Reviewer's report

Title: Planning and priority setting in the context of Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV; a qualitative assessment from Tanzania

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Reviewer: Laetitia Rispel

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1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

This article tries to bring together the literature on decentralization with planning and priority setting using PMTCT as a case study, as well as integration of a vertical programme (PMTCT) with district level services. One district in Tanzania was selected and the qualitative assessment is part of a broader study on “Response for Accountable Priority Setting for Trust in Health System”. Aspects of donor ‘interference’ in the context of HIV financing is also brought into the mix.

The article has the potential to add district level insights into how planning and priority setting happens at district level for a historically vertical HIV programme. However, there are too many themes that are introduced throughout the paper, leaving the reader quite confused as to the main focus of the article. I think the authors have to decide on the main messages and structure the paper accordingly. For example, if it is about decentralization, then they need to refer to some established frameworks on measuring decentralization (e.g. Bossert’s framework on decision space), and why their framework is different and useful. If about perceptions of district and programme level staff, the article will have a different focus.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

While a qualitative approach is fine, it is not clear how the REACT approach differs (or not) from the Accountability for Reasonableness framework (page 7). More details are needed on the selection of key informants as well as the FGD participants. The reader only knows that the FGD consisted of 22 people-it is not clear whether these were two FGDs of 22 people each or the cumulative total was 22. It also seems that the district medical offer has undue influence in the selection of informants at regional and district levels-if the DMO felt very strongly about the issues under investigation, he/she might have identified participants with similar views to his/hers.

3. Are the data sound?

See comment above-also it is not clear whether the quotes selected are from different people, or those of a few that support the views of the authors. It is also
not clear how the themes were generated-not all of those seem to relate to the decentralization theme that is explicitly stated.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   Not applicable-largely a qualitative study

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   See comment above

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   To a certain extent-the research question and the focus of the article are not clear, and this is the major limitation of the study

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   To a certain extent

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   Focus is not clear

9. Is the writing acceptable?
   There are a number of split infinitives in the text and grammatical errors that need to be addressed. However, the main problem is the lack of focus of the article.

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

**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