Reviewer's report

Title: How countries cope with competing demands and expectations: a qualitative perspective on priority setting and resource allocation for health in the era of HIV and Aids

Version: 1 Date: 10 September 2012

Reviewer: Olivier O. Weil

Reviewer's report:

REPORT ON THE PAPER ‘HOW COUNTRIES COPE WITH COMPETING DEMANDS AND EXPECTATIONS: A QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON PRIORITY SETTING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION FOR HEALTH IN THE ERA OF HIV AND AIDS’ BY F. JENNISKENS AND ALL.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? The paper addresses two important questions related to the definition of priorities in the health sector in developing countries: (i) the perception the different stakeholders involved have about priorities and (ii) the ways decisions are made. In the Background section, the authors should more clearly focus on these two dimensions. Instead, they provide questionable data on resource allocation and mainly question the relative degree of priority of HIV/AIDS vs HSS. They should also make clear that they are mostly looking at perceptions.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? Yes although the rational for the selection of these 5 countries is not clear enough and the country data that appear in the Figure 1 (Study sites) lack of explanations and references (date? Expenditure per year or over which period of time? Where do these data come from?)

3. Are the data sound? There is no way to assess the quality of the qualitative data collected and analysed by the authors but there is no reason either to question it (as the methodology they used looks robust). However, the quantitative data presented in the Background section and used in the discussion (e.g. expenditure per capita on HIV/AIDS and Health in the 5 countries) should be revisited (through a review of recent) and updated. Most data are 2009 or older. In at least some of the targeted countries (such as Burkina Faso and DRC), the data on HIV/AIDS and Health expenditures are significantly different from those provided by the National Health Accounts.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? Qualitative data are adequately presented and discussed.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? In general yes. However, one of the key conclusions (‘the need to
promote sector or pooled funding mechanisms’) is not clearly supported by common perception of the stakeholders in this regard.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? Yes

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? Yes

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Both title and abstract should put more emphasis on PERCEPTIONS. As they are, the let think the paper includes an analysis of the validity of decisions made in terms of allocation of resources which I think is not the core of the paper.

9. Is the writing acceptable? Yes

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- Major Compulsory Revisions

  • Policy context and key financial data should be updated (as both have significantly changed since the study was conducted and the paper written).

- Minor Essential Revisions

  • Background, discussion and conclusion sections should be reviewed in the light of the comments made above (1, 3 and 5).
  • Explanations on the selection of the 5 countries should be given in section Methodology.

- Discretionary Revisions

  • Title could be reviewed in order to express the focus on ‘perceptions’
  • The abstract should be review to reflect the changes suggested in the paper.

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

**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