Reviewer's report

Title: An assessment of fishing communities around Lake Victoria, Uganda, as potential populations for future HIV vaccine efficacy studies.

Version: 2
Date: 24 July 2014
Reviewer: Susan Buchbinder

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Major compulsory revisions:
1. The study design was not entirely clear to me. Was this drawn from annual surveillance data, in which a subgroup was sampled for willingness to participate in future trials? Or was this a de novo study with de novo sampling? If this was part of an annual surveillance project, and particularly if this has been going on for a number of years, the retention data should be explained with this in mind, as the relevance of this type of “retention” is quite different from a clinical trial.

2. Were participants who were found to be HIV positive at baseline included in the analyses? If this is supposed to reflect potential vaccine trial participants, the results would best be limited to HIV negative participants.

3. The paper could be strengthened by providing more information on the HIV incidence. How many infections were newly diagnosed? Given the extensive description of dealing with indeterminate or conflicting HIV results, more detail on how many samples needed to be adjudicated would be helpful. More information on risk factors for infection would also be helpful, even if the only data collected are the demographic variables described in other analyses.

4. The authors note the limitations of extrapolating from hypothetical willingness to participate to actual willingness to participate in a trial. This may be the best surrogate in the absence of an actual trial. Nonetheless, the amount of information given to participants about such a trial is critical to interpreting results. Were participants only given the single sentence question, or was more detail provided on the goals, risks/benefits, and prior experience with HIV vaccine trials? If little information was given, this would make these data less compelling.

Minor essential revisions
1. The introduction provides some unnecessary information (e.g., the structure of Phase 1-3 clinical trials), but doesn’t mention one of the important considerations in selecting sites for participation in HIV vaccine trials: circulating sub-type. At this relatively early stage in HIV vaccine development, most trials are trying to “match” the vaccine to the circulating sub-type to maximize potential efficacy. Similarly, the authors imply that the higher the incidence in a trial, the better. But, if trying to avoid rejecting a partially effective vaccine, it may be important to include moderate incidence populations, where the threshold for protection may be lower.
2. How complete is the census? The rate of participation is astronomical!!

3. Were the WTP questions asked more than once? If so, which was used in the analysis?

4. The “ranges” of incidence and retention in the last paragraph of results before description of willingness was unclear to me until I looked at the table. One suggestion would be to make Table 2 a table that shows independent risk factors for HIV infection, if the numbers are great enough. If they aren’t, then it is hard to interpret whether the “differences” in incidence between subgroups are “real” or just statistical noise.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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