



# Knowledge and Learning Exchange: Locally Led Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL)

## Panelists & Speakers

Kiran Acharya  
Lwana Palwendo Kamanga  
Kristina Granger  
Barbara Rawlins

## Moderator

Molly Lauria

June 6, 2024

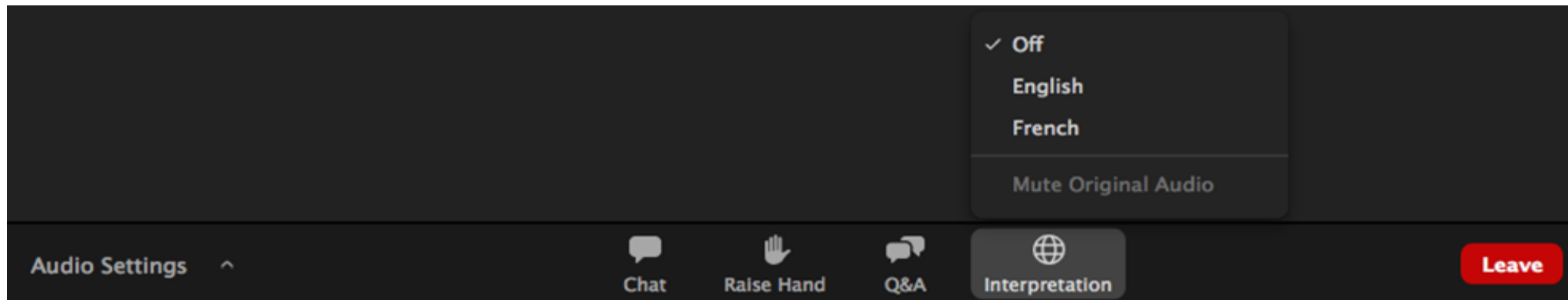




## Zoom Logistics

This webinar will be presented in English with live French interpretation. Click the "interpretation" icon at the bottom of the screen and select "Off" if you'd like to hear the original English. Click French if you'd like to hear French.

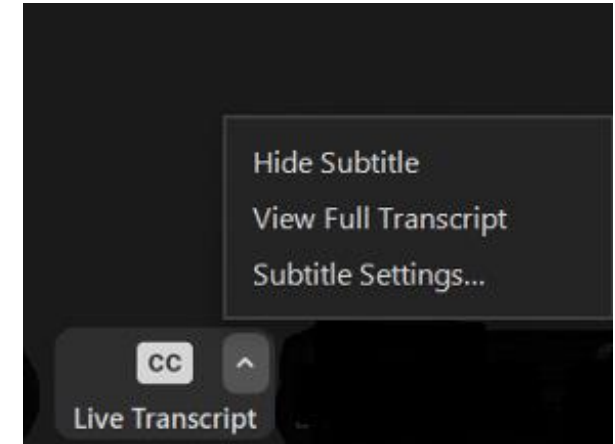
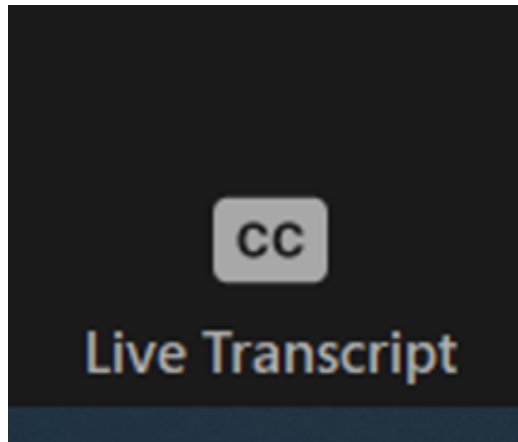
*Ce webinaire sera présenté en anglais avec une interprétation en français. Cliquez sur l'icône "interprétation" en bas de l'écran et sélectionnez "Off" si vous souhaitez entendre l'anglais original. Cliquez sur "French" si vous souhaitez entendre le français.*





# Closed Captioning (sous-titrage code)

**Please select closed captioning** if you wish to see live English captioning.





# Webinar Overview

## Session

## Presenter(s)

Welcome and Introduction

Tory Taylor, D4I

USAID's approach to locally led MERL

Barbara Rawlins, USAID

Exploring MERL leadership pathways

Molly Lauria, D4I

Presentation: AFIDEP's approach to leading MERL work

Lwana Palwendo Kamanga, AFIDEP

Presentation: New ERA's approach to leading MERL work

Kiran Acharya, New ERA

Panel Discussion

Kiran Acharya, New ERA  
Lwana Palwendo Kamanga, AFIDEP  
Kristina Granger, USAID  
*Moderator: Molly Lauria, D4I*

# 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 in MERL Webinar Series

Join D4I in June and July for our **Localization in Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL)** webinar series

Topics include:

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



## Upcoming webinars in the series:

- From Policy to Practice: Navigating Localization and Equitable Partnerships in MERL  
**June 26, 2024, 10–11 a.m. EDT / 14:00 GMT**
- Localization in MERL with Local Research Organizations and Individuals  
**July 17, 2024, 9-10 am EDT**





# Speakers and Panelists

**Kiran Acharya**, MPH, is the Deputy Director of New ERA, a research organization based in Nepal, where he leads projects, and supports proposal development and office management. He has expertise in data analysis, report writing, and stakeholder coordination, and his primary research focuses on analyzing health coverage inequalities and health system research.

**Kristina Granger**, MPH, is a Senior Social and Behavior Change (SBC) Advisor for the USAID Bureau for Global Health, Office of Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN). She supports behavior-centered programming for the maternal, child, and newborn health teams, and serves as the localization lead for MCHN.

**Lwana Palwendo Kamanga**, MPM, is a MERL expert at the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) where he leads MERL for the Institute and projects. He has worked for over 10 years designing, implementing, and managing MERL systems and efforts for development programs across sub-Saharan Africa.

**Barbara Rawlins**, MPH, is a Senior Implementation Research Advisor for the USAID Bureau for Global Health, Office of MCHN, Division of Research and Policy. She has extensive experience conducting and managing MERL activities for reproductive, maternal, newborn, child health programs.

## **Moderator:**

**Molly Lauria**, MPH, PhDc, serves as the D4I Activity Lead and is a health systems and policy researcher with 15 years of global health experience in implementation, evaluation, and research.



---

# USAID's Approach to Locally Led MERL

Barbara Rawlins, Senior Implementation Research Advisor  
USAID Bureau for Global Health  
Office of Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition







# LOCALIZATION

CATALYZING AND SUPPORTING LOCAL CHANGE



## USAID's Four Pillars of Localization

- Adapting out policies and programs
- Shifting power to local actors
- Channeling a larger portion of funding directly to local partners
- Serving as a global advocate and thought leader



# LOCALIZATION

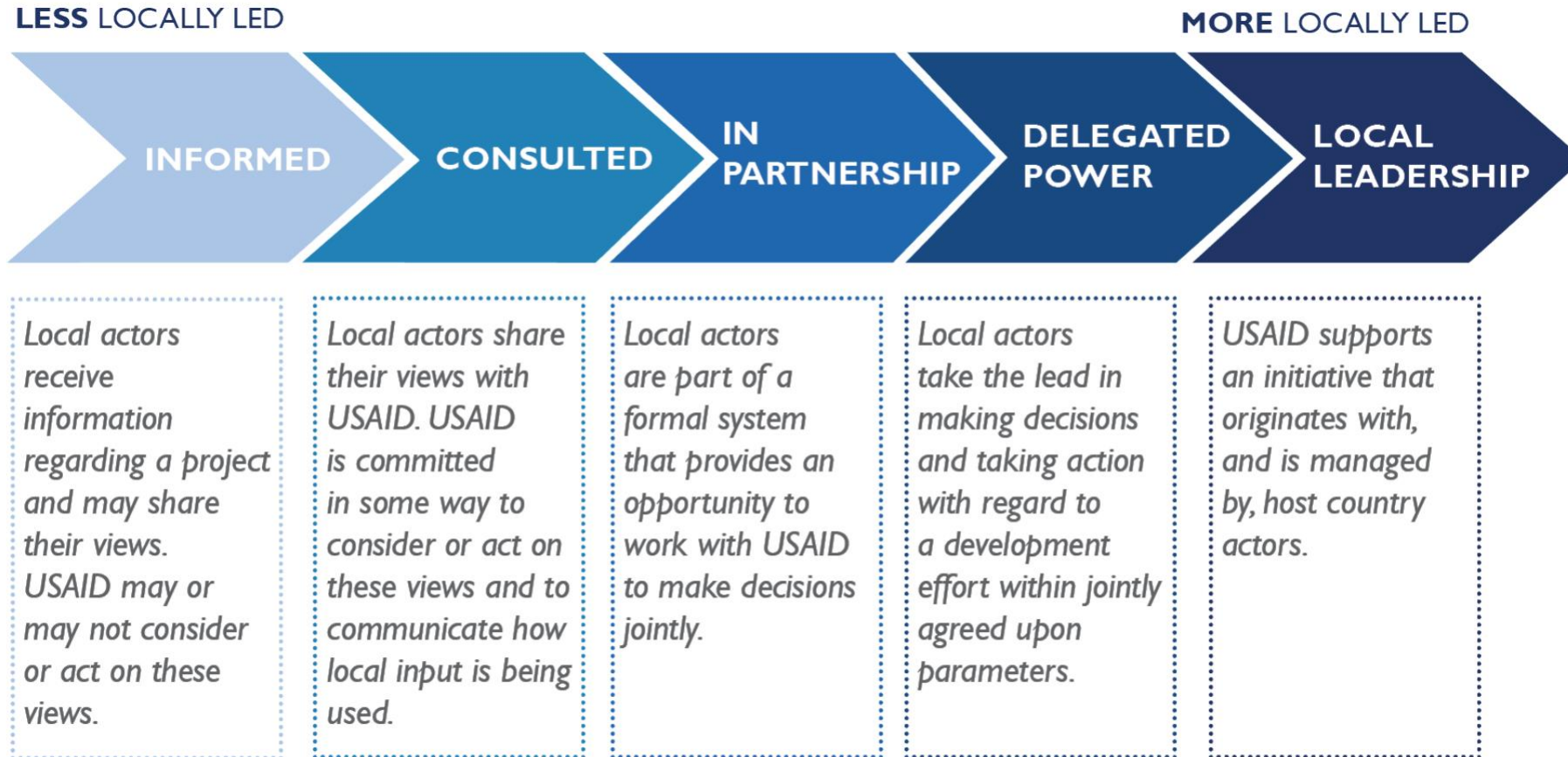
CATALYZING AND SUPPORTING LOCAL CHANGE



- USAID aims to achieve local leadership in a minimum of 50% of its programming by 2030.
- Goal of more inclusive and effective MERL leadership, reflecting a commitment to enhancing local input.



# What is Locally Led MERL?



Source: [USAID's What is Locally Led Development | Fact Sheet](#)



# What is Locally Led MERL?

MERL organizations:

- Having leadership roles in MERL activities
- Exercising local programmatic leadership
- Becoming prime funding recipients in MERL projects and activities





# Exploring MERL Leadership Pathways

Molly Lauria, D4I





---

# Exploring Pathways for Locally Led MERL

- Completed a rapid literature scan and compiled a list of local MERL projects funded by USAID
- Project list focused on MEL platform projects and found that they were largely led by non-LMIC organizations with few LMIC consortium members
- Rapid Scan
  - Literature gaps within common global health sources
  - Importance of ongoing learning and skill development (individuals, organizational)
  - Strategic planning and implementation can support targeted organizational growth
  - Consider insights from social entrepreneur, non-profit, and organizational science



# African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP)

Lwana Palwendo Kamanga,  
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Officer





## About AFIDEP

- Pan-African research and policy institute established in 2010 to bridge the gaps between research, policy, and practice
- Vision: An Africa where evidence is used consistently to transform lives
- A non-profit organization registered in Kenya, Malawi and the USA
- Governed by an international Board of Directors
- 80 multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural staff from 11 countries
  - 18 PhDs, 37 Masters

**AFIDEP**



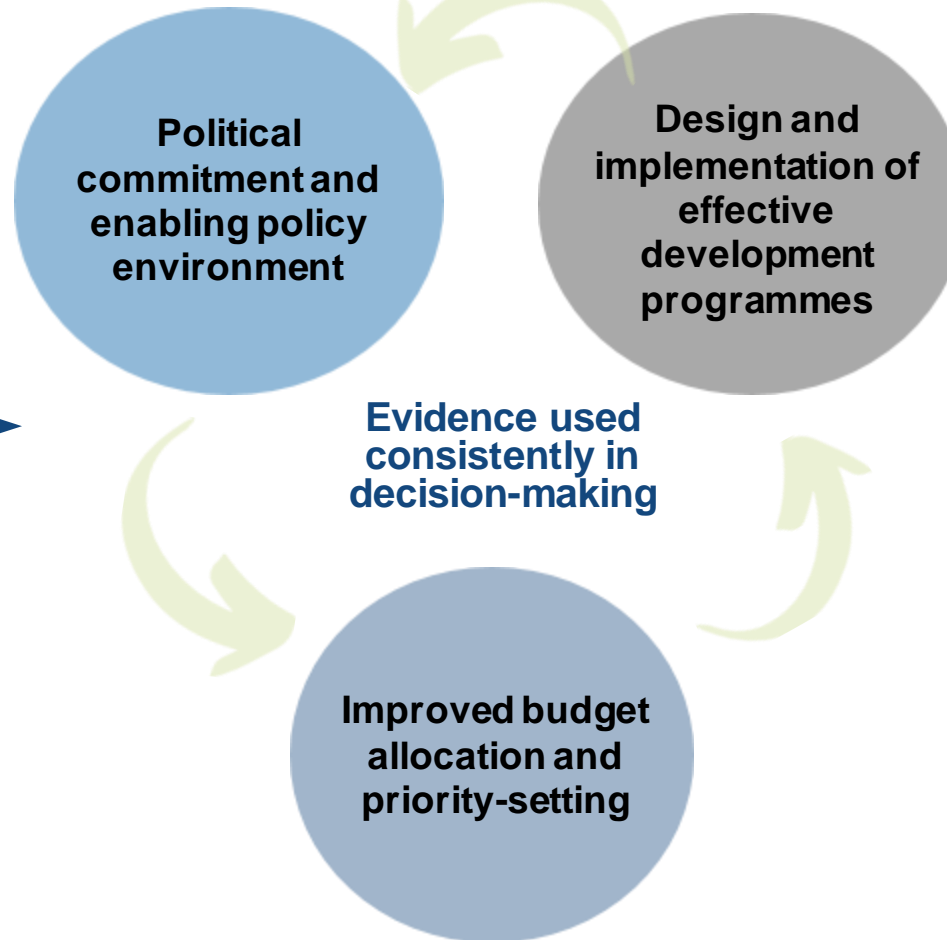


# AFIDEP's Theory of Change

## WHAT WE DO

1. Strengthen capacity in evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM)
2. Generate, synthesize and translate demand-led research on SDGs 3,4,5,13,16
3. Conduct advocacy to stimulate evidence uptake in policies and programme actions
4. Elevate African voices in national and global discourses

## OUTCOMES



## IMPACT

- ✓ Improved services & programmes
- ✓ Improved wellbeing of Africans





# AFIDEP: Highlighting MERL Leadership in Practice

- AFIDEP leads about 30 different projects for a variety of funders
  - USAID, DFID, Gates Foundation, Wellcome Trust and governments (Botswana DD)
  - Focus on capacity strengthening, policy, advocacy, and research projects
  - All these projects include MERL components
- Select MERL-specific projects
  - Evaluation of the United Kingdom government's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) programmes (ITAD), 2020–2024
  - Family Planning/Sexual Reproductive Health Impact (Guttmacher), 2022–2025
  - Evaluation of GAVI/Girl Effect Partnership to Expand HPV Vaccine (Swiss Tropical Institute), ended in 2021





# Capacity Strengthening and Organizational Visibility

- Internal MERL capacity strengthening:
  - AFIDEP strategy (MEL Unit)
  - Hewlett Foundation core funding and organizational development grant (Strategy 2020–2024, MERL assessment, staff retreat);
  - CIFF organizational development grant (MERL systems strengthening and performance review, 2020–2023; and strategy development, 2025–2029 )
- Visibility strategies
  - Communications Strategy
  - Resource Mobilization and Donor Engagement Strategy
  - Results Framework
  - Project-based strategies





# Facilitators and Challenges to Locally Led MERL



- ▲ High staff skill level and expertise in MERL
- ▲ M&E systems that includes automation of key MERL functions
- ▲ Strategies to increase visibility in Kenya, Malawi, and globally
- ▲ Supportive leadership from top management for growth



- ▼ Political leadership changes affect continuity and demand for MERL work by governments
- ▼ Limited investment in MERL
- ▼ Difficulties to secure leadership role in MERL projects from diverse funders



# New ERA

Mr. Kiran Acharya, Deputy Director of New ERA



# About New ERA

- Not-for-profit, national-level research organization in Kathmandu, Nepal
- Demonstrated management expertise in MERL projects
- Skilled in impact studies, M&E, needs assessments, feasibility studies, baseline surveys, panel studies, exploratory research, case studies, and participatory/action research.
- Dr. Harka Gurung-New ERA Fellowship program for Nepal master's students
- Woman-led with a diverse academic and professional staff



New ERA Staff Retreat, 2024. © New ERA





# New ERA's Experience in MERL Leadership for Health

- Large scale complex survey execution for health and nutrition
  - Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)
  - Nepal Health Facility Survey
  - Nepal Micronutrient Status Survey
- Knowledge translation and dissemination leadership
  - Dissemination meetings and data use workshops to inform programs and policies
- Expertise in technology and skills to lead MERL activities
  - Computer assisted personal interviews (CAPI)
  - Quantitative and qualitative analysis and data visualization





# New ERA's Approach to Capacity Strengthening

- Recognized for Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) training methods
  - Participatory Learning and Action approaches
  - Provided capacity strengthening of over 40 government, I/NGOs, and CSOs since 1989
- Multi-disciplinary training programs
  - Agencies involved in broad development activities in Nepal
  - Approach supplements theory with practical exercises to prepare for future implementation
- Public Sector capacity strengthening in data analysis
  - Analysis using health information systems and secondary data sources
  - Training local faculty in complex survey methods
- Focus on youth employment and applied training opportunities
- Learning and growth opportunities for New ERA staff in MERL skills







# Facilitators and Challenges



- ▲ Extensive experience with a diverse professional staff and high retention rates
- ▲ Resilience and ability to adapt to different contexts
- ▲ Fellowship program to train new MERL professionals
- ▲ Strong technical skills in data collection and monitoring, ensuring data quality



- ▼ Dependency on donors
- ▼ Low funding for research and MERL activities

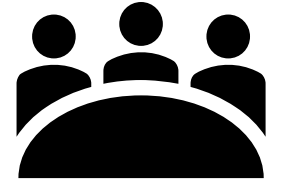


# Panel Discussion





## Panel Structure



- 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



## Question 1

What does locally led MERL mean for you and your organization?



## Question 2

How, if at all, have opportunities for locally led MERL shifted in recent years?

What is driving or preventing a shift to locally-led MERL?



## Question 3

What needs to change to increase opportunities for locally led MERL in the future?



## Question 4

What approaches has your organization taken to identify and pursue MERL leadership opportunities?



**Thank you!**





# Post-webinar survey





This presentation was produced with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of the Data for Impact (D4I) associate award 7200AA18LA00008, which is implemented by the Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in partnership with Palladium International, LLC; ICF Macro, Inc.; John Snow, Inc.; and Tulane University. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States government.

[www.data4impactproject.org](http://www.data4impactproject.org)

