Author’s response to reviews

Title: Developing and costing local strategies to improve maternal and child health: results from four countries

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To the Editor, BMC Public Health

Dear Editor

I would like to present the original manuscript entitled “Developing and costing local strategies to improve maternal and child health: results from four countries” for your consideration.

This article details the results of the Investment Case, conducted at sub-national level in four countries; Indonesia, India (State of Orissa), Nepal and the Philippines. This initiative takes a pragmatic approach to support developing countries in creating evidence-based sub-national planning and budgeting for equitable scale-up of maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) services. It complements two previous manuscripts that have focused on the process and how this approach has been used by policymakers, one more broadly in our study countries (1) and one specifically focused on the Philippines (2).

Our study combines problem solving analysis to identify strategies addressing the key health system constraints to scaling up essential MNCH interventions with a modelling exercise that estimates the impact and cost associated with implementing these strategies. A number of scenarios are presented that allow governments to assess the relative benefits that can be achieved for different financial inputs, especially important in resource-poor settings.

Our results indicate that whilst there is significant variation in scaling-up constraints, strategies, and associated costs there were also some commonalities, particularly in relation to the different strategies necessary to scale up quality MNCH services in urban versus rural areas. Whilst in rural areas there was an emphasis on relatively higher cost strategies to improve basic supply side components of the health system, in urban areas a mix of public and private suppliers necessitates strategies aimed at improving quality and access to private providers.

As suggested by the editorial team at Health Research Policy and Systems, this manuscript details the results of an approach highly relevant to the wider readership of the journal of BMC Public Health. It addresses pertinent issues surrounding health system effectiveness and would make an excellent addition to the body of evidence designed to inform researchers, policy makers and health practitioners in relevant countries.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to your response

Yours faithfully

- Dr. Eliana Jimenez-Soto