Author's response to reviews

Title: Holding a Country Countdown to 2015 Conference on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - The Zambian Experience

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Author's response to reviews:

To: Journal Editorial Office

From: Dr Victor Mukonka

Dear Sir/Madam,

Following the review of our manuscript by the editorial reviewers, we have addressed the issues raised and revised the article. Kindly find below the responses to the reviewers comments.

RESPONSE TO EDITORIAL COMMENTS

Title: Country Countdown to 2015 Conference on MDGs- The Zambian Experience

Version: 2
Date: 11 December 2013

Comment: Subsequent conferences or follow-up activities carried out after 2008 to monitor progress towards the achievement of MDGs, and guide the implementation of high impact interventions between 2008 and now.

The authors should please actually state what has been done since 2008 in Zambia, not just say another conference has been planned for next year.

Response: Actions undertaken after the 2008 conference have been listed in the
manuscript under Country and Global Level with timelines as indicated below:–

Zambia has made important advances in the last five years as a result of the country countdown conference. The most significant actions and direct results of the countdown conference at country and global levels include:

Country level

1. Creation of a separate budget line for reproductive health and commodities in the national budget in 2009
2. Introduction of direct funding to training institutions, commencement of direct midwifery training, expansion and rehabilitation of training institutions to increase health professionals in 2009
3. Institutionalisation of maternal deaths reviews in all districts in 2009
4. Amendment of the legislation authorising midwives to administer a set of core interventions to reduce maternal and child mortality in 2010
5. Launch of Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA) in 2010
6. Introduction of the safe motherhood week and mandatory inclusion of MNCH activities in district action plans in 2010
7. Development of the MNCH road map in 2013

Global level

1. The UN System and the global partnership for MNCH invited Zambia to share experiences at the following global events
   • Women Deliver Conference in Washington held on June 13th 2012
   • 2012 Annual African Women Parliamentarians Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa from 3rd to 4th October, 2012
   • African Union International Conference on MNCH in Africa held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 1st to 3rd August, 2013
   • Women Deliver Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 28th to 30th May, 2013
2. Participation in the development of countdown tools for the MNCH Partnership
3. Provision of technical support and serve as a resource base for countries in the region planning to conduct countdown conferences

Comment: Of note is the fact that similar national conferences - with different titles, but similar content and same objectives - have been held successfully in different African countries over the past years, for which documentation of follow-up is available and results are apparent.

The authors did identify that three countries have also held conferences - I believe the reviewer wants some information from each of these to appear n the manuscript for comparative purposes - I assume something can be traced online
Response: Other countries which have held country countdowns are Nigeria and Senegal with the following outcomes respectively.

1. Nigeria embarked on an Integrated MNCH Strategy. Nigeria produced a national report, and regularly produces up-to-date child and maternal health profiles for each of its 36 states, modelled on the Countdown country profiles. These sub-national profiles led to increased commitments by the government and its partners.

2. Senegal’s national Countdown event led to a number of new commitments including the development of a new plan for child survival to complement the existing national Roadmap for Maternal Health.