Localizing Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL):

Insights from Local Actors in Burundi, Colombia, and Malawi

Andrea Navarrete, René Manirakiza, and Tawonga Mwase-Vuma

July 17, 2024

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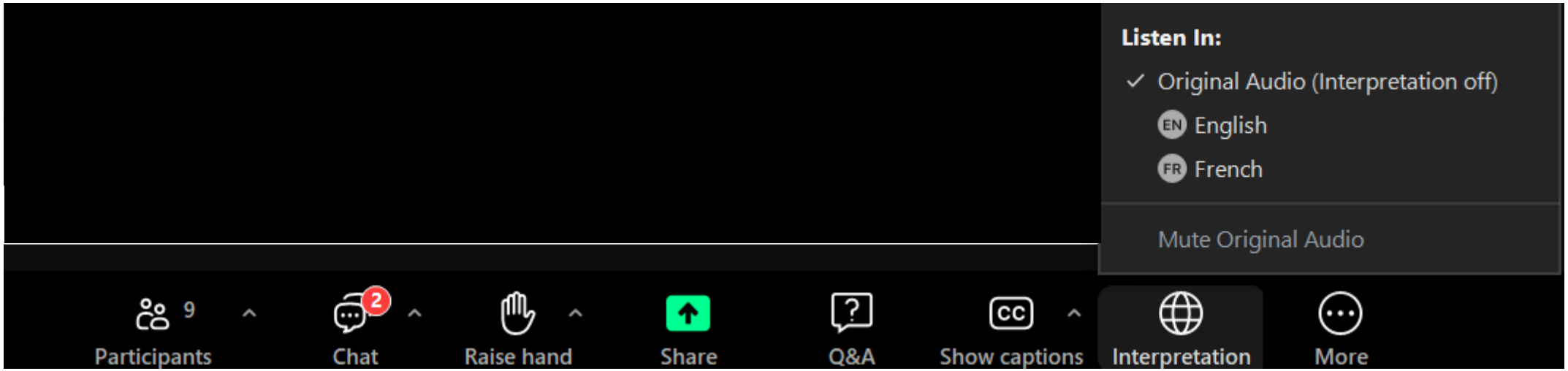

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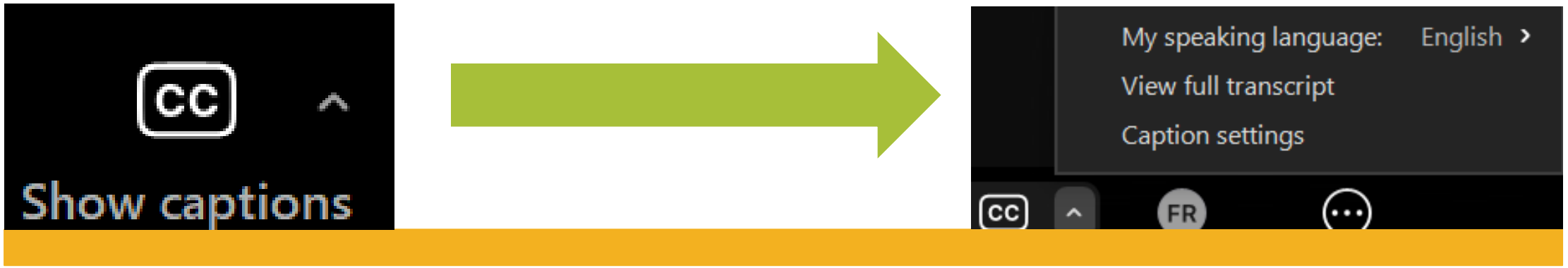


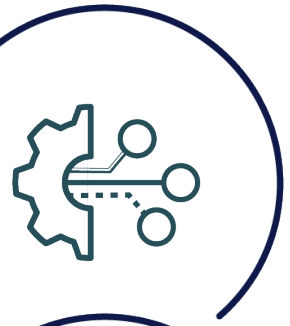
Webinar Overview

Session	Presenter(s)
Welcome and Overview	Tory Taylor, D4I
Panelist Introductions	**Andrea Navarrete**, Consultant and Professor at Universidad de los Andes, Colombia **Tawonga Mwase-Vuma,** Centre for Social Research (CSR), University of Malawi **Pr René Manirakiza**, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche en Population et Développement (CERPED)
Panel Discussion	Moderator: Liz Millar, D4I

Honoring Professor Phyllis Dako-Gyeke

Based at the University of Ghana and a member of the GEMNet-Health Network, Dr. Dako-Gyeke was a distinguished scholar and public health advocate dedicated to improving public health outcomes in underserved communities.

D4I's Work



Generate Evidence

Use routine and other existing data and generate new data through rigorous methods tailored to budget, timeline, and context

Integrate Gender

Integrate gender throughout the project to ensure high-quality data for assessment of health and gender outcomes

Strengthen Capacity

Strengthen capacity through fostering collaboration, experiential learning, mentoring, and peer networks tailored to partner's needs

Promote Data Use

Visualize and communicate data in ways that are compelling, user-friendly, and actionable

Ensure Data Quality

Focus on ensuring high-quality data for effective decision making and program outcome improvement

Learn

Encourage collaboration, improved results, and timely progress updates through idea exchange and shared learning

D4I's Localization Webinar Series

Thank you for joining our final webinar in the series, **Localization in Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL)!**

Topics included:

- Local capacity strengthening
- Using a systems lens
- Engaging with diverse local actors and organizations
- Implementing other good practices for locally led development

Watch webinars in the series on our YouTube channel:

1. Social Accountability in Ethiopia: Community Score Care Implementation to Improve Primary Health Care with NPI EXPAND, February 14, 2024
2. Using Sentinel Indicators and Network Analysis to Assess Health Program Sustainability in Nigeria, February 28, 2024
3. Panel Discussion: Shifting Power and the Need to Better Understand Locally Led Capacity Strengthening Efforts, March 27, 2024
4. From Policy to Practice: Navigating Localization and Equitable Partnerships in MERL, June 26, 2024
5. Localizing MERL: Insights from Local Actors in Burundi, Colombia, and Malawi, July 17, 2024

Localization in MERL Webinar Series YouTube Playlist

USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening (LCS) Policy

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USAID's LCS Policy Principles

Source: https://www.usaid.gov/policy/local-capacity-strengthening

LCS Policy Principles

Principles for **Effective Programming** of Local Capacity Strengthening

1. Start with the local system.
2. Strengthen diverse capacities through diverse approaches.
3. Plan for and measure performance improvement in collaboration with local partners.

Principles for **Equitable Partnerships** in Local Capacity Strengthening

4. Align capacity strengthening with local priorities.
5. Appreciate and build on existing capacities.
6. Be mindful of and mitigate the unintended consequences of our support for local capacity strengthening.
7. Practice mutuality with local partners.

Introduction of Panelists

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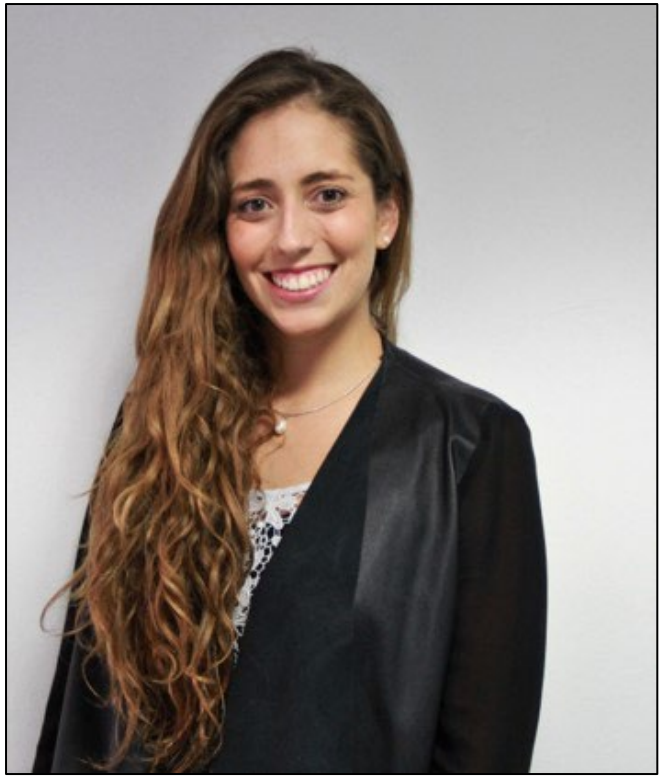
Andrea Navarrete

Over 10 years of experience working with NGOs, international organizations, government agencies, academia, and local organizations on social impact projects, specializing in:

- Monitoring and evaluation
- Knowledge management
- Strategic planning
- Public policy design

MEL Regional Manager, LATAM, UK Partnering for Accelerated Climate Transitions (UK PACT) and System Dynamics Professor at Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

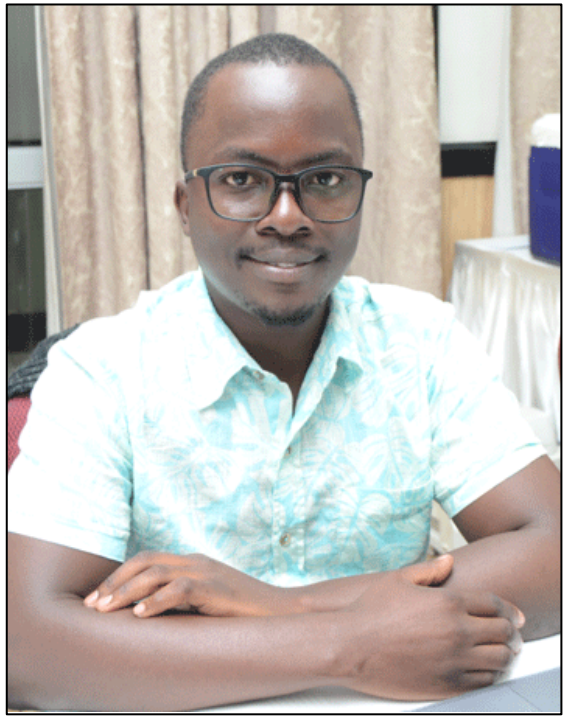
- Previous role: Project Manager for D4I in Colombia



Tawonga Mwase-Vuma

- Research Fellow at the Centre for Social Research (CSR), University of Malawi
- Over six years of experience in research and evaluation
- Co-Investigator for the Malawi SEED Impact Evaluation
- Local Principal Investigator for a health facility assessment in Mangochi, Malawi.

- The CSR was established in 1979.
- Four research thematic areas:
  - Public health and society
  - Poverty and economic wellbeing
  - Governance, institutions, and citizenship
  - Social inclusion and equity
- Clients include AfDB, FCDO, government of Malawi, UNICEF, UNDP, USAID, universities, and more.



UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

Pr René Manirakiza

- CERPED's General Coordinator, René MANIRAKIZA, is a senior researcher with over 15 years of experience in monitoring and evaluation studies.
- CERPED is a research organization specializing in data collection, data analysis for decision making, and monitoring and evaluation with over 10 years experience.
- As head of mission, Pr René often coordinates and ensures the quality of studies carried out by CERPED. He is also the author of several publications in the field of population and development.

Centre d 'Etudes et de Recherche en Population et Développement

"CERPED"

Pour un développement intégral

Panel Discussion

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Panel Structure/Structure du panel

English:

- Moderator-led questions (shown on slides)
- Each panelist will have 2–3 minutes to respond to each question
- Six minutes per question, four questions total
- Panelists are invited to ask follow-up questions of other panelists
- Audience questions will be answered as time allows

Instructions en français:

- Questions posées par les modératrices (affichées sur les diapositives)
- Chaque panéliste aura de 2 à 3 minutes pour répondre à chaque question
- Six minutes par question, quatre questions au total
- Les panélistes sont invités à poser des questions complémentaires aux autres panélistes
- Les questions du public seront répondues selon le temps disponible.

Question 1

What is one important or interesting experience that you have had with MERL capacity strengthening? How were LCS Policy principles reflected in it?

Quelle expérience importante ou intéressante avez-vous eue avec le renforcement des capacités en matière de SERA? Comment les principes de la politique de renforcement des capacités locales (LCS) y étaient-ils reflétés?

D4I Colombia

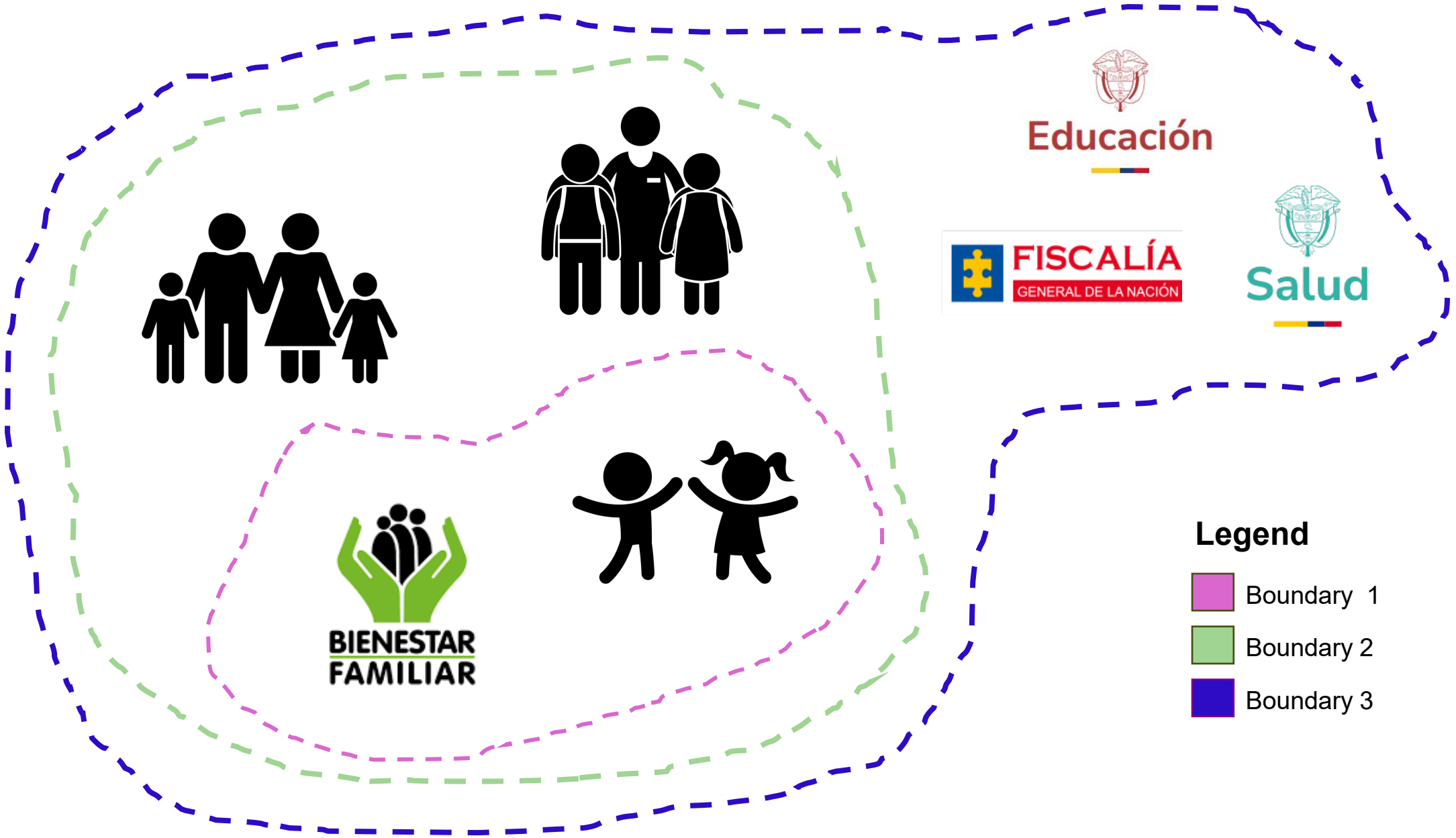
- October 2020 to August 2023
- Goal: “To support child and adolescent protection activities, especially at zonal level to promote the use of data for management and decision making.”

Colombia Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF)

ICBF working with children in La Guajira Department © ICBF

- Mandate covers child protection, infant and early childhood services, nutrition, and others
- One the largest government agencies in Colombia
  - ~4000 people in 215 local offices
  - Organized into 1,286 defensoria (advocacy) teams that work directly on assessment and monitoring of cases and judicial processes
- All direct services provided by contracted organizations

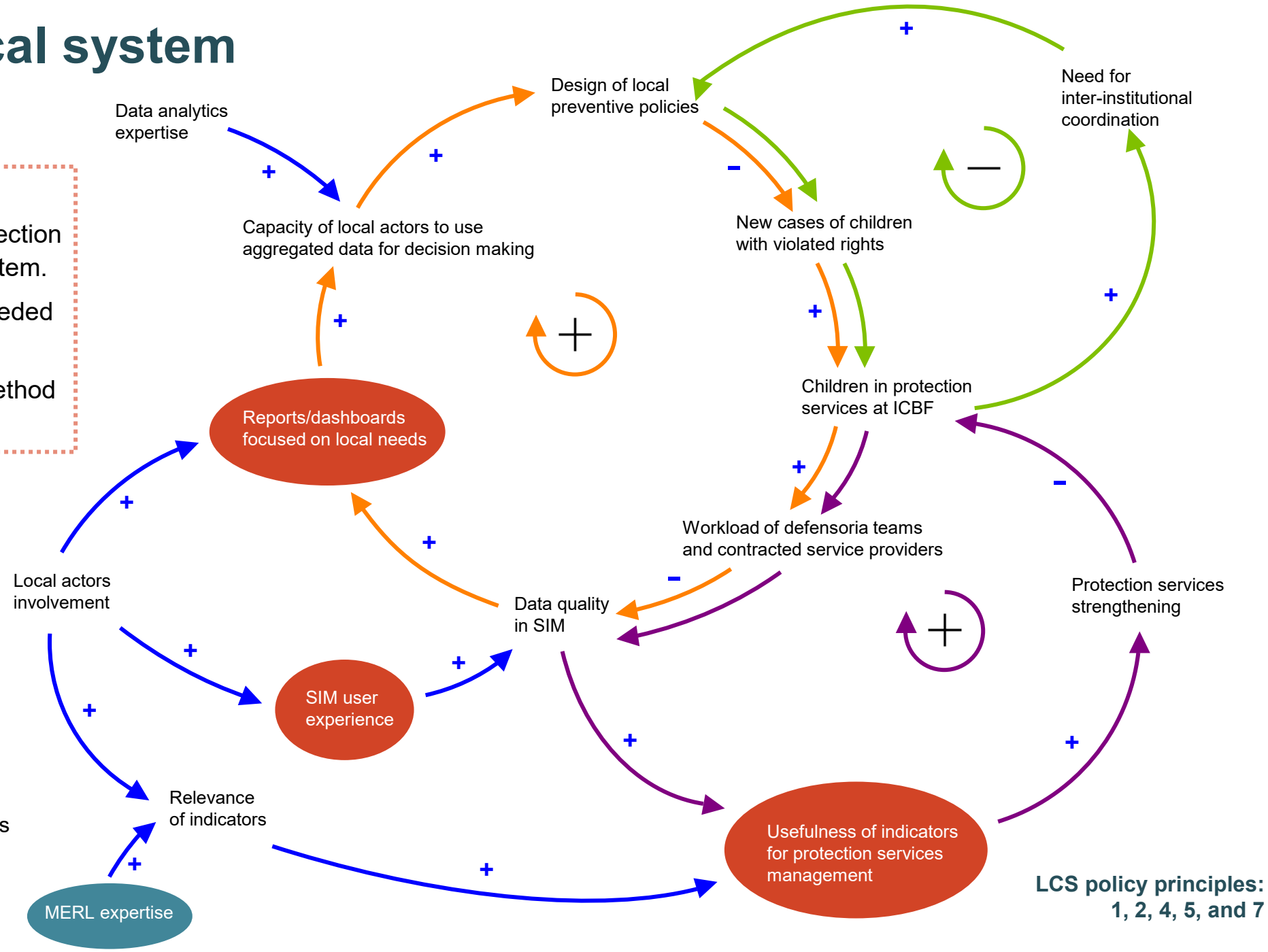
Many actors, interests, and roles…



Start with the local system

Activities:

1. Improve usability of child protection module within information system.
2. Identify data visualizations needed by ICBF local offices
3. Develop indicators for new method for case management (MAC)



Legend

- Local capacity strengthening
- Positive feedback loop #1
- Positive feedback loop #2
- Negative feedback loop
- Activities impact on feedback loops

LCS policy principles: 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7

Question 1

What is one important or interesting experience that you have had with MERL capacity strengthening? How were LCS Policy principles reflected in it?

Quelle expérience importante ou intéressante avez-vous eue avec le renforcement des capacités en matière de SERA? Comment les principes de la politique de renforcement des capacités locales (LCS) y étaient-ils reflétés?

Question 2

What tools, resources, or strategies have been useful for implementing LCS in your MERL partnerships? What kinds of tools are still lacking?

Quels outils, ressources ou stratégies ont été utiles pour mettre en œuvre le LCS dans vos partenariats de SERA? Quels types d'outils manquent encore?

Question 3

What is a significant challenge you have encountered in localizing MERL practices within your partnerships?

What changes do you think are necessary to enhance local leadership in MERL?

Quel est un défi important que vous avez rencontré dans la localisation des pratiques de SERA au sein de vos partenariats?

Quels changements pensez-vous nécessaires pour renforcer le leadership local dans le SERA?

Question 4

What do you want USAID to focus on in the next year to be more aligned with the LCS Policy and in support of local actors?

Sur quoi souhaitez-vous que l'USAID se concentre l'année prochaine pour être davantage alignée avec la politique de LCS et pour soutenir les acteurs locaux ?

Audience Question & Answer

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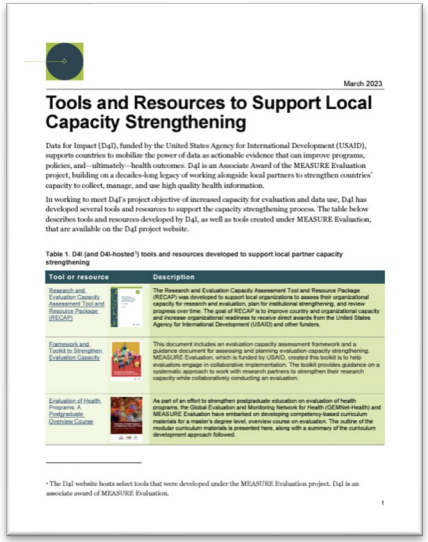
Key Publications



March 2023

Tools and Resources to Support Local Capacity Strengthening

Data for Impact (D4I), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), supports countries to mobilize the power of data as actionable evidence that can improve programs, policies, and—ultimately—health outcomes. D4I is an Associate Award of the MEASURE Evaluation project, building on a decades-long legacy of working alongside local partners to strengthen countries' capacity to collect, manage, and use high quality health information.

In working to meet D4I's project objective of increased capacity for evaluation and data use, D4I has developed several tools and resources to support the capacity strengthening process. The table below describes tools and resources developed by D4I, as well as tools created under MEASURE Evaluation, that are available on the D4I project website.

Table 1. D4I (and D4I-hosted[1]) tools and resources developed to support local partner capacity strengthening

Tool or resource	Description
Research and Evaluation Capacity Assessment Tool and Resource Package (RECAP)	The Research and Evaluation Capacity Assessment Tool and Resource Package (RECAP) was developed to support local organizations to assess their organizational capacity for research and evaluation; plan for institutional strengthening; and review progress over time. The goal of RECAP is to improve country and organizational capacity and increase organizational readiness to receive direct awards from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other funders.
Framework and Toolkit to Strengthen Evaluation Capacity	This document includes an evaluation capacity assessment framework and a guidance document for assessing and planning evaluation capacity strengthening. MEASURE Evaluation, which is funded by USAID, created this toolkit is to help evaluators engage in collaborative implementation. The toolkit provides guidance on a systematic approach to work with research partners to strengthen their research capacity while collaboratively conducting an evaluation.
Evaluation of Health Programs: A Postgraduate Overview Course	As part of an effort to strengthen postgraduate education on evaluation of health programs, the Global Evaluation and Monitoring Network for Health (GEMNet-Health) and MEASURE Evaluation have embarked on developing competency-based curriculum materials for a master's degree level, overview course on evaluation. The outline of the modular curriculum materials is presented here, along with a summary of the curriculum development approach followed.

[1] The D4I website hosts select tools that were developed under the MEASURE Evaluation project. D4I is an associate award of MEASURE Evaluation.

1

Strengthening Local Research Capacity through Small Grants

March 2023

Photo credit: ORCID Inc

Background

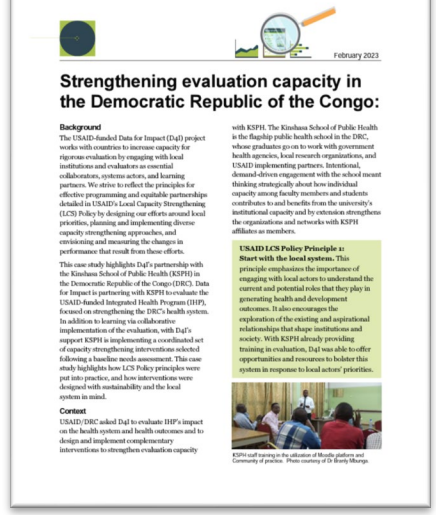
Family planning (FP) policies and practices should be grounded in scientific evidence. This is why the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Population and Reproductive Health (PRH) has played a critical role in supporting FP research and is a core partner in FP2030, which prioritizes evidence and innovation to improve access, quality, and uptake of voluntary FP services around the world. Yet opportunities to lead FP research studies are largely unattainable, both technically and financially, for those living in the very countries being studied. An analysis of authorship trends in The Lancet Global Health found that only 35 percent of the authors were from and worked within low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), but 92 percent of the articles addressed interventions in these countries (Lyer, 2018). The unequal distribution of resources and persistent structural barriers to research capacity in the Global South undermines the ability of researchers in LMICs to generate scientific knowledge to address both international and local concerns (Bowsher, et al., 2019) and puts at a disadvantage the researchers in LMICs who are at the forefront of global health practice (Charani, et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the lack of LMIC-based researchers in turn can contribute to a lower quality evidence base because the research lacks local and diverse perspectives and insights.

Issuing small grants to local organizations and universities to conduct their own research studies, coupled with customized technical assistance, provides a valuable opportunity for local professionals to gain hands-on research and project management experience. The small grants model can be an effective approach to local capacity strengthening and provides financial support for FP research that is centered in LMICs. As stated in USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy, "Partnering with local actors to strengthen their capacities is one of the most effective ways to advance sustainable development" (2022). This approach contributes to sustainable development by working with host-country institutions to generate FP evidence, disseminate findings to local stakeholders, and help develop strategies for improvements.

D4I Small Grants Program

The Data for Impact (D4I) small grants program was designed to build off the successes and lessons learned from the PRH Associate Award (AA), MEASURE Evaluation Phase IV, and Tanzania AA small grants programs, which generated over 50 small grants research projects combined. (The MEASURE Evaluation and Tanzania AA small grants research papers may be found here.)



February 2023

Strengthening evaluation capacity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo:

Background

The USAID-funded Data for Impact (D4I) project works with countries to increase capacity for rigorous evaluation by engaging with local institutions and evaluators as essential collaborators, systems actors, and learning partners. We strive to reflect the principles for effective programming and equitable partnerships detailed in USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening (LCS) Policy by designing our efforts around local priorities, planning and implementing diverse capacity strengthening approaches, and envisioning and measuring the changes in performance that result from these efforts.

This case study highlights D4I's partnership with the Kinshasa School of Public Health (KSPH) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Data for Impact is partnering with KSPH to evaluate the USAID-funded Integrated Health Program (IHP), focused on strengthening the DRC's health system. In addition to learning via collaborative implementation of the evaluation, with D4I's support KSPH is implementing a coordinated set of capacity strengthening interventions selected following a baseline needs assessment. This case study highlights how LCS Policy principles were put into practice, and how interventions were designed with sustainability and the local system in mind.

Context

USAID/DRC asked D4I to evaluate IHP's impact on the health system and health outcomes and to design and implement complementary interventions to strengthen evaluation capacity with KSPH. The Kinshasa School of Public Health is the flagship public health school in the DRC, whose graduates go on to work with government health agencies, local research organizations, and USAID implementing partners. Intentional, demand-driven engagement with the school meant thinking strategically about how individual capacity among faculty members and students contributes to and benefits from the university's institutional capacity and by extension strengthens the organizations and networks with KSPH affiliates as members.

USAID LCS Policy Principle 1: Start with the local system. This principle emphasizes the importance of engaging with local actors to understand the current and potential roles that they play in generating health and development outcomes. It also encourages the exploration of the existing and aspirational relationships that shape institutions and society. With KSPH already providing training in evaluation, D4I was able to offer opportunities and resources to bolster this system in response to local actors' priorities.

KSPH staff training in the utilization of Moodle platform and Community of practice. Photo courtesy of Dr Brenly Mbunga.

March 2023

Data for Impact's Approach to Individual and Institutional Capacity Strengthening

Data for Impact (D4I), a five-year cooperative agreement funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), supports countries to **mobilize the power of data** as actionable evidence that can improve programs, policies, and—ultimately—health outcomes. As an Associate Award of the MEASURE Evaluation project, D4I builds on a decades-long **legacy of working alongside local partners** to strengthen countries' capacity to collect, manage and use high-quality health information.

The objective of D4I is to increase capacity for rigorous evaluation. D4I works in partnership with local institutions to generate evidence, ensure data quality, integrate gender, and promote data use.

D4I works to ensure that its capacity strengthening approach is aligned with USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy. Wherever possible, the project incorporates intentional, demand-driven processes that start with understanding local systems and the roles that local actors play. Working from this systems perspective, D4I:

1. Collaborates with local partners to **identify their priorities for capacity strengthening** and understand what improved performance would look like.
2. **Plans, implements, and assesses the effectiveness of integrated strategies** including training and mentorship, evaluation co-implementation or learning by doing, building communities and forums for networking and learning, and supporting the development of new resources and practices to help sustain capacity and performance gains.

Figure 1 (page 3) details the ways in which D4I is intentional in partnership with local organizations for evaluation and research activities through the design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination phases.

D4I supports local actors within existing systems to strengthen capacity and enhance overall system performance.

Strengthening university-based evaluation capacity in the Democratic Republic of Congo: In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), D4I partnered with the Kinshasa School of Public Health (KSPH) to conduct an evaluation the country's Integrated Health Program. In addition to collaborating on core elements of the evaluation, D4I worked with KSPH to design a capacity strengthening plan centered on KSPH's priorities for strengthening evaluation and research skills. This included new modules for KSPH's existing web-based learning platform, a resource library, and an online

The Dean of KSPH

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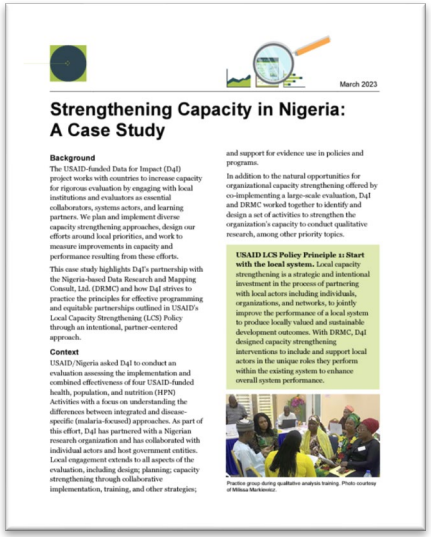


March 2023

Strengthening Capacity in Nigeria: A Case Study

Background

The USAID-funded Data for Impact (D4I) project works with countries to increase capacity for rigorous evaluation by engaging with local institutions and evaluators as essential collaborators, systems actors, and learning partners. We plan and implement diverse capacity strengthening approaches, design our efforts around local priorities, and work to measure improvements in capacity and performance resulting from these efforts.

This case study highlights D4I's partnership with the Nigeria-based Data Research and Mapping Consult, Ltd. (DRMC) and how D4I strives to practice the principles for effective programming and equitable partnerships outlined in USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening (LCS) Policy through an intentional, partner-centered approach.

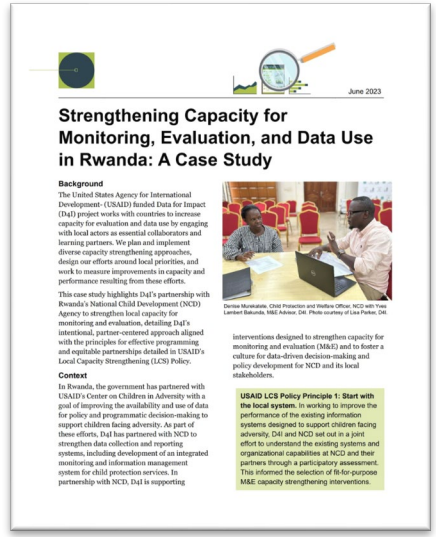
Context

USAID/Nigeria asked D4I to conduct an evaluation assessing the implementation and combined effectiveness of four USAID-funded health, population, and nutrition (HPN) Activities with a focus on understanding the differences between integrated and disease-specific (malaria-focused) approaches. As part of this effort, D4I has partnered with a Nigerian research organization and has collaborated with individual actors and host government entities. Local engagement extends to all aspects of the evaluation, including design; planning; capacity strengthening through collaborative implementation, training, and other strategies; and support for evidence use in policies and programs.

In addition to the natural opportunities for organizational capacity strengthening offered by co-implementing a large-scale evaluation, D4I and DRMC worked together to identify and design a set of activities to strengthen the organization's capacity to conduct qualitative research, among other priority topics.

USAID LCS Policy Principle 1: Start with the local system. Local capacity strengthening is a strategic and intentional investment in the process of partnering with local actors including individuals, organizations, and networks, to jointly improve the performance of a local system to produce locally valued and sustainable development outcomes. With DRMC, D4I designed capacity strengthening interventions to include and support local actors in the unique roles they perform within the existing system to enhance overall system performance.

Practice group during qualitative analysis training. Photo courtesy of Milissa Markiewicz.



June 2023

Strengthening Capacity for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Data Use in Rwanda: A Case Study

Background

The United States Agency for International Development- (USAID) funded Data for Impact (D4I) project works with countries to increase capacity for evaluation and data use by engaging with local actors as essential collaborators and learning partners. We plan and implement diverse capacity strengthening approaches, design our efforts around local priorities, and work to measure improvements in capacity and performance resulting from these efforts.

This case study highlights D4I's partnership with Rwanda's National Child Development (NCD) Agency to strengthen local capacity for monitoring and evaluation, detailing D4I's intentional, partner-centered approach aligned with the principles for effective programming and equitable partnerships detailed in USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening (LCS) Policy.

Context

In Rwanda, the government has partnered with USAID's Center on Children in Adversity with a goal of improving the availability and use of data for policy and programmatic decision-making to support children facing adversity. As part of these efforts, D4I has partnered with NCD to strengthen data collection and reporting systems, including development of an integrated monitoring and information management system for child protection services. In partnership with NCD, D4I is supporting

Denise Munkatate, Child Protection and Welfare Officer, NCD with Yves Lambert Bakunda, M&E Advisor, D4I. Photo courtesy of Lisa Parker, D4I.

interventions designed to strengthen capacity for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and to foster a culture for data-driven decision-making and policy development for NCD and its local stakeholders.

USAID LCS Policy Principle 1: Start with the local system. In working to improve the performance of the existing information systems designed to support children facing adversity, D4I and NCD set out in a joint effort to understand the existing systems and organizational capabilities at NCD and their partners through a participatory assessment. This informed the selection of fit-for-purpose M&E capacity strengthening interventions.

Thank you!

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