Reviewer’s report

Title: Assessment of the core and support functions of the Integrated Disease Surveillance system in Maharashtra, India.

Version: 1 Date: 20 January 2013

Reviewer: Peter Gaturuku

Reviewer's report:

Response to the key questions based on the BMC guidelines

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The actual purpose of the study is well defined in paragraph 4. However, the context of the study including the introduction of the IDS strategy, the geographic context, and operation of the system do not give the reader enough information to understand what IDS is and why it has been adopted. This is an important contribution to our understanding of how disease surveillance systems work in low- and middle-income countries and the study has potential to contribute to the literature if the introduction of the topic of surveillance is clarified, definitions of IDS and its priorities and goals, and the data display is improved so that findings are easier to access.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The methods were appropriate although providing the reader with a list of the topics included in the assessment guide would have helped to set up the link to the response section. Many readers may not be familiar with the contents of the assessment guides referred to, and some explanation of the general areas of interest would be useful: standard case definitions, reporting, case confirmation, data analysis, etc.

There should be a table stating what core functions are and what support functions are.

3. Are the data sound?

There appears to be sound and adequate data. However, it is quite difficult to follow in the text format and its utility may be hampered by having so many comparisons within each paragraph. A suggestion is to prepare a table with headings for the key function areas assessed, then findings from the districts, and then findings from health facilities. That would help the reader to see the differences and comparisons. The table should also include the number of health facilities and districts assessed. The very detailed tables about laboratory tests done at a particular level are interesting, but by themselves without a companion table listing some key comparisons, it could confuse readers.

The table about logistics is most interesting. But there is no paragraph in the
results section that explains this table.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

It is sufficient but could be displayed for easier access to the information as noted in #3.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The discussion presents points supported by the data and insights from the study.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

The limitations are satisfactorily stated.

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

Yes, although they may want to consider including a reference to WHO-AFRO IDSR Technical Guidelines and WHO-AFRO IDS Strategy Document as work that influenced the IDS strategy in SEARO.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Yes.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

The writing would benefit first from improving display of the data as mentioned above. That would help the authors to more clearly organize the results and conclusions in a simpler, clearer way. Editing for Standard English would also benefit this manuscript.

In Summary:

i. This is an interesting paper but it needs structural reorganization and refining of the introduction to ensure the reader understands the IDS strategy in general and within the context of Maharastha State.

ii. The authors’ should endeavor to highlight what factors were evaluated since the reader might not have access to the detailed assessment guide or questionnaire.

iii. A comprehensive table comparing key questions and findings from district and health facility levels could help the authors to more clearly organize the results and conclusions.

iv. Editing for Standard English would also benefit this manuscript

I declare that I have no competing interests,
Thanks and regards,
Dr Peter Gaturuku

**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