Reviewer's report

**Title:** Listening to health workers: lessons for strengthening the programme for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Mbale District, Eastern Uganda

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 9 August 2011

**Reviewer:** Harriet Nuwagaba-Biribonwoha

**Reviewer's report:**

A. Major compulsory revisions

1. This paper is too long, the authors try to cover too much material so the paper is not well focused. For example, it is not clear whether the goal was to highlight problems with PMTCT in general or with health workers in particular. Authors target getting HCW ‘perspectives’ which is a very general term- suggest more specific terms e.g. attitudes, limitations, lessons e.t.c and carry the theme throughout the paper.

B. Minor essential revisions

1. Introduction has much background from HIV prevalence to MTCT rates to PMTCT regimens. Suggest trimming down to 2-3 paragraphs specifically focusing on the PMTCT program and why this study was necessary
2. Methods: suggest excluding the details on operations research and just focusing on the qualitative methods
3. The methods are appropriate but the site selection procedures could be written better- it seems to be a mixture of sites already doing another study and some specific characteristics? Suggest a table showing the different criteria for site selection, or if no criteria the different site characteristics in the results section.
4. Need a sentence or 2 to describe the other operations research study (design and objectives) that this study is supplementing. If already published, add a reference.
5. Data analysis para 2 ’The major themes…worker frustrations’ reads like results not methods
6. Themes table- were these pre-determined or emerging themes? Are they themes of challenges identified or areas proposed for improvements? The wording could be refined e.g. instead of ‘constant availability of supplies’, suggest something like challenge 1: lack of constant supplies or improvement 1: ensure constant availability of supplies

C. Discretionary revisions

1. HCW selection- need to more clearly define inclusion criteria and ‘basis of their involvement’- based at health facility for 6 months, working in PMTCT clinic, present on interview day etc
2. Data reported should be refined around key themes and cut down to maybe half. Suggest identifying no more than 5 lessons and illustrating them with no more than 3 quotes each.

3. A number of Ugandan studies that are acknowledged in the discussion but not in the introduction. Authors should say what was already known on the topic in the introduction and why their study was important/done- e.g. no work done in Mbale before, or this is an evaluation in the scale up phase of the PMTCT program etc.

4. The theme for lessons learned should be carried throughout the paper, or a new suitable title identified.

**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