Case Study: PAN Asian Collaboration for Evidence-based e-Health Adoption and Application (PANACeA)

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1. Utilization Focused Evaluation

"Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use" (Patton, 2008: 37). In UFE, evaluators facilitate a learning process with attention on how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experiences. The focus of utilization-focused evaluation is on intended use by intended users. UFE does not prescribe any specific content, method or theory. It is a framework, as opposed to any other methodology. It can include any purpose of interest to the user: it is a process for making decisions in consultation with those who can benefit from the evaluation. It is based on the observation that intended users will more likely utilize an evaluation that they have ownership of.

About the DECI Project

DECI stands for Developing Evaluation Capacity in ICTD (Information and Communication Technology for Development), and it is an IDRC-funded evaluation research and capacity development project. This case study is one of the five UFE experiences supported by DECI. The project built an evaluation capacity among IDRC-funded projects in the field of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICTD) across Asia. The project provided researchers and evaluators with coaching and mentoring in UFE through a team of regional evaluation mentors. The mentoring team introduced the concepts and practices of UFE and facilitated the design and completion of evaluations across five ICTD projects. These five case studies capture the mentoring team's experiences and reflections as a way of sharing what was learned by facilitating UFEs.

2. The UFE Framework

The following are an abbreviated representation of the 12 steps of UFE:

1. **Programme/Organizational Readiness Assessment** — Those who want the evaluation conducted need guidance to understand utilization-focused evaluation (UFE). This requires active and skilled guidance from an evaluation facilitator.

2. **Evaluator Readiness and Capability Assessment** — Facilitating and conducting a UFE requires that both managers and evaluators review their skills and willingness to collaborate. The facilitators' effectiveness will be judged on the basis of actual evaluation use.

3. **Identification of Primary Intended Users** — Primary intended users (PIUs) have a direct, identifiable stake in the evaluation and its use. The facilitator assesses the characteristics of primary intended users and sustains a climate of openness.

4. **Situational Analysis** — Evaluation use is both people- and context-dependent. Use will be enhanced when the evaluation takes into account situational factors, which the facilitator reviews, such as timing, resources, culture, turbulence, power and politics.

5. **Identification of Primary Intended Uses** — Intended use by primary intended users is the goal of UFE. A number of evaluation options are reviewed, screened and prioritized.

6. **Focusing the Evaluation** — The focus follows the intended uses of the evaluation by PIUs who need assistance identifying and confirming the uses. The fine-tuning of key evaluation questions is a critical component of the UFE. This process is difficult, however, it is critical for the richest research results.

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.

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 usable findings.

9. **Data Collection** — Managed with use in mind. It is important to keep the primary intended users informed and involved throughout all the stages of the process.

10. **Data Analysis** — Accomplished in consultation with the primary intended users. This involvement increases their understanding of the findings while adding to their sense of ownership and commitment to utilization.

11. **Facilitation of Use** — Use does not just happen naturally — it needs to be facilitated. This action includes priority setting among recommendations. This step is central to UFE requiring that time and resources are allocated to this activity from the project's inception.

12. **Meta-evaluation** — UFEs are evaluated by whether primary intended users used the evaluation in intended ways. This step tells the story of how the UFE process evolved. It allows the users and the facilitator to learn from their own experiences. This case study is the product of Step 12.

3. UFE — Background
The PAN Asian Collaboration for Evidence-based e-Health Adoption and Application (PANACeA; http://www.panacea-ehealth.net/) is a network of health researchers and institutions that conducts collaborative research on e-Health applications in the Asian context. The members of the network are from 10 developing countries in Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka. The project is based at the Aga Khan University (AKU) in Karachi, Pakistan. The Advisory and Mentoring Team (AMT) manages the network, as well as mentoring and facilitating research projects[1]. The project began in August of 2007 and was originally planned to finish in August of 2010. The project was granted a 12-month extension and took a final extension until 31 December 2011.

PANACeA's projects, led by the AMT, incorporated these themes: Systematic Reviews on Tele-health and Health Informatics; Free and Open Source Software; Readiness and Change

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[1] AMT is comprised of six e-Health experts from the Aga Khan University (AKU), Pakistan; University of Calgary, Canada; Molave Development Foundation (MDF), the Philippines; Institute of Public Health, India; and IDRC, Canada.

Management; Policy and Influence; and Network Management and Gender Analysis. The objectives and interventions of PANACeA are at two levels: Network and Projects. The research network has the objective of generating evidence on how e-Health could improve health programmes and services in the member countries through collaborative multinational e-Health projects. The Projects have the following objectives: researching the most beneficial e-Health applications and practices; creating a theoretical model for evaluating good practice in e-Health programme in Asia; building research capacity in Asian researchers to adopt appropriate e-Health technologies for practices and policy influences; and sharing the research findings with regional and international research communities.

The introduction of DECI and UFE to PANACeA in mid-2009 raised interesting and varied expectations as well as anticipation among the AMT members and project leaders. This process included strengthening the research capacity among the network's members; having an evaluation and strengthening the understanding of it; and introducing UFE, specifically, as part of the work process. The members of PANACeA felt that the DECI UFE was an opportunity for its partners to be involved collectively in evaluating the network, rather than only having a small group or higher level leaders within the network take on this role. It was also expected that the opportunity would help develop evaluation skills and capacities among the researchers and project partners in the PANACeA network in evaluation, in general, rather in UFE alone. Further, it was expected that the capacity to evaluate, especially a "network" like PANACeA whose partners are diverse and spread over many countries, would be enhanced. A network member stated: "We were already thinking of a formative evaluation of the Network and when this opportunity came we thought we could make use of it. We wanted to avoid duplication and decided to go with UFE for the formative evaluation of the network". PANACeA members also thought and anticipated that this opportunity would enhance accountability to its donor, IDRC, Canada.

Further, PANACeA felt the UFE came at a timely moment for evaluating both the Projects and the network, although PANACeA later decided to evaluate only the network. They wanted to assess whether the projects were successful and whether the network supported its projects. Additionally, they ascertained what it achieved as a network. A PANACeA member stated: "We will have the evaluation findings quickly so that they can be used in the ongoing project/network". Significant learning was anticipated from the DECI UFE in an evaluation directed at ICT and e-Health related projects. A member of PANACeA noted: "Doing the process oneself, learning skills to do such evaluation process with self-reflection and help the progress of projects such as TB-DOTS"[2] much would be gained. What took longer for the members to appreciate was that UFE allows the users to focus the evaluation on whatever uses matter to them. This scope can encompass a wide range of questions. There was also anxiety about the UFE framework as the 12 steps of UFE initially looked complex.

When the PANACeA team was introduced to UFE through the DECI project, the approach was new to them. There was also a lingering question: "Why only UFE and why not some other approaches to evaluation?" However, PANACeA took the opportunity to join in. Gradually, it became clear that UFE is an approach that ensures that evaluation findings are actually "used" and not just filed away. As time passed, and as the process developed, the understanding and capacity of UFE was built. Inevitably, some of the primary users developed more learning and interest about UFE than other users.

4. UFE — The What

PANACeA had objectives and interventions at two levels (Network and Project). Through this evaluation PANACeA aimed at determining how well the network supported its research projects as well as how and what it achieved as a network. The evaluation would also: identify lessons learnt as a network and its strengths; what else should be done during the rest of the project as well as by whom and at what level. The intent was to review the overall

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[2] TB-DOTs is a tuberculosis treatment http://www.who.int/tb/dots/en/

functioning of the network in order to ensure the fulfillment of its objectives. After the initial briefings about UFE, PANACeA confirmed its readiness for a formative evaluation through UFE and for which its AMT played a facilitating role: "The leadership and the network members were ready to spend their time and resources for the evaluation since they wanted to identify the achievements of the network and were prepared to identify gaps in the overall functioning of the network for their rectification"[3]. PANACeA did this as part of the Organizational Readiness Assessment *(UFE Step 1)*. To further strengthen its readiness, PANACeA organized a workshop at its annual conference where the mentor from DECI gave face-to-face briefings and provided information to network members about the 12 steps of UFE.

Step 2, Evaluators' Readiness, was not an easy step to navigate. PANACeA identified an "evaluator" from another department of AKU. However, it faced with problems of "deputation" which led to temporarily appointing another member from PANACeA until it found a replacement. Subsequently, it succeeded in getting an independent evaluator from AKU based in Karachi. She was able to stay on and facilitated the evaluation process until its end. Her facility in the process was noted: "The evaluator was assessed for capabilities and readiness for the evaluation. It was ensured that the evaluator had prior experience in research and evaluation. The evaluator was based at AKU and was guided by the evaluation mentor throughout the evaluation process. The evaluator was briefed regarding the structure of the network and objectives of the evaluation" (PANACeA, *Evaluation Report,* 2010, p. 11). The AMT, based in AKU, provided closer support and accompanied the evaluator until she became familiar with the earlier process of "organizational readiness".

Though PANACeA was aware that UFE focuses on one Primary Intended User (PIU) or a small team, 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 PANACeA 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*, 2010, p. 11). They held the belief that for the network to be strengthened further, the PIUs should consist of all the 25 members of the network[4]. Identifying Primary Intended Users *(UFE Step 3)* required an intense debate within PANACeA and with the mentors from DECI prior to deciding to have all its 25 members of the network as the Primary Intended Users (PIUs) of the evaluation.

The evaluator and the PIUs, together, assessed the situational factors that would affect evaluation process and usage of evaluation findings. This situational analysis *(UFE Step 4)* helped in identifying potential barriers and also the favourable factors. PANACeA ensured the availability of enough material and monetary resources to carry out and support this evaluation. PANACeA and its members had earlier experience in formative evaluation[5], however, the UFE framework was new for all the network members. Other possible challenges included the large number of PIUs and their availability and commitment to the process. However, the PANACeA team reassured itself that the process was possible. The timeline was another tricky aspect. The first phase of the project ended in February of 2011; since this was a "formative" evaluation the process would need to have been completed well in advance of that date for the evaluation to be useful. However, since the execution was delayed "PANACeA adapted to this (potential) barrier by not evaluating all aspects of the network, but by focusing itself on some important critical aspects so that the evaluation could be managed in the limited time period and its utility could also be enhanced" (PANACeA, *Evaluation Report*, 2010 p. 12).

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[3] Sajwani, A., Khoja, S., and Durrani, H. with Solomon, C., 2010, *PANACeA Formative Network Evaluation Report*. Karachi, Pakistan: PANACeA, p. 11. See http://idl-bnc.idrc.ca/dspace/bitstream/10625/48142/1/IDL-48142.pdf

[4] The Network Lead; AMT members; Project Leads; Project Partners and Support Team members.

[5] Formative Evaluation of PAN's Networking Approach by conducted by Mary Jane Real and Ricardo Wilson-Grau in July of 2008.

After having decided on the PIUs and the Situational Analysis, the next major task was to proceed with Identify the Primary Intended Uses *(UFE STEP 5)* of the evaluation. Use by Primary Intended Users is the goal of UFE. PANACeA arrived at the "uses" after having considered how the evaluation could contribute to the network's improvement and how it could contribute to making major decisions in the current phase of the network. It is important to underline that the UFE 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: Focusing the Evaluation *(UFE Step 6)*; and Simulation of Use *(UFE Step 8)*; and Data Analysis *(UFE Step 10)*.

The primary intended uses formed three broader categories under "formative" evaluation: (1) Collaboration and Team Network; (2) Capacity Building; and (3) Knowledge Management (refer to the next page for examples). During the next step Focusing Evaluation *(UFE Step 6)* the high priority questions, i.e. the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs), were derived from the primary intended uses by the PIUs. The KEQs were put under two broader categories of Collaboration and Team Work as well as Knowledge Management and Learning. Noted here are only the main KEQs which were arrived at after a long process with the PIUs: (1) Collaboration and Team Work: (a) Communication: "How has PANACeA facilitated communication and interaction amongst the network members?"; (b) Participation: "How have the network members collectively worked towards achieving common PANACeA objectives?"; (2) Knowledge Management and Learning: (a) Network Approach: "To what extent has PANACeA's Network approach contributed to the development of your research skills and management (or conducting) of your research?"; (b) Dissemination: "How has PANACeA helped in disseminating the research findings inside and outside the network?"; and (c) Policy Impact: "To what extent will the PANACeA Network contribute to policy change in the partner countries?"

PANACeA selected methods for data collection during Evaluation Design *(UFE Step 7)*. A unique feature in this case was that the PIUs (all the network members) were also the only data source for the evaluation. In order to stimulate respondents' thinking and extract their opinions, an interview guide was designed containing open-ended questions. PANACeA carried out an exercise for Simulation of Use *(UFE Step 8)* with four out of 25 PIUs who were easily accessible. As noted in the PANACeA, *Evaluation Report*: "The primary intended users were given the list of KEQs along with two to three varied simulated responses on each KEQ and the list of primary intended uses that they identified earlier. PIUs were asked to reflect on whether the simulated data in response to the KEQ was likely to answer the uses as intended by them or not" (2010, p. 16). This step was a unique experience/decision point for PANACeA and can be likened to a mid-journey course correction. This solution resulted in realigning and revising the interview questions and uses for a better focus. PANACeA adapted by dropping a couple of sub-uses since they were beyond the focus of the current phase. For instance, one of the original uses under Collaboration and Team Work was "to enhance the use of appropriate technology and tools for collaboration and a clear documentation system". It was reframed as "to enhance the use of appropriate technology and tools for documentation and collaboration, among and between project partners". The change was the specification of adding "among and between project partners" that was missing earlier.

The evaluator initiated the Data Collection *(UFE Step 9)* after the revision and finalization of the evaluation questions and data collection tool. Given the size of the PIUs and their spread across 10 Asian countries, these interviews were conducted online by using Skype. As noted in the PANACeA, *Evaluation Report*: "The interviews were recorded using an i-free Skype Recorder[6], and the recordings were then used for transcription of the interviews" (2010, p. 17). The transcription was then shared with the respective respondent who is also the PIU, for his or her review and confirmation.

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[6] It is a free, easy-to-use tool for recording Skype-to-Skype calls; Skype-Out/Skype-In calls; and Skype Conference.

During the Data Analysis *(UFE Step 10)* the PANACeA, *Evaluation Report* notes: "PANACeA involved a chain of steps, which includes data organization, integration and recommendation. The software QSR NVivo was used to organize and help analyze the data gathered from the interviews. The software does not conduct analysis, but it actually facilitates the process by providing structure to elicit meaning from the data" (2010, p. 17). PANACeA examined the findings and their implications from various perspectives with focus on primary intended uses by primary intended users. This work also led to the revision of the "use categories" under the designations: Collaboration and Teamwork; Capacity Building; and Knowledge Management in order to bring more use focus[7]. PANACeA took systematic efforts to address the Facilitation of Use *(UFE 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 first phase of the project (PANACeA 1.0.)[8] and in the second phase (PANACeA 2.0)[9].

5. UFE — The How

Non-familiarity with the UFE method was a challenge and affected the approach to UFE. The PANACeA team was using UFE for the first time. The process and the 12 steps of UFE were found to be difficult and complicated. In addition to this challenge, there was confusion at the initial stage of the project about whether the focus was on evaluating the "Network" or the "Projects" of PANACeA. This point became clearer only later in the process as the "uses" were finalized by the PIUs. However, even after completing all the steps of UFE in PANACeA, with the formative evaluation of the Network, there were still weaknesses in the understanding of the UFE process by the primary users. This problem was due in part to the large size of the PIU group, which was spread across Pan Asian countries and different time zones.

The UFE process required an appropriate person, who would be designated the evaluator, with sufficient capacity and skills in evaluation to facilitate the process. As mentioned previously, PANACeA had to go through a change in the evaluator during the initial steps of the UFE: Organization Readiness *(UFE Step 1)* and Selection of PIUs *(UFE Step 2)*. This meant that the evaluator, who was appointed later in the evaluation process, 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". It was felt, as well, that the rigorous nature (each step involving intensive attention) of the UFE was a challenge for the evaluator. Every step of the UFE was neither that of a single person, nor the evaluator's, decision. It had to go through all the primary users to get their responses, with the subsequent compilation and consolidation and feedback for agreement and consensus. In other words, PANACeA, metaphorically speaking, breathed a sigh of relief that a committed evaluator was found. She was alert and efficient, understanding the process, explaining it to the PIUs, doing things quickly and following up.

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[7] Collaboration and Team Work example: Original planned use was to promote open and effective communication etc. The revised use was also to promote open, effective and timely communication, etc. Capacity building example: To enhance the e-Health knowledge of PANACeA partners. The revised one is to extend e-Health knowledge and research capability of network members and other external stakeholders. Knowledge management example: To build capacity to disseminate research findings and impact inform policy development e.g. publishing in journals, conference presentations etc. The revised one is to build capacity to disseminate research findings and inform policy development e.g. publishing in journals, conference presentations etc.
[8] Improving communication between different levels of the network; using simple and inclusive ICT tools; regular sharing of project findings with other members; building partnerships with governments, e-health associations and institutions for policy change etc.
[9] Ensuring gender balance at the field level; enhancing formal learning and capacity building opportunities for network partners; country specific actions for policy change etc.

The choice of an evaluator who had come from and was stationed within the lead organization, AKU, proved to be an advantage and an important decision point as this helped logistically. It became doubly advantageous since two of the PIUs were from the Advisory and Mentoring Team (AMT) of PANACeA based at AKU. They helped the evaluator by filling her in on information and updating her on the initial steps where she had not been a part of the process. They involved themselves and interacted closely with the UFE steps and provided ongoing support throughout. This element of readiness was crucial.

Identification of PIUs *(UFE Step 3)* was a labour intensive task for PANACeA. The decision regarding the PIUs involved deciding whether the PIUs should be a few members of the network or all. It was finally decided to utilize the full team. The PANACeA AMT team was pleased with this decision: "We feel it was a good decision and no one could say that they were not part of the evaluation". For the DECI mentors, it was surprising that all of the network members wanted to be PIUs. Clearly, it meant a few additional challenges as the researchers were spread across countries with different time zones and had limited face-to-face interaction. They generally met only during annual workshops. It was a challenging to get the true engagement and involvement that was required of the primary users throughout the process. PANACeA had to maintain a balance between the flexibility and usefulness of the UFE, on the one hand and the desire of the research partners to be very thorough during each step.

In his seminal book, *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* (2008), Patton noted that the PIUs should be: interested, knowledgeable, open, credible and teachable; connected to an important stakeholder constituency; available for interaction throughout the evaluation process; and should be able to take ownership of the findings. In this case, these requirements were multiplied by 25 as the members were spread across projects in 10 countries. This complexity called for a significant effort. A problem was, for example, the lack of clarity and lack of understanding of primary users about the UFE steps led to insufficient involvement and interest in the process. The evaluator, as a solution, took it upon herself to keep them closely involved and be available through the process. She built a rapport with the primary users and used every available opportunity to communicate through emails, via Skype and especially during face-to-face briefings when the evaluator met the PIUs for the first time during one of their project review meetings in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in October of 2010. During this meeting, the evaluator took time to meet each primary user individually as well. However, getting all the primary users involved closely with the process was difficult and continued to be a challenge until the end of the 12th step of UFE. The rapport of the evaluator with the primary intended users of PANACeA enhanced the interactions and contributed to overcome the challenge. Her adaptability and communication skills made important contributions to solving the problems inherent in this project.

Identifying the Uses *(UFE Step 5)* was at first seen as an uncomfortable step as the PIUs felt that it could be pre-empting what was going to come as "findings" of the evaluation. It was challenging for the PIUs to foresee how the initial results were going to be used. Secondly, the 25 primary users were from different levels in the network structure. Thus the responsibility and ownership positions were different. The PIUs wondered: "How was this going to work while delivering the 'use' of the evaluation findings?" However, the PIUs left it to the future process. Data Collection *(UFE Step 9)* was a challenging task: (1) The data collection tool was applied through interviews over Skype or Skype-phone; (2) It generated a huge amount of data, which had to be organized and analyzed. Some of the data collection had to be redone to meet the need of the intended uses since gaps were realized while analyzing the data; and (3) It required that the evaluator learn to use software to compile the collected data for data analysis.

Timelines made it a challenge to complete the UFE steps on time. UFE Steps 1 to 10 took 10 months to complete. To get sufficient time for process reflection, evaluative thinking and to get this process finished well in time for course correction was very demanding. In the rush, Simulation *(UFE Step 8)* was skipped as the project's members focused all efforts on the Data

Collection *(UFE Step 9).* At the request of the DECI mentors, the team retraced their efforts to address that step**.** Fortuitously, the time spent on Simulation helped the evaluator and PIUs to reflect, correct and sharpen the data collection tool: "We could have expedited the process, but it was not possible to do so due to the size of the PIUs and their other commitments and it was still worth it" were the feelings of the evaluator and some of the PIUs. The support from the DECI team was felt to be appropriate. The mentors from DECI provided time and detailed comments which were timely.

By the time the UFE report was ready, the first phase of the Project i.e. PANACeA 1.0. was over. The second phase (PANACeA 2.0) was yet to be finalized within PANACeA and with their donor partner IDRC. PANACeA was not sure what shape 2.0 would take. In regard to the Facilitation of Uses *(UFE Step 11)* it should be noted that some uses had been already acted upon, such as bringing more intensity and focus into interactive communication. The remaining "use(s)" have to be actualized pending the start of PANACeA 2.0. The "uses" are segregated and responsibility lies among the different categories of the PIUs (AMT, PCTA and Project Heads). This shared responsibility raises questions such as: "Who will monitor the uses?"; "How is it going to be done?"; and "Will it be done by the AMT, the Steering Committee, an Interim Steering Committee, or an Evaluator?" PANACeA's estimation is that the AMT will cede responsibility to the Steering Committee in Phase 2.0.

IDRC's role, was as a funder of the project, but in the UFE process relinquished control over the evaluation. This entailed a shift in the role played by the programme officer (PO) of IDRC who commented: "I step away from what is happening, but also make myself available to provide inputs". The PO walked a metaphorical tightrope wanting not to impose herself, but ensure that she was present and listening. But when it came to the UFE her presence and role as she noted: "it was an issue to consider and I did not find it a challenge, but I always had it at the back of my mind". The PO was clear about the IDRC's role and she had ensure that she "wore the right hat" i.e. that she fulfilled her role without exceeding it. For instance, when checking on the alignment of use after the data collection and compilation was done, she saw it not as a challenge but more as an opportunity when balancing her role as the IDRC's representative: asking questions but not proposing answers.

6. UFE — Outcomes

One of the focus areas selected by PANACeA for evaluation was Collaboration and Teamwork. The sub-category was Network Approach, Communication and Participation. There were many findings generated by the evaluation. The following are a sample of those findings that focus on Project and Network Outcomes. PANACeA's strengths were recognized in the diversity of the network and collaboration among members. The facilitation of use confirmed "diversity" and "collaborative actions" will be given a robust estimation by the network partners as evidence of the network's strength — PANACeA 2.0.

The network's focus on individual researchers rather than institutions had several implications: the individual researchers had less available time as they had their regular jobs. They also faced administrative issues, which meant a decreased participation by some members (individual researchers). This weakness has been addressed in the current phase (PANACeA 1.0) in the form of financial reporting by each partner country and by having the network provide administrative support to individual researchers. This finding will be reflected in the Criteria for Selection of network members in PANACeA 2.0. The evaluation also noted some limitation among members in terms of the level of training; haphazard communication; non-adherence to deadlines; and limited involvement from the government sector. PANACeA took remedial action, which improved the process, during the course of the current project (PANACeA 1.0) through: a stricter adherence procedure for deadlines; ensuring the free flow of communication from the network and between partners; and by creating a sub-network within each country for training, organizing events and for the involvement of respective governments.

The above sample of findings (refer to the PANACeA *Evaluation Report*, 2010) helped improve the following uses. Taking efforts, while PANACeA 1.0 was still operational, to: encourage more interation; to create more reminders to respond; and hold more face-to-face meetings. Additionally, there was a commitment to using better quality Internet connections and adjusting to time zone differences and using ICT tools like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, webinars and web portals. They chose and adhered to one or two technological solutions that were found to be most appropriate. Furthermore, there was an additional commitment to organizing more interactions with its partners during the annual conference. For instance, during the workshop held in Kuala Lumpur in April 2011, it was required that each of the network partners come prepared for presentations on their projects. This requirement opened up more interactions with opportunities for critiques on each of the research projects. This step enhanced researchers' capacity in their respective projects and encouraged them to look at the areas of weakness and respond to them.

The process of UFE prompted PANACeA to create a summative evaluation of the network projects. They chose to do this separately since evaluating both Network and Projects from the UFE process was too involved. PANACeA also wanted the summative evaluation of their Projects to be done within a quicker time frame, relative to UFE experience, which in their case was lengthy. Further, the built-up skill and motivation levels on evaluation enhanced the capacity and confidence among the partners for self-evaluation.

During the latter phase of the UFE evaluation (December, 2010) PANACeA came up with an evaluation tool, the Khoja-Durrani-Scott (KDS) Evaluation Tool, for summative evaluation of PANACeA projects. The tool covers four stages: (1) Development; (2) Implementation; (3) Integration; and (4) Sustained Operation with seven outcomes: (1) Health; (2) Technology; (3) Economic; (4) Readiness and change; (5) Social and Cultural; (6) Ethical; and (7) Policy Outcome. At each stage there is an interview questionnaire format to go with and a tool each for managers, health provider and clients. The scoring consists of six levels ("Un-satisfactory", "Below Expectations", "Meets Expectations", "Above Expectations", "Extraordinary and Don't Know-DK") and the results are expected to be used to find out where each project stands[10].

The primary users were satisfied with the process outcomes from the UFE process that they could apply in future. A primary user stated: "We were the test subjects (guinea pigs) for the tool and we willingly used it on ourselves. However, we learnt a new framework of evaluation and there is a possibility to use this to evaluate different networks, especially in an issue-based network". The evaluator added: "In what we did, at a network level where there are different and multiple players, the UFE was helpful, but when it comes to individual project evaluation, I am not sure". On the whole, the findings were considered amazing. PANACeA, as a large network, felt UFE could be a model for evaluating networks this is a major achievement for the process. There was clarity as to what worked which was assisted by the process's systematic approach and rigor. What did not work, such as the timeline, was fixed. The process did require extreme flexibility, however. As was is noted in the *Evaluation Report*: "This PANACeA formative evaluation experience and findings can act as a cornerstone and be shared and used by other similar current networks and future collaborations".

The UFE process that PANACeA went through was detailed and systematic. It gave the primary users an understanding at each step, such as why it is important to clarify who the PIUs are and what was expected of them. They were quite excited that the PIUs could be involved in other evaluations as well, with different titles like Primary Stakeholders instead of Primary Users but having the same meaning.

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[10] Please refer to www.panacea-evaluation.tk for more details.

The rigor in UFE comes from the systematic application of each step that enables its replicability. Beyond its mechanical application the process contributed to bringing a sense of the ownership over the process by the primary users. Nevertheless, the level of ownership varied and developed gradually among some ofthe primary users. The variation in ownership was due the initial confusion as to whether the focus was on evaluating the Projects or the Network. As mentioned before, these questions all became clear later in the process while working on the Key Evaluation Questions. Overall, PANACeA felt that the rigor of a systematic process could be used in other future projects. It was also felt that one or more steps *(UFE Step 6; UFE Step 8; UFE Step 11)* selected from the UFE could be used to add rigor to any evaluation carried out with other methodologies.

Of interest to other future projects was the way electronic communication such as emails, websites, Skype, telephone, audio conference and SMS were used throughout the process of conducting the UFE. The use of different media allowed PANACeA to keep in close contact with the primary users and to enhance their involvement. Nevertheless, it was also clear that the process needed more face-to-face interactive meetings. Email and Skype were not very effective when it came to interaction with as large a size grouping of primary users such as found in PANACeA. It was also noted that reading through the attachments sent by email was not practical for the primary users since the tendency was to shelve them. In other words, there were limits among these electronic means for effective interaction with the primary users.

7. UFE — Lessons Learned

The UFE framework was new to the primary users as well as to the evaluator and to the mentor. This proved to be a challenge in the earlier stages of the UFE. Once the understanding of the UFE steps was obtained, and, it should be noted, this comprehension developed gradually, it helped more and became a contributing factor in the outcomes of both the network and UFE processes in PANACeA. The very fact that the DECI mentors were applying UFE for the first time meant that a learning attitude was shared among the evaluator and PANACeA partners. This factor was a major contributor to a sense of trust among the different parties — it was a joint effort of learning by doing. A critical 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 AKU, were important contributing factors to the positive outcomes attained. The PIUs committed themselves to and owned the process. Through their involvement a sense of ownership was strengthened gradually. That determination came with the sense 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.

Network and project leaders and PIUs were uncomfortable with the time consuming steps of the UFE, nevertheless, they adapted and persevered. UFE requires a different mindset for the evaluation process during which primary users assume control which, in turn, entails responsibility over all aspects of the evaluation. PIUs have to make a considerable investment upfront and set aside extra time to ensure that each step is covered systematically and that all key questions be posed. For a researcher, realizing that he or she can decide what to focus the evaluation on can feel like a luxury. DECI mentors found that it took time to truly appreciate the significance of this opportunity. This sensitizing process, an important factor, takes time but the resulting change in people is worth the effort. Facilitating a UFE approach requires a set of specific skills and experience (such as understanding an evaluation; data collection tools and analysis; facilitation and adaptive skills). It should not be construed that the process is achievable only by experts as UFE, in itself, is not an inaccessible process. In DECI's experience, it was very accessible. It followed a logical path and, as well, it was adaptable. However, through DECI we also learned that it requires a lot of experience for mentors and facilitators to constantly focus on the issue of "use" and "users". This required a true understanding and re-orientation of outlook as well as the ability to ask whether the process is going to help "use" or is in the line of "use".

An important learning opportunity for the DECI mentors was the design of the UFE modules. While an initial version was prepared for the start of the project, the regional mentors produced further versions[11] (the last version was presented at the SLEvA conference in Sri Lanka in June of 2011). Another important learning opportunity came from documentation and stock taking. A first set of internal interviews[12] was conducted among the mentors, evaluators and partners for 'Documenting our Learning'. DECI combined the learning with the preparation for panel discussion on UFE and DECI as part of the *Evaluation Conclave 2010* held in New Delhi, India. A second set of interviews[13] was conducted as part of the meta-evaluation *(UFE Step 12)*. This process included most of the same stakeholders plus the respective project POs from IDRC. This case study is the result of this effort: a summary of the UFE experience with PANACeA. The interactive and periodic refinement of usable and do-able knowledge was an important outcome.

The uniqueness of this case is that, even with the larger size of primary users and a work base spread across ten Asian countries with different time zones, PANACeA was still able to complete the evaluation in a satisfactory manner. Secondly, this work required the dedicated facilitation skills of the evaluator with the ongoing support of the mentor for detailing the process and helping the primary users take ownership of the process and findings. Thirdly, evaluation in general involves important stakeholders, but in this case it meant their engagement in all the steps. Fourthly, the situation necessitated the use of every possible communication technique to bring the process closer to the PIUs. Finally, PANACeA felt that using UFE and evaluating the network was a unique experience for the PIUs. PANACeA concluded that the approach could be replicated, but with simplified steps.

How ready was PANACeA for the evaluation *(UFE Step 1)*? PANACeA was not clear in the beginning about the different steps related to the process. Further planning and more investment in preparation would have contributed towards readiness. This work could have included an earlier decision on whether to focus on the Network or the Projects, more clarity on how UFE could be adapted to combined ICT and e-Health projects as well as agreements on uses and primary users. The primary users were not clear about the UFE process and they initially lacked understanding of the steps of UFE. This led to a lack of involvement and interest on the part of some members. The evaluator, as a result, had to push through the process. If all the primary users had been made well aware of the 12 steps through better communication *(UFE Step 3)* this, in turn, would have encouraged the primary users' engagement in the process. Consequently, they would have gained a greater ownership from the UFE's initial stages. Secondly, more workshops and online training would have enhanced the skills in UFE and been more enabling. The process could have been easier if the users had undergone better training earlier to understand the framework, especially since it was new to PANACeA. Simultaneous "learning and doing" was difficult. The DECI team assumed the introductory modules on UFE would be clear enough to provide confidence in the approach. However, the DECI team understood its full potential only through trial and error. The UFE process started late in the project cycle of PANACeA. The process took a longer time than expected i.e. between 10 to 12 months. PANACeA would have benefitted more had this evaluation taken place earlier in the project to assess the network and to apply the findings during the course of the project cycle.

The large size of the PIU group *(UFE Step 3)* affected the process. It also created a dilemma when some members had to be separated from the larger group, especially as PANACeA was

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[11] See http://evaluationinpractice.wordpress.com/ for more information.

[12] The first set of interviews focused on: (1) Aspects of UFE that were found most helpful and why?; (2) Aspects of UFE that were found most challenging; and suggestions; (3) Enabling factors that are most important for UFE to succeed; (4) Aspects that should have been done differently; (5) The UFE lens and its effect on other evaluation; (6) Aspects of the mentoring experience that worked the best; (7) Aspects of the mentoring experience that were the least effective; and (8) Suggestions for additional mentoring practices.

[13] The second set of interviews focused on the broader areas of: (1) The UFE journey — The what; (2) UFE — The how; (3) UFE — The outcome; and (4) UFE —The lessons.

a network (with multiple projects underway). While PANACeA concluded that the decision to include all 25 members was sound, this presented challenges that have already been described. A change of staff, or of PIUs, has been noted as a challenge to the continuity of UFE[14]. The original evaluator was unable to stay on. The new one was unable to be involved in the UFE's initial steps. She missed key events like the Bangkok meeting where all the primary users were present and where the introduction to UFE steps was made. Such meetings would have made the steps of finalizing the key evaluation questions easier since the PIUs would have been more accessible and a sense of trust would have emerged sooner. This was an opportunity lost.

It would have helped the evaluator greatly if DECI had provided opportunities for evaluators of the five Pan Asia projects to meet and learn the UFE approach from each other's experience in a face-to-face interaction. There are still lingering issues for the evaluator on some aspects of the UFE such as designing, focusing the evaluation and simulation. With additional resources, an opportunity could have been created to bring the people together, especially the evaluators who managed the evaluations of different projects. It would have been useful for them to have met and discussed what some of their experiences had been. A meeting could have offered close interactions and they would have come to know how the process worked elsewhere. This is an opportunity lost[15].

There should have been a matching of expectations and a leveling of expectations. PANACeA felt that the leveling happened only at the end of the process. DECI can only hope that the Primer will be the vehicle to share its experiences as a means to address this issue. PANACEA members felt that they were introduced to a new concept and framework of evaluation — UFE. The real life experience with the UFE process gave them a unique opportunity for learning. The experience has helped the participants to realize the "use" value even though they are yet to become entirely confident with the process and some of the steps. UFE has provided more structured and participatory approach. The primary users of this evaluation would like to use it more in a simplified version. One very encouraging outcome was the change of perception or outlook about the concept of "evaluation" that can be a scary word when applied primarily to funding, rather than learning. Other IDRC projects and other foundations could use and replicate this approach to change the perception and utility of evaluation.

The PO from IDRC observed: "It has deeply affected my outlook on project evaluation as a PO or somebody who works alongside researchers. Just the fundamentals, I have slowly nurtured within myself, and I do not have to refer to books all the time to figure out whether I am doing UFE or not. But what I think has changed in me — yes, the books, the slides and things like that, I can never do without them — I feel as though I have almost accomplished within, and my mind which is always pointing to "north" — here the "north" is Use. When I think about evaluation it has moved on its own in me through the process, to always point towards use. It has made me realize that UFE is not about the sample or scale of funding and it is really about the fundamentals and how it is going to be useful, and whether you are really going to be honest about this and if so let us make it happen".

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[14] See for example: 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.
[15] Perhaps the project-based evaluators have narratives to share in a paper or at a conference. Perhaps this step, within this project, could be shared through Skype or on Facebook.

Appendix: Case Study PANACeA Acronym List

AMT: Advisory and Mentoring Team
AKU: Aga Khan University
DMC: Development Management Consultants
IDRC: International Development Research Centre
KEQs: Key Evaluation Questions
MDF: Molave Development Foundation
PANACeA: PAN Asian Collaboration for Evidence-based e-Health Adoption and Application
PO: Programme Officer
SLEvA: Sri Lanka Evaluation Association