Reflections on the Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) Process

"Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia" (SIRCA) Programme

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SIRCA Programme (1)

- Funded by the International Development Resarch Centre (IDRC), Canada

- Administered by Singapore Internet Research Center (SiRC), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

- 14 research projects for 3 grant categories (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Vietnam)

SIRCA Programme (2)

- Research projects on *Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D)*

- Project length: 12 to 24 months

- Key Features:
  - Mentorship Programme
  - Graduate Student Award Programme
  - Capacity Building Workshops
  - Dissemination Conferences

SIRCA Key Objectives

- Enhance **research capacity** in Asia through rigorous academic research

- Create a **space for dialogue** on ICT4D social science research issues in Asia

- Create linkages through a **mentorship program**

- **Disseminate** findings in publications and conferences

SIRCA Evaluation

- First time to commission an evaluation

- Evaluation period: Mar 2008 – July 2010 (2 yrs, 4 mos)

- Formative evaluation: Identify areas for improvement in operations, activities, and provide actionable recommendations to staff and senior management

- *Utilization-Focused Evaluation(UFE):* Participatory evaluation approach, focus on **use of the findings** by evaluation's **primary users**

UFE Learnings (1)

- **Establish common understanding and expectations**
  - UFE Primary Users vs non-Primary Users vs Important Stakeholders – Primary Users should have the final say
  - Time commitment
  - Face-to-face meeting with evaluator always helps!

UFE Learnings (2)

- **Do not hurry**
  - Identify the <u>Primary Users</u>: Get individuals who are committed, knowledgeable, care about the evaluation, "personal factor"
  - Identify the <u>Primary Uses</u> of the evaluation
  - Identify potential <u>Evaluation Areas</u>

UFE Learnings (3)

- **Participation of Primary Users is crucial**
  - Knowledge of history, challenges, internal politics
  - Involvement in UFE Steps 1 – 12 (key evaluation questions, evaluation design, data collection methods, analysis and interpretation of findings, generation of recommendations, using the findings)
  - <u>Understanding</u> of findings → sense of <u>ownership</u> of the evaluation →higher probability of <u>using</u> the evaluation

UFE Challenges (1)

- Primary Users have other job priorities – UFE is time consuming

- Primary Users lose interest, drop out

- Staff turnover – lose continuity of knowledge and experience, changes in evaluation areas and delays in process

- Change of mindset - evaluator is not the typical outsider/external auditor but a facilitator and trusted advisor

- The evaluation should be "objective"?

UFE Challenges (2)

- **Evaluator doesn't have the answer to everything**

  *"I find that when I enter a new program setting as an external evaluator, the people with whom I'm working typically expect me to tell them what the focus of the evaluation will be. They're passively waiting to be told by the evaluation expert – me – what questions the evaluation will answer. But I don't come with specific evaluation questions. **I come with a process for determining what questions will be meaningful and what answers will be useful given the program's situation, priorities, and decision context.** Taking them through the process of formulating questions and determining evaluation priorities is aimed at engendering their commitment to data-based evaluation and use."* (Michael Quinn Patton, UFE, 4th edition, p.49)

Evaluation is over…but there's a lasting outcome…

- **Internal capacity is built!**
  - Infused *evaluative thinking* into organization - Primary Users, staff and senior management more mindful of the processes and systems of SIRCA
  - Assisted new personnel in adapting quickly into the organization, particularly if they became Primary Users
  - Stimulated new ideas for programme
  - Learned to critically analyze, identify and anticipate programme challenges
  - Conscious of monitoring mechanisms and indicators
  - Learned how to conduct, review and manage future evaluations

Thank You