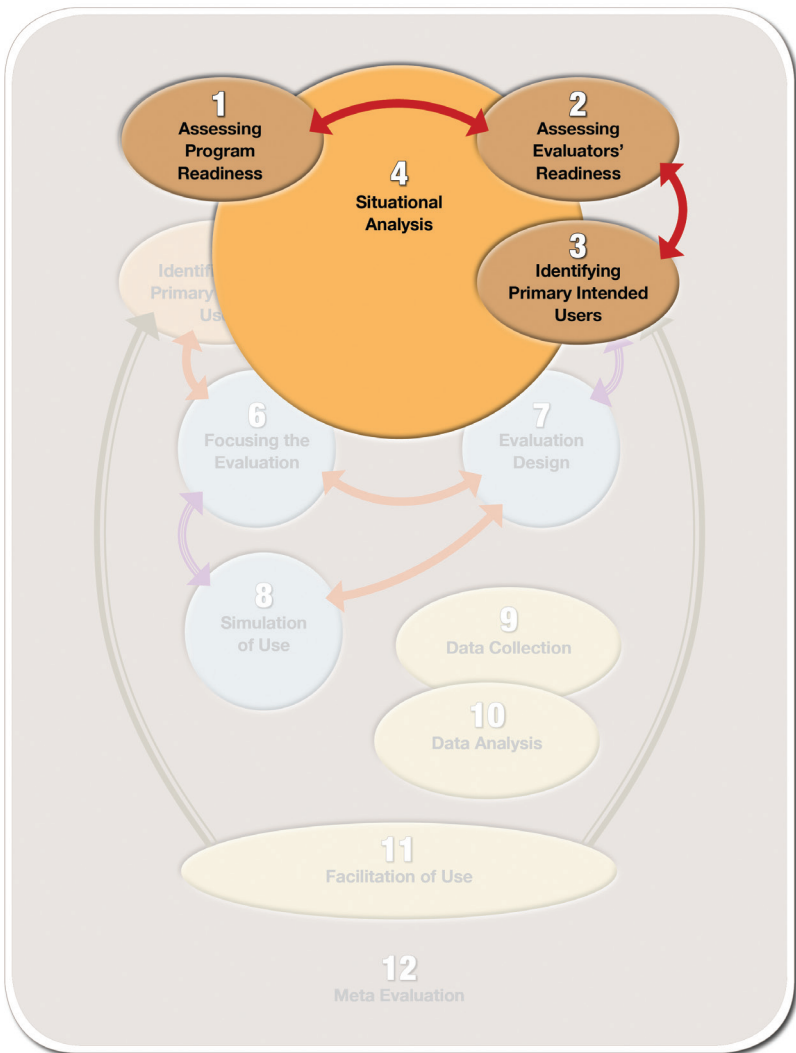
Through initial briefings PANACeA was aware that UFE generally recommends a focus on one Primary Intended User (PIU) or a small team, however this was not convincing for the Network members. They did not want any of the Network members to feel that he or she was left out of from the evaluation process and outcome. Hence PANACeA decided that: "all of these [25] members are the ones who hold very important stakes in this evaluation because these are people who are responsible for executing the functions of the PANACeA Network."

The actual number of PIUs is less important than the adherence to their must-have qualities. A large number, however, has practical limitations in terms of communication and coordination, especially if they are spread across a wide network. The PIU(s) must possess a variety of qualities. One might envision those qualities as being on a continuum and requiring individuals who are: interested; knowledgeable; open; teachable; credible; connected to key constituencies; and who are available to participate in every step of the process; and, most important, are willing and able to take ownership of the results.

### Step 3 Summary

The selection of PIUs is part art, part strategy, and part intuition by the evaluator and the PIUs themselves. The PIU identification approach itself needs to be transparent, inclusive, multi-level, and participatory. The desirable attributes of PIUs include that they are: committed, dedicated, engaged, open to learning and dialogue, and keen to gain a new outlook on evaluation. It is important to pay attention to the context and to ask questions such as: “Is engagement possible?”; “What training is needed?”; “How spread out are the PIUs?”; and “How to deal with organizational cultures and structures that are top-down?”.

## Step 4 Situational Analysis



**E**valuation use is people and context dependent. Use is likely to be enhanced when the evaluation takes into account and is adapted to specific situational and organizational factors.

The primary tasks for Step 4 include a review of prior evaluation experiences, an examination of possible barriers or resistance to process and use, as well as considerations of enabling factors that can facilitate use. An important task is the review and confirmation that resources are available for the evaluation. The timing is also important to explore, especially as deadlines and time-sensitive decisions will influence the orientation of the evaluation. Situational analysis also involves a review of the political, social, and economic context for the evaluation. A stakeholder analysis to double-check that PIUs are representative of the interested parties is also important. The diagram summarizing the UFE steps shows Step 4 as a frame that overlaps Step 1 and Step 2, while it encompasses Step 3 and Step 5. This illustration emphasizes how Situational Analysis is part and parcel of these early steps, and requires iterative attention.

### **Favourable Factors for a UFE Approach**

#### ***Leadership willing to test drive a new approach***

The leadership is generally willing and ready to invest time and resources, especially if there is an early understanding of UFE. A favourable factor is a project team that is open to evaluation, willing to be involved, and supportive of experimenting with a new approach. In other words, it is important to have an organization that will be willing to take responsibility for the process, with PIUs that are willing and able to invest the necessary time. Ideally, the consensus within the project should be that there is a strategic need for the evaluation and that the findings will be used for decision making. Research organizations tend to be predisposed positively towards UFE as they understand the value of evidence in analysis. As with other participatory approaches, this can very difficult to

know in advance. Often leaders and senior managers may express verbal support and appear to be open and committed. However, as the reality of meaningful participation and the necessary letting go stage approaches, resistance may grow.

### *Timeliness*

The evaluation's timing is important. It will need to accommodate the deadlines and timing of decisions along a project cycle. It is important to verify that the designated human and financial resources are made available in a timely manner. This is a challenge in itself as often the volume of work required is under estimated. It is common for budget constraints to also dictate a more targeted focus on evaluation areas, and around themes where data is available and can be collected in a cost effective manner. The ISIF project, for example, found it necessary to accommodate additional costs that had not been originally planned for:

It is also important for the organization to be 'open' to evaluation, to be willing to think critically, to support the UFE researcher and to involve other staff as and when the UFE work progresses. For example, the on-line survey details were worked out with the help of the Publications and Marketing team of APNIC that supported ISIF. The organization also allotted money and human resources to the UFE evaluator in response to the evaluation 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 it. Within the Asia region, such cultural behavior is common.

It is helpful to keep in mind that the culture, both societal and organizational, that a project's evaluation operates within may have an influence on how decisions regarding unexpected developments in a UFE evaluation are handled.

## 4 Factors Unfavourable to UFE

Step 4 provides an opportunity to verify whether some of the limitations can be overcome. The UFE evaluator will have already encountered some of these barriers during the Readiness Assessment in Step 1. However, some of these constraints may emerge anytime during the UFE process, such as the departure of staff or assigned evaluators. Common unfavourable factors to be aware of include the following four points:

### ***Funders and senior stakeholders are unable or unwilling to give up control over an evaluation***

Some funding agencies attempting to use UFE may insist that the focus be mainly on upward accountability, which in turn does not normally leave room for a focus on other uses, users, or forms of accountability (i.e., downward to intended beneficiaries and horizontally, to peers). In other words, the funder might state it is using UFE, while there might not be an adequate understanding of these implications in terms of wider participation and lessening their own control over the evaluation. For instance, when the PIU that is chosen is not from within the funding organization, the organization may feel a loss of control over purpose of the evaluation if the uses that emerge do not align with its expectations or priorities.

### ***Organizational cultures***

Most organizations are hierarchical and consequently some organizations are unwilling to delegate control of the evaluation to users who are not part of management. An organization's limited exposure to evaluation can be remedied, or a traditional view of evaluation as an external imposition that causes stress, can be shifted through awareness of the principles and benefits of UFE. In addition, it is useful to clarify roles, as often the expectation is that all tasks will be delegated to the evaluator.

Another element of organizational culture has to do with having a research tradition. For example, organizations that have done market research are typically well positioned to grasp this approach, relative to others that are strong only in business or implementation, and who might lack a research perspective.

### ***Staff turnover***

Many examples in the literature highlight the challenges that arise with a change in users.<sup>6</sup> A change in the assigned evaluator can also pose a challenge to UFE as was found during the PANACeA project:

PANACeA had to go through a change in the evaluator during the initial steps of the UFE. This meant that the evaluator who was appointed later had to catch up not only with understanding the UFE but also to become familiarized with the steps she had missed. “My interactions with the primary users would have been at an improved status if I was involved from the beginning”, felt the evaluator. It was felt as well that the rigorous nature of the UFE was a challenge for the evaluator. Every step of the UFE was neither a one-person, nor the evaluator’s decision. It had to go through all the primary users to get their responses, with the subsequent compilation/consolidation and feedback for agreement/consensus.

Staff turnover can slowdown the evaluation process as it affects both relationships within the team and knowledge transfer. There can be an ongoing effect from the turnover through the stages if rebuilding of relationships within the team does not receive proper care and attention.

### ***Resource and time constraints***

While PIUs may have committed to take on additional roles and direct involvement, Step 4 reminds us how important it is to confirm this time commitment as well as the financial resources.

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6. Franke, T. M., Christie, C. A., & Parra, M. T. (2003). Transforming a utilization focused evaluation (UFE) gone awry: A case of intended use by unintended users. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 29, 13–21.

The PANACeA case study's example, as noted in its *Evaluation Report* (p. 12), emphasizes the importance of the strategic application of both time and resources to an evaluation:

The evaluator and the PIUs together assessed the situational factors that would affect evaluation process and usage of evaluation findings. This situational analysis (Step Four) helped in identifying potential barriers and also the favourable factors. PANACeA ensured availability of enough material and monetary resources to carry out and support this evaluation. PANACeA and its members had earlier experience in formative evaluation but for the first time PANACeA as a program was going for an evaluation. However, since the execution got delayed.... "PANACeA adapted to this (potential) barrier by not evaluating all aspects of the network, but focusing itself on some important critical aspects so that evaluation could be managed in the limited time period and its utility could also be enhanced."

Completing the UFE steps in time is a challenge as there are many tasks to complete. With large decentralized projects, each of these steps gets enlarged as a wider range of stakeholders need to be involved.

Changes in and lack of continuity of funding support will also affect the evaluation focus chosen by the PIUs. In order to secure funding, they will most likely focus on the project dimensions that, in their judgement, will be attractive to potential donors. The down side of this approach is that, to some extent, they no longer view the evaluation for their own use, as their goals are set on pleasing an external party.



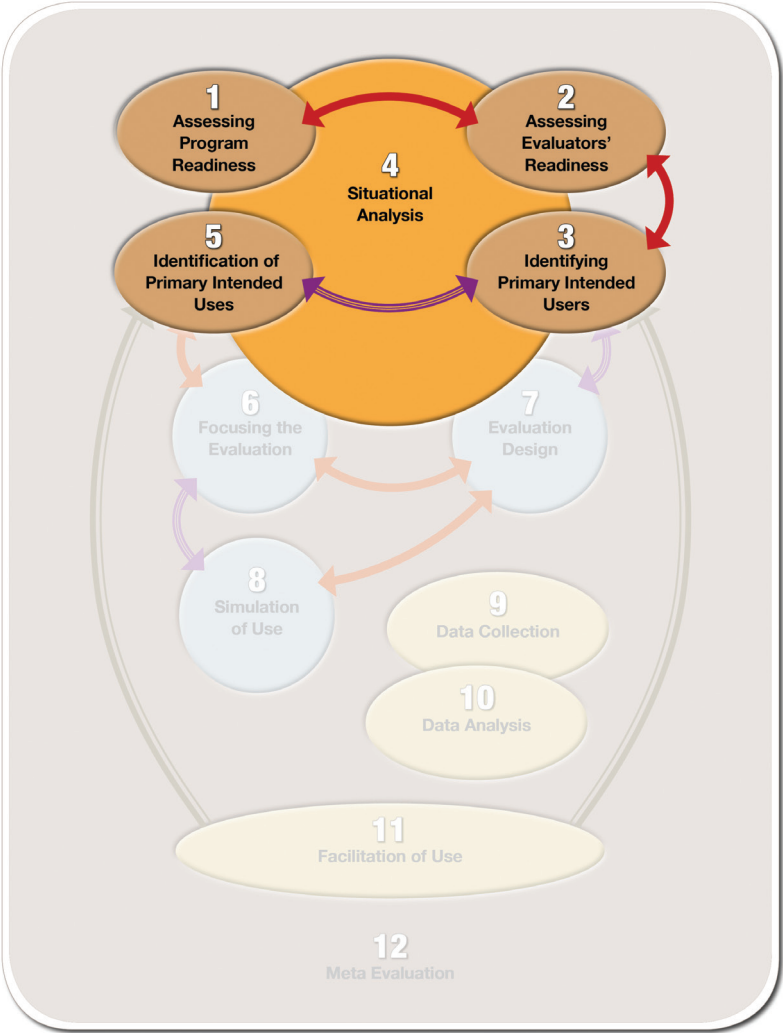
## Step 4 Summary

Among the favourable factors to look for we include a project team that is open to evaluation; willing to involved; and supportive of experimenting with a new approach. This means engaging with partners throughout the evaluation process, ensuring there are the human and financial resources available, and emphasizing the reasons why UFE can enhance utilization. A funder that proposes UFE with the partners that it funds may take what appears to be a hands-off attitude when it agrees that others become the primary users. In doing this, the funder is still engaged, but it is inviting the primary intended users to take ownership over the evaluation.<sup>7</sup> Organizations with a research tradition can be particularly well poised to take on UFE. The evaluation timing is also important, as it will need to accommodate the deadlines and timing of decisions. While ideal evaluation conditions are rarely present, they are a useful point of reference. Among the unfavourable factors we highlight: project funders and managers that are unable or unwilling to give up control over an evaluation; inflexible organizational cultures; staff turnover; and insufficient funding, time, or human resources dedicated to evaluation.

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7. A funder may choose to follow UFE and remain as the primary intended user, though this did not happen in any the projects covered by DECI.

Step 5 Identification of Primary Intended Uses



Intended use by primary intended users is the goal of UFE. A menu of evaluation options is reviewed, screened, and prioritized.

It can be a harder than expected task for Primary Intended Users (PIUs) to settle on their intended uses. This is because Step 5 is about taking control of the purpose of the evaluation, and this means making a radical change in perspective relative to conventional evaluations. Suddenly, the users realize that the evaluation can become a learning opportunity — one that can be shaped to their liking and needs. It is during this Step that many users realize that they have ownership and control of the process.

The evaluator's role is to help the users identify a menu of interests and purposes to help guide their exploration of potential uses:

- Are they charged with making major decisions based on practical programming experience? In such cases, will they benefit from a formative evaluation question to make judgements on project achievements?
- Do they need to adjust and re-design programs based on approaches used during the project and/or based on what emerged through the life of the project? In such cases, they may benefit from a formative evaluation question that emphasizes learning and monitoring.
- If they have authority over administrative procedures and funding allocations, then upward accountability and cost-benefit questions may be a priority.
- For those innovating in complex and dynamic contexts, a more developmental approach to evaluation may be the most relevant.<sup>8</sup>
- For planners and scholars, and some policy makers, there may be value in knowledge generation and theory testing based on trends across various project experiences.

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8. Developmental evaluation refers to evaluations as support to projects or processes of innovation where goals are emergent and dynamic. An example would be processes that set out to develop new models or approaches through action research and experimentation.

Users and evaluators can jointly consider a combination of key evaluation questions. These questions can cover a mixture of evaluation factors including inputs, outcomes, impact, approach and model, process, quality, and cost-effectiveness. The evaluator's role is to facilitate the users' review of these possible directions, and areas of focus, and not to make the decision themselves.<sup>9</sup> While some uses may be evident during this early step, others may emerge during later steps, so it is important for the evaluator to remain flexible.

## The Process

Taking on ownership and control of evaluation means an additional responsibility for PIUs. Not only are they taking on an additional responsibility, but there is also a significant time commitment as they become involved in subsequent steps of UFE. At the same time, the evaluator needs to assure them of the benefits of this new role. These assurances come in two forms. First, the guarantee of relevant findings to inform their future decision making. Second, the exposure to evaluative thinking and practices. In the PANACeA project, uses was found to be a fluid, as opposed to a linear, concept:

PANACeA arrived at the 'Uses' after having considered how the evaluation could contribute to the Network improvement, how it could contribute to making major decisions in the current phase of the Network, and how it could contribute to the process use. It is important to underline that the process required to reach the final Uses was not 'linear' in nature. Rather it was a matter of moving back and forth through other UFE steps: 6<sup>th</sup> Step — Focusing the Evaluation, 8<sup>th</sup> Step — Simulation of Use, and 10<sup>th</sup> Step — Data Analysis. . . . The final primary intended uses formed three broader categories under 'formative' evaluation: (1) Collaboration and Team Network, (2) Capacity Building and (3) Knowledge Management.

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9. Patton (2008, p. 90) warns of possible temptations by evaluators. He notes, for example, that the evaluator may be tempted to become the primary decision maker, and thereby the primary user.

The definition of uses is very dependent on the facilitation provided by the evaluator (ideally with the support of a mentor). This support includes encouraging PIUs to become more specific as they develop KEQs. This process is neither easy, nor linear. It can, in fact, be rather uncomfortable: as one user pointed out, it felt like walking into the domain of donors. As the process becomes real, users gain confidence in the process. Like learning to ride a horse, there comes a moment when they realize that they can actually steer the animal. For instance, if funding conditions change, they are able to change the use focus of the evaluation. The DREAM-IT project was enabled by the evaluator's mentoring to explore the possibilities of the UFE process:

The PIU unequivocally expressed that the patient and expert mentoring was instrumental for learning, recognizing what could work and what could not and thinking creatively about the outcomes of the UFE. It was the process that helped DREAM-IT in several ways: to select the topic for UFE (no matter how long the process became); to have the confidence to change it when the earlier topic could not be used, to choose another one; to appoint a UFE researcher; to analyze the findings, and to produce the checklist.

Helping determine uses requires that the evaluator (and/or mentor) appreciate the context within which staff and other stakeholders work. For the evaluator, scanning the context is not restricted only to Step 4, especially as circumstances will often change, with direct use implications. The LIRNEasia project was enhanced by the UFE process as it was able to specify resources needed for future development while also being able to document its progress over its previous five years:

At CPRsouth's Annual Conference of 2009 and Board Meeting, this proposed UFE evaluation was discussed, and consultations with the triumvirate of PIUs on identification of key issues that needed to be addressed, Key Uses and these discussions helped in the formulation of

Key Evaluation Questions. The situation analysis conducted up to this point, helped in the PIU selection also identified and resolved the issue of resources required for the evaluation. Resources were identified and allocated, and it was agreed that results of this evaluation would be used for both formative improvements, as well as to document results of the past 5 years of the work of CPR*south* — strengthening the organization's ability to enhance its fundraising ability.

The organizational self-awareness inspired by the UFE evaluation can enable evaluation participants to question business as usual approaches and to tackle project needs with greater efficiency.

## The Scope

As users take ownership over the evaluation and as they determine priority uses, it is common for the number of evaluation topics or purposes to be reduced. The evaluator is well positioned to challenge the user to double check that the variety and scope of uses is adequate. Since UFE constitutes a learning process, users may favour a formative focus, especially when there is a further phase to the project where improvements can be made. On the other hand, when projects have been operational for some years, there is often added interest to draw summative conclusions, which could be helpful for strategic goals and funding expansion as was seen in the SIRCA I case study:

When the process started, SIRCA I produced a list of evaluation topics with the expectation that all would be included: selection, mentorship, finance, etc. In fact, when the evaluator hired by the project was given her contract, the whole list of the evaluation areas were part of her Terms of Reference. But then, when the process of UFE started, SIRCA I realized that they had to reduce the scope of the evaluation to key evaluation areas.

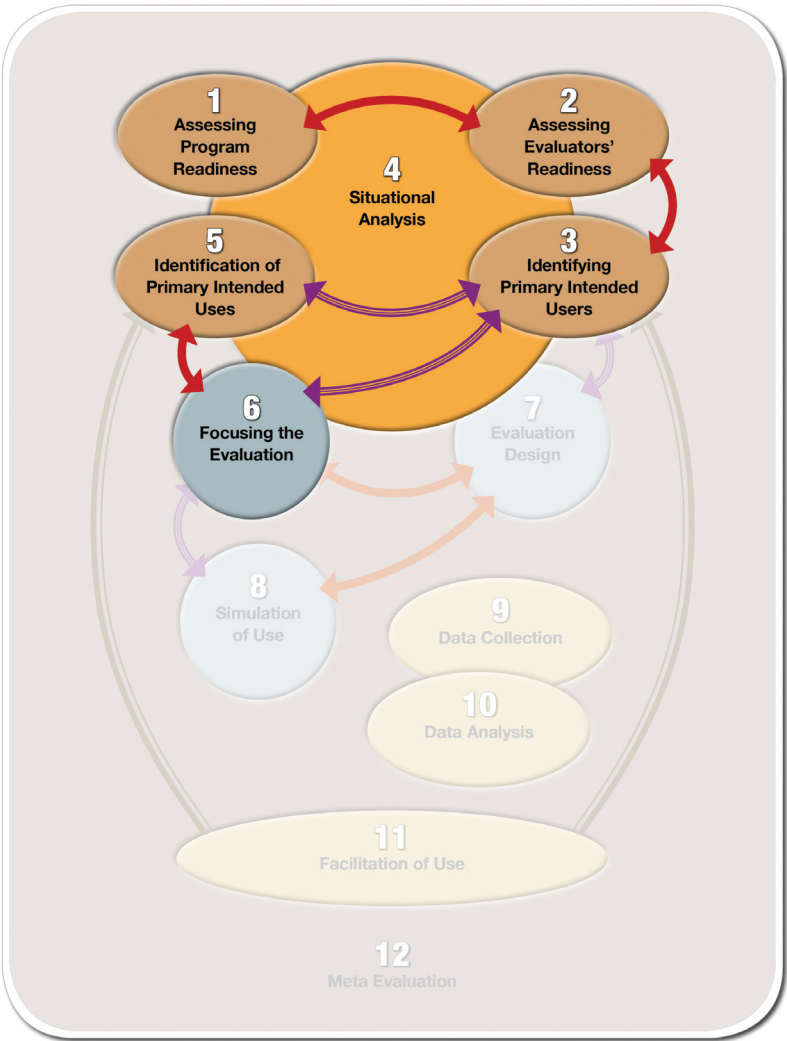
When dealing with umbrella projects, the PIUs will tend to focus on the process. For example, in projects that offer competitive grants, PIUs might focus the evaluation on the management of the grant giving procedure. This formative approach is directly relevant to the decisions managers face with regards to future calls for proposals, selection criteria, and communication with applicants. The uses are concrete and their relevance immediate.

The very process of identifying uses and the outcomes, in the form of KEQs, constitutes one of the most strategic moments of UFE. In subsequent UFE Steps, this selection gets further modified through an iterative process.

## Step 5 Summary

Helping determine uses requires that the evaluator appreciate the context within which the project stakeholders work. For the evaluator, scanning the context is not restricted only to Step 4, especially as circumstances will often change, with direct use implications. Step 4 is about taking control of the purpose of the evaluation, and this means the PIUs often experience a radical change in perspective relative to conventional evaluations. Suddenly, PIUs realize that the evaluation can become a learning opportunity — one that they can help shape to their liking and needs. We liken this to learning to ride a horse: there comes a moment when one realizes that one can actually steer the animal.

Step 6 Focusing the Evaluation





The purpose of this step is to focus the intended uses of the evaluation by helping users revise and confirm them. As with any research, fine-tuning key evaluation questions (KEQs) turns out to be harder than expected, and is a pillar of UFE.

Patton (2008, p. 49) offers this advice for a UFE evaluation “One way to facilitate a program’s readiness for evaluation is to take primary intended users through a process of generating meaningful evaluation questions. . . . Taking them through the process of formulating questions and determining priorities is aimed at engendering their commitment to data-base evaluation and use.”

During Step 6, the primary intended users’ transition from uses (Step 5) to a carefully formulated set of evaluation questions referred to as KEQs.<sup>10</sup> As with any research question, the clearer their wording, the easier it is to identify the data that is needed and the different methods to gather it (Step 7). Getting the wording right can take more time than expected, especially as clarity and brevity emerge usually from several iterations in thinking and reflecting. We emphasize that this process is not linear. This step in particular is closely linked with Step 7, Evaluation Design, and Step 8, Simulation, and refers back to Step 4 and Step 5.

## From Uses to Evaluation Areas

The first task is to define evaluation areas or themes. While these will be based on uses, they may also reflect major project components. Their selection is also influenced by the stage of development of project components. The project’s objectives and

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10. This term was proposed by Jess Dart in 2009; and several of the guidelines included in this section are adapted from her work (and are included in some of the UFE modules). Further information can be found at: Dart, J. (2009). Key evaluation questions. A presentation made during the PANAsia partners meeting IDRC, June 9–12, Penang, Malaysia. Visit <http://evaluationinpractice.files.wordpress.com/2008/01/keyquestionschoices.pdf>.

its theory of change<sup>11</sup> are also important reference points. For large projects that support smaller initiatives, there are often choices between high-level and low-level focuses — such as between the overall coordination of the project versus the impact of the smaller elements as seen in the following instances from the PANACeA and the LIRNEasia case studies. The ability to objectively scrutinize the component parts of an organization's functions and needs is critical to create clear objectives:

Moving on to the next step (Step Six) of *'Focusing Evaluation'*, the high priority questions/Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) were derived from the primary intended uses by the PIUs. The KEQs were put into two broader categories of Collaboration & Team Work and Knowledge Management & Learning.

LIRNEasia drew its evaluation questions from its Outcome Mapping based Results Framework — which included a combination of 'process' and 'outcome' indicators.

It is helpful to begin with a few broad areas of inquiry and then to develop more specific questions within each one. It is important not to be fooled by an early success, as users may discover additional KEQs later on in the process that they will want to include. The process is designed to be flexible to such changes and to be adaptable along the way.

The uses developed in Step 5 by different users will also point to the purposes of the evaluation. For instance, PIUs charged with making major decisions may favour an overall summative review (i.e., a judgement of achievement). Program administrators may be interested in a formative focus that emphasizes learning; while other managers may be more interested in accountability issues. Some researchers will be keen on innovation and theory generation and will favour a more open, developmental approach

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11. The notion of a theory of change refers to describing the expected trajectory of change, in terms of what activities will likely lead to what outcomes.

to evaluation.<sup>12</sup> When faced with a team of PIUs with different roles in the organization and project, the evaluator, as was noted in the SIRCA I *Evaluation Report*, (2010), needs to accommodate a range of uses and purposes. The SIRCA I key evaluation questions were:

1. To what extent did the Grant Review Committee select the most appropriate candidates for the SIRCA I grants, given the time and resources that were available to them?
2. To what extent did the Mentorship Programme facilitate learning and/or collaboration between emerging and established researchers?
3. To what extent did the Workshops & Conferences facilitate the publication and dissemination of research findings?

### From Evaluation Areas to Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs)

A useful guide to move beyond broad areas of inquiry is to provide PIUs with a short list of categories of KEQs to consider. Do they wish to look into inputs, outcomes, impacts, approach or models, process or quality issues?<sup>13</sup> It is important to let them work on drafting a few examples of questions. Once they have a first set, PIUs will welcome assistance in rewording them, as illustrated by the following generic examples:

- **Input:** To what extent did the implementers receive adequate and timely resources to carry out the activities?
- **Impact:** To what extent did the desired practice changes lead to improvement in X, Y, and Z (measurable changes in state)?

12. We note that these are not contrasted, as a developmental approach focuses on innovation.

13. In the fourth edition of Patton's UFE book, Menu 8.1 provides 79 options for focusing evaluations that readers may want to refer to (pp. 302–305).

- **Outcome:** To what extent did participating (nurses) change their practices around (patient care)?
- **Approach/Model Questions:** How did our model of capacity building compare with a best practice?
- **Process:** To what extent were partners adequately engaged during the project process?
- **Quality:** What was the quality of the research or research output?
- **Cost effectiveness:** What was the cost-benefit of the intervention?

The three key evaluation questions in the ISIF case study were:

1. How effective was the ISIF approach/methodology to encourage innovative projects to apply?
2. How effective were ISIF mentoring practices and administrative support during the implementation process?
3. What were the lessons learned from this investment? What worked and what did not work? Why?

While our experience suggests that two to four KEQs is a good number of questions to begin with, there is no strict rule on the number. What becomes a limiting factor in practice is the realization, during subsequent steps, about the level of effort required to fulfill each of them, both in terms of individual time commitments and resources available. The tendency, then, is to subsequently reduce the breadth of the evaluation and focus on a narrower set of KEQs. It is helpful, therefore, to remain both focused and selective while creating KEQs that reflect essential needs, such as those chosen by the CPR*south* case study example:

The choice of Key Evaluation Questions was challenging as a very wide range of possible questions could have been selected. The process used to help narrow the choice and keep it most relevant started

with identifying the primary objectives of CPR*south* and the results framework that it set for itself. This results framework had been formulated using Outcome Mapping, and included key process related as well as outcome related results. For each of the two main Outcomes to be attained by CPR*south*, two main evaluation questions were posed that related to a combination of formative and summative aspects of the results.

The following guidelines will help improve KEQs selection:<sup>14</sup>

- Remain on target: This will guide you through the evaluation;
- Be broad: This enables the KEQ to be broken down. Remember KEQs are not the same as a survey question;
- Be specific with your data: It can be both qualitative and/quantitative and can be brought to bear on your KEQs;
- Remember: KEQs are open questions. You do not just answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to them;
- Keep in mind: KEQs are meaningful for those developing the plan;
- Results: KEQs lead to useful and credible evaluation; and
- Be focused: Two to four KEQs are enough.

The box below provides an outline of the Results Framework and Key Evaluation Questions posed by CPR*south*'s PIUs for this evaluation.

**Objective 1.** To stimulate ICT Policy research for policy impact

LEVEL 1 RESULT: CPR*south* attracts the attention of ICT policy and regulation scholars throughout the South.

LEVEL 2 RESULT: CPR*south* community members engage in policy processes. Also, the indicators of connectivity within the scholarly network improve significantly and members' institutions support network.

14. Based on inputs from Jess Dart, 2009.

**Objective 2.** Young scholars are supported to engage in ICT policy research

LEVEL 1 RESULT: A keen interest shown by young scholars to attend tutorials shown by increasing demand.

LEVEL 2 RESULT: Universities and regional entities commit resources to support CPR*south*.

**Key Evaluation Questions Framed for the Evaluation:**

1. Status of the application process? Is the number of applications for CPR*south* increasing?
2. Is there an increase in the overall quality of the papers presented?
3. Have the CPR*south* members engaged in the policy process since becoming a member of the CPR*south* community?
4. To what extent has CPR*south* influenced the community members' current work?

Source: LIRNE*asia* Case Study

There will be cases where the initial focus cannot be maintained due to unforeseen project implementation difficulties. In such situations, the evaluator needs to assist the primary intended users in a review of earlier decisions and assumptions. This is the reason why our diagram emphasizes the non-linear nature of UFE steps. Two Sub-projects within the DREAM-IT case study experienced difficulties as they experienced delays in meeting their goals, while other Sub-projects were on time. All of the Sub-projects' participants had attended a UFE capacity building workshop in April of 2011 where UFE basic concepts such as the development of KEQs was discussed. Previous to the workshop there had been discussions via Skype with the DREAM-IT team and after the workshop discussions were held with the Sub-project team and the UFE Facilitator. Despite this support, it became necessary for Sub-project #1 to reject its original UFE research topic at a time when two thirds of the allotted timeline for the project was over. Rejection

of the research topic was, as noted in the DREAM-IT case study, “unusual.” As the DREAM-IT case study Evaluation Report noted, the rejection likely occurred for a variety of reasons: “understanding of the meaning of UFE was vague”; “selection of sub-project #1 was based on wrong assumptions such as UFE Facilitator’s familiarity with the sub-project”; and that there was an issue with the “presence of research capacity within the sub-project staff” as well as with “a timeline that would parallel UFE process.” Positive results came from the two delayed sub-projects:

This led to a discussion with Board Members that it would be very useful, being an umbrella project, to analyze what were the reasons for some projects to perform better than others. By reviewing a selection of delayed and on-time sub-projects, DREAM-IT hoped to use findings to learn how to manage projects better so that objectives could be achieved. The UFE research topic was revised accordingly. (Step 4 again and 5)

Among the findings of this review it was found that the two delayed projects were tackling more innovative and non-traditional projects. The projects were, in effect, exploring new ground. The delays were the result of the exploratory and innovative qualities of the Sub-projects. This brought new understanding to the DREAM-IT team.

## **Adjusting and Re-adjusting**

As KEQs are formulated PIUs will shift into a learning mode. They will become researchers in charge of their research. In doing so, the PIUs discover the depth and breadth of their choices. Their first attempts may reveal problems, such as the fact that a project component is delayed, which in turn calls into question the merit of pursuing a review of impact, as initially hoped for.

As projects evolve and as the context changes (when revisiting Step 4), some PIUs may wish to shift away from the original uses and KEQs to address new challenges that emerge. For example,

this switch may happen when funding circumstances change and project managers decide to focus their energies on promoting the project with other organizations. The ISIF case study provides an example of this:

By early 2010, it was apparent that IDRC support and other funding for the small grants was itself in question and there was great uncertainty about whether the ICT for development project itself would be around when ISIF completed the first round and started the second round of grants. It became clear that ISIF would have to raise funds for small grants in order to continue their work and that would mean approaching donors other than those currently supporting the program. For this reason, the focus of UFE moved to assessing the Secretariat that in turn would provide grist for a resource mobilization strategy and communication campaign. Further, as the ISIF secretariat had been supported from a separate grant from IDRC and with an expected lack of funding for even the small grants; it became apparent that ISIF would need to communicate what value they brought as a secretariat to the program. Only then would a funder be willing to support both a Secretariat along with the small grants.

Refining and refocusing the evaluation will continue through subsequent steps. The one guideline that never fails to be useful is to always check whether the KEQs express the uses that the users identified. Getting these questions right is central to UFE, which may mean that a number of iterations are required.

This step includes an important task: To double check that the intended uses of answers to the key evaluation questions are clear and that they belong inside the program objective. The table below can help structure this review.<sup>15</sup>

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15. This table was developed by Joaquin Navas and is part of a UFE module available at: <http://evaluationinpractice.wordpress.com/deci-research/step-by-step-modules/>.



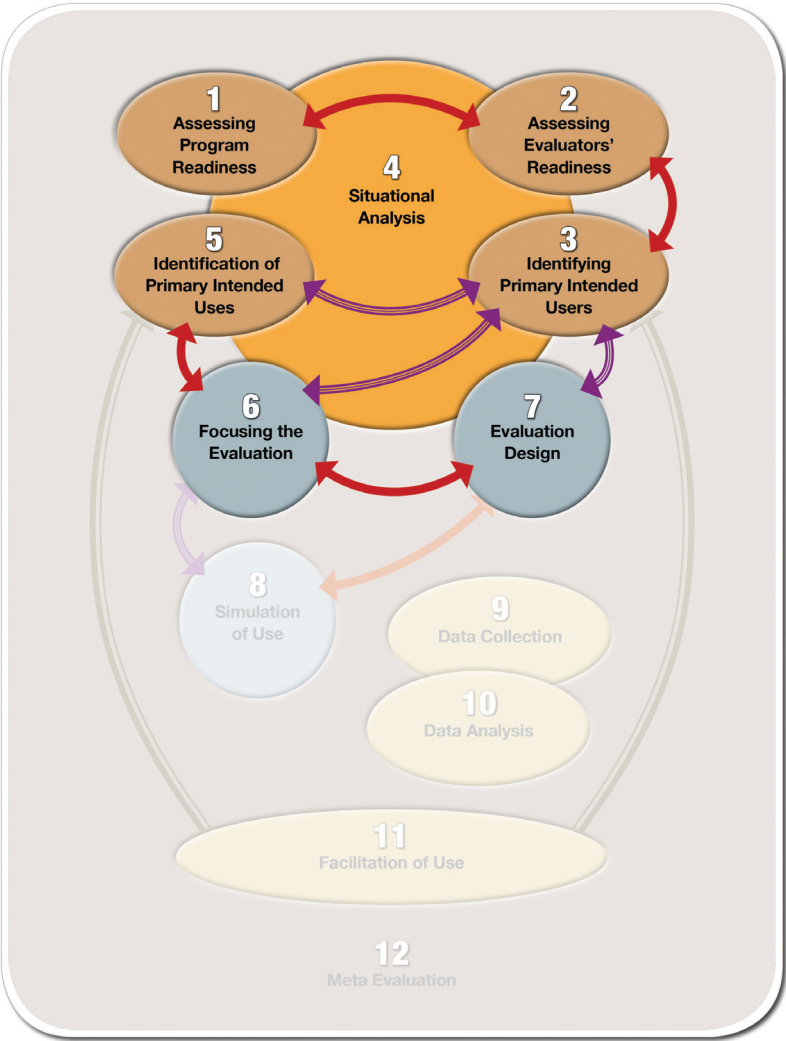
| Key evaluation question | Related primary intended use | KEQ category (*) | Desired KEQ features (**) | Related to specific program objective |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|                         |                              |                  |                           |                                       |
|                         |                              |                  |                           |                                       |
|                         |                              |                  |                           |                                       |

- (\*) Input/Resources; Impact; Outcomes; Approach/Model; Process; Quality; Cost-effectiveness
- (\*\*) Specific; Broad; Open; Meaningful; Leading to credible, useful evaluation; Related data can be realistically obtained

Step 6 Summary

During Step 6 the primary intended users transition from uses to a carefully formulated set of KEQs. As with any research question, the clearer the wording, the easier it is to identify the data that is needed and the different methods to gather it. An initial task is to define evaluation areas, or themes. Their selection is also influenced by the stage of development of project components. The project’s objectives and its theory of change are also reference points. The uses developed in Step 5 will also point to the purposes of the evaluation. When faced with a team of PIUs with different roles in the organization and project, the evaluator needs to accommodate a range of uses and purposes. As projects evolve and as the context changes some PIUs may wish to shift away from the original uses and consider new key evaluation questions to address emerging challenges. A number of guidelines are provided to help improve KEQs.

Step 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 by the evaluator.

UFE is a framework that is methodologically neutral in that it can encompass a variety of evaluation methods. The methods and data collection tools are chosen on the basis of the KEQs that were defined during Step 6. In other words, this design feature is not unique to UFE. What is unique is that the choice of methods is made in consultation with the users, who will by now be well aware of the extent to which their evaluation budget will cover the different data collection methods that can be included. In the SIRCA I case study a mixture of methods was found to be most effective:

The PIU worked with the evaluator to make a feasible 'Evaluation Design' with relevant survey questions (*Step 7*). A mixed method approach was employed to collect quantitative and qualitative data.

This step is a quality control one as well, where the evaluator confirms that the results to be obtained by the different data collection methods will be credible in terms of the science as well as in the eyes of the PIUs. In the ISIF case study, a survey was modified to capture various types of information found in traditional, more quantitative, and non-traditional, more qualitative, data sources:

To find answers for each question, the ISIF Secretariat used two major evaluation tools to support the evaluation plan. Both activities were designed in house, with support from relevant departments. An online survey was designed 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 and included questions about: the speed and ease of the application process, the feedback turnaround from ISIF secretariat, and the use of various capacity building resources provided by the secretariat in comparison with other grant seeking applications.

Additional questions were added to the survey to: 1) define which application process the survey participant is referring to; 2) measure level of satisfaction with the application process by adding qualifying questions; 3) request qualitative documentation such as case studies, stories, examples, letters of reference, background; 4) find out how ISIF funding support has impacted their own work, relationships with other organizations and with clients/beneficiaries.

The participation by PIUs in the design has two advantages. First, those with previous research experience can build on their skills, plus they gain a sense of control over specifics of the data collection process. In this approach to the process, evaluation is demystified. Second, the assurance that the methods used will be practical, cost-effective, and ethical. This is a joint decision. In the DREAM-IT case study the inclusion of an on track and a delayed project created a very realistic picture of the evaluation and its context:

The UFE process (Steps 6 and 7) of focusing the evaluation and developing the research design was well underway after the 'new' UFE research area was confirmed and the UFE researcher was appointed. Key questions were discussed and revised with the help of the UFE researcher and inputs from the Board, and the PIUs. Although it was initially decided to include one 'on track' and one 'not on track or delayed' project, the Board added one more project to each category to strengthen the sample size and research design. A qualitative evaluation design included interviews with key stakeholders on the Board and at sub-project levels, as well as focus group discussions.

Some useful tips for evaluation design:

- Utilize more than one method for each KEQ;
- Be ready to defend your choice;
- Consider sequencing, for example, beginning with semi-structured interviews (for scoping), then a survey (for breadth) that is followed by select focus groups (for depth);
- Vary your methodology, for example, consider a dominant and a supplementary combination, where some methods become the main anchors for data collection with others are added selectively;<sup>16</sup> and
- Adhere to professional standards for evaluation (utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy).

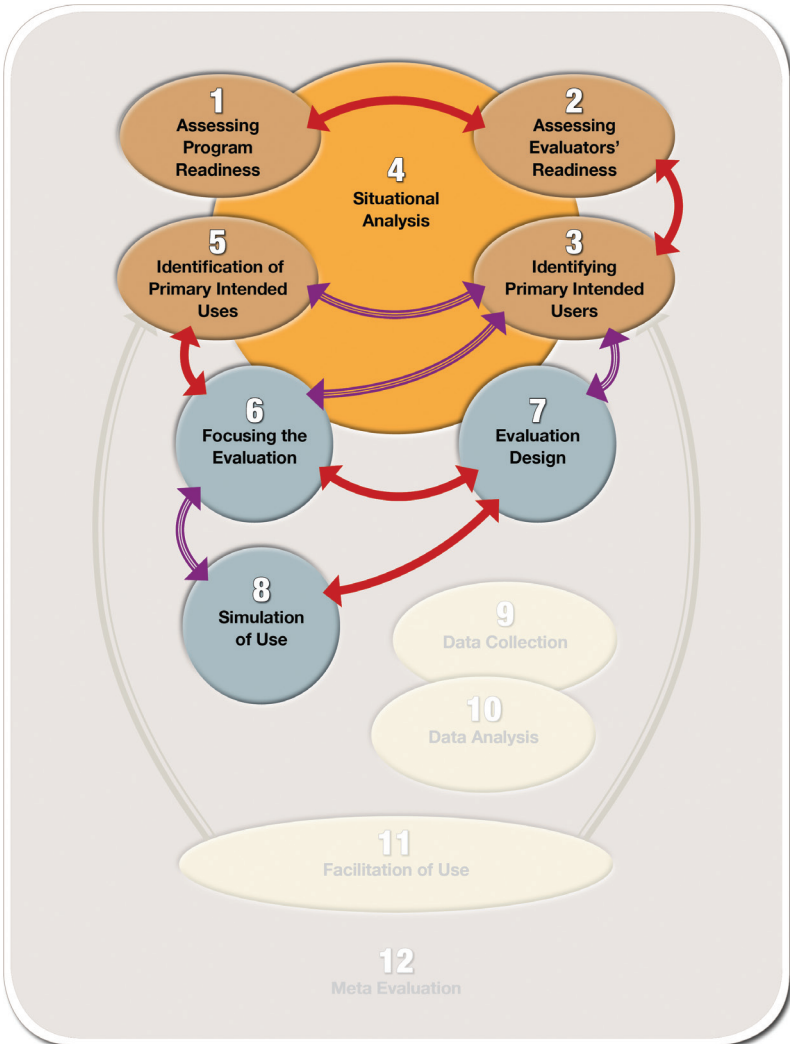
### Step 7 Summary

UFE is a methodologically neutral framework that can encompass a variety of evaluation methods that are chosen on the basis of KEQs. What is critical is that the choice of methods is made in consultation with the users. This has two main advantages. First, those with previous research experience can build on their skills and they gain a sense of control over specifics of the data collection process. Second, there is the assurance that the methods used will be practical, cost-effective, and ethical. Step 7 involves quality control where adherence to the professional standards for evaluation is assured (utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy).

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16. Adapted from Jess Dart, 2009.

## Step 8 Simulation of Use



**B**efore data are collected, a simulation of potential use is done with fabricated findings to verify that the expected data will lead to usable findings.

Simulation is about simulating the data that is expected to be generated, as opposed to piloting the instruments. By developing simulated findings based on the proposed data collection tools, PIUs are able to verify whether there is a need to revise KEQs, or the proposed methods. Participants will also be able to confirm that the findings are in line with the data needed to answer the questions, which in turn should foster their utilization as was found in the SIRCA I case study's situation:

To ensure that the survey questions yielded useful findings, the evaluator and the PIU conducted a 'Simulation of Use' and reviewed the simulated answers to every question for the different groups of respondents (*Step 8*). This simulation exercise was extremely helpful in discarding irrelevant, biased, or redundant questions, thereby considerably shortening but increasing the quality of the questionnaires.

This test-driving step may mean going through several of the earlier steps again. While this review may feel as if it will slow down the process, the simulation of use is a worthy investment in time and resources. One can think about it as a quality control measure to fine-tune the evaluation as was the case in the PANACeA case study:

In the haste to catch up with time, 'Simulation' (Step 8) was skipped and the process moved onto 'Data Collection' (Step Nine), and PANACeA had to revert back to it. In the end, the time spent on 'Simulation' helped the evaluator and PIUs to reflect, correct and sharpen the data collection tool.

The simulation steps can also become a concrete opportunity to involve PIUs who may have had limited engagement in earlier steps. In the LIRNEasia case study, in the following first example,

hypothetical results helped to generate new questions that needed to be considered. In the second example, the ISIF case study, a simulation helped to create a definitive survey format. In both instances input from PIUs gave more depth to the final format of findings and feedback mechanisms:

Prior to data collection, a listing was made of all data sources available and to be collected to address the Key Evaluation Questions. From these data sources, a list of indicators was constructed that would be used in the analysis, and Tables and Figures shells were constructed that would be used in the evaluation report. These shell tables were then filled in with hypothetical results and implications of the results discussed with the main PIU for his strategic assessment of the usefulness of the findings. During this meeting, some additional questions were identified that should be looked into — in order to assist in drawing better conclusions and to lead to clearer ‘Use’ implications (e.g., visual mapping of network, capacity building role and activities of CPR*south*).

The simulation (Step Eight) was conducted soon after the design of the online survey was finalized. The simulation was conducted with support from the Steering Committee and Grants Evaluation Committee members, and the feedback collected was used to finalize the design of the survey questions and format. The PIUs involvement in the UFE process was very useful because they contributed actively as the data emerged.

This step can help PIUs reflect on the actual uses, and reframe them if the simulated findings turn out to be less relevant than expected as occurred in the DREAM-IT case study:

The Simulation Step (Step Eight) was also very useful. The project used a worst case and best-case scenario. As a result questions related to policy influence and sustainability were added to enhance subsequent use.

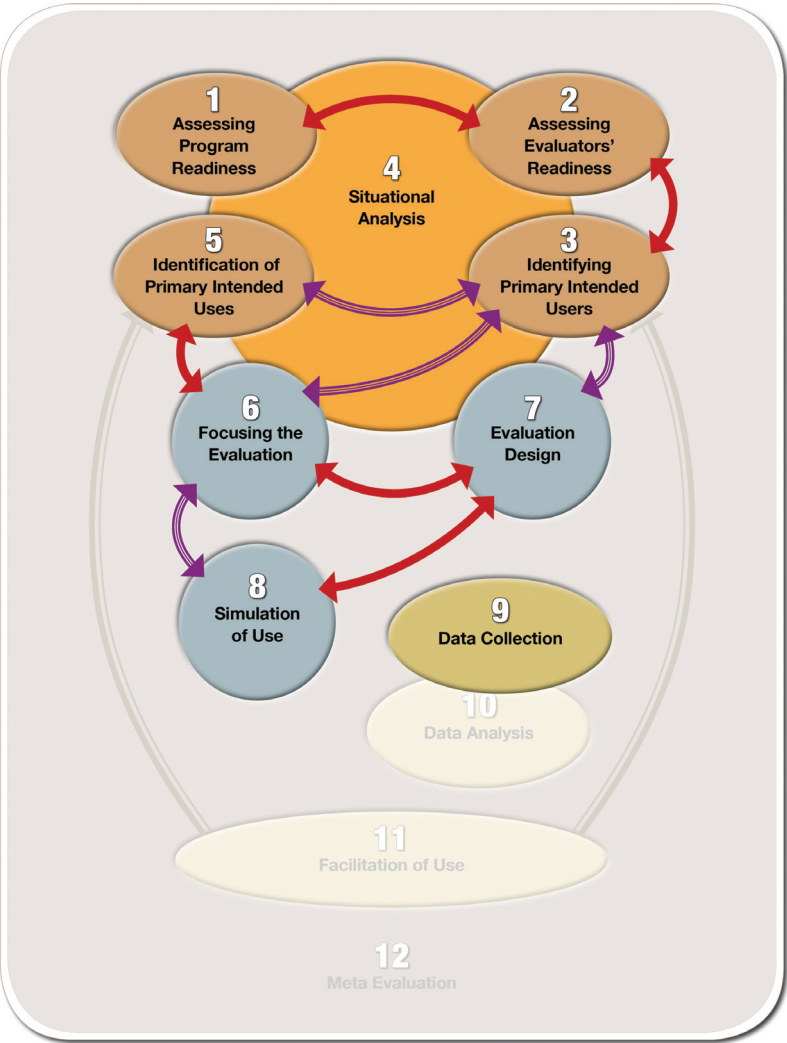


The UFE checklist suggests some guiding questions for this step such as: Given likely costs and expected uses, is the evaluation worth doing? This question assumes the PIUs feel ownership of the design completed in Step 7, and it serves as a way to verify the extent to which ownership is being achieved.

## Step 8 Summary

By developing simulated findings users are able to verify whether there is a need to revise KEQs or methods. They will also be able to confirm that the findings are in line with the data needed to answer the questions, which, in turn, should help to foster their utilization. This test-driving step may mean retracing back to several of the earlier steps (especially Step 7). While this review may feel as if it will slow down the process, the simulation of use is a worthy investment in time and resources.

Step 9 Data Collection



**D**ata collection is managed with use in mind. It is important to keep the primary intended users informed and involved throughout all stages of the process.

Data collection in UFE can be a joint responsibility between the evaluator and PIUs. However, the trend is for the evaluator to take over the bulk of data collection and synthesis. The distribution of effort varies throughout the process. In some cases, the PIUs may be more involved up and until Step 8 and less so during Step 9. In others, they become closely engaged in data collection to the extent that they suggest ways of summarizing the findings. The PIUs in the case studies, SIRCA I, PANACeA, and LIRNEasia, respectively, acted as touchstones for the evaluation data gathered and to ensure the use orientation of the studies was on track:

Triangulation of data took place through perception (evaluator's own observations), validation (surveys and interviews) and documentation (desk review of documents and literature) to substantiate findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The PIU was not involved in data collection, but she was kept informed of the progress of the collection of data, always keeping in mind the focus on 'use'. The evaluator initiated the '*Data Collection*' (Step Nine), after the revision and finalization of the evaluation questions and data collection tool. Given the number of the PIUs and their spread across ten Asian countries, these interviews were conducted online by using Skype. . . . The transcription was then shared with the respective respondent who is also the PIU, for their review and confirmation.

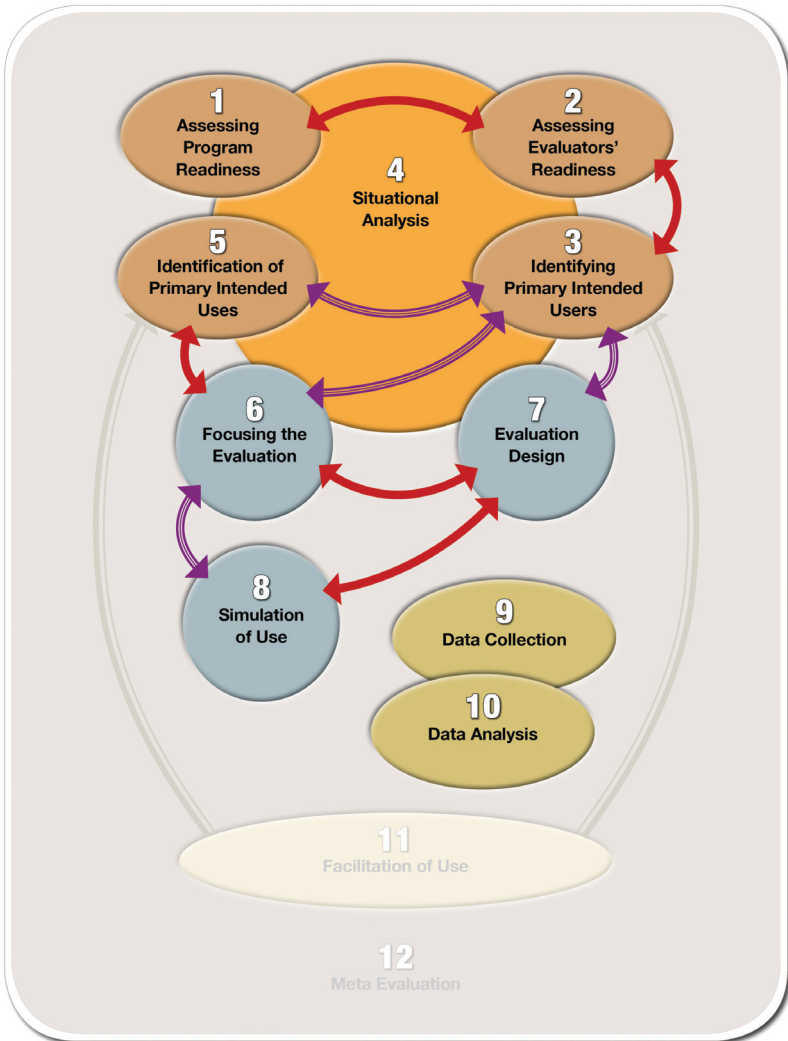
Several of LIRNEasia managers became involved in assisting in the data collection and analysis. Many experimental approaches also came to be developed during this process that got applied (e.g., such as using Facebook to reach out to network members for getting feedback, information exchange, announcements, etc.).

A common concern is how to keep the PIUs engaged and involved without over burdening them. This is a tension that the evaluator has to keep in balance. Knowing when to invite busy people to review or comment on data collection efforts is an art. There are no simple guidelines here and much depends on the trust and communication between the evaluator and the PIUs.

### Step 9 Summary

Data collection in UFE can be a joint responsibility between the evaluator and PIUs. However, the trend is for the evaluator to take over the bulk of data collection and synthesis. The distribution of effort varies throughout the process.

## Step 10 Data Analysis



**D**ata analysis is done in consultation with the PIUs. This involvement increases their understanding of the findings and adds to their sense of ownership and commitment to utilization.

Many of the issues highlighted in Step 9 apply to Step 10. The trend is for the evaluator to take on the bulk of this effort. However, getting the involvement of the PIUs has advantages. Their involvement helps them to begin interpreting findings and deriving recommendations in line with the intended uses.

Participation by PIUs in data interpretation allows them to suggest alternatives to how the findings might be interpreted based on their knowledge of the context as found in the SIRCA I case study:

'Data Analysis', including interpreting findings and generating recommendations was done in a collaborative effort between the evaluator and the PIU (Step Ten). The PIU was helped by the evaluator to get involved in the analysis of the data, reading the draft report, concurring with the interpretation of the data and the finalization of the same.

When problems arise with regard to organizing and analyzing the data collected, the evaluator may require assistance. While this challenge is not unique to UFE, it is useful to keep in mind that the mentor may be able to lend a hand by simply suggesting ways to more helpfully structure the data. This was the experience of the DECI mentor in the DREAM-IT case study:

Data analysis (Step Ten) was also time consuming, especially with regard to processing qualitative data. The UFE researcher completed the data collection, analysis and report in six months although the contract was for only three months. The DECI mentor assisted with the analytic discussions and reviewed several drafts of the report. Challenges emerged at this phase of the UFE. Over several skypes, the DECI mentor assisted in the data analysis finally settling on a tabular format so that busy Board members could easily interpret the findings and take action.

It was evident that the long distance support was not sufficient to resolve the various difficulties in data analysis and generating a usable report and indicated the need for the next site visit by the DECI mentor to DREAM-IT in Mongolia.

The participation of PIUs in data analysis can also lead to a review of the original set of uses, which in some cases are revised or regrouped for clarity and analysis. This occurred during the PANACeA case study when Step 10 was applied:

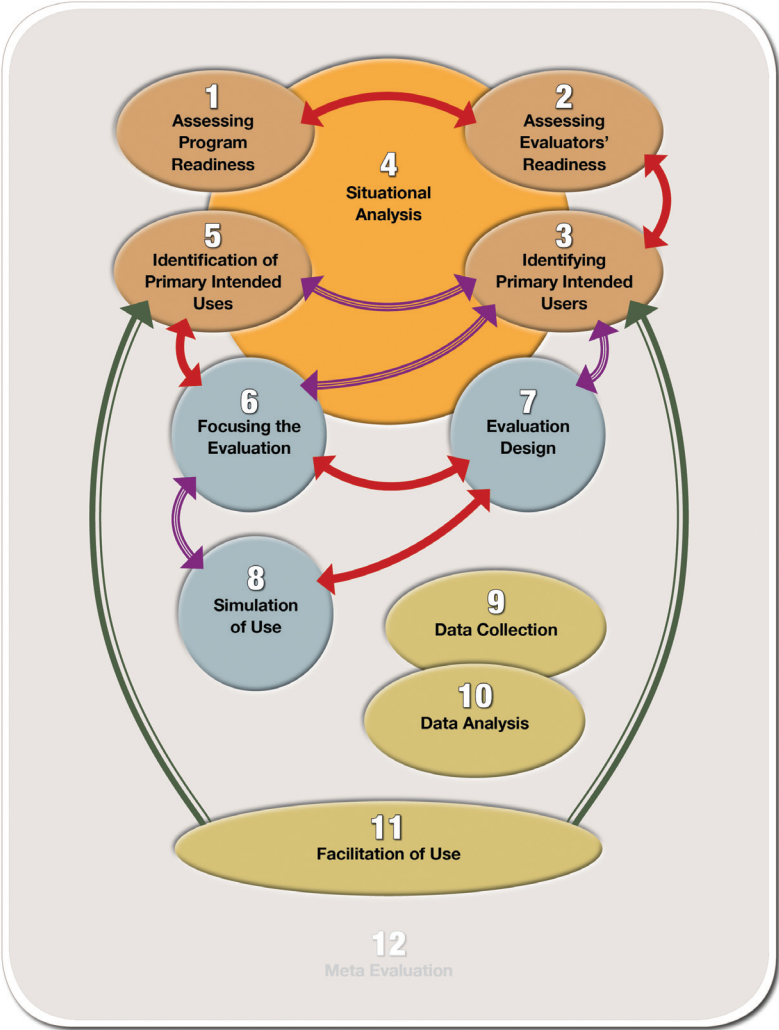
*'Data Analysis'* (Step Ten) for PANACeA involved a chain of tasks, which included data organization, integration and recommendation. The software QSR NVivo was used to organize and help analyze the data gathered from the interviews. PANACeA examined the findings and their implications from various perspectives with focus on primary intended uses by primary intended users. This analysis also led to the revision of the 'use categories' as follows: "Collaboration and Teamwork", "Capacity Building" and "Knowledge Management".

The PANACeA case study's example illustrates the interconnectedness of the UFE steps and actions to be taken within the steps themselves. Additionally, this example draws attention to the ability of UFE to respond to changing conditions whether it involves personnel, resources, knowledge, or methodology.

## Step 10 Summary

Many of the issues highlighted in Step 9 apply to Step 10. The trend is for the evaluator to take on the bulk of this effort. However, getting the involvement of the PIUs has advantages. Their involvement helps them to begin interpreting findings and deriving recommendations in line with the intended uses. The participation of PIUs in data analysis can also lead to a review of the original set of uses, which in some cases are revised or regrouped.

Step 11 Facilitation of Use





**U**se does not just happen naturally; it needs to be facilitated. This work includes drawing connections between evaluation findings and uses, prioritizing among recommendations, as well as developing the dissemination strategy for the evaluation to facilitate Use. This step is central to UFE; it requires that time and resources are allocated to Step 11 from the beginning.

This step is about using the findings and linking them to the original KEQs and uses. If PIUs have been closely involved in Step 9 and Step 10, this use will come naturally, as they will have witnessed the unfolding of the findings. In an ideal situation, the PIUs will take charge of drafting recommendations; in other cases the evaluator produces these and they jointly review their relevance. In the SIRCA I case study, see below, the study's evaluation 27 recommendations were categorized into levels of importance. This effectively streamlined the priority of implementation they should receive:

The evaluation findings were overwhelming as 27 recommendations for 'use' were made from the analysis of the survey findings. In *Step-11*, 'Facilitation of Use' the evaluator helped the PIU prioritize the evaluation recommendations so that the use of findings became more manageable. They were prioritized under 'Strategic' and 'Operational', and these two categories were further prioritized into 'high', 'medium' and 'low' importance. Altogether, there were 27 recommendations for 'use' and 14 (52%) of the 27 were identified for use in the implementation of the current phase, 8 (30%) were identified for use in requesting grant for the next phase of the project, 2 (7%) were to be modified for use and 3 (11%) were not be used.

UFE gives PIUs ownership that, in turn, is manifested in their interest in linking findings to recommendations that respond to uses. The analysis can lead to learning that can have an immediate effect on actions. It often is the case that utilization of emerging findings happens before the evaluation report is completed, for instance in modifying procedures or in reporting progress. This

was true for the ISIF case study results as well as in the PANACeA case studies, respectively:

The use (Step 11) had started even before the final report was out. The results from the data analysis and the survey were included in the Progress Report (30 months) submitted to IDRC and shared with all Steering Committee members, to start with. This action allowed the secretariat to position all the data in the context of the program implementation. Once the report was submitted and approved, the secretariat started preparing a publication to be distributed to potential donors and sponsors focusing on program management, the advantages of the small grants funding model and the benefits of the 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.

PANACeA took systematic efforts to cover the *'Facilitation of Use'* — Step 11. When the team realized that the finalization of the evaluation report was very close to the start of the second phase of the project, they organized a planning session on 'facilitating use' with the PIUs during the Annual Conference of PANACeA 2011. At this meeting, they cut back the scope of the evaluation with attention to priority uses in the first and second phases of the project.

Utilizing the findings, and/or the process of evaluation, is the main focus of UFE. While it appears to come very close to the end of the checklist, utilization has been intentionally and actively fostered from the very start. If users understand the evaluation's goals, and the key evaluation questions capture the purposes clearly, then the stage is set for utilization. Ownership of the process largely secures the users' commitment and their interest as well as providing opportunities for unexpected revelations about projects, as was true for the DREAM-IT case study:

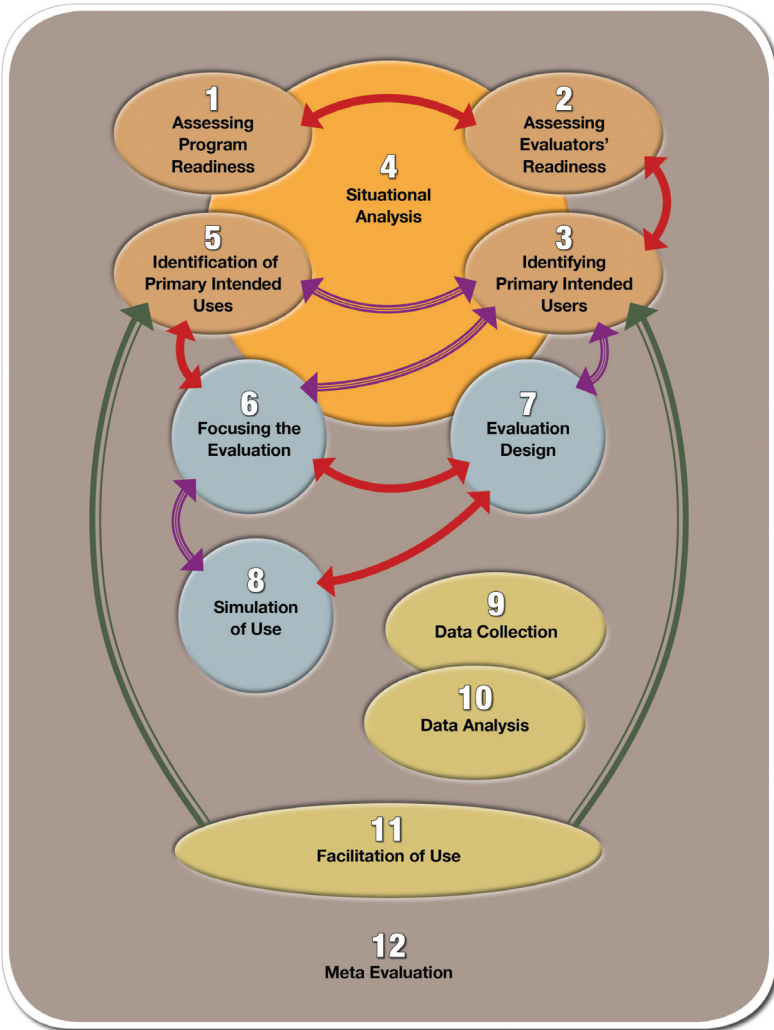
A deeper analysis of sub-project performance indicated that there were fundamental differences among the projects. Those that had not performed so well were innovative on many fronts — technology, nature of multi-sector partnerships and objectives. The discussions helped in understanding that the Board would need *different styles of management* depending on the degree and type of innovation. This analysis was a breakthrough moment for the DREAM-IT PIUs and led to an *unintended but vital new use* for the findings. DREAM-IT extended the analysis to the development of a checklist with special emphasis on the degree and type of innovativeness proposed to assess the *new* proposals requesting funding. The checklist raises pertinent questions to the new project applicants about planning and implementation of innovative strategies such as piloting very new technologies/applications, or working with target populations not familiar with technology, or managing partners from different sectors.

The structured elements of UFE as well as the self-reflection process of UFE benefit projects that may not fit traditional evaluations. UFE has an inherent flexibility that enables it to be adapted to different types of organizations' projects.

## Step 11 Summary

This step is about using the findings and linking them to the original KEQs and uses. If PIUs have been closely involved in the prior steps, this use will come naturally, as they will have witnessed the unfolding of the findings. In an ideal situation, the PIUs will take charge of drafting recommendations; in other cases the evaluator produces these and they jointly review their relevance. The analysis can lead to learning with immediate effect on actions. It often is the case that utilization of emerging findings happens before the evaluation report is completed, for instance in modifying procedures or in reporting progress.

Step 12 Meta Evaluation



**U**FEs are evaluated by whether primary intended users have used the evaluation in intended ways. This step tells the story about how the UFE process evolved; it allows the users and the facilitator to learn from both from their own experiences and from the evaluation outcomes.

Step 12 calls for evaluators to take the time to document and reflect on their experience. Such accounts will build a body of knowledge that can enrich the field of evaluation. In order to prepare case studies to summarize each UFE experience, the following template and interview guide is one example that can serve as a starting point. This template includes indicative length for each section, suggested sources of information and guiding questions for interviews.

|                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Title Page.</b><br>(1 page with photo/image of your choice)                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Blurb about the project(s).</li><li>• Author, editor, date.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2. <b>UFE as the framework.</b><br>(1 page)<br>single line,<br>12 pt. font                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Summary of the 12 steps (common to all case studies).</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 3. <b>Background on case study project</b><br>(1–2 pages for project background; 1 page for different expectations). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1–2 paragraphs about the project<br/>Thematic area, sample sub-project/ activities, geographic coverage, reference to websites, examples.</li><li>• Expectations</li></ul> <p><b>Q1</b> What were your EXPECTATIONS at the start of the UFE support to the project?</p> |

|                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>4. <b>UFE journey — the what.</b><br/>(1 page)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users and uses: key evaluation questions.<br/>Source: evaluation reports</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <p>5. <b>UFE — the how.</b><br/>(3–4 pages)</p>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation challenges: problems, alternatives, decision points, and solutions.</li> <li>• Innovations and adaptations.</li> <li>• Illustrate with examples.</li> </ul> <p><b>Q2</b> Which CHALLENGES stand out in your mind?</p> <p><b>Q3</b> What alternative actions were needed to address them?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p>6. <b>Outcomes.</b><br/>(3–4 pages)</p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What worked, what needs improving, why?</li> <li>• Intended and unintended outcomes (e.g., replication elsewhere).</li> <li>• Illustrate with examples from the project evaluation report.<br/>The findings already put in project use (examples from existing reports).</li> </ul> <p><b>Q4</b> What were the main ACHIEVEMENTS that you can apply to future projects?</p>                                                                                                                                |
| <p>7. <b>Lessons.</b><br/>(2–3 pages)</p>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About UFE, about the factors that enabled or hindered progress, recommendations for others.</li> </ul> <p><b>Q5</b> What FACTORS explain the achievements?</p> <p><b>Q6</b> Which ones can be REPLICATED and which ones are UNIQUE?</p> <p><b>Q7</b> Can you think of OPPORTUNITIES LOST that we can learn from?</p> <p><b>Q8</b> Can you give examples of how UFE has changed your outlook on project evaluation?</p> <p><b>Q9</b> What single STORY or ANECDOTE do you use to explain UFE to others?</p> |

Other tips are available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Case\\_method](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Case_method)

For each STORY (case study), the following is an indicative distribution of time for the authors:

- a. 1 or 1.5 days for Skype interviews with the evaluators, primary users, and Project Officers (POs).
- b. 3 or 3.5 days to prepare the Story Draft using the Template.
- c. 0.5 to 1 day to revise with inputs from the internal editors.
- d. 0.5 to 1 day to revise with inputs coming from the projects (evaluator and/or primary users, and POs).

### Step 12 Summary

This step calls for evaluators to take the time to document and reflect on their experience. This step tells the story about how the UFE process evolved. Such accounts will build a body of knowledge that can enrich the field of evaluation.

## Summary About What Each Step Entails

**Step 1 Summary:** Traditionally, evaluations have been done to and on organizations mainly for accountability purposes. Thus, a commitment by the organization, a willingness to participate in the exercise, while desirable, has not been a prerequisite for undertaking an evaluation. In UFE, a commitment by the leadership to take ownership is central. In doing so, the potential for them to learn from the process and the outcomes increases because they are engaged in every aspect of the evaluation. Making sure the organizations are ready for this approach is important. The three essential aspects of organizational readiness can be summarized as:

- Redefining an evaluator's role emphasizing facilitation;
- Investing time and resources to build UFE capacity — particularly at the start of an evaluation process; and
- Ensuring a clear commitment to the exercise by the leadership and primary users (staff) to allocate their time and a budget to the work.

There also needs to be a shift in the role and expectations of the donor(s) where a focus on use by primary users takes priority.

**Step 2 Summary:** Commitment, capacity building, and proactive facilitation of evaluation are the main principles that



characterize the journey through Step 2. Our diagram emphasizes the overlap between Step 1 and Step 2. These activities do not happen in isolation. Rather they occur in conjunction with the other steps that will now be described. A challenge for evaluators is to acknowledge that the self-reflection required for this readiness step can be awkward. When an evaluation mentor is available, the reflection can happen during their interaction, where the mentor challenges the evaluator to make use of his or her facilitation skills. An evaluator working on UFE for the first time, without a mentor, will need to make a conscious decision to review his or her readiness over several of the subsequent steps.

**Step 3 Summary:** The selection of PIUs is part art, part strategy, and part intuition by the evaluator and the PIUs themselves. The PIU identification approach itself needs to be transparent, inclusive, multi-level, and participatory. The desirable attributes of PIUs include that they are: committed, dedicated, engaged, interested, open to learning and dialogue, and keen to gain a new outlook on evaluation. It is important to pay attention to the context and to ask questions such as: “Is engagement possible?”; “What training is needed?”; “How spread out are the PIUs?”; and “How to deal with organizational cultures and structures that are top-down?”.

**Step 4 Summary:** Among the favourable factors to look for we include a project team that is open to evaluation, willing to be involved, and supportive of experimenting with a new approach. This means engaging with partners throughout the evaluation process, ensuring there are the human and financial resources, and emphasizing the reasons why UFE can enhance utilization. A funder that proposes UFE with the partners that it funds may take what appears to be a hands-off attitude when it agrees that others become the primary users. In doing this, the funder is still engaged. However, it is inviting the primary intended users to take ownership over the evaluation. Organizations with a research tradition are often particularly well poised to take on UFE.

The evaluation's timing is also important, as it will need to accommodate the deadlines and timing of decisions. While the ideal evaluation conditions are rarely present, they are a useful point of reference. Among the unfavourable factors we highlight include: project funders and other senior stakeholders that are unable or unwilling to give up control over an evaluation; inflexible organizational cultures; staff turnover; and insufficient funding, time, or human resources dedicated to evaluation.

**Step 5 Summary:** Helping to determine uses requires that the evaluator appreciate the context within which the project stakeholders work. For the evaluator, scanning the context is not restricted only to Step 4, especially as circumstances will often change with direct use implications. This step is about taking control of the purpose of the evaluation. It means the PIUs often experience a radical change in perspective relative to conventional evaluations. Suddenly, they realize that the evaluation can become a learning opportunity — one that they can shape to their liking and needs. We liken this to learning to ride a horse: there comes a moment when one realizes that one can actually steer the animal.

**Step 6 Summary:** During Step 6 the PIUs transition from uses to a carefully formulated set of key evaluation questions. As with any research questions, clear wording is important. This makes it easier to identify the data that is needed and the different methods to gather it. An initial task is to define evaluation areas, or themes. Their selection is also influenced by the stage of development of project components. The project's objectives and its theory of change are also reference points. The uses developed in Step 5 will also point to the purposes of the evaluation. When faced with a team of PIUs with different roles in the organization and project, the evaluator needs to accommodate a range of uses and purposes. As projects evolve and as the context changes some PIUs may wish to shift away from the original uses and consider new key evaluation questions to address emerging challenges. A number of guidelines are provided to help improve KEQs.

**Step 7 Summary:** UFE is a methodologically neutral framework that can encompass a variety of evaluation methods that are chosen on the basis of the key evaluation questions (KEQs). What is critical is that the choice of methods is made in consultation with the users. This has two advantages. First, those with previous research experience can build on their skills, plus they gain a sense of control over specifics of the data collection process. Second, is the assurance that the methods used will be practical, cost effective, and ethical. Step 7 also involves a quality control where adherence to the professional standards for evaluation is confirmed (utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy).

**Step 8 Summary:** By developing simulated findings users are able to verify whether there is a need to revise KEQs, or methods. They will also be assured that the findings are in line with the data needed to answer the questions. This, in turn, should help foster their utilization. This test-driving step may mean retracing back to several of the earlier steps (especially Step 7). While this review may feel as if it will slow down the process, the simulation of use is a worthy investment in time and resources.

**Step 9 Summary:** Data collection in UFE can be a joint responsibility between the evaluator and PIUs. However, the trend is for the evaluator to take over the bulk of data collection and synthesis. The distribution of effort varies throughout the process.

**Step 10 Summary:** Many of the issues highlighted in Step 9 apply to Step 10. The trend is for the evaluator to take on the bulk of this effort. However getting the involvement of the PIUs has advantages. Their involvement helps them to begin interpreting findings and deriving recommendations in line with the intended uses. The participation of PIUs in data analysis can also lead to a review of the original set of uses, which in some cases are revised or regrouped.

**Step 11 Summary:** This step is about using the findings and linking them to the original KEQs and uses. If PIUs have been closely involved in the prior steps, this use will come naturally, as they will have witnessed the unfolding of the findings. In an ideal situation, the PIUs will take charge of drafting recommendations. In other cases the evaluator produces the recommendations with the PIU and the evaluator jointly review their relevance. The analysis can lead to learning with immediate effect on actions. It often is the case that utilization of emerging findings happens before the evaluation report is completed. This is seen, for instance, in modifying procedures or in reporting progress.

**Step 12 Summary:** This step calls for evaluators to take the time to document and reflect on their experience. Step 12 tells the story about how the UFE process evolved. Such accounts will build a body of knowledge that can enrich the field of evaluation.

## What Benefit Does UFE Bring to Commissioners of Evaluation?

**D**ECI was an explicit experiment at IDRC to ensure that a group of ICT4D researchers we support would have the human, financial, and technical resources required to be the primary evaluation users. With only a small investment, we believe it proved to be a successful experiment. The evaluation capacities of partners and a group of internal evaluators were increased and a set of high quality and useful evaluations were conducted and used. Additionally, the knowledge gained is being shared through events, this Primer, and a website. We heartily recommend other donors and commissioners of evaluations consider UFE and the DECI model as an approach.

After supporting over a decade of ICT4D development research and its evaluation, including DECI, we have learned four key lessons.

First, there is not, nor can there be, one best way of doing an evaluation. The choice of evaluation approach, methodology, and design must fit the specific purpose and context. Each of the DECI evaluations was unique to the particular needs of the partners involved. As the funder, we needed to step back and give them the space to define their evaluation questions and approaches so that it could truly align with their purposes and goals. Stepping back was not always easy as we saw them struggling at times and wanted to help; staying removed from the process was not our usual role.

Second, the ICT4D field deserves and demands an approach to evaluation that does not oversimplify the complexities of the

development problems and contexts in which we work. UFE does not, per se, advocate an appropriate means of evaluating ICT4D but it does demand more than the rote evaluation planning all too prevalent in international development. UFE requires deep thinking about the context in which the evaluation is occurring as well as the key evaluation questions and appropriate methods.

Third, determining who the user(s) of an evaluation are is an important power- and value-laden exercise with implications that ripple throughout the whole evaluation process. If IDRC was not to be the user of the DECI supported evaluations, it meant we had to remind ourselves to be supportive but largely silent in the decision making processes. For example, at one point, the context shifted and IDRC required an evaluation of the outcomes of one of the initiatives, to showcase and learn from it. Rather than imposing on the DECI evaluation to meet this need, we designed and commissioned a separate evaluation study. This went against one of the original concepts of DECI so we tried to be as transparent as possible with the partners about why we now needed an evaluation study for our purposes and to reduce the burden of effort on them.

Fourth, evaluation use does not occur naturally or without effort. It requires intentionality and careful attention and reaction to emergence. It needs committed participants and skilled evaluators.

If donors want to support innovative and influential development initiatives, we have to challenge traditional views and change our mindsets about evaluation. In many development circles, evaluation has a negative connotation. It is too often only a mechanism of upward accountability, generally from grant recipients towards donors. DECI confirmed for us that donors could and should support and promote specific evaluation studies as well as deep reflective practice that benefit those actually implementing the work, not only those funding it. Handing over the evaluation agenda to the implementers implied that IDRC must give up the power that comes with control over evaluation. This was neither simple nor straightforward, but it was worth it.

# Take Away Lessons

**I**n this closing section we review what we learned about UFE in the context of the DECI project.

## **What worked and why?**

This Primer focuses on two main audiences: practicing evaluators who are new to UFE and project implementers. While UFE can have other users besides project implementers, this Primer is based on five research project experiences where the project managers were the users. The five evaluation reports that were completed were used. From a UFE perspective, the five cases were successful for the following reasons.

First, the DECI project included two international project mentors, plus three regional mentors with a strong background in evaluation but who were new to UFE. The regional mentors partnered with project evaluators who were invited to do the same: to test-drive UFE. The capacity development objectives of the project created a safe environment for experimentation.

Second, a factor in our favour was a project funder interested in experimenting with this approach to evaluation capacity development. The IDRC project managers allowed the DECI mentors and the project partners the freedom to become users and to define uses.

Third, another factor was that we, as international and regional UFE mentors, followed the checklist systematically. While we quickly realized that the process was less linear and called for more iterations, it was still useful to cover each task in order. An analogy would be how one learns to drive a standard shift car: you begin with the first gear and move on to the second and so forth. Only later, with experience you realize that when starting on a downhill road you can begin on second just as well; you also begin to learn to use gears to slow down. This knowledge, however, comes with experience.

### **What we would do differently next time?**

Mid-way through the DECI project we, as the DECI team, did an internal review of progress. Among the things that we would do differently we note the following activities:

- Ensure preparedness and readiness of all;
- Integrate UFE into other projects and into their planning. Renegotiate with IDRC to get more time committed for getting the work done, if necessary;
- Identification of the key uses and questions could have been done a sooner. It was a long time from the initial orientation in Penang to starting the evaluation. Hence, starting this formative evaluation earlier would have given the evaluation a greater likelihood of being used;
- Earlier training on UFE would have been helpful;
- Arrange a separate meeting with evaluators to facilitate understanding of the process before meeting with intended users;
- Consider doing the simulation with real respondents to sharpen the questions. Conduct a simulation exercise prior to data collection; and
- Provide externally hired evaluators with contracts that can cover all steps.



We note how many of our own observations refer to earlier preparation, to readiness, to covering steps sooner. One of our regional mentors even referred to a “Step Zero” to emphasize how much of the readiness was difficult to ascertain at the beginning. A challenge may be to alert potential projects interested in UFE to the conditions before committing to supporting them.

## **Principles that travel**

We are well aware that many readers may not have the benefit of a mentoring process to learn UFE such as we enjoyed. While we have emphasized the mentoring throughout, we realize that experienced evaluators may be able to pick up the approach from the checklist on their own. However, what we found with UFE was that the ownership by the users created a refreshing environment of collaborative inquiry. While mentoring was a means to work in such an environment, there may be other ways to create this notion of shared exploration. Since UFE is characterized by evaluations that get used, we sense that a broader principle that may travel is the notion of evaluation as participatory learning inquiry.



# Postscript: Utilization-Focused Evaluation

by Michael Quinn Patton

The Primer notes:

In his latest book, *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation*, Patton (2012) describes 17 steps. While we find that the additional steps provide guidance for possible variations. . . , this Primer is based on the original 12 steps that guided us in the DECI project.

What the authors were too modest to add is that they were sharing with me their experiences in DECI as I was writing the new *Essentials* book and that their insights and learnings significantly informed both the added steps and, no less important, further elaboration and illumination of the original 12 steps. Indeed, the revised Utilization-Focused Checklist in the *Essentials* book emphasizes the interconnections and dynamic interrelationships among the steps that this Primer anticipated and conceptualized in the diagram in the section on “What is Utilization Focused Evaluation?” (p. 3)

So that there is no doubt about the continued relevance of this Primer to inform the practice of utilization-focused evaluation, despite the movement from the original 12 steps to the new version’s 17 steps, let me briefly review the added steps. The original 12-step framework presents a single step (Step 5) for identification of primary intended uses. The 17-step framework separates this step into two: identifying intended uses of findings (Step 5) and identifying intended uses of the evaluation process (Step 6). This

change reflects the increasing importance of process use as distinct from findings use, and this Primer does a good job making that distinction.

Step 6 in the 12-step framework is “focusing the evaluation.” The 17-step framework divides that step into three steps: prioritizing evaluation questions; checking that fundamental issues are addressed; and theory of change work. As the Primer’s case studies demonstrate, these more distinct steps are still central to the giant step of focusing the evaluation.

Step 7 in the 12-step framework is designing the evaluation. That step also becomes two steps in the 17-step framework: negotiating methods and reviewing methods debates (as part of that negotiation).

Finally the 12-step framework has a steps data analysis (Step 10) and facilitating use (Step 11). The 17-step framework revises these two steps into three: data presented for user engagement; report produced; and follow-up with users to facilitate use. More important these three steps are depicted as interdependent and iterative rather than linear.

Indeed, a major insight of this Primer revealed in the cases and the reflections of those involved is that utilization-focused evaluation is not a set of linear steps where you finish one and then move on to the next. Rather, it is a matter of moving back and forth through the steps.

In the Preface to the new *Essentials* book I quoted Confucius:

When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don't adjust the goals, adjust the action steps.

The goal of utilization-focused evaluation remains intended use by intended users. That has not changed. The number of action steps has grown. So how did I get from 12 to 17 steps? See the wisdom of Confucius cited above. And the wisdom of the DECI project participants and dedicated utilization-focused practitioners around the world. My thanks to them all. And thanks for this excellent and informative Primer. You have advanced both utilization-focused theory and practice.

# The UFE Checklist

by Michael Quinn Patton

Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use; therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration of how everything that is done, *from beginning to end*, will affect use. Use concerns how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process. Therefore, the *focus* in utilization-focused evaluation is on **intended use by intended users**. Since no evaluation can be value-free, utilization-focused evaluation answers the question of whose values will frame the evaluation by working with clearly identified, primary intended users who have responsibility to apply evaluation findings and implement recommendations.

Utilization-focused evaluation is highly personal and situational. The evaluation facilitator develops a working relationship with intended users to help them determine what kind of evaluation they need. This requires negotiation in which the evaluator offers a menu of possibilities within the framework of established evaluation standards and principles.

Utilization-focused evaluation does not advocate any particular evaluation content, model, method, theory, or even use. Rather, it is a process for helping primary intended users select the most appropriate content, model, methods, theory, and uses for their particular situation. Situational responsiveness guides the

interactive process between evaluator and primary intended users. A utilization-focused evaluation can include any evaluative purpose (formative, summative, developmental), any kind of data (quantitative, qualitative, mixed), any kind of design (e.g., naturalistic, experimental), and any kind of focus (processes, outcomes, impacts, costs, and cost-benefit, among many possibilities). *Utilization-focused evaluation is a process for making decisions about these issues in collaboration with an identified group of primary users focusing on their intended uses of evaluation.*

A psychology of use undergirds and informs utilization-focused evaluation: 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; by actively involving primary intended users, the evaluator is training users in use, preparing the groundwork for use, and reinforcing the intended utility of the evaluation every step along the way.

The 12 parts of the checklist are divided into two columns on the following pages. Primary U-FE tasks are identified in the columns on the left. Because of the emphasis on facilitation in U-FE, particular facilitation challenges are identified in the columns on the right. Underlying premises are made explicit for each step in the U-FE process.

## 1. Program/Organizational Readiness Assessment

|                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: Key people who want the evaluation conducted need to understand and be interested in a utilization-focused evaluation (U-FE).             | PREMISE: U-FE requires active and skilled guidance from and facilitation by an evaluation facilitator.                                       |
| PRIMARY TASKS:                                                                                                                                     | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                                                          |
| Assess primary evaluation clients' commitment to doing useful evaluation based on an explanation of U-FE.                                          | Explaining U-FE and enhancing readiness for evaluation generally and U-FE specifically.                                                      |
| Assess if the program is ready to spend time and resources on evaluation.                                                                          | Communicating the value and requirements of U-FE, assessing commitment, and building commitment as needed.                                   |
| Determine if primary evaluation clients are ready to assess various stakeholder constituencies to select primary intended users of the evaluation. | Explaining and facilitating stakeholder assessment; distinguishing between stakeholders in general and primary intended users in particular. |
| Assess what needs to be done and can be done to enhance readiness.                                                                                 | Planning, negotiating, and facilitating increased readiness with evaluation clients as needed.                                               |

| 2. Evaluator Readiness and Capability Assessment                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: Facilitating and conducting a utilization-focused evaluation requires a particular philosophy and special skills.       | PREMISE: Evaluation facilitators need to know their strengths and limitations and develop the skills needed to facilitate utilization-focused evaluations. |
| PRIMARY TASKS:                                                                                                                   | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                                                                        |
| Assess the match between the <i>evaluator's knowledge</i> and what will be needed in the evaluation.                             | Getting a good match between the evaluator's knowledge and what will be needed in the evaluation.                                                          |
| Assess the match between the <i>evaluator's commitment</i> and the likely challenges of the situation.                           | Maintaining focus on and commitment to intended use by intended users as the primary outcome of the evaluation.                                            |
| Assess the match between the evaluator's skills and what will be needed in the evaluation.                                       | Developing facilitation skills to fit the challenges of the specific people and situation.                                                                 |
| Make sure the evaluators are prepared to have their effectiveness judged by the use of the evaluation by primary intended users. | Honest self-reflection by the evaluators.                                                                                                                  |



### 3. Identification of Primary Intended Users

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: Primary intended users are people who have a direct, identifiable stake in the evaluation and meet the criteria below to some extent. (Caveat: These judgements are necessarily subjective and negotiable.) | PREMISE: The U-FE facilitator needs to both assess the characteristics of primary intended users and reinforce characteristics that will contribute to evaluation use. |
| PRIMARY TASKS:<br><i>Find and recruit people who are...</i>                                                                                                                                                          | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                                                                                    |
| Interested.                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Determining real interest; building interest as needed; sustaining interest throughout the U-FE process.                                                               |
| Knowledgeable.                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Determining knowledge; increasing knowledge as needed.                                                                                                                 |
| Open.                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Facilitating an evaluation climate of openness.                                                                                                                        |
| Connected to an important stakeholder constituency.                                                                                                                                                                  | Working with primary intended users to examine stakeholder connections and their implications for use.                                                                 |
| Credible.                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Building and sustaining credibility.                                                                                                                                   |
| Teachable.                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Teaching evaluation and U-FE.                                                                                                                                          |
| Available for interaction throughout the evaluation process.                                                                                                                                                         | Outlining and facilitating a process that intended users want to be part of.                                                                                           |

| <b>4. Situational Analysis</b>                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: Evaluation use is people- and context-dependent. Use is likely to be enhanced when the evaluation takes into account and is adapted to crucial situational factors such as those below. | PREMISE: The evaluator has responsibility to identify, assess, understand, and act on situational factors that may affect use.                                                                                                              |
| PRIMARY TASKS:                                                                                                                                                                                   | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Examine program's prior experiences with evaluation.                                                                                                                                             | Learning the extent to which past evaluations were useful.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Look for possible barriers or resistance to use.                                                                                                                                                 | Looking at typical barriers – people, resources, culture, turbulence – while also looking out for unusual or unexpected barriers.                                                                                                           |
| Identify factors that may support and facilitate use.                                                                                                                                            | Looking at typical supports e.g., accountability demands – while also looking out for unusual or unexpected ones.                                                                                                                           |
| Get clear about resources available for evaluation.                                                                                                                                              | Including in the budget resources beyond analysis and reporting to facilitate use.                                                                                                                                                          |
| Identify any upcoming decisions, deadlines, or time lines that the evaluation should meet to be useful.                                                                                          | Being realistic about time lines.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Assess the evaluation knowledge level and experiences of primary intended users.                                                                                                                 | Building into the evaluation process opportunities to increase the knowledge of primary intended users.                                                                                                                                     |
| Understand the political context for the evaluation, and calculate how political factors may affect use.                                                                                         | Including attention to both potential uses and potential misuses.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Make sure that important constituencies and diverse stakeholder groups for the evaluation are represented among the primary intended users and assess the consequences of any omissions for use. | Staying focused on intended use by intended users while assuring that intended users represent important and legitimate interests of diverse stakeholders — done on an ongoing basis as new information surfaces throughout the evaluation. |

### 5. Identification of Primary Intended Uses

|                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: Intended use by primary intended users is the U-FE goal of the evaluation.          | PREMISE: The rich menu of evaluation options are reviewed, screened, and prioritized to focus the evaluation.                                                                                   |
| PRIMARY TASKS:                                                                               | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                                                                                                             |
| Consider how evaluation could contribute to <b>program improvement</b> .                     | Guiding primary intended users in reviewing formative evaluation options.                                                                                                                       |
| Consider how evaluation could contribute to <b>making major decisions</b> about the program. | Guiding primary intended users in reviewing summative and major decision-oriented evaluation options.                                                                                           |
| Consider how evaluation could contribute by <b>generating knowledge</b> .                    | Guiding primary intended users in considering the possibility of using evaluation to generate lessons learned and evidence-based practices that might apply beyond the program being evaluated. |
| Consider <b>process uses</b> of evaluation.                                                  | Enhancing communications; building capacity; learning evaluative thinking; nurturing an evaluation culture within the organization; and/or reinforcing the program intervention.                |

| 6. Focusing the Evaluation                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>PREMISE: The focus derives from primary intended uses of the evaluation by primary intended users.</p>                                     | <p>PREMISE: Primary intended users will often need considerable assistance identifying and agreeing on priority evaluation uses and the major focus for the evaluation.</p>                                                                        |
| <p>PRIMARY TASKS:</p>                                                                                                                         | <p>EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p>Make sure that all <i>high priority</i> questions are addressed in the evaluation design – or be clear about why they aren’t included.</p> | <p>Actively involving primary intended users in determining priorities; narrowing the options and determining what <i>specific</i> evaluation questions and issues will be addressed by the evaluation based on <i>priority intended uses</i>.</p> |
| <p>Make sure that the intended uses of answers to the specific evaluation questions are reasonably clear.</p>                                 | <p>Actively involving primary intended users in determining the specific <b>relevance</b> of intended uses of findings.</p>                                                                                                                        |

| <b>7. Evaluation Design</b>                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: The evaluation should be designed to lead to useful findings. Methods should be selected and the evaluation designed to support and achieve intended use by primary intended users. | PREMISE: Evaluators and users have varying responsibilities in the design decision-making process.                                                     |
| PRIMARY TASKS:                                                                                                                                                                               | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                                                                    |
| Select methods appropriate to the questions being asked.                                                                                                                                     | Making sure that methods are selected jointly by primary intended users and the evaluator(s).                                                          |
| Assure that results obtained by the methods selected will be believable, credible, and valid to primary intended users.                                                                      | Making sure that primary intended users play an active role in reviewing methods to examine their believability, credibility, and validity.            |
| Assure that the proposed methods and measurements are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical</li> <li>• Cost-effective</li> <li>• Ethical.</li> </ul>                           | Making sure that methods and measures are reviewed jointly by primary intended users and the evaluator(s).                                             |
| Assure that the results obtained from these methods will be able to be used as intended.                                                                                                     | Facilitating serious review of intended use by primary intended users.                                                                                 |
| Review the evaluation as designed in relation to professional standards and principles.                                                                                                      | Taking professional standards and principles seriously—not just treating them as boilerplate or window dressing.                                       |
| Consider seriously whether involving primary intended users or other stakeholders in actual data collection enhance process use.                                                             | Seeking creative possibilities for enhancing process uses; examining potential trade-offs between utility (process uses specifically) and credibility. |

| 8. Simulation of Use                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: Before data are collected, a simulation of potential use can be done with fabricated findings in a real-enough way to provide a meaningful learning experience for primary intended users. | PREMISE: It's important to move discussions of use from the abstract to the concrete, and a simulation of use based on fabricated data helps do that.                                              |
| PRIMARY TASKS:                                                                                                                                                                                      | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                                                                                                                |
| Fabricate findings based on the proposed design and measures.                                                                                                                                       | Fabricating realistic findings that show varying results and offer good grist for simulated interaction among primary intended users.                                                              |
| Guide primary intended users in interpreting the potential (fabricated) findings?                                                                                                                   | Helping primary intended users take the simulation seriously so that they can use the experience to improve design and be better prepared for real use of findings.                                |
| Interpret the simulation experience to determine if any design changes or additions to the data collection would likely increase utility.                                                           | Taking time to do this final, critical check before data collection.                                                                                                                               |
| As a final step before data collection, have primary intended users make an explicit decision to proceed with the evaluation given likely costs and expected uses.                                  | Helping primary intended users seriously ask: Given likely costs and expected uses, is the evaluation worth doing? Assuring that primary intended users feel ownership of the design and measures. |

| <b>9. Data Collection</b>                                                                                           |                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: Data collected should be managed with use in mind.                                                         | PREMISE: It's important to keep primary intended users informed and involved throughout all stages of the process. |
| PRIMARY TASKS:                                                                                                      | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                                |
| Keep primary intended users informed of progress.                                                                   | Noting any problems or delays as soon as they are known.                                                           |
| Inform primary intended users of important interim findings to maintain interest in the evaluation.                 | Getting intended users to understand that preliminary findings are subject to revision.                            |
| If involving primary intended users or other stakeholders in actual data collection, manage this process carefully. | Offering opportunities to reflect on the process and learn from it; debriefing process learnings as they occur.    |

| <b>10. Data Analysis</b>                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: Analysis should be organized to facilitate use by primary intended users.                                                   | PREMISE: Facilitating data interpretation among primary intended users increases their understanding of the findings, their sense of ownership of the evaluation, and their commitment to use the results.                        |
| PRIMARY TASKS:                                                                                                                       | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Organize data to be understandable and relevant to primary intended users.                                                           | Basing organization of data on primary intended uses of the evaluation.                                                                                                                                                           |
| Actively involve users in interpreting findings and generating recommendations.                                                      | Helping users distinguish between findings, interpretations, judgements, and recommendations.                                                                                                                                     |
| Examine the findings and their implications from various perspectives with focus on primary intended uses by primary intended users. | Offering opportunities to reflect on the analytical process and learn from it; helping users distinguish varying degrees of certainty in the findings; being open and explicit about data strengths, weaknesses, and limitations. |



| <b>11. Facilitation of Use</b>                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: Use doesn't just happen naturally; it needs to be facilitated.                                   | PREMISE: Facilitating use is a central part of the evaluator's job.                                                                                                                                    |
| PRIMARY TASKS:                                                                                            | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Work with primary intended users to use the findings and learnings from the process in intended ways.     | Actively facilitating the users' sense of ownership of the findings and their commitment to act on those findings.                                                                                     |
| Examine potential uses and users beyond those intended and originally targeted (dissemination).           | Reviewing the larger, and possibly changed, stakeholder environment. (There may be a separate action group that the evaluation findings and recommendations would be passed on to for implementation.) |
| Decide on dissemination mechanisms and avenues consistent with intended uses and additional desired uses. | Reviewing the larger, and possibly changed, stakeholder environment and resources available to support dissemination; clearly differentiating use from dissemination.                                  |
| Identify possible misuses, and plan action to assure appropriate uses.                                    | Being clear about the ethical obligations of being an evaluator.                                                                                                                                       |
| Stay involved beyond formal reporting, and engage in follow-up facilitation as needed to enhance use.     | Building in from the beginning time and resources to facilitate use beyond just writing a report—additional resources may be needed if new uses or users are added.                                    |

| 12. Meta Evaluation                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PREMISE: Utilization-focused evaluations should be evaluated by whether primary intended users used the evaluation in intended ways. | PREMISE: A U-FE facilitator can learn something from each evaluation.                                 |
| PRIMARY TASKS:                                                                                                                       | EVALUATION FACILITATION CHALLENGES:                                                                   |
| After the evaluation is completed, follow up to determine the extent to which intended use by intended users was achieved.           | Taking the time for ongoing learning to achieve long term, utilization-focused evaluation excellence. |
| Follow-up to determine the extent to which additional uses or users were served beyond those initially targeted.                     | Finding time and resources to do the necessary fieldwork.                                             |
| Follow-up to determine and learn from any misuses or unintended consequences of the evaluation.                                      | Helping primary intended users be open and reflective about their U-FE experience,                    |

## Case Studies: Highlights

The UFE evaluation process enabled the five projects discussed in this Primer to create opportunities for future funding and build partnerships. Capacity creation in terms of knowledge infrastructure, self-reflection and self-confidence, resource sourcing, as well as understanding the often subtle needs of particular projects was facilitated and augmented by the UFE evaluations. These results were often hard won after initial trepidations concerning the UFE process, dealing with time, distance as well as resource constraints, personnel changes, differing management cultures, and the struggle to understand the nuanced applications of UFE. The success of the case studies is a testament to the dedication of the various individuals involved and their tenacious and passionate pursuit of their projects' objectives. The following are the highlights of those projects.

### **LIRNEasia**

Communications Policy Research South (CPR*south*) is a capacity building effort by the regional Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy and regulation think tank LIRNEasia. Prior to this evaluation, the CPR*south*'s leadership was aware that its support from IDRC may end at some point. The evaluation was perceived as an opportunity to help enable it to diversify its

funding opportunities. It could also allow them to retool its existing activities to better enable it to meet its core objectives. Thus the decision was made to use the DECI supported evaluation to address these issues. Furthermore, LIRNEasia was also committed to enhance its own evaluation capabilities. The leadership assigned adequate time for one of its researchers to work on the evaluation and thereby build organizational capacity. The choice of focusing the evaluation on CPRsouth was also conditioned by the fact that LIRNEasia was interested in assessing the value of its capacity building approach.

Focusing the evaluation (Step 6) was one of the most challenging steps of this UFE experience. In this case the primary intended users (PIUs) were the managers of CPRsouth. They were coached to a select number of key evaluation questions (KEQs). In order to organize the main issues they were interested in, and create some order in the very wide range of possible questions that could be addressed, several questions were asked pertaining to: a) the purpose (uses) of the evaluation, and b) the objectives and execution of the program. In reviewing the main objectives and desirable outcomes of the conference CPRsouth, an interesting combination of outcomes and process elements were evident. This was the result of an Outcome Mapping approach used to develop the effort, and this structure very easily led to the identification of a small set of formative and summative KEQs that were in line with the primary uses that had been identified.

In the experience of LIRNEasia's leadership, the UFE as a self-evaluation was found to be much more useful than previous external evaluations. The project managers stated: "we started using findings even before the UFE was completed", and "it became useful as a whole at the end of the day". Results from this evaluation have also been used by IDRC in shaping their supporting policy research, as well as its support to LIRNEasia and in promoting the CPRsouth model lessons to other regions.

## ISIF Asia

The Information Society Innovation Fund (ISIF) is a small grants and awards program aimed at stimulating innovative approaches and creative solutions to the provision of ICT access. The expectation at the ISIF Secretariat was to evaluate the program itself, not the small grants projects allocated. They saw an opportunity in the UFE method to focus on learning about grant making and grant administration. From the funding side it was also clear that ISIF would have to raise funds beyond IDRC in order to continue its work. That would mean approaching new organizations and looking for potential partners and sponsorships other than those currently supporting the program. For this reason, the UFE focused on assessing the secretariat under the assumption that this would provide grist for a resource mobilization strategy and communication campaign.

Three evaluation questions were developed: 1) “How effective was the ISIF approach/methodology to encourage innovative projects to apply?”; 2) “How effective were the ISIF mentoring practices and administrative support during the implementation process?”; and 3) “What were the lessons learned from this investment? What worked and what did not work? and Why?”

The evaluation findings were used spontaneously from the time the evaluation process was finalized. A variety of uses, always linked to the main intended use, have occurred naturally. The data analysis of the applications received and the feedback provided by current and former grant recipients provided the ISIF secretariat with intelligence to improve the application and selection process, to provide better support to grant recipients and to improve the reporting strategies used. This, in turn, provided validation for the program 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 negotiations to secure funding from donors and sponsors have been concluded and ISIF has secured funding from 2012 to 2015.

## SIRCA I

**S**trengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia (SIRCA I) provides research grants on a competitive basis. Grantees receive funding, mentoring from ICT4D researchers, and support to participate in regional knowledge sharing conferences. The SIRCA I management focused the evaluation on: the extent to which the Grant Review Committee selected the most appropriate candidates; the extent to which the mentorship programme actually facilitated learning and/or collaboration between emerging and established researchers; and the extent to which the Workshops & Conferences facilitated the publication and dissemination of research findings.

In the case of the SIRCA I UFE, the external evaluator proposed to develop the project's theory of change. She felt this exercise would help with Step 6: focusing the evaluation. This exercise helped the evaluator and the primary intended user (PIU) to differentiate between Outputs, Short-term Outcomes, Long-term Outcomes, and Impacts.

A total of 27 recommendations were developed on the basis of the findings. The evaluator worked closely with the PIU to narrow down a list of the most urgent and relevant ones across three areas: the Grant Review Committee, the mentorship process, and the workshops and conferences. Another outcome is that SIRCA I has built an evaluation event into its next project phase. SIRCA I perceived that the UFE was useful in reflecting the shortcomings of the program and helped tremendously in facilitating the stakeholders' thinking in the development of a more strategic plan for SIRCA I's future.

## PANACeA

**T**he PAN Asian Collaboration for Evidence-based e-Health Adoption and Application (PANACeA) is a network of health researchers and institutions that conducts collaborative research on e-Health applications in the Asian context. PANACeA works at

two levels: Network and Projects. Through this evaluation PANACeA aimed at determining how well the Network supported its research projects, how and what it achieved as a Network.

Step 3 (identifying primary intended users [PIUs]) was particularly challenging. Though PANACeA was made aware that usually UFE focuses on a small team of PIUs, this was not what the Network members desired. They did not want any of the Network members to feel left out of the evaluation process and outcome. Hence they decided that “all of these members hold very important stakes in this evaluation because these are the people who are responsible for executing the functions of the PANACeA Network” (*PANACeA Evaluation Report*, p. 11). They held the strong belief that for the Network to be strengthened further, the PIUs should consist of all the 25 members of the Network. This decision was respected and led to a significant amount of coordination and communication work for the evaluator. Another highlight was the impact of the Simulation of Use (Step 8). While at first there was resistance to including this step (due to a significant work load) it turned out to be very useful and served much like a mid-course-correction. It resulted in realigning and revising the interview questions and Uses for a better focus.

By the time the UFE report was ready, the first phase of the project was over. Some uses had been already acted upon, such as bringing more intensity and focus into interactive communication; while the remaining use(s) have to be actualized pending the start of a second phase. An outcome we highlight is that some PIUs were encouraged by their own change of perception about evaluation. No longer was it as a scary word that related primarily to funding, rather now it has taken on learning purpose.

## **DREAM-IT**

**D**REAM-IT stands for: Development Research to Empower All Mongolians through Information Communications Technology. The project is designed to develop the capacities of researchers

and research managers to achieve their objectives, as well as to strengthen strategic linkages and knowledge sharing opportunities among the projects. The UFE by its very design is driven by the needs of the person(s) or users. The primary intended users (PIUs) were all the members of the DREAM-IT Board. In UFE it is the users who determine how they will use the findings and chart a course to do so. We learned that this process is not straightforward and within the Mongolian context there were unique challenges. Determining what to evaluate, who will be the users and how the evaluation will be used turned out to be difficult questions for grantees.

Initially the topic of the evaluation was also expected to be a summative review of the Sub-projects or the oversight role of the DREAM-IT board. This view was strongly influenced by previous external donor driven evaluations. However, after much reflection, the purpose or the use of the UFE was to understand how DREAM-IT could better manage its projects so that it could fulfill its management oversight role. To that end four Sub-projects were selected for the UFE — two of them had been able to complete their objectives within a stated time frame and two had not. The mentoring in this project was particularly important, and the DECI mentor was able to add a third on-site visit thanks to funding for a separate activity. The series of face-to-face workshops and support proved to be indispensable.

A significant achievement of the UFE process was the confidence it instilled in DREAM-IT that it could *do evaluation*. One UFE Board Member recognized that they were not evaluation experts but with the appropriate mentoring they were able to understand UFE, conduct it, and use its findings. Another important achievement was the development of a checklist. The UFE checklist was to be used *in addition* to the general checklist to review proposals for projects. The checklist raises pertinent questions to the new project applicants about planning and implementation of innovative strategies such as piloting very new technologies/applications,



or working with target populations not familiar with technology, or managing partners from different sectors. The checklist could be used to review how realistically new applications addressed innovation in their objectives, implementation strategies and expected outcomes. The checklist was intended to also help the Board to systematically and critically review proposals for criteria (based on UFE research findings) that would enable successful completion, management of such innovative projects as well as assessing if outcomes could contribute to policy influence.

## Recommended Reading

Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (4th. Ed).  
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2012). *Essentials of utilization-focused evaluation*.  
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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*Three Cats, One Dog, a Fish and Five Compasses,*  
2010, stained glass and found objects, 21.5" diameter,  
by Barbara Bryce. The artist combines found objects  
with a scattering of instruments – in UFE we use  
“found” methods; we harness various data  
collection tools. She assembles a whole that  
combines new with old; we strive to do  
the same – a unity of parts.

