Reviewer's report

Title: Maternal care practices among the ultra poor households in rural Bangladesh: a qualitative exploratory study

Version: 2 Date: 31 August 2010

Reviewer: Amy, Judith Kesterton

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The paper provides a very interesting insight into pregnancy and childbirth in rural Bangladesh and I applaud the work BRAC is doing. However, in trying to cover a very wide range of issues and relying purely on qualitative data the paper is weakened. While it provides useful information to inform further BRAC programming I am not fully convinced it is suitable for publication.

Major compulsory revisions

- The sample size of 20 is small and I would recommend carrying out 10-15 additional interviews. It would be helpful to hear not only from mothers, but also grandmothers (who are often instrumental during child birth) and birth attendants. It may also be useful to supplement the in depth interviews with some focus group discussions to see if this adds to the richness of the data collected.

- Some of the questions looked at in the paper would be better addressed using quantitative methodologies. While it is unrealistic to carry out a survey at this stage it would be useful, in the applicable sections, to quote some key statistics from the Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey for this region (e.g. % of home deliveries, % breastfeeding etc etc).

- The paper could benefit from some re-structuring and editing. This would help draw out the key findings more clearly and avoid unclear sentences (for example - the meaning of the sentence on the top of page 12 starting 'Three cases were found where women stopped their other child's schooling....'

- The final conclusions are not satisfactory and need to be focused and fine-tuned. While it is stated that the paper highlights the way forward for programming the main conclusion that 'poverty and culture' are the main determinants of maternal care seeking is neither new, or in any way intervention focused.

Minor essential revisions

- On page 4 it needs to be made clear that the inclusions/exclusions described are those used to define ultra-poor in this study. It would also be useful to know whether this is a BRAC categorization or one used nationally.

- On page 5 it is stated that health status shows that the ultra-poor are disadvantaged. It would be useful to quote some actual statistics.
- In the discussion section it would be useful to further highlight the fact that findings of this study are very similar to those carried out in other areas of rural South Asia. It would be useful to reference some more of these and draw the links. It is also not strictly true that this paper fills a complete knowledge gap, the work of Barnett, Costello et al (cited) and others has taken place in this area.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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