Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1  Date: 21 October 2013

Reviewer: Sandro Accorsi

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Major compulsory revisions:

1) The focus of the article is on the Country Countdown to 2015 Conference on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) held five years ago (2008), with detailed description of the process and organizational aspects of the event (i.e. attendance higher than planned with subsequent budget problems). This conference is considered by the authors as a “powerful mechanism and tool for in-country stock-taking of achievements and bottlenecks, identifying areas and population groups needing more attention, monitoring progress towards meeting MDGs and stimulating country momentum and actions for implementing high impact interventions (…)”. However, no mention is made of 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. It is questionable the relevance of the account of the process of holding a conference in 2008 for an international audience, without any explanation of follow-up and subsequent progress. 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.

2) Since the article consists of an account of the Country Countdown to 2015 Conference held in 2008 without any explanation on the follow-up over the past five years, it does not seem to fit with the BMC journal policy for publication, which “does not consider narrative review articles”.

3) Concerning the structure of the article, the abstract consists of four sub-chapters: (i) background, (ii) methods, (iii) results, and (iv) conclusion. However, the body of the article shows a different structure, with the following chapters (which are not numbered): (i) background, (ii) situation analysis, (iii) objectives, (iv) methodology, (v) results, (vi) actions and commitments, (vii) discussion and lesson learnt, and (vii) conclusion. Furthermore, limited consistency is found across chapters. For example, the section “Discussion” should be based on the section “Results”; however, no reference or mention are provided in “Discussion” to the data presented in “Results”. In particular, according to the graph on Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in the section “Results”, MMR trend is as follows: 200 per 100,000 in 1991, increasing to 649
and 729 in 1996 and 2001, respectively, and then decreasing to 591 in 2007. While it is difficult to understand such trend (very low MMR in 1991, followed by an increase in the following decade, and by a decrease in 2007), not only explanation is not provided, but there is also inconsistency between the stated baseline and target. In fact, while the baseline, as mentioned before, is 200 per 100,000 in 1991, it is stated in the fourth paragraph of the section “Situation Analysis” that the “target is 162 deaths per 100,000 by 2015”. Therefore, since the target for MDG5 is to reduce MMR by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015, there is inconsistency between the estimate of the baseline stated in “Results” (200 per 100,000) and the target stated in “Situation Analysis” (162 per 100,000). In addition, the above mentioned graph has no title and the measure of MMR is stated per 100,000 population (while it should be per 100,000 live births).

Therefore, based on the above comments, not only the structure of the article does not seem to fit with the format of an article to be published in an international journal (i.e. structure not as per the standard, discussion not derived from results etc.), but also there are inconsistencies in the estimation of baseline and target for MDG5 and errors in graphical representation, leading to confusion and misunderstanding for the reader.

4) In general, the formatting is not as per the standard of an article to be published in an international journal: (i) six out of seven references listed in the bibliography are not mentioned in the body of the text (with the exception of “2007-ZDHS” in the text which, however, does not correspond to the year mentioned in the corresponding reference, which is “2008”); (ii) key statements in the body of the text are not properly referenced; (iii) acronyms are not explained when mentioned for the first time across all sections of the article; (iv) graphs are not properly labeled and one of them has no title; and (v) editorial errors are found across sections of the article. As a result, the article does not meet the standard for clarity and limited evidence is provided to support the discussion and conclusion.

**Level of interest:** An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

**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