# Pilot experiences: Using RECAP to build capacity for research and evaluation of health programs

What is RECAP?

The Research and Evaluation Capacity Assessment Tool and Resource Package (RECAP)—developed by the USAID-funded Data for Impact (D4I) project—supports local organizations to rapidly assess their technical and management capacity for conducting research and evaluations.

Figure 1: RECAP assessment structure
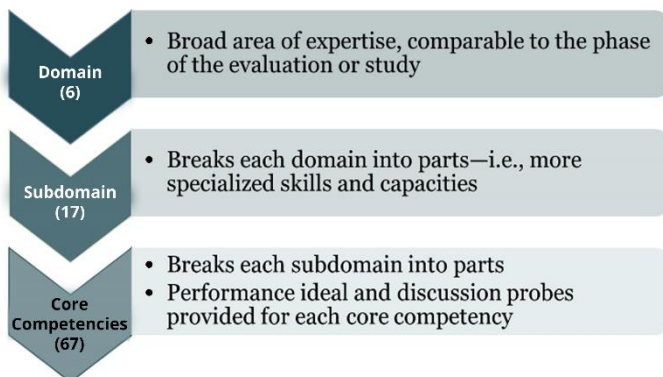
The assessment provides research and evaluation organizations with a systematic approach to assess their own performance. It is organized by six domains aligned to what is needed at an organizational level to undertake evaluation or research activities. Each domain has corresponding subdomains and core competencies, as shown in Figure 1.

The assessment is completed as a participatory consensus-building workshop with organizational leadership and staff who determine a score of 1–4 for each individual core competency (see Figure 2).

For more details, please see the RECAP User Guide.

What is included in this report?

As part of the RECAP development process, three evaluation and research organizations from different backgrounds conducted a self-assessment using RECAP. Feedback from each workshop was incorporated into the final version of the RECAP package. Results from each assessment workshop are anonymously presented as an example of the information that RECAP can generate.

What are the outputs of RECAP?

The RECAP assessment process results in a completed assessment workbook. The workbook captures the scores for each relevant competency area, as well as notes on how decisions are made around scoring, and relevant evidence (e.g., organizational documentation). Results are used to create an institutional strengthening plan.

Figure 2: RECAP scoring
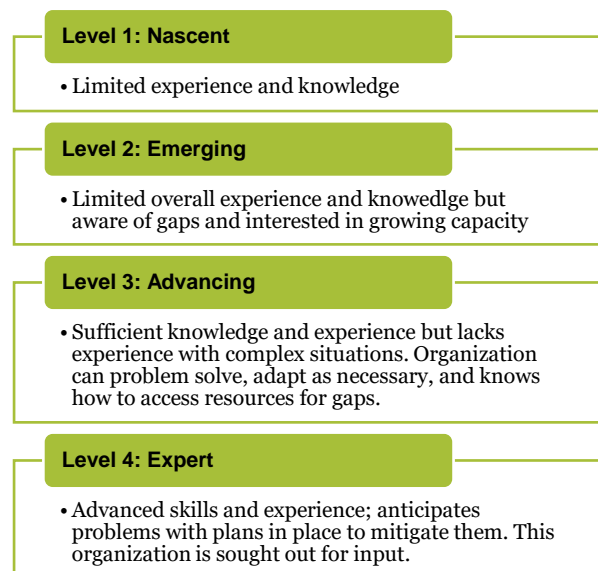
Pilot 1: West Africa

The first implementation of RECAP was done by a private organization with expertise in monitoring and evaluation, research, mapping, and training. The assessment was conducted as part of a partnership with D4I, through which the organization held a contract to collect quantitative data. The organization conducted a self-assessment of two of the six RECAP domains that fell under their scope of work: Domain 2 (Fieldwork) and 5 (Information Sharing). Results were used to identify opportunities for institutional strengthening throughout the organization's partnership with D4I.

Results

Thirteen partner staff attended the workshop, including staff representing the organizational leadership, operations, programming, administrative, and accounting staff. Over the course of two 2.5-hour sessions, participants built consensus on the scores presented here and noted how scoring decisions were made.

Under Domain 2: Fieldwork, the organization scored level 4 for 8/12 competencies (see Figure 3), noting priorities for improvement in subdomains of team mobilization, interviewing techniques, and gender integration.

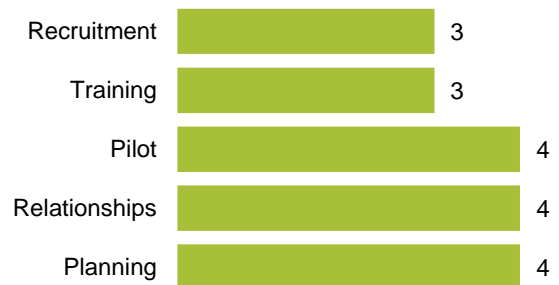For example, in the core competency of training, the team noted:

> **"***We would like to grow our training abilities on tablets; previously we only train[ed] with paper. We are open to receiving TA [technical assistance] on modern technologies.***"*

The organization also identified a strength in gender integration, noting:

> *"Most of the time we do this, but [it] really depends on what the client wants. Always keep option to integrate the gender divide in our analysis, especially in our recommendations. But we must follow what the client wants; we cannot add questions to their instruments."*

Figure 3: Domain 2: Fieldwork

2.1 Team Mobilization (Subdomain Score 3.6)

Recruitment	3
Training	3
Pilot	4
Relationships	4
Planning	4

2.2 Interviewing Techniques (Subdomain Score 3.5)

Gender Integration	3
Quantitative	4

2.3 Data Collection Management (Subdomain Score 3.8)

Quality Assurance	4
Supervision	4
Procedures	4
Safety	4
Gender Integration	3
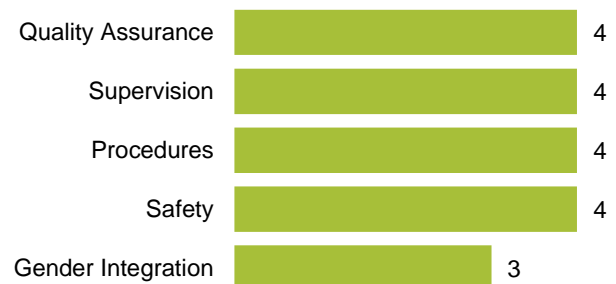
Under Domain 5: Information Sharing, the organization scored level 4 in 4/8 competency areas and noted qualitative data interpretation as a priority for improvement (see Figure 4):

> *"Before there was no qualitative! We need to learn it!"*

Under subdomain dissemination, the organization shared that they had capacity for writing but were not often engaged by their clients for dissemination or action planning efforts.
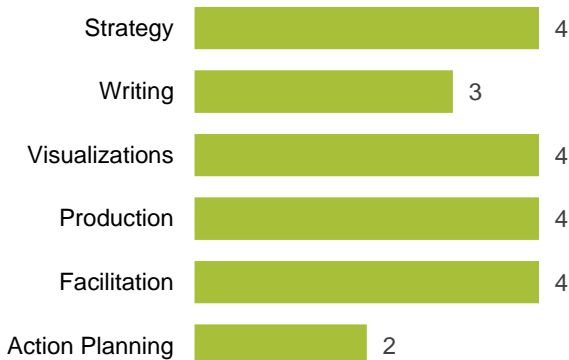
The organization used the results to develop an institutional strengthening plan designed to address priorities noted during the assessment, including a need to expose organizational management to modern training technologies and best practices, and to increase expertise in analysis and interpretation of qualitative data.

Figure 4: Domain 5: Information Sharing

5.1 Translation (Subdomain Score 3.5)

Interpretation	3
Gender Integration	4

5.2 Dissemination (Subdomain Score 3.5)

Strategy	4
Writing	3
Visualizations	4
Production	4
Facilitation	4
Action Planning	2

Pilot 2: South Asia

The second organization to use RECAP was a non-profit research and evaluation organization. The organization is a small, member-based agency focused on promoting scientific evaluation practices and advocating evidence-based policy. The organization had previously provided expert consultation during the development of RECAP and followed this by completing the full assessment as an organization to articulate strengths and core capabilities for business development and to identify gaps in management and technical skills.

Results

This organization completed the assessment remotely and on their own time, in the context of the COVId-19 pandemic. Through the assessment, this group identified gaps in capacity for secondary quantitative data analysis, human resource management, and gender integration. Results from this assessment are presented by subdomain in Figure 5.

In the domain Information Sharing, the organization noted,

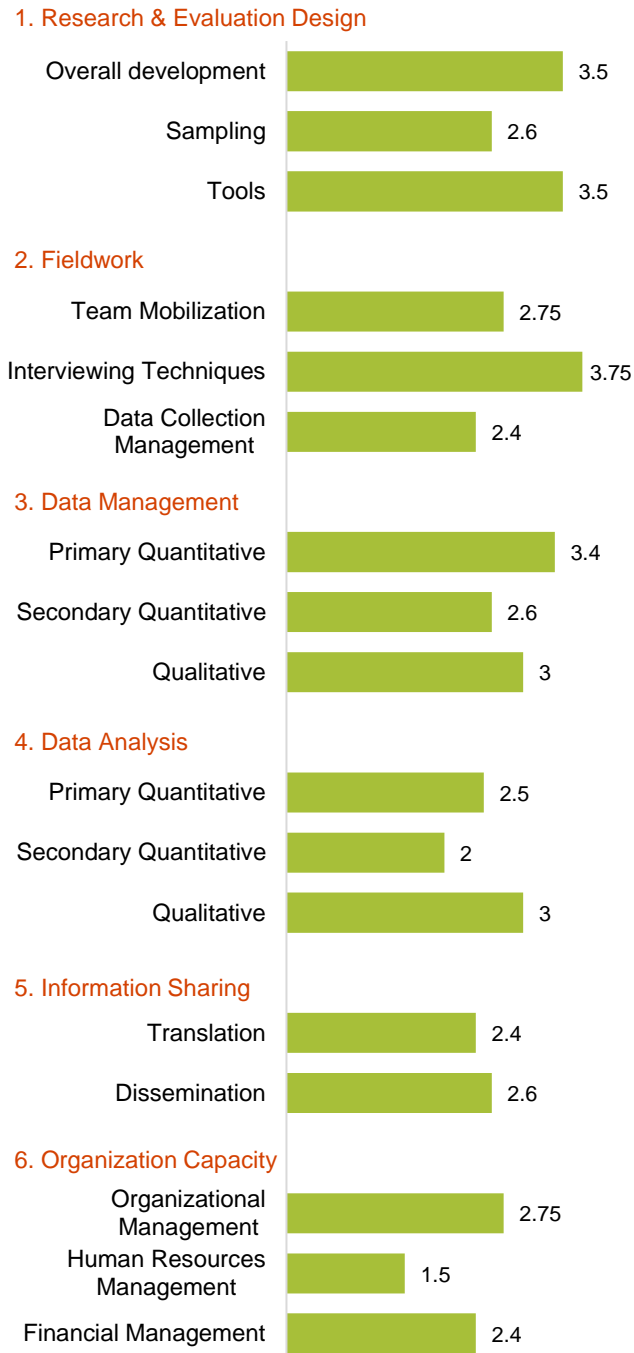*"We have experience and expertise of presenting findings in narrative [format] and also can use basic graphics. However, we are not well versed with data analytics. We do not have staff with these creds."*

The organization also noted:

"We have a practice to review projects upon their completion but do not have [a] practice of internal feedback sharing. We will prioritize that."

Figure 5: Subdomain Results

1. Research & Evaluation Design

Overall development	3.5
Sampling	2.6
Tools	3.5

2. Fieldwork

Team Mobilization	2.75
Interviewing Techniques	3.75
Data Collection Management	2.4

3. Data Management

Primary Quantitative	3.4
Secondary Quantitative	2.6
Qualitative	3

4. Data Analysis

Primary Quantitative	2.5
Secondary Quantitative	2
Qualitative	3

5. Information Sharing

Translation	2.4
Dissemination	2.6

6. Organization Capacity

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Organizational Management	2.75
Human Resources Management	1.5
Financial Management	2.4

Spotlight on Gender Integration

Gender is a cross-cutting assessment area of RECAP, as gender is an aspect of all health interventions. Scores for gender-related competencies from each domain are compiled in the assessment workbook dashboard tab. In South Asia, the organization identified opportunities to grow in gender integration in research and evaluation design, data analysis, and information sharing, shown in Figure 6.

"[We have] run some studies that were specifically focused in exploring gender outcomes. We are familiar with techniques to measure gender sensitive results. However, we have not really integrated gender in our evaluation. We do not have staff sufficiently trained on this and also do not have any resource materials that could be useful."

Figure 6. Gender Integration by domain

1. Research & Evaluation Design	2
2. Fieldwork	3
4. Data Analysis	2
5. Information Sharing	2
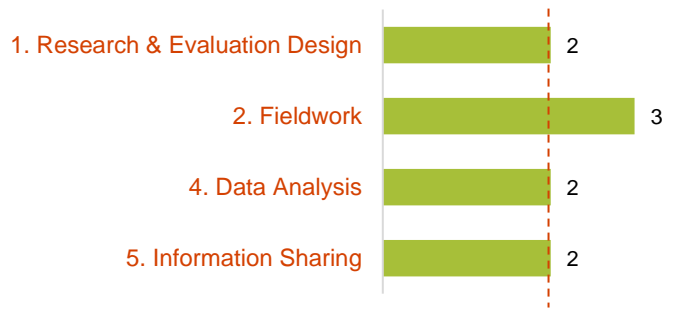
Based on the results, the organization was able to use the RECAP Institutional Strengthening Resource Guide to identify available resources mapped to each assessment domain. The organization is prioritizing free virtual resource options that offer skills-based applied content in a flexible and self-paced environment.

Pilot 3: East Africa

The third implementation of the RECAP assessment was done by a university-based organization that has the goal of becoming a center for research and excellence in their region. The organization was contracted with D4I to collect, analyze, and interpret quantitative and qualitative data as part of an evaluation of a local development activity.

Results

Six staff members convened with an independent facilitator to complete the assessment over two half-day workshops. Participants began the assessment in plenary, and then decided on day two to each individually score assessment competencies and then reconvene to compare individual scores and build consensus to find final scores for each competency.

The organization scored level 4 in 12/17 subdomains (see Figure 7) and prioritized competencies that scored below 4 for strengthening activities, including qualitative analysis, dissemination, and organizational management.

Specifically, the organization noted a need to expand their expertise in dissemination to be able to translate data for a variety of audiences, including new formats and visualization techniques:
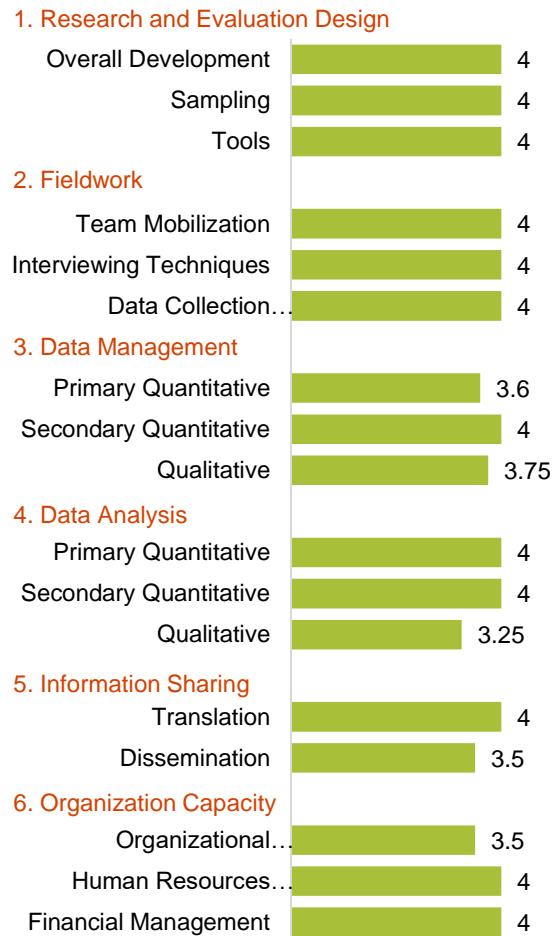
> *"There is clear need for capacity building in this area using Tableau and ArcGIS and advanced Excel."*

This priority fit within the scope of work with D4I, and under the partnership, identified opportunities to collaborate on the creation of a variety of information products for different audiences.

The organization used the assessment results to articulate strengths and capabilities and identify training and resource needs across each of the domains. The organization shared results with D4I to identify additional opportunities for

collaboration to facilitate organizational growth with the partnership scope of work. Based on the assessment results, D4I was also able to suggest free and low-cost resources from the Resource Guide for the organization's consideration.

Figure 7: Subdomain Results

1. Research and Evaluation Design
- Overall Development — 4
- Sampling — 4
- Tools — 4

2. Fieldwork
- Team Mobilization — 4
- Interviewing Techniques — 4
- Data Collection… — 4

3. Data Management
- Primary Quantitative — 3.6
- Secondary Quantitative — 4
- Qualitative — 3.75

4. Data Analysis
- Primary Quantitative — 4
- Secondary Quantitative — 4
- Qualitative — 3.25

5. Information Sharing
- Translation — 4
- Dissemination — 3.5

6. Organization Capacity
- Organizational… — 3.5
- Human Resources… — 4
- Financial Management — 4

When asked about their experience using RECAP, the organization's participants shared:

"[RECAP] is a very good tool that can help an institution to review itself and plan for effective ways of managing itself since the tool makes it possible for institutions to identify [its] own gaps and resources needed for its operations."

Pilot experience: Lessons learned

Key lessons from the pilot experience included:

- **Timing:** When using RECAP during a partnership/contract relationship, one of the first decisions is when to conduct the assessment. In D4I's experience, allowing time to first establish a working relationship rather than conducting the assessment right away resulted in more open and reflective discussion during the assessment workshop.

- **Facilitation:** The RECAP assessment can be facilitated internally by an organization or perhaps most ideally by an independent facilitator. The facilitator should be well-versed in RECAP prior to the assessment. It is important to have a point person from the organization who co-leads the process.

- **Repeating the assessment:** RECAP is not designed specifically for monitoring or measurement; however, organizations may choose to repeat the assessment periodically to revisit priorities and institutional strengths and gaps. At least one of the pilot organizations planned to repeat the RECAP assessment independently in the future.

- **Participants:** As RECAP is designed to assess an organization across multiple content and organizational dimensions, workshop participants should represent varying content areas and seniority within the organization. This includes not only technical areas of research and evaluation but organizational management.

- **Scoring:** Scores are used to identify potential priorities for strengthening and creating an institutional strengthening plan. High scores may be expected, especially when the assessment is self-administered and/or when the assessment is focused in competency areas that match the research partner's scope of work. Scores should be used only for organizational strengthening; thus, it will benefit organizations to be honest about perceived strengths and weaknesses.

- **Sleeping capacity:** Staff may have technical skills and experiences individually, but as an organization may not have had an opportunity to demonstrate this ability in their funded work. The assessment may help identify sleeping capacities, which the organization would like to grow in future work.

- **Ownership:** The structure of donor funded work sometimes limits country ownership and agency over evaluation and research activities and products. Donor requirements often limit opportunities to fully realize organization capacity, for example when organizations are contracted for data collection but not included in writing and dissemination efforts.

Summary

The purpose of RECAP is to support local organizations in navigating their own institutional strengthening. Each component of RECAP is designed to provide organizations with the tools they need to take stock of their institutional strengths, identify priorities for growth, and design a plan to support the organization's identified priorities for growth. The pilot experiences explore how three organizations used and adapted RECAP.

RECAP is intended to be a "living" resource that will be updated to meet the evolving needs of organizations and partners working in research and evaluation of health programs.

Please contact D4I with your experiences and feedback of using components of RECAP.

About D4I

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 their sustainable development. For more information, visit https://www.data4impactproject.org/.
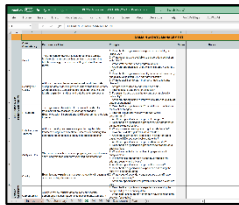
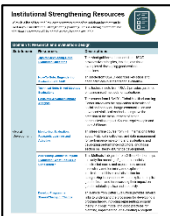## RECAP Package Components

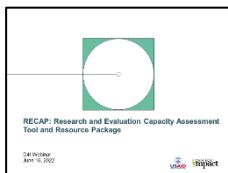|	
	The **User Guide** provides step-by-step instructions for planning and implementing the capacity assessment, including additional notes on facilitation and workshop formats. There is also a multistep guide for developing the institutional strengthening plan as well as background on RECAP's purpose and development.
	The **Assessment Tool** describes each of the six domains of RECAP relevant to research and evaluation, and corresponding subdomains and core competencies, with defined performance ideals for each. The Assessment Tool includes a list of discussion questions under each competency to help guide the discussion during scoring.
	The **Excel Workbook** is designed to be used during the assessment for data entry. The workbook includes a tab for each domain with a dropdown menu to input scores for each competency as well as suggested discussion questions for each subdomain. The workbook includes a visual dashboard that automatically compiles scores for each domain and for gender integration. There is also a template for planning action steps that map the gaps identified in the assessment.
	The **Institutional Strengthening Resource Guide** provides a list of free and low-cost resources mapped to specific domains to aid organizations in identifying actionable steps for strengthening priorities.
	The **Facilitation PowerPoint** was adapted from pilot experiences and can be adapted and used by the facilitator during the assessment workshop. The PPT summarizes the purpose of RECAP and each of the domains and the steps for designing the institutional strengthening plan.