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# 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.



Figure 1 shows how D4I works to strengthen capacity not only with its local research partner, DRMC, but also with individual actors and government entities. By starting with and understanding how DRMC operates within the local context allows capacity strengthening interventions to be mutually reinforcing and sustainable beyond the life of the evaluation.

**Figure 1. Capacity strengthening across different health system levels in Nigeria**



### Using RECAP: A D4I tool designed to catalyze the process of capacity strengthening

At the onset of the partnership, D4I implemented the D4I-developed Research and Evaluation Capacity Assessment Tool and Resource package (RECAP) with DRMC. RECAP is designed to provide a process-oriented self-assessment of an organization's evaluation capacity strengths and priorities for growth. The RECAP tool assesses capacity in six domains through a consensus-building approach. DRMC staff participated in a two-day RECAP assessment workshop facilitated by D4I. During



the workshop, DRMC staff focused on competencies from two priority domains: Fieldwork and Information Sharing.

Using RECAP, DRMC identified existing organizational strengths including their ability to collect quantitative data, plan for fieldwork, effectively pilot quantitative tools and methods, and conduct data quality assurance. In addition, DRMC identified opportunities for growth in the areas of qualitative data collection and analysis, quantitative data analysis, and results dissemination. Following the workshop, DRMC and D4I met to review the results and created a capacity strengthening plan focused on the evaluation competencies identified as priorities.

The capacity strengthening interventions selected for implementation included:

**1. Training on the Most Significant Change<sup>1</sup> (MSC) methodology:** D4I trained DRMC on MSC, complexity aware method for evaluation, which would be used during midline data collection. The training included a detailed review of the steps involved in conducting state-level, two-day MSC workshops and involved several practice runs to allow DRMC staff to master the method.

<sup>1</sup> Davies, R. and J. Dart (2005) *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique; A Guide to Its Use*, see: <https://mande.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MSCGuide.pdf>

**2. Qualitative analysis training:** D4I supported a multi-day workshop on qualitative data analysis for DRMC staff, led by a local consultant including hands-on training on

**USAID LCS Policy Principle 2: Strengthen diverse capacities through diverse approaches.** Local capacity strengthening is a strategic and intentional investment in the process of partnering with local actors—individuals, organizations, and networks—to jointly improve the performance of a local system to produce locally valued and sustainable development outcomes. In designing CS interventions to include a local research partner, a graduate student intern, and state government staff, D4I is supporting local actors in the unique roles they perform within the existing system to enhance overall

coding, identifying themes, and use of qualitative software to aid in analysis. This was followed by a series of virtual trainings led by D4I on thematic analysis and memo writing. Training topics were tailored for the evaluation and to address priorities identified by DRMC.

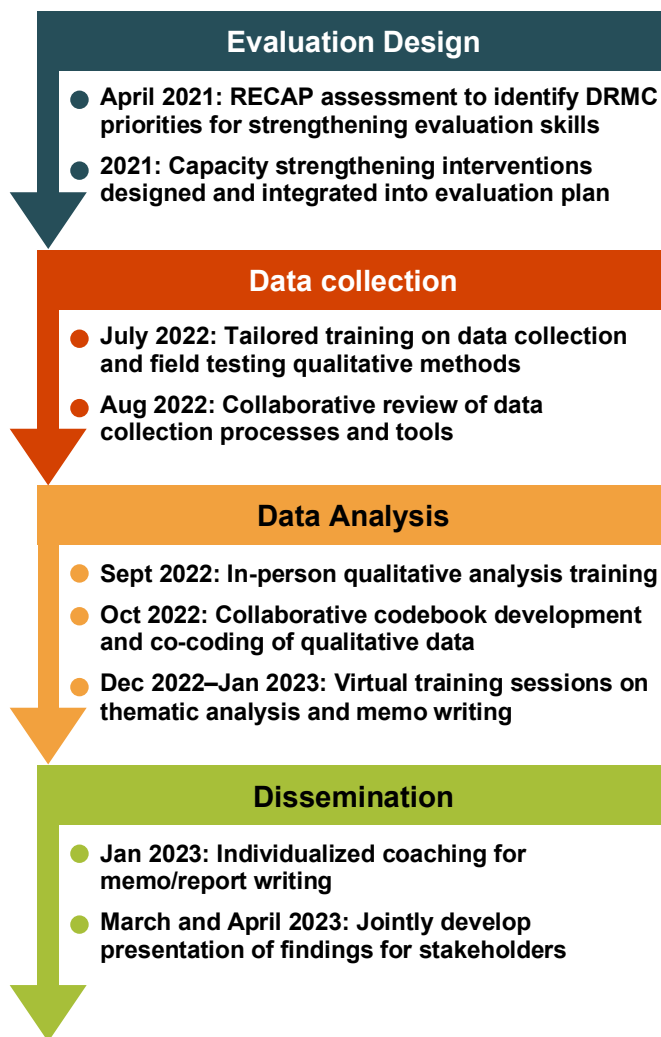
**3. Collaborative qualitative analysis:** The qualitative data collected at midline (45 focus group discussions and 18 key informant interviews) were coded by DRMC, with D4I reviewing work and providing feedback throughout the process. DRMC then led thematic analysis and memo writing for selected topics.

**4. Collaborative dissemination:** Following analysis, DRMC will be involved in reviewing draft reports and presentations, organizing data sharing and data use events with local stakeholders, and presenting the findings in collaboration with D4I staff. This will not only

strengthen their capacity for developing and sharing products for results dissemination but will also foster relationships and networking between DRMC and other local actors.

The timeline in Figure 2 depicts how the specific interventions intersected with the overall evaluation. Specific resources were dedicated under the activity to support the capacity strengthening interventions including funding to support the RECAP assessment and training in qualitative skills including the MSC methodology. Much of the capacity strengthening work was integrated into the

**Figure 2. Timeline of integrated capacity strengthening interventions**





overall evaluation workplan, especially related to dissemination, but was accomplished by being more intentional about how work was being done and engaging DRMC at strategic points, including early in the development of dissemination products.

### **Measuring improved performance**

Planning for and measuring organizational performance helps USAID, D4I, and partners identify and understand linkages between local capacity strengthening investments and improved performance among local actors. USAID's LCS policy encourages incremental measurement of improved performance, acknowledging that improved performance may take time and that there may be milestones that could be measured over the shorter term, for example, during the duration of a USAID-funded evaluation. DRMC is working to improve the organization's qualitative research capacity as well as their ability to produce a variety of dissemination products.

- **Short-term measures of improved performance** may include competent independent coding of qualitative data, identification of themes related to the evaluation questions, and creation of quality dissemination products such as briefs, reports, and presentations following the midterm data collection.
- **Longer-term measures of improved performance** may reflect consistent results in future activities, including DRMC taking on additional research projects and contracts in which they are collecting and coding qualitative data without requiring external support.

### **What factors supported local capacity strengthening in this context?**

- **Use of a participatory tool to catalyze change:** Use of the RECAP tool allowed

DRMC to identify and advocate for their own priorities in capacity strengthening. This provided an opportunity for both the organization and individual staff members at

#### **USAID's Standard Indicator**

**CBLD-9:** D4I's work with DRMC is expected to contribute to Standard Indicator CBLD-9, "Percent of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance." USAID Operating Units have flexibility in selecting a measurement and are expected to engage with local organizations to identify appropriate performance metrics and assessment methods. D4I anticipates working with DRMC to select and use a combination of qualitative interviews, self-assessments, and task-based benchmarks to measure improved performance resulting from the capacity strengthening interventions included under this evaluation.

DRMC to strengthen their abilities related to qualitative data collection and analysis. Having DRMC conduct aspects of the qualitative analysis also allows for a local lens to be applied in all stages of the analysis process, potentially enhancing the quality of the results. The RECAP assessment results facilitated conversation about how DRMC could best contribute to the dissemination process. Additionally, the use of RECAP allowed D4I to recognize a broader spectrum of capacities that already existed at DRMC. This has enhanced the relationship between DRMC and D4I, enabling expanded opportunities for collaboration.

- **An integrated approach:** While there was not a dedicated budget for capacity



strengthening under this evaluation, capacity strengthening interventions were incorporated into the evaluation workplan, allowing for tailored training, collaborative learning, consistent engagement, and on-the-job mentoring throughout the evaluation process.

- **Taking a systems perspective:** In addition to D4I's partnership with DRMC, the evaluation work also incorporated individuals, such as a local intern who is a recent graduate student and a local qualitative consultant who led the training. This has supported local actors in their unique roles, and reinforces a network of locally available resources.

## Challenges

- **Competing interests in activity timelines:** While this evaluation provided an opportunity to strengthen a research partner's capacity for qualitative analysis, incorporating the learning component meant that analysis took more time. The additional time needed to strengthen capacity effectively and thoughtfully is sometimes at odds with project timelines and donor expectations. In Nigeria, some analysis responsibilities ultimately had to be shared between D4I and DRMC.
- **Challenges in long-distance collaboration:** The collaborative analysis and dissemination process between D4I and DRMC provided an opportunity for capacity strengthening, but also proved challenging at

times because most collaboration, mentoring, and learning happened through remote communication channels. While remote collaboration is often more cost-effective, it can also create delays and missed opportunities or inefficiencies in collaborative learning processes.

- **Performance is more challenging to measure than latent capacity:** Although there are some incremental measures of improved performance that can be readily assessed in the short term, it may be challenging to continue to monitor measures of improved performance over time, especially once the contractual relationship and evaluation have ended.

## Summary

The partnership between D4I and DRMC described in this case study provides concrete examples of how to incorporate locally led capacity strengthening interventions into a complex evaluation in a way that is mutually beneficial and contributes to sustainable, systems-level outcomes. A key aspect of this work was the use of the RECAP tool, which helped DRMC to identify and advocate for the specific capacity areas in which they desired strengthening. Availability of local actors to provide training and to continue to be available as a local resource to DRMC is also a strength of this process, as is the networking and relationships fostered within local systems through the dissemination efforts.





## For more information

D4I supports countries to realize the power of data as actionable evidence that can improve programs, policies, and—ultimately—health outcomes. We strengthen the technical and organizational capacity of local partners to collect, analyze, and use data to support sustainable development. For more information, visit <https://www.data4impactproject.org/>