Okay, it’s two after, so I think we’ll go ahead and get started. My name is Ashley Hagaman. I’m a faculty member in our Social and Behavioral Sciences Department and the Director of the Qualitative Methods Innovation Program within our Center for Methods and Implementation and Prevention Science here at Yale. And we are delighted to welcome Dr. Cakouros as our seminar speaker today. She is a global health scientist and mixed methodologist with expertise in health systems. I met Bridget a couple of different ways. One was through one of our Master’s in Public Health students and another was an email just asking about access to qualitative methods training and methods just like more generally here at Yale. And then of course our shared interest in global health. So we had been in some common spaces together and I was just immediately impressed with her wealth of experience working on complex systems studies and in sort of implementing programs around the world.
She has a really interesting and really important focus on developing and development research more broadly.

Global health research and global health development are topics that I engage with every day as a part of my own career. And my teams and I often think about the larger dynamics that we have with our composition and our positionality and relationality both within our team and our project is being implemented.

But I hadn’t thought about how we understand that or what we do with that and kind of what we can learn about these dynamics more broadly. And so Dr. Cakouros’ work is so important because it will help us not only do better global health work and health systems work but it’ll help global health programs be more successful which is really all health programs.

And so at Yale, she is a postdoctoral fellow with Professor Talbert-Slagle, the Associate Director of our Yale Institute for Global Health.

And today she’s going to talk about qualitative methods to study global health collaboration anchoring in her collaborative work in Liberia.
And so thank you so much for joining us Dr. Cakouros and I’ll hand it over to you.

And then just a note, I can kind of monitor the chat as well in case there were any questions but let us know if you want to take questions in the middle or if you just want to wait till the end.

Brigid speaks faintly.

Here’s my computer, there you’re welcome.

Hey Brigid, just to stop you for a second.

It sounds very muffled on our end.

How about now?

Ooh, that’s great.

Okay, we switch it to my computer.

So when we start maybe in chat as a group.

Okay, thank you.

Perfect.

All right.

So to summarize what I was saying,

I’m just really excited to talk about this project.

I’ve been working on it for about a year now,

a little over a year.

And I’m really excited about qualitative methodology

and especially in global health

and what you can learn about systems
and how systems operate using qualitative methods.

It’s kind of a fun frontier to be working on and I’m looking forward to sharing this project with you.

So this is titled using qualitative thematic analysis to explore financial donor and recipient collaboration in Liberia.

And a little overview, there we go, for what I’ll be talking about today. I’ll talk a little bit about why Liberia, why it makes sense to be thinking about collaborations in Liberia, kind of what sets the stage for the importance of studying this topic there. And then I’ll talk about the study design and methodology, why we chose the methods we did, the processes we went through for analyzing our qualitative data and such. And then I’ll touch briefly at the end, summarizing some of the lessons we learned. This was really a training opportunity with some of our students. So I talk about that kind of throughout this presentation as well, but I think it’s kind of cool to reflect on that as we go.

And there’s a couple of pictures throughout here of just, they’ll be of the team or pictures I took in Liberia.
So they're really to just enhance this visually because qualitative sometimes is just words, but giving a little bit of context of where we were.

So why Liberia? I'll give a little brief background on it. And I wanna highlight that what I'm gonna focus on is really the reasons why the health system there is broken.

So it’s focusing on some of the tougher times and the harder hit parts of the health system. Liberia is great. There’s a lot to offer from this country. So I’m not trying to just ground Liberia and being like this place of civil conflict and Ebola, but that’s really what’s weakened the health system to make this type of study.

So between 1989 and 2003, I’m sure that people remember that there was civil conflict there. It was more by child soldiers and extreme poverty and fear. 90% of the skilled health workers fled the country.

So the health infrastructure was destroyed. And this really started a strong reliance on humanitarian organizations and international NGOs and foreign donors to kind of keep this system afloat.

So then there was a brief period
of health system rebuilding from 2006 until 2013.

This is a picture of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female elected president on the continent of Africa. Very exciting.

And she really, when she was sworn into power, she not only negotiated down and canceled a lot of debt, but she was able to renegotiate some investments from global donors.

So she was really working on rebuilding a lot of these partnerships. And this chart here just shows the change in under five mortality rate, which is a strong indicator of a health system. So Liberia had started to turn the corner right around 2010, a little bit earlier in the early 2000s from when it was in civil conflict.

And by 2013, access to health facilities increased to 71% by 2013. In 2008, only 41% of people were within one hour walk of a health facility.

So these are huge gains in a short amount of time. But then there was Ebola, which also many public health people probably remember.

There was just over 5,000 or just under 5,000 deaths,
including 8% of the skilled healthcare providers, which is the doctors, nurses, midwives. So routine healthcare service essentially collapsed once again, which was really unfortunate because as I noted in that period of rebuilding, they were really on a strong chart to go forward.

So now what? You know, this timeline not only increased reliance on donors, it brought in a lot of donors. So many donors started engaging in Liberia with different aspects of strengthening the global health system. There was funding coming in from many partners. And again, you know, there’s many more people that are just even highlighted on this slide. So in 2015, Liberia created this investment plan for building a resilient health system because clearly the system’s taken some hits and it’s how do we build up, make it even stronger?

So again, this is just some examples of the numerous partners working in Liberia. And if you’re thinking about the government as where this document is fitting, think about how many different negotiations and collaborations and partnerships are operating
And again, if that’s the government, here’s where the government sits now. You know, some of these organizations are dealing with one or two different arrows. The government is negotiating all of them. So it’s a really complex kind of daunting system to try to negotiate what these collaborations look like. So now I hope I’ve convinced you that Liberia is a very interesting place to study this. I’ll talk a bit now about the study design and methodology and we’ll talk about some of the influences for how this was designed. So the overview and goal of this particular study was to explore these dynamics of global health collaborations from the perspectives of those working in Liberia. So pictured here is Dr. Bernice Dahn. She’s a former minister of health. She was chief medical officer for a time as well in the country. And she’s just all around, you know, an expert on health system resilience in Liberia.
And she gave a lecture at Yale, I believe it was in either the spring of 2022 or the fall of 2021, titled The Unchecked Power of the Purse. And this talked about a lot of the inequities she’s seen over her career working in global health. From this lecture, there were two master’s students and two undergrads along with Christina Talbert-Slagle who designs this qualitative study to explore these relationships in Liberia. So Dr. Talbert-Slagle was the co-PI along with Dr. Dahn. So we had the US representation affiliated with Yale and strong Liberian representation as well. So there’s this whole push that global health is inherently equitable when you talk about the word collaboration, but I think many of us kind of know that it’s not. And from Dr. Dahn’s experience, she’s talked about how accountability and transparency are a one-way street. Essentially that the donors are controlling what accountability looks like, what is allowed to be transparent. She’s talked about donors’ priorities being favored over government needs.
and that there’s a value of, there’s claims of value of empowerment, but that’s never actually transferred to the government. So it’s leaving weak systems weak and perpetuating this corruption and ideas of perceived corruption. So really hearing these issues, knowing that Liberia is a great setting to study this, this is why a really qualitative study makes a lot of sense here. So if we’re looking at, trying to understand the subjective meanings and these actions and behaviors of people working in this setting, we can try to map out what this actually looks like. You can have as many structures and norms and frameworks as you want, but we really would like to understand and gain insight to the human experience here. So a couple of terminology, I know I’ve talked a lot about the word collaboration. So collaboration generally in this type of setting is a low resource country that needs support. Here we’re talking really about financial support.
from a high resource setting. And this again can create a sort of reliance on needing that type of funding and support. And I think it’s really important that collaboration is accepted as positive. It’s not always positive. You really wanna understand the nuance of what’s driving a collaboration or collaborative partnership. And this is kind of known in the field of global health and development, but there are calls to have more equitable collaborations and decrease this dependency, but is it really happening? So again, another push for why qualitative. By the end of this part, I’m gonna be convinced that qualitative is perfect to be studying this. And so, oops, my keys jumps forward a few slides. To sum up this notion of, we can have all of these calls and frameworks. We can have normative accounts of why equity is essential, and we can have practical guidelines, which are frameworks and norms of how we should be operating in these collaborations, but we need these empirical studies to inform action. And I think this quote from Bauer,
it’s a study of why considering equity in global health collaborations is necessary. This really just sums up all of that. I’m not gonna read the whole quote, but I’d like to focus on this idea that empirical studies can provide important insights from the experiences of those involved in developing equitable research collaborations. They could also inform policies, frameworks, and guidelines related to equitable research collaborations in global health. So tying to implementation science, we’re really trying to build an evidence base of whether these frameworks are actually doing what we think they are doing? And just, again, I wanna reflect on this image. This is what we’re trying to understand. We’re trying to use qualitative data to make sense of these arrows and to discern some of the patterns and how individuals are acting in this system. And a lot of times in global health, we talk about the software and the hardware of the system. And briefly, I’ll just talk about that. The hardware is generally the infrastructure, the finance, technology,
interventions that are really easy to measure and see that we’re making these investments. And then associated with that is the tangible software. So those are kind of go together. That’s how you create structures and systems and hierarchies of how you’re going to make change. Now, what we’re really curious about though, and especially in this study, are the values and norms and the relationships and communication and power that exists that aren’t as easy to measure or to understand. You can’t really put a quantitative measure on this. So by understanding the lived experience of it, we can try to map places to intervene and strengthen it. So all of these questions and all of this background now led to a study of this. So we wanted to examine these dynamics and perceptions through financial control, accountability, and decision-making. And the idea of focusing on these three within the study gave us our interview guide. some structure to follow along with. And we really wanted to keep it broad to talk about the partnerships in Liberia.
It wasn’t just financial donors and it wasn’t just recipients. We talked to academics, we talked to NGOs to really try to get a rich experience of how this operates.

So a few of the procedures. This here is a picture of some of the research team. I think we’re missing a few people, but right in the center there is Dr. Talbert Slagle. And these are some of the students that were there over the summer representing Yale.

So we obtained IRBs to start from both universities. So it was grounded in ethics in both Liberia and here at Yale. And the participants were recruited through purposeful sampling and then snowball sampling.

So the purposeful part of it was reached out directly to by Dr. Dahn. And so she was able to work within her network as well.

It was so strong and it would kind of have been a huge pass to not use her assistance with that.

And then once we started the interviews, there was snowball sampling.

So interviewees were able to recommend different people throughout the country.
that they felt would have powerful insight as well. So the interviews were in the summer of 2022 between July and August. Then they were anywhere between 30 and 60 minutes.

And to ensure kind of quality assurance, we had a Liberian data collector and an American data collector present at each data collection opportunity. And this was to make sure it was quality data collection, but also we were using this as a training opportunity for students. And so it’s really good to be able to hear what your colleagues are doing or follow-up questions they might use or be able to flag a point where they missed the question.

These were all novice data collectors. So it was great to have the teams. And then the students all transcribed the data themselves, which also helped embed them fully in this process.

because if anyone’s done transcription, it is not the most fun of a process and it takes a lot of time. But they were great. And we ended up having a total of 38 interviews.
We realized after the fact that we didn’t do great training on note-taking if anyone declines to be interviewed. So we did eliminate three of those just on the idea that it didn’t seem like we really had done adequate training for the data collectors. But we were still left with 35 interviews. We were really trying to have solid female representation because sometimes in global health, that can be very skewed. And I’d say 40% we did okay. And nationality, we definitely wanted the Liberian experience overall and what it’s like to be working in Liberia. So that felt good as well. And then this idea of the classification of position. Many of these people have been working in this field for many, many years. And they had many different roles. Some had been Liberian government workers. Some had then switched into NGOs and some then had even shifted into the role of a donor. So in the process of reviewing the data, we did our own classification then of what was the most prominently discussed role.
So that also forced the deeper reading of the data to be sure we were capturing that.

Here we are now, we have these 35 interviews and we were trying to think like, what is the best way to be analyzing this data? And we were really guided by Brown and Clark’s thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes within data. And I know I have this as my last bullet point, but I think I will note it as my first. Thematic analysis is the most used but least well-defined method of qualitative analysis.

So it was really important, especially for me having worked with qualitative data that I really wanted to document why we were making the decisions we were making and why this actually was the best way to be conducting this analysis. And again, this is a training opportunity. So this type of analysis fit well with being able to train students. It’s a good intro to qualitative analysis. We could also go from picking a rich description of the dataset and doing a broad overview of it.
or we were able to dive in with questions. And at this stage, I'll be honest, we weren’t really sure what we were going to do. If that we thought we wanted to do a rich description, the more we engage with the data, it was huge. So we started asking more specific questions. And you’ll see when we get to the analysis, we actually kind of did a layered like two-level analysis, which was really fun. So I’ve never done that either. But just to note that we actually started with grounded theory. We thought that’s what we were going into. We knew what patterns existed in this type of world, but we were trying to see how they manifested within Liberia. So we felt that there was enough of already theoretical, small T theoretical background of what we could be expecting with this data.
So just a bit about the structure of the application of thematic analysis. It kind of is on a spectrum a little bit, starting with coding reliability, which really focused on getting this objective and unbiased coding. You’re using a codebook that everyone agrees is defined and strongly used and reflective of the data and also what you expect to see. So the goal with that is that every team member could see an excerpt of data and know exactly what code that would go into. I mean, that’s if you have perfect inter-rater reliability, which is a measure of how much you are actually coding the same data the same way over and over. This is great for teams, but it also is pretty rigid in how you’re structuring your codebook. So you kind of have that set early on. And then on the other end, all the way on the flexible end, the idea is that the researcher embraces where they’re sitting with the data. You’re really acknowledging that like you are part of the tool that is working with this data.
You’re having like a big impact on how the data is shaped as well. There’s open coding and no real structured codebook. You can have like notes and documentation throughout, but the goal is that your end result from coding is themes. It’s not really creating a codebook to go back and reapply this codebook. So really that’s kind of like an individual setting. And then somewhere in the middle, we have codebook and codebook uses kind of both of them a little bit. You’re using a structured codebook to assist analysis, but that’s not driving the objectivity of your results. Accuracy between coders is not the focus of the codebook. And the codebook can really evolve throughout the process. Again, with qualitative, as long as you’re documenting, the goal is to really be documenting, documenting why you’re doing what you’re doing and why it makes sense. And it’s really great for teams. Again, we were working with a team. It was a pretty big team by the time we got to coding.
So we needed some kind of structure to assist us.

But again, we were really trying to keep it as organic as possible when we were moving through the data.

So I’d say we fell kind of about there. We were within the codebook structure, but there was a lot of reflexive aspects going on.

I’ll talk a bit more about the structure of the team, but I was reflexive of working between two different teams on this and also how the codebook was adapting and changing throughout.

So there are six steps of thematic analysis. You start with familiarizing yourself and generating your initial codes. And that’s kind of a phase where you’re going back and forth a little bit. But we tended to kind of stay in this cycle for a while here before we moved on to themes and the other steps in it.

But I’ll focus on this for now, the process that we had five members now of the team coding.

We had two Liberian citizens and two American, and then me.

I was the fifth. So we started our first meeting.

Both PIs were present as well.

We all read through three interviews.
and created an initial codebook and thought, had many discussions of how does this codebook pan out? Does it work? Does it not? And I think, I know we had at least one two-hour meeting. I think we had two two-hour meetings to kind of get through this rough idea of what a codebook could look like. And then we came to an idea, like a consensus on what a draft was. And then we moved it to code two more interviews. And this ended up just being the coding team, the four students and myself. And then we came back and continued to refine this codebook and finalize it. So after our second meeting, then we split into two teams. I’ll walk through that a little bit now. This is a screenshot of kind of how we organized it. And I think it’ll walk through a little bit of this process. It says we did 10 weeks. That was over the course of many months. We were working with multiple schedules, multiple commitments, multiple time zones, and students in very different aspects of their careers. So we ended up having two meetings. Once we sat with, you know, this part of having the initial code team going,
then we split into two teams, one and team two. I sat on both teams. So every time each team met, I met as well. And then we’d meet as a group every Friday to then go over the codebook. And then we’d meet as a group every Friday and reassess and decide, you know, what changes are we making? And you can kind of see at the top, we had the deadline for when we wanted to complete it. And then in blue, it was when we actually completed it because some meetings took a lot longer. And then we highlighted which codebook we would be using because we were using many iterations of this codebook. And I’ll do a quick screen share then to just highlight the evolution of the codebook. This is from the end of September last year, one of our first codes. You can see that we started with what we would have as like our parent code, how we defined it, how we had child codes. I’ll just focus on accountability right now. You can see that we broke that down into many different, you know, D meant donor, R meant recipient. At this point, we were still classifying our interviews.
as donor and recipient, which then the more we read them, that’s where we started to get, you know, some donors are, or some recipients are actually donors themselves. And, you know, it was a really, we had to actually classify the interviews then and it made it a lot easier. But you can see that this is like the first iteration. You can see notes, you can see changes. And then finally to the last one. So this was really just a screenshot of how, you know, accountability evolved. Then we, once we had realized we could classify people as to what position they were speaking about the most, it just came down to, was there a form of accountability or was there a lack of accountability? So then we could go into how are NGOs talking about forms of accountability? How are donors, foreign donors talking about forms of accountability? They aren’t, if you want to know, in their own form. So it became a lot easier to figure out how to start organizing and structuring the data. Oh, I just saw the note that every time I turn my head, I’m muscling sound.
So I will keep focused on the computer from now on.

So yeah, the codebook, as you can also see at the bottom of the screen here, we went through so many iterations and we dated them so that as a team, we could go back to the shared document and know which is the most relevant codebook to be using.

So here we are now coming back together. We're searching for themes. So imagine this is now, we've got through all 11 weeks of those meetings, we've got through all 11 weeks of those meetings, which were 30 some meetings on my end of like getting these teams together. And we're starting to talk about themes. So all five of us met and discussed common themes and talked about our notes on what we saw kind of coming out of the data. And we started grouping codes based on where we thought codes were fitting into give development to these themes. And then from here, we did discuss as a big group, but then really only me and one of the team members continued to start actually writing our results up and refining and defining and naming the themes. And I'll be honest at this stage, it was just,
we were doing a lot of wrangling with a lot of people. So it kind of made sense to just start focusing a little bit more on how to move forward now the data analysis part of it. And it was great. People, I think within that group, I'd say people were graduating, some were working on other projects. So it was never like people didn’t want to be involved. They were always willing to give feedback and step in as needed. But this one student really had an aptitude for coding as well for qualitative analysis. And in the vein of being reflexive, I'd say maybe she and I worked well together. Maybe we approached the data the same, but at the same time, I was just, she was a student who had never taken qualitative before, but she was willing to just really discuss. And she was never afraid to kind of get knee deep in it and really talk through what definition she was seeing or to push back against something or to be quick to jump in and give examples to bolster other people’s feedback. So she just got it.
So I’d say from there, it became her and I really working on how to move forward with this. So I’ll present now some of the results that we saw. Again, a lot of this is focused on the analysis, but we do have results that I think were really powerful. We have two phases of the analysis. And after I go through some of the results, I’d like to talk a bit about just what it took to get to the images that we used, because I think also in qualitative work, it is so powerful to have images that can represent what you’re trying to say. And it’s kind of a quick takeaway for people as well. So starting here, we found this cycle of, it’s pretty clear, whoever had control of the money was the person making the calls for how they were going to prioritize using that money. And then a lot of times, so we’ll talk actually first a bit about just that pattern right there, who has the money and how that gets to be in that priority setting power. So we started this analysis really diving first into priority setting power. So we wanted to see kind of how that manifested within the system, but how that was being pushed along.
So that’s why we focus now a bit on what financial control really means.

So the theme we discussed was that priority setting power is most strongly tied to whoever has the financial control.

Not surprising, again, this was something we kind of expected to see.

There was a strong hesitancy among those we interviewed to say no to donors.

There was kind of a pressure that if you say no, you’re going to damage a relationship to have funding for a long time.

So it was tedious.

And that also there was a feeling that these gestures of collaboration were kind of just checking boxes.

So it was tedious.

And that also there was a feeling that these gestures of collaboration were not actually genuine.

They were kind of just checking boxes.

And it was kind of obvious to definitely on the side of being a recipient,

but sometimes donors are mentioning that as well,

that they were doing this because it was expected.

And I’d like to read this quote.

I think it’s a great quote that sums up being engaged in this type of work right now.

Most of the time,

the international partners come with what they want to do.
So they prioritize what they want to do in a particular environment or in a particular area. And in many instances, you either accept it or it is pushed down your throat. It is a bad process because when you are building a system, if you want to help, it is good to work with the people that you want to help to tell you what their priorities are. And you can work around it so that at the end of the day, they have an ownership to it. But if you decide on what you want to do for the recipient, there is no ownership. So you set your priorities, you have how you want this work to get done, but then metrics are being consistently set.
to meet those priorities.

So if you’re meeting those priorities, you hit those metrics, the funders are seeing this
and they’re funding the same type of cycle.

You know, that’s just innate nature.

It’s a feedback loop, a reinforcing feedback loop of that exact process happening.

So these implementation plans are driven by donor priorities
with outputs that reflect these donors’ measures and metrics.

Sometimes they’re not reflecting what the country members really even want to be seeing.

So there’s a stronger obligation back to home country
than to the Liberian government.

A lot of times we did hear quotes on taxpayer dollars
and who needs to be having reports back on what’s going on with their money abroad.

And donors generally in this sense focused on short-term metrics.

I’ll talk about this a bit in the quote,
but the Liberian government really wanted to see longer term sustainability interventions.

And it’s really hard to factor that in when you have to be working under someone else’s priority.

So then the idea was that these successful outcomes
lead to successful funding, and that funding leads to, again, like I said, a reinforcing loop.

So for this quote, it’s not just priorities, but even the results are like, who decides what success looks like? Part of the problem is the way that the funders define success.

The way that a lot of donor funded projects are measured, their success is measured by performance-based indicators. And I think, you know, an important measure of success is contribution towards building systems and a lot of long-term things that are difficult to measure within funding cycle of even five years.

That distorts how things are planned and how success is defined, and that’s a cycle. I mean, this quote really just summarizes everything I showed within that cycle.

And there were a few people who also spoke about this idea that when you come into a lot of these big international donor organizations, or even some of the NGOs, you’re coming in on a five-year timeframe. And so what you wanna achieve in that five-year timeframe is what’s gonna get you to your next role.
So people are naturally looking out for themselves too
in their own career, but at this point, it’s not creating an allegiance to building a bigger system that exists beyond them when they’re there.
So reinforcing here is the first phase of the analysis.
We created this loop. We were left thinking though, like, why is this loop still existing? Is there a way that we can understand what’s going on underneath it?
So this is what we call the cyclical process of priority setting. It keeps operating in this cycle.
So our goal was to then rotate it and think how can we discern what’s going on underneath it?
We came up with this type of image. What’s going on that’s driving these types of patterns?
And we wanted to really understand the underlying factors that are influencing this process.
When we wanted to create it, it’s kind of like a vortex in a way, or the idea of the iceberg model, where what you see on the surface, there’s a lot more going underneath.
And it’s kind of the power inherently of qualitative work.
But at the same time,
we wanted to show that within this data, three major themes kind of emerged, that there was a history of prior engagement, a level of transparency and patterns of accountability. And some of these were reflective of what we asked in our guide, our interview guide. Some had emerged a bit more organically in how interviewees were talking about these topics. But we did want to note that there’s likely more that exists underneath this as well, driving this pattern. But this is what we saw within this data. So the history of a prior engagement is referring to the ways that prior engagement in Liberia forms current collaboration. So as I had said, giving the background of Liberia, there was civil conflicts that kind of set the stage on reliance. Then there was Ebola. So it created this state of emergency and crisis that many donors continued to collaborate in this way. There’s kind of this mentality of get in, get work done, and less of a focus on the long-term sustainability of a system. Donors did have a continued fear of corruption and mismanaged funds.
And many Liberians were not ignoring that. They were not saying that that wasn’t true, but that was perpetuating a fear of changing types of investment and ways to engage.

And this wasn’t just seen, I would assume this isn’t only seen in Liberia. I think we also know from other studies and reports that external partners often operate in low resource settings in unethically, unethically questionable ways. They might not do in their home country or different types of settings. And that was definitely evident in Liberia in the way that some people spoke about this. So this quote summarizing would be, they resist channeling their money to a recipient country government until it’s running as well as their own. Like at that point, they don’t need your money.

The country’s already running really well. So it’s, if you want to wait for the country to be perfect before you take any risk, what that does, a preoccupation with fiduciary risk ends up becoming a strategic risk that your programs can fail. You’re not helping the country to achieve its development goals and progress.
So this idea of there’s a constant risk state is not allowing there to be many different ways to consider how to fund or support or collaborate.

Next, you’ll remember in that diagram, I talked about that the donor is determining how transparent they are willing to be.

And this was really specific to funds because that was a lot of what we were asking. But a lot of times, and a lot of us are in academia here, I’m assuming it’s not all of us, indirect costs are not totally transparent, but especially members of the Liberian government are saying, we don’t know how much money is coming through our country now.

We don’t know what the overhead costs are for NGOs. We don’t know this.

So sometimes, when a donor is filtering money through either NGOs or supporting partners, it’s not clear what money is actually getting into Liberia.

And this quote, I think sums that up perfectly where it’s an imbalance of maybe what the public perception is of a huge investment, but then what really is happening in countries is not the same amount.

So one thing that was of concern was the NGOs,
not the donors, because the donors will channel funding through the international NGOs.

The concern was that they will come and give the narrative of what needs to be done, but the actual financial display was kept secret.

And I always told them, we know that you write proposals. We know that a certain percentage of money is there for your administrative costs. We know, but we also wanna know how much is there for service delivery. You cannot get up and tell Liberia, oh, we channel $2 million through external organization, and then you come and you use 50% of that money on administrative costs.

It is wrong.

There were a couple accounts too of different partners, either Liberians or based in Liberia or strong collaborations in Liberia saying that there is an inequity of how resources are used. Liberia doesn’t even have stable electricity and fuel costs to run an office are astronomical, but sometimes there’s rules of what would be funded, what wouldn’t be funded when it’s not in that organization’s office. So it was really tricky to navigate.
901 00:39:44.160 --> 00:39:46.563 some of the transparency on what was going on.
902 00:39:47.480 --> 00:39:51.270 And finally, at the bottom of this vortex I had shown,
903 00:39:51.270 --> 00:39:52.830 the donor is creating structures
904 00:39:52.830 --> 00:39:54.510 that are holding the recipient accountable
905 00:39:54.510 --> 00:39:56.790 by often overlooking their own accountability
906 00:39:56.790 --> 00:39:58.860 back to the Liberian government.
907 00:39:58.860 --> 00:40:00.960 So the government,
908 00:40:00.960 --> 00:40:04.110 we didn’t ever explicitly ask about audits.
909 00:40:04.110 --> 00:40:06.510 We asked about accountability and auditing came up
910 00:40:06.510 --> 00:40:10.320 by almost every single Liberian government representative.
911 00:40:10.320 --> 00:40:11.520 And they were really proud of it
912 00:40:11.520 --> 00:40:13.110 because they said we would meet
913 00:40:13.110 --> 00:40:14.190 all of our audits in the end.
914 00:40:14.190 --> 00:40:15.960 We were hitting these milestones,
915 00:40:15.960 --> 00:40:18.360 but also there were reports of being audited
916 00:40:18.360 --> 00:40:20.910 like 17 times during a project or something.
917 00:40:20.910 --> 00:40:23.550 So it’s continuous, continuous monitoring
918 00:40:23.550 --> 00:40:25.340 and reports being written.
919 00:40:25.340 --> 00:40:27.630 And that was never happening on the donor side.
920 00:40:27.630 --> 00:40:29.940 There were not audits on what the donors were doing
921 00:40:29.940 --> 00:40:32.400 or not audits on how, again,
922 00:40:32.400 --> 00:40:34.350 tying back to the financial aspect
923 00:40:34.350 --> 00:40:36.000 on where they were spending their money.
924 00:40:36.000 --> 00:40:39.120 So it really was, as Dr. Dunn had alluded to,
925 00:40:39.120 --> 00:40:40.470 a one-way street.
926 00:40:40.470 --> 00:40:42.030 And it was really hard for anyone
other than who had that financial control to negotiate that.

So we thought it was also interesting, and this was noted when we talked about the bigger circle, the original phase one of the analysis, that donors are really responsible only to report to their home countries. So you’re seeing now that there’s this discrepancy of kind of where there is kind of what you’re owing when you’re working in another setting. So again, there aren’t really any systems for accountability in the other direction. That is, for a funder to even be really questioned for maybe withdrawing funding or changing their priorities or not providing the amount of funding originally promised or any number of things, the decisions they make about what can be paid for and what can’t, the extent that they’re really being held accountable, that’s internal itself. They’re self-regulated, really. So if there’s no structure of who these donors are reporting to, remember back that document that I had representing
how the Liberian government is trying to work with all these red arrows kind of shooting around it.

There’s no way to kind of make sense of that if there’s no responsibility to report back to the government of what’s going on.

So I’d like to just reflect and really give, I know Christina Talbert-Slagle is on this call. We spent so much time trying to get to these images.

I think it’s also really important to talk about in the process of qualitative work, because again, it’s really words, but images can be powerful.

So we went from something like this, trying to map out what these themes and codes are looking like and where they’re fitting in. This looks like something out of like an electric box or something,

where we finally then shift into this cyclical pattern. But then thinking of where does collaboration fit in?

Is it within the priority setting to the implementation of the plan, or is it part of this cycle rather than where we kind of ended with it being underneath and embedded by supporting this cycle?

We kind of went back to the square again,
thinking about a lot of definitions of what is legacy of engagement? Who’s being held accountable again? And then finally, we even did a causal loop diagram. So we really were going all over with trying to get to this, but as you can see, there’s kind of this building to get to this point of it actually being a cyclical pattern that we can kind of start to dig underneath. So then finally producing the final report. I’m excited that we’re pretty much about to submit it. As I’m reading some of these quotes, I’m seeing spots where we had to clean them up a little bit too, but the report I think is great. I’m really excited. It’s something that we’ve worked on for a long time and going through these methods are showing like how strategically and thoughtfully we thought about every step of the way. And just some, you know, this ended up being embedded throughout, but just some highlights of using this as a training opportunity. The size of the team was big.
And I think in a setting other than academia and training, it would have been like a little bit daunting to try to have a timeframe to do this, but it really allowed for a hands-on experience to learn these qualitative methods. And I think for students, that’s really invaluable. So it would be kind of cool to think about ways that we can kind of implement something like training on the go with students in a way that is also standing true to the data and moving along projects. I really had fun being reflexive on my own aspect of working with this data, as well as trying to maintain reflexive of the process of working with multiple teams and editing a codebook and moving that part along. It was kind of unexpected that I would end up in that role. I don’t think any of us knew that would end up being my role, but I really enjoyed it and it was fun. And then also time is key. You can see this was 40 minutes of just talking through like some of the different meetings and discussions and considerations we had to make.
But if we really wanted these methods to make sense, especially in qualitative, where I think that some of the rigor is always challenged, like we put so much time and effort into making sure this was sound. We wanted to make sure the codebook was inclusive. We wanted to make sure the approach made sense. So that takes a lot of time. And I loved the idea of thematic analysis where you don’t have to do everything all at once. We did code the whole project at once, but then we started to realize, no, we wanna ask questions to really get further into these codes and develop the themes that way. And it felt a lot more manageable and more interesting personally. And then also the idea that we didn’t expect anything wild, like we kind of knew what we would see with this data, but I think with qualitative, it offers great insight and it offers great insight to, are these systems working the way that we think that they’re working? And the human experience oftentimes might tell you not.
So finally, I’d like to just thank Dr. Kristina Talbert-Slagle. She was the US Co-PI and Dr. Bernice Don who was our Liberian Co-PI. These are the four students and master’s students, undergrad and recently graduated master’s students who worked with us, Defne, Joseph, Antoinette and Johannah. And then again, there was a lot of support from CTLI, which is the Center for Teaching, Learning and Innovation at ULCHS, which is University of Liberia College of Health Sciences. It’s a great team and supportive network to be. And overall, this was under BRIDGE-U Liberia, which is a USAID grant between here and the University of Liberia. So I think thank everyone for having me to do this seminar and please reach out with any questions or thoughts. And I will let you know the results of the impending paper. I’ll take questions now or feedback, comments. I’m excited to engage.
And I mean, I think that’s because we’re doing a rapid qualitative analysis in order to get results quickly from qualitative studies, especially in information science where we need the information to understand and change or tweak interventions.

But on the tip of what you were doing this time, rapid analysis, but yet you sound like you’re analyzing very large amount of data. It looks like it’s two months period.

<Brigid>Oh, let me change that. I’m gonna switch to. Is this a bit better to hear? We’re engaging as a room?

<Attendee>One thing you could do</Attendee> is just repeat the question.

<Brigid>Okay, yeah, I’ll just repeat. All right, let me get back to it, to my computer.

I’ll repeat the question here. So it was noted that it seems like the analysis was rather quick and I should have emphasized this a bit more that it wasn’t.

It took a long time. The timeline. So we did, I’d say we started with our analysis.

It was, we had 10 weeks of meetings.
So probably shouldn’t be labeled as weeks. It should be labeled as meetings because some of the meetings took two weeks of us actually meeting to talk about that and get to the final results. And again, it was some of the weeks then if we had team one meeting and team two meeting, I would meet with both of those teams individually. And then we had to find a time for all of us to meet as a group. Sometimes that took a couple of weeks to implement as well. I think that if I could, if there were a need to have a rapid assessment or a rapid qualitative, something I would probably go back and do would be do a really initial, intense, deep dive into the data and then formulate questions worth kind of probing throughout the data with. But with this process, we kind of allowed that to emerge more of what the data was showing us could be different avenues to explore. So it really was exploratory, I would say. But we definitely, we had our first meeting with the data at the end of September and we wrapped up our final coding at the end of February, beginning of March.
And from there, then we started diving into figuring out what our themes were. It was a process.

In that early process, you mentioned having the interviewers who did the transcripts then from recording, except the ones that rejected recording, so they were left out. What are your thoughts on using software to create initial transcripts and then do the coding?

I mean, that’s how I’ve always kind of worked previously. I worked in a mixed methods research lab and mostly my role was doing qualitative analysis for the quantitative ends of projects, but I didn’t repeat the question, here I go. The question was, what are my thoughts on using like transcribing assistive technology and then going back and recleaning the data? And my response to that was, I think that’s great.

Really, I’ve used that before in other settings. It’s really difficult in Liberia because of Liberian English is just hard to transcribe from settings. So you really have to listen.

You can try using that assistive technology. I would have assumed that it would be not worth using.
I know that a few of the students tried and it just did not work and they had to listen and do it on their own. But in previous studies, I've done that where you get the initial transcript and then it's easy to just listen to it and look at the words and do the editing, stopping the recording as it goes. Yeah, I agree with that as well. It's just a standard American tradition. Yeah, but anything helps. Hey, there's a market. I'm sure somebody wants to start thinking about that. I'll go quickly to a question we have online. How can we have a look at the final report and will it be possible or I'll say ethical to reproduce this analysis in other countries based on their work? This person works in Nigeria and the topic is so familiar. I definitely will be able to look at the final report. We're submitting it to journals, like I wanna say Monday or Tuesday. Kristina's probably laughing on this call as soon as possible, but definitely would love to disseminate that. And I think it's absolutely possible to reproduce elsewhere.
I mean, and I would love to talk about how to do that. I don’t think the results are gonna be reproduced, but this process, and we could have more feedback on refining this process, but how do you kind of dig below to understand what these collaborations look like? I think, again, this is my bias. I think this could be done everywhere that these collaborations are happening. And I think it would really give light to how to go forward to structure them a bit more equitably.

Questions in the room? So the question was, aside from journals, what are we hoping to do with the results outside of submitting them to journals? That is a great question. And that’s something that I think, especially thinking about peer-reviewed journals that also comes with a specific audience who’s reading those.

I did present this at a conference already. That was the original causal loop, one of the green loop diagrams. And again, that’s also a very specific audience. But the goal would be to, I think,
try to write even commentaries or something that’s gonna start getting attention that this is worth being investigated in a different way. There’s different documents, like USAID and WHO, reports about what collaborative partnerships look like. And if we could get attention of that, if you have ideas too, I’d love to hear. But I think getting that attention of like, how can we make this routine to monitor as well? So I just want to follow up on some stuff that you guys have. So, and now, what was the experience of donors for this type of action? What was the push of power on the donors? And I was wondering if you were finding a secondary search that you were looking for on that, like from the risk-taking actionable things that you were looking for, or were there other things that happened? So the question was that a lot of the themes were donor-centric and things that the donors could be doing, but are there ways that we could see what the recipients could be doing to change this pattern as well?
I think that could be, the way I would envision that for follow-up collection, I don’t think we could see that clearly in this data as much.

There’s definitely room for it. I think people would have so much feedback. I think it would be cool to structure workshops around that.

Like, what would that look like to implement change and how, I mean, another facet of my research is I like future studies and foresight strategic planning, and I’m doing that with a project in Stellenbosch right now, and thinking their whole focus is what does the future of development research look like?

And how can you kind of plan that and set the stage for that? And I think that’s like, that type of futures planning is like, all right, we have an idea of where we wanna be, and how can we work backwards to get there? I think that that’s gonna be something that needs to be a collaborative meeting. I mean, regardless, we can’t just say, donors, you’re kicked out. Like, that would be ideal, but in reality, that’s probably not going to happen. So how to have this be a collaborative meeting?
where there is that agency to really put forward ideas that are centered on what Liberians think need to happen, I think could be awesome.

The answer to this question was to ask what role people thought could be done to improve equity and positive impact research. It seems like it’s an out-of-touch question. But the other question was, it seems to me that people in this board of controllers clearly have a different idea of government people, and I think that’s a big thing to kind of have.

And I think that’s a big thing to kind of have. Yeah, so the second part of the question, Yeah, the second part of the question had to do with it. But it was looking at the different perspectives. Like we had these, the groups classified as, Liberian academic, Liberian government donor and NGOs.

And it’s kind of like understanding
the nuance of perspectives between those. And we did try to do that. And there definitely was, especially between Liberian academic and government, because Liberian universities are so tied to its government funding, they have very similar views too. A quote that’s kind of, yeah. But a quote that’s even standing out to me was one of the academics saying like, you can sit down with people and you show up with your list of like 12 things. that you really want done. And you’re hoping that maybe four of them get funded. And with whatever gets funded, you cobble together what you need for your program. because you need that money. And that’s frustrating, right? Like that on that list of 12, maybe number two, number eight, number four, 12 get funded. And you’re like, well, how do you structure? We have this whole plan of a program. How are we structuring those four specific things? And then the first question I believe was like,
Did we ask people?
We kind of did.
How could you envision like these collaborations be more equitable?
And it was pretty standard answers that were reflecting what the issues were, stronger systems of accountability or stronger reporting.
And if we were to do this again, I would say like, dig into that question, like really dig further and have more.
And again, this is, we were working with novice data collectors who did a great job, but even it highlights like training for people how to probe, training on how to circle back to a previous question.
It’s like kind of hard.
So I think that could be a next, a really great next study as well.
So Brigid, I just want to note.<v Ashley>So, I just want to note</v>
that it’s one o’clock.
And so I think several folks will probably need to hop off, but I just want to thank you so much on behalf of CMIPS and others that for this talk.
it was really phenomenal.
Thank you for digging into so much of the analytic process.
I had a question in the chat that maybe we could chat about later. You can kind of talk about later, but it seems like there’s a lot of implications for new NIH requirements and policies, particularly the one that requires all foreign projects and foreign agencies to submit their lab, like lab notes, which is just like a phenomenal amount of work in general. So I think it’s all wrapped up in everything you’re talking about, about trust and accountability and all of those things. So anyway, thank you so much. And I’ll say goodbye to everyone here and take care. Thanks everyone. I had a lot of fun chatting about this. Okay.