Reviewer's report

Title: Policymakers' perceptions of introducing task shifting for voluntary counselling and testing in Kenya: applying the policy analysis triangle

Version: 1 Date: 24 May 2011

Reviewer: Mercy K. Njeru

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The paper addresses a concern relevant to low income countries explaining manpower shortages and task shifting in the context of HIV testing. It also explains issues related to policy implications. The topic is important and the choice of methods was appropriate however, the manuscript requires some improvement before it can be considered for publishing

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The objective of the paper needs to be refined see sections on Abstract and Introduction below for further details

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
More details should be included e.g. study area and more. See section on methods below.

3. Are the data sound?
The results are stated however the use of references in the results section should not be done

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
For most of the parts Yes! However, the section on ethical clearance should be presented under the methods section and the local (Kenya) ethical approvals should be indicated.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The conclusions in the main text is well balance however the conclusion in the abstract section needs to be made clearer see comments under the abstract section

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
This sections needs to be included within the discussion section
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

The authors have reported the minimal published work. More discussions and references should be included in the discussion section example second paragraph after first sentence and third sentence.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Some amendments need to be done. See comments within the Abstract section below.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
The writing needs revision.

Major compulsory revisions

ABSTRACT

The results do not reflect the objective of the study. The authors indicate that they sought “to examine policy makers’ perspectives on task shifting”. The results section sounds like a conclusion i.e. the perceptions of the policy makers towards task shifting, is it actors were critical, the process required compromise and content? The objective also indicates that the authors sought to elucidate policy analysis implication, what were they? The authors should state the specific findings in the results section.

The conclusion section also needs some clarification. Again can the authors be specific? Second sentence of the conclusion, what do they mean by existing systems? Can the authors also mention a few of the entrenched interests they have stated?

INTRODUCTION

Second paragraph, third sentence: was the introduction of the rapid HIC technology in 2000 or 2002? Provide a reference

The objectives (paragraph 3, last sentence) in this paper are not clear and they are confusing to the reader. As presented, it seems to differ from that in the Abstract section and varies from the title. The title suggests that the authors sought to explore the ‘perceptions’ of policy makers on task shifting. The objective stated in the abstract section indicate that the authors set to ‘examine’ policy makers ‘perspectives’ and ‘elucidate’ policy analysis implication and in the introduction section the authors claim that they sought to ‘document’ the behind the scene ‘reality’ of policy development. In my view, perceptions and reality are different.

Suggestion: the first 4 sentences in the first paragraph of the methods section
starting with “to explore policy makers’, could be a potential objective of this manuscript

METHODS
The authors need to clarify the following:

Second paragraph:
What was the study area? Was the study conducted in the entire country? A clear description of the study setting is important with details on the HIV scenario (prevalence, context on the task force e.t.c) would be beneficial to the paper and for better understanding.

Are there meetings that were held but had no documented minutes?
Are the 53 sets of minutes the total number of all the meetings held during the years: 2000 to 2004? If not, what was your inclusion criterion of the minutes?

MT made matching diary notes. Does this mean that MT sat in all those meetings from 2000 to 2004? Is it correct to indicate that the diary notes totalled up to 53 as well?

Third paragraph:
Was analysis of the interviews conducted using the 22 interviews or the 15 that gave feedback?
Of the 15 that offered feedback how many were taskforce members?

Forth paragraph: Expand more on the elements of the health policy triangle including the rationale for considering it for analysis.

ETHICAL APPROVAL
This section should be included right after the methods section or within the methods section.
The authors should state the local ethical approvals obtained in Kenya, where the study was conducted.
The authors should also indicate whether they sought permission to utilise meetings minutes.

RESULTS
Paragraph 2 the section on “context of VCT scale up in Kenya” looks out of place. Whereas it is an important section, it provides background information that did not emerge from the study findings. Moreover it is not usual to use references in the results section of a manuscript. As it reads the section fits best at the Introduction or Methods section.

Quotes, all through the section: the authors should be consistent when indicating the source of the quotes. It would hold more credibility if the data is broken down
into gender and location. As it stands, some include the gender of the informants while others do not and none include the location.

DISCUSSION

Paragraph 1 last sentence. Clarify what you imply by “new services” does this imply all sectors? It would strengthen the paper if the authors discussed more here.

Forth paragraph the reference system differs from the numbered in sentence number 5 “personal communication, NASCOP 2008”. This reference is also not clear, is it part of the findings? If yes, this is the wrong section to present it. If No, then the referencing should be consistent.

The authors need to add more discussion. In the last paragraph they note “no national picture of where testing is conducted, who is doing the testing e.t.c.”

I. What is the implication of this practice in light of the current literature on PITC?
II. Are the services by lay counsellors needed and applicable in these (PITC) contexts?
III. What could be the advantages and challenges of including lay counsellors when implementing the PITC models from the literature and in view of your findings on policy maker’s perceptions?

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Results section: paragraph 2 forth sentence ‘GoK are’ change to “GoK is”. Also elaborate this abbreviation
2. Same paragraph in results section seventh paragraph, ‘government are’ change to “government is”
3. Third paragraph in the results section under the sub-title “Key actors and their interests in task shifting” sentence stating with whereas the counselling… do you mean ‘lay counsellors’ and not just ‘counsellors’
4. Authors contribution section, second sentence “write” change to ‘wrote”
5. In addition, the paper needs some revisions for typo errors
6. Figure 2: the authors should indicate the sources of these materials.

Level of interest: an article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: The writing needs revision.
Statistical Review: No the Manuscript does not need to be sent to a statistician
Declaration of competing interest: I declare that I have no competing interests.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
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.