Reviewer’s report

Title: Temporal trends and gender differentials in causes of childhood deaths at Ballabgarh, India - Need for revisiting child survival strategies

Version: 2 Date: 8 April 2012

Reviewer: Pinaki Panigrahi

Reviewer’s report:

This is a very important report that provides compelling evidence that could drive change in policy. The discussion is lucid, yet provides a comprehensive comparative picture of major outcomes of interest over the last four decades in India. Minor changes in the presentation of the same data will make the manuscript stronger and provide direct guidance for interventions.

Minor essential revisions: The authors have pooled neonatal, infant, and under-five deaths under one category. Since current programs target specific disease(s), it will be helpful to discern the difference in deaths during neonatal, if possible post-neonatal (29-60 days), and in infancy. This can go as a separate table (Table 4 can be split into two). This reviewer is presuming that septicemia is only being counted in the neonatal period (although there may be cases in the 29-60 days period). Apart from birth asphyxia and prematurity, it is highly unexpected to find diarrhea-related deaths in the neonatal period.

These types of analyses will make the manuscript even more robust, and the authors will be able to comment on the failure of some of the programs. For example rise in the ENMR or overall slowing may be pointing to a “real” lack of manpower in the facilities that is confronted with handling lot more deliveries now, and hence, a rise in birth asphyxia. This not only increases the asphyxia-related deaths, but puts a much more serious burden on the society to care for the affected neonates (with various forms of disability, CP etc.). Inclusion of these types of bold statements will force policy makers to think long term.

Overall, this is a concise and valuable report, and should be published with some modifications.

Level of interest: An exceptional article

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.