

"My PI-ship was a colony": An LMIC investigator's account of systemic betrayal and the need for radical grant restructuring

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The project

In Pakistan, a multimillion-dollar preschool education and health grant — a hundred preschools, a hundred villages.

On paper, a model of innovation.
In practice, a hierarchy disguised as collaboration; co-creation as control.



Named PI, not in power

I was made Principal Investigator to satisfy “LMIC leadership” criteria.

Yet all financial and operational control remained elsewhere.



Innovation that ignored evidence

Young women hired as teachers
— “empowerment,” funders
told.

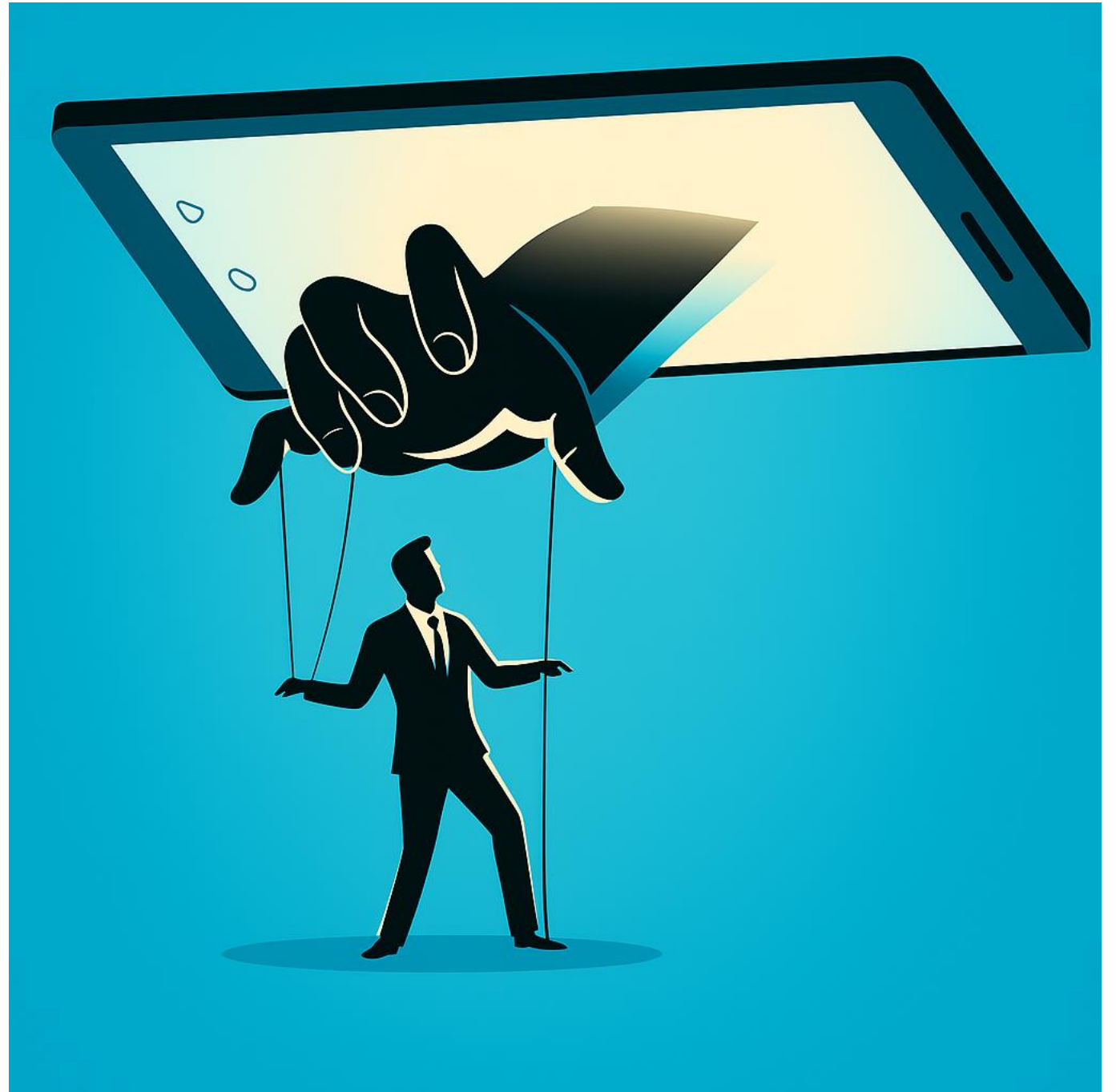
Local evidence warned: unsafe,
unsustainable—But ignored.



The digital chain of command

Budgets, timelines, and directives arrived online.

No signatures, no dialogue — just control disguised as collaboration.



The leadership strategy

HIC research assistants flew in unannounced.

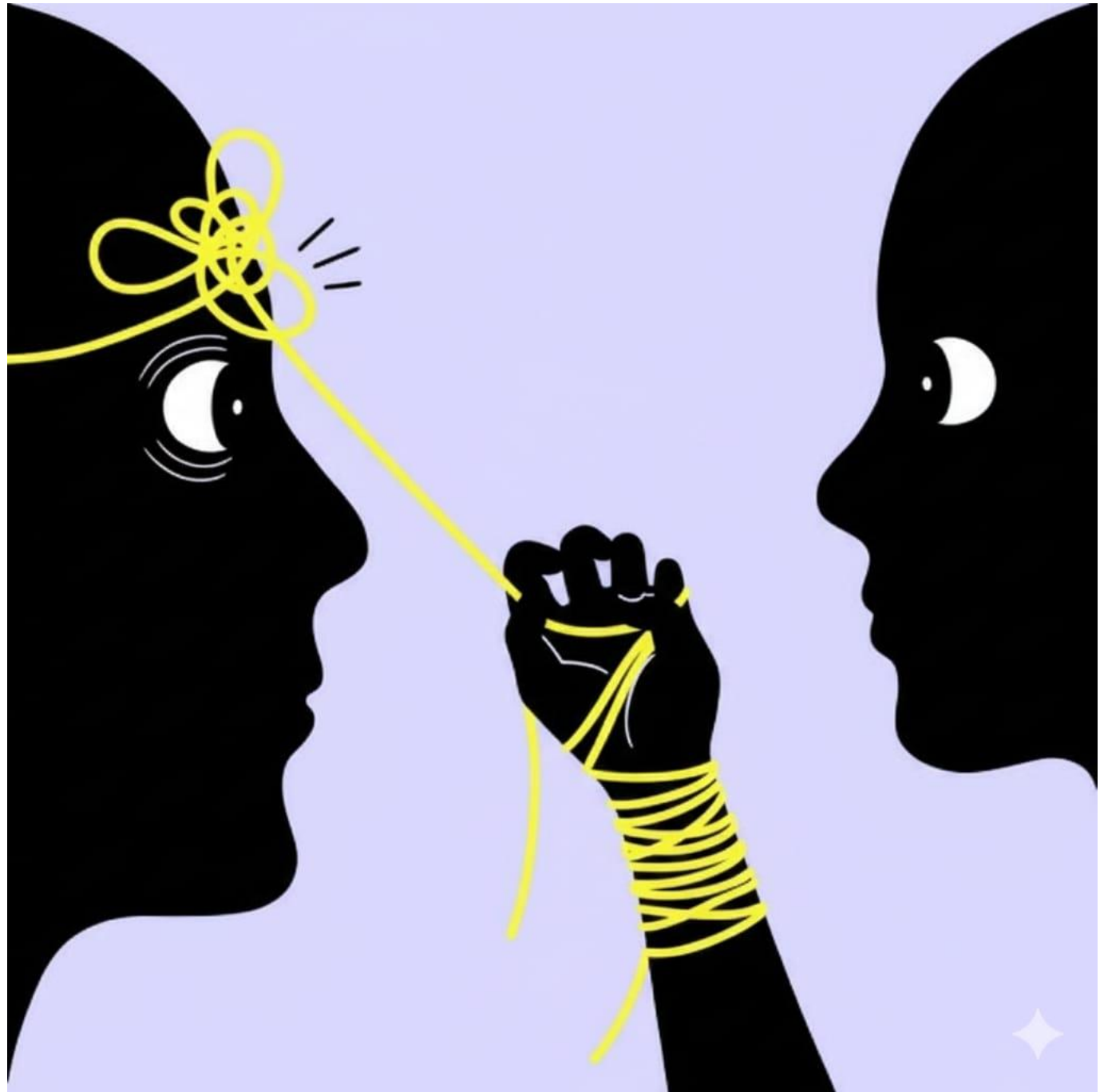
My authority dissolved as they bypassed local coordination.



Mentorship or control?

“Guidance” came as instruction.
“Support” came as surveillance.

Every suggestion was meant to
feed a narrative.



The burden of “in-kind” contributions

Local teams worked unpaid
hours, bearing risks
unacknowledged.

Our labour funded someone
else's career.





Financial control = Narrative control

Who holds the funds decides
whose story is told —
and whose ethics count.

Performative Inclusion

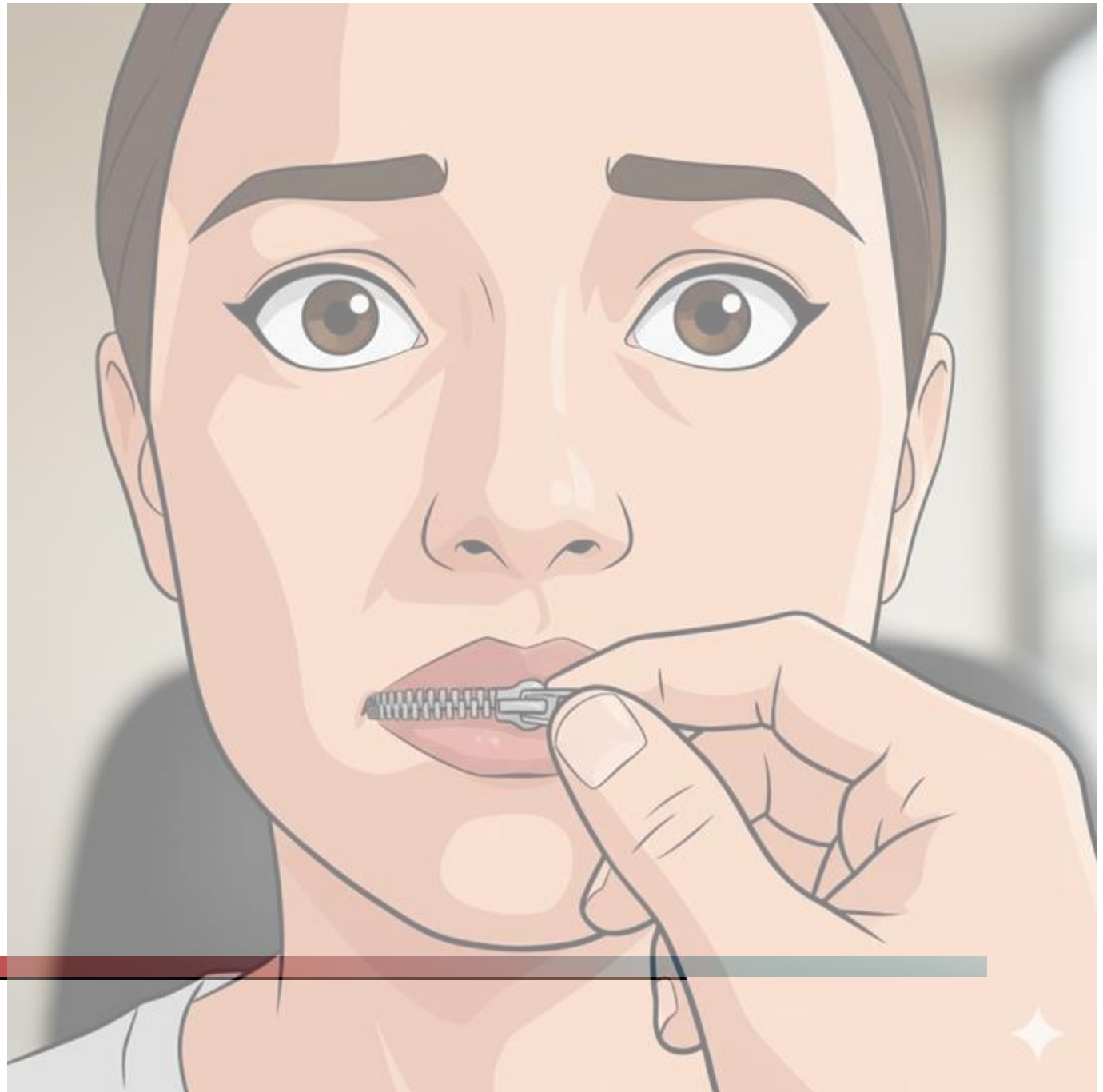
My leadership was symbolic.
I was both the proof of equity
— and its prisoner.



When conscience becomes dangerous

For asking these questions, they
named me an “ethical threat.”

After all, the system protects
power — not those who
challenge it.



Institutional Complicity

My university stayed silent.
When funding replaces ethics, silence becomes
survival.



LMIC institutions depend on donor approval
a system built to preserve obedience, not
partnership

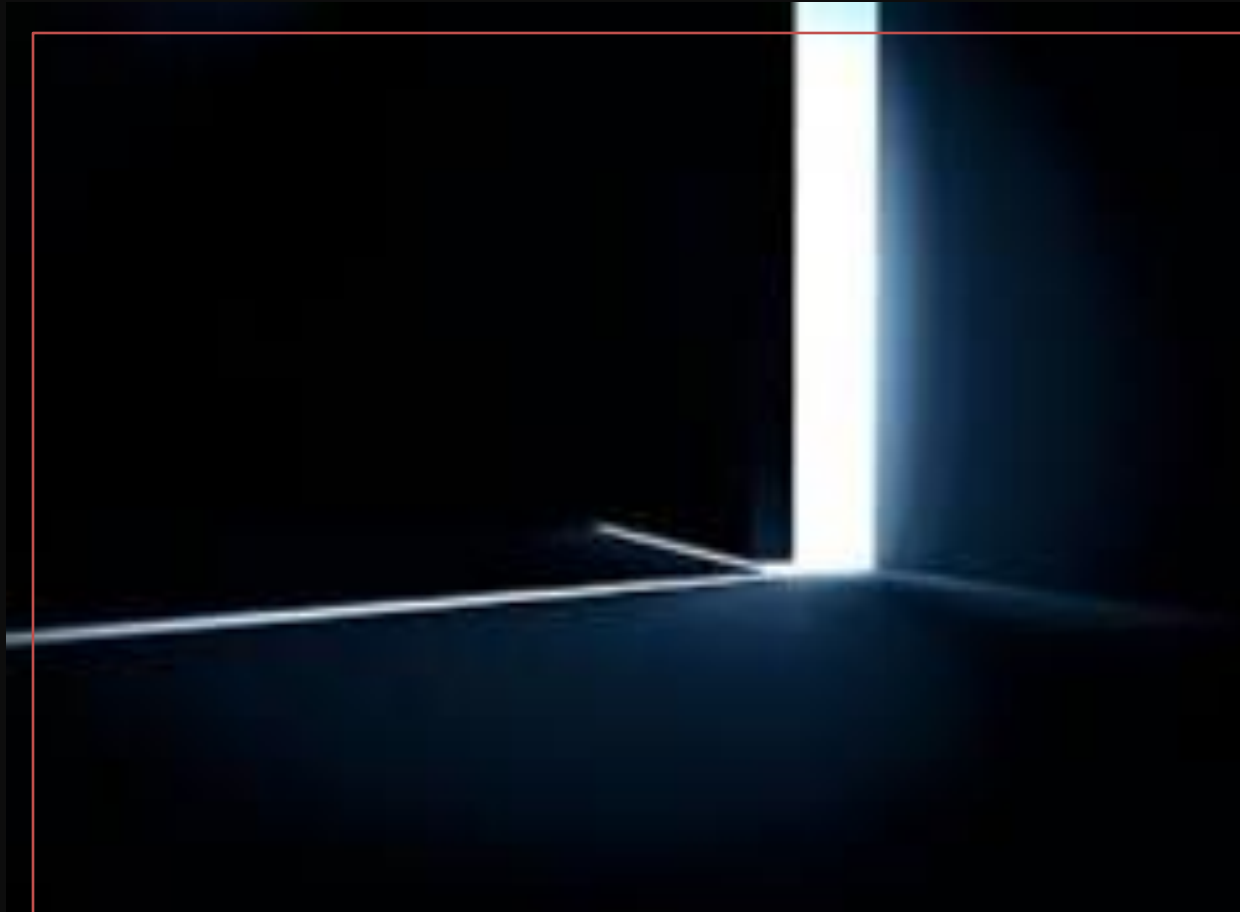


The human cost

Anxiety. Isolation. Sleepless nights.

*In this age, I conceal each wound
lest someone see,
Yet my heart yearns for one who
would notice me*





Choosing resignation over ruin

I resigned.
Not from failure, but refusal —
to participate in erasure of my values.

Courage as the currency of change



Equity will remain illusion
until courage replaces compliance,
and dignity becomes non-negotiable.

