Author's response to reviews

Title: Strengthening monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and building sustainable health information systems in resource limited countries: lessons learned from an M&E task-shifting initiative in Botswana

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Jane M. Dalumpines,

Thank you for forwarding reviewer comments on our manuscript *Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation and building sustainable health information systems in resource limited countries: lessons learned from an M&E task-shifting initiative in Botswana* for publication with BMC Public Health.

Attached please find a revised manuscript, considering all the points raised by the reviewer. Below, we clarify changes made in response to each point raised by the reviewer. Responses to each of the reviewer comments are in bold while the text added/modified to the manuscript is italicized.

**Reviewer's report**

Title: Strengthening monitoring and evaluation and building sustainable health information systems in resource limited countries: lessons learned from an M&E task-shifting initiative in Botswana

Version: 4
Date: 10 September 2014
Reviewer: Stephanie Davis

**Reviewer's report:**

**Minor essential revisions:** The authors have responded satisfactorily to some comments; some clarification is still needed on the process of selecting the respondents in order for the reader to understand what bias if any the selection process might have introduced. This could be addressed by:

The authors are encouraged that the reviewer is satisfied with the responses to the previous comments.

1. **For the in-depth interviewees:**
   In a sentence or two, clarifying more precisely on what basis individuals were proposed or excluded by the TWG (were they ALL the people who had substantial involvement in training/implementation, only those who performed direct training or made supervisory visits, only those above a certain seniority/authority level, etc., or was the list the result of a less systematic brainstorming session?)
   - stating how many of those invited to participate did so

   The reviewer raises a good point. The authors have modified text in the methods to qualify the inclusion criteria for those who were interviewed, and the number invited. Specifically, the following modified text is included in the revised manuscript:
A total of 18 potential interviewees were purposively sampled through identification by the M&E technical working group, having substantially contributed to the development of the cadre through training, mentoring and supportive supervision. They represented all the government institutions, donor agencies, and technical organizations involved in development of the cadre. All the 18 potential interviewees were invited to participate, but 12 were available and interviewed (response rate =67%); eight from government entities, three from technical partners and one from a donor agency.

2. For the FGs:
In selected districts, clarifying whether it was just the cadres that were purposively selected or also the individuals within them. If ALL M&E officers, district health managers and district program officers were invited to participate, authors should state this, and then state how many declined. If there was further purposive or other selection on the individual level, authors should state by what criteria this was done, how many were invited, and how many declined.

The justification for the selection of the three cadres, and who was invited in these groups is clarified in the following text in the methods of the revised manuscript:

Program officers were included because they are beneficiaries of M&E support and some of their data-related duties had been task-shifted to the district M&E officers. A community health nurse and a PMTCT coordinator were invited per district in this group. District managers were included as the supervisors of the district M&E officers, and a District Health Management Team coordinator and a District AIDS coordinator or their representatives respectively were invited per district. Additionally, all M&E officers were invited, with some districts having two while others had one. On average, there were seven participants in each focus group (range: five to nine). All of the focus group discussions centered on achievements, challenges, and possible solutions to improve the cadre and its work.

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