Reviewer's report

**Title:** Systems thinking in Practice: The current status of the Six WHO building blocks for Health System Strengthening in three BHOMA intervention districts of Zambia: A BASELINE QUALITATIVE STUDY

**Version:** 5  **Date:** 2 May 2013

**Reviewer:** Eva Silvestre

**Reviewer's report:**

This manuscript has been greatly improved and I applaud the authors for their efforts. However, I believe it still requires additional revisions. The questions I raised about the methodology were addressed but I think could still be explained better. Many of my suggestions really have to do with the quality of the writing which could be improved. There are several typos (e.g. in the abstract “Zambia is one of the countries that are lagging behind (when it should be “behind”) in achieving millennium development targets) and incomplete or awkward sentences (e.g. The other selection criteria were that these must be rural districts and have similar health system challenges to other rural districts in Zambia.) which can make it difficult to read.

**Major Compulsory Revisions**

1. I made a comment about how the quotes needed to be better incorporated into the text and supporting your argument, but there are some instances where the quote doesn’t seem to. For example, the first quote in the results section. In the narrative, you argue that simply hiring more staff was not the solution to the problem, but then the quote you selected is from a FGD participant saying they need to hire more staff. I would again, revisit the quotes selected to make sure they support your argument.

2. I saw the author response about focusing the results, and I understand why you want to keep it as is, but I maintain my reservations listed in the first review. Some of the sections feel un-developed.

3. I would start the results section reminding the reader that the results are organized by the six building blocks

**Minor Essential Revisions**

4. Focus group discussions—standardize how you write this in the manuscript. Why does the “F” have to be capitalized?

5. I would suggest moving the listing of the six building blocks for health from the methods section to the background section. They are referenced in the background section and not listed out, and I think this would make it more clear. Then, you could take out the list from the data collection section.
6. Purposively sampled as opposed to purposefully

7. So, you said that all interviews were conducted in English except for the community representatives, so what language was used?

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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