Reviewer's report

Title: How does context influence performance of Community Health Workers in low and middle income countries? Evidence from the literature

Version: 1 Date: 8 October 2014

Reviewer: Brynne Gilmore

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. A definition of performance was never included, or what the authors mean by CHW performance was not described and explained. How performance was measured or identified is missing.

This needs to be clarified throughout your article, as many of the themes are more around these factors affecting performance or the CHWs ability to work or disseminate than the actual performance of the CHW. As well, when you discuss the contextual factors that influence CHW or CHW programme performance, I would suggest looking at some of the more recent literature on CHW performance, or health worker performance.

For example, the below report provides some definitions on performance.

2. The background section does not provide enough information or evidence of CHW performance in health programmes, and its impact on health programmes and outcomes. In your figure, you make the link between CHW performance and End-user Outcomes, but that link is not established in the article. This can help provide a more clear justification for the study, which is missing from the background.

3. More details on the methodology including reasoning for timeframe of included studies, and justification for choice of predefined categories. Inclusion and exclusion criteria of articles could be clearer. I am also unclear on how you classify your study. You report a literature review, but describe a systematic review search strategy with a narrative analysis.

4. Quality of included literature was reported as being assessed though it was not reflect on in the results or discussion.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Somewhat linking back to the first point provided, I think the paper could benefit from a more clear description and justification for the inclusion of all types of close to the community provider studies. For example, you report that 66 studies had home based delivery, while the others are facility based. To me, these could
have a very different impact on performance of CHW, and though I understand the reasoning for all to be included, I think that it could be explained more in the background or methods.

2. Both of your figures are labeled as 1.

Discretionary Revisions

1. To help highlight how context is important for CHW programmes, consider comparing your findings of specific contexts with contrasting findings in the discussion. For example, under Gender roles and norms I was surprised to see that women in Malawi were more likely to complete treatment if there was no male involvement, because there are several studies that highlight that involving men in MCH-CHW programmes can increase utilization of programmes.

2. To me, this article describes 1) Factors that affect a CHWs ability to implement (which does not necessarily reflect on their performance) (for example, women’s preference to deliver at home with TBA) and 2) Factors that affect CHWs performance (lack of financial incentives which can lead to high attrition). Though they are not clearly distinguished throughout the article. Possibly consider dividing the results into similar sections, or more clearly explaining the difference.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests