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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 Murekatete, 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.



Capacity strengthening interventions

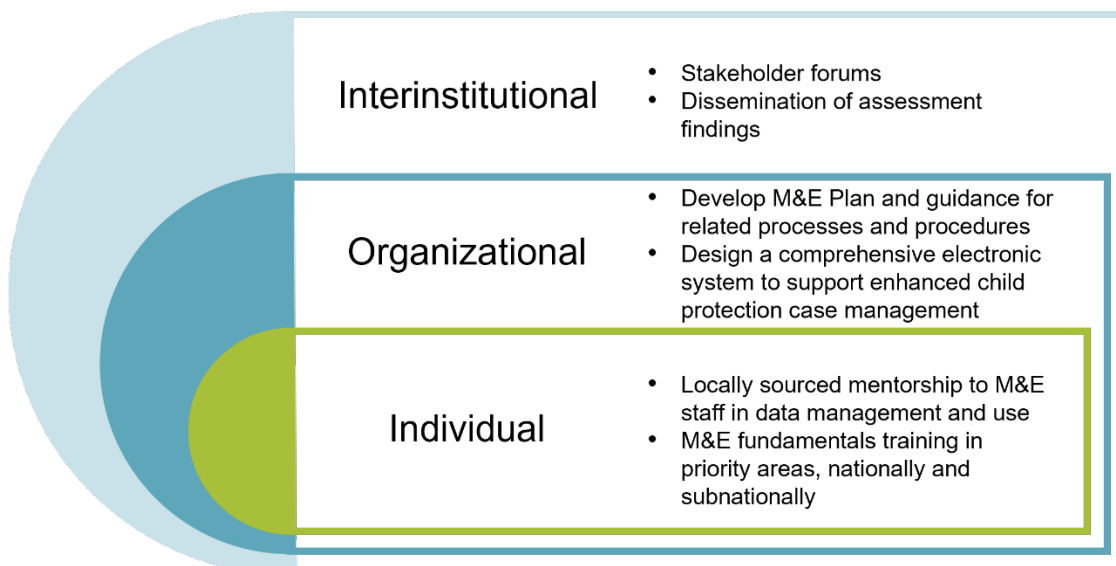
To identify areas and opportunities for M&E capacity strengthening, D4I and NCD teams worked together to organize a five-day Child Protection Management Information System stakeholder workshop. As part of the workshop, participants completed an M&E capacity assessment structured around six assessment areas: M&E planning; M&E structures and human resources; M&E processes and procedures; data and information management; data quality assurance; and data analysis, dissemination, and use. Participants grouped by area of expertise worked to build consensus on their capacity for competencies in each of the six areas. D4I's role in the assessment was to moderate the consensus-building process and then guide the group in identifying priorities for improvement and appropriate interventions and timelines to strengthen capacity. Follow-up discussions were held with NCD M&E staff following the workshop to provide for a more robust understanding of NCD's existing M&E capacity. The full results of this catalytic assessment process are available in an [M&E Capacity Assessment Report](#).

Following the stakeholder workshop, NCD's priorities and goals for M&E strengthening were grouped into three categories:

- **Interinstitutional** (network): Increase coordination of NCD with the Ministry for Gender and Family Promotion, UNICEF and other key partners in the child protection M&E space.
- **Organizational**: Undertake strategic interventions to strengthen NCD's organizational capacity in the priority areas identified during the assessment.
- **Individual**: Strengthen M&E capacities of NCD employees.

Capacity strengthening interventions were designed to correspond with the goals and priorities, as shown in Figure 1, and specific actions, roles, and expected outcomes are outlined in the [M&E Capacity Strengthening Plan](#).

Figure 1. NCD strategies for M&E capacity strengthening by system level





Locally available solutions

A key aspect of implementing the organizational and individual capacity strengthening interventions was to identify locally-sourced experts that could conduct M&E training and provide mentorship. As part of NCD's vision to partner with a local agency, the Rwanda Management Institute (RMI) will conduct staff capacity strengthening programs. D4I will facilitate the coordination process with NCD and RMI to ensure that the M&E program is designed to strengthen capacity in areas identified during the stakeholder workshop. RMI has a history of conducting training for government agencies and the private sector in Rwanda. A local M&E Advisor, embedded in the NCD, will also mentor NCD colleagues and support capacity strengthening initiatives.

Measuring improved performance

Planning for and measuring organizational performance helps USAID, D4I, and partners identify and understand linkages between local partners' priority outcomes. USAID's LCS policy encourages partners to identify and measure incremental results, acknowledging that high-level performance objectives take significant time and combined efforts to achieve. NCD is working to improve the organization's capacity for M&E, along with clearly defining the organization's role and mechanisms for collaboration within the local system.

- **Short-term measures of improved performance** may include improved data quality of child protection sector data, enhanced quality of data analysis, increased use of data, and strengthened collaboration between NCD and local partners for better coordination of child protection interventions.
- **Longer-term measures of improved performance** could include NCD's improved use of information systems to support individual cases in the child protection sector and effective use of child protection sector data to provide services and resources to best serve children facing adversity.

Sustainability

The M&E capacity strengthening plan was designed with sustainability in mind. This will be accomplished in the following ways:

- Establishing a collaboration mechanism for NCD and their partners on M&E issues, with clearly defined roles to support ongoing and regular coordination
- Ensuring NCD appropriately informs the development and enhancement of new and existing information systems for child protection, based on standardized, validated M&E indicators
- Institutionalizing the updated forms, tools, and guidelines for data collection, data quality assurance, analysis, and use

Lessons learned

Designing and implementing the capacity strengthening plan with NCD offers lessons learned for other capacity strengthening efforts.

- **Use local solutions:** The preference for Rwandan solutions in providing support and training including embedding an M&E advisor within NCD will both enhance uptake of interventions and support sustainability. Conducting the initial M&E capacity assessment alongside a landscape analysis bolstered the understanding of NCD's role within



the local system and provided a comprehensive view of local information systems.

- **Apply a systems approach:** The NCD will continue to develop digital solutions to address emerging data and learning needs. Working across the country's Family and Gender Sector silos will promote coordinated approaches to enhancing NCD's digital ecosystem, taking into consideration the implications of individual digital solutions beyond an immediate project, and providing opportunities to scale these solutions to other sectors, such as early childhood development and nutrition.
- **Align with existing strategic guidelines and policies:** NCD has developed a range of guidelines and policies to improve the quality of child protection interventions. New digital solutions will be designed to align with existing policies and support users' ability to operate platforms by mimicking processes they are already familiar with.

Summary

The partnership between D4I and NCD provides a concrete example of how to incorporate locally-led capacity strengthening interventions into an overall systems strengthening initiative. A key aspect of this work was the landscape and M&E assessment, carried out jointly by D4I and NCD, which helped both parties understand the context and existing local and organizational capacity in M&E. Capacity strengthening interventions have been designed to leverage existing local resources and systems as much as possible, to reduce the burden on systems actors and with the intention of being scalable to other sectors in the future.

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/>



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