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: 7 Date: 24 May 2013

Reviewer: Eva Silvestre

Reviewer's report:

I am happy to see the authors’ perseverance and this version is another improvement. I understand the author’s position to present the results as they are and will leave it at that. I still have some suggestions and I appreciate the authors’ patience.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) I would suggest explaining a little more of the results and linking it to the discussion. One example has to do with the section on user fees that included this quote:

"We don’t pay use fees, it is for free. But we are told to buy books from the clinic once we buy from somewhere else they refuse to write in them"

Female FDG participant, Chongwe

I wasn’t quite sure what the point was reading the results section until I got to the discussion, where you state:

“Nonetheless, there was a requirement that patient provided their own note book for medical notes. This condition was seen by many as a form of payment and was discouraging some people from seeking medical attention.”

This point needs to be better explained when you present the quote and the supporting information.

2) You also state this in the discussion “This had negatively affected trust in the health system as most participants felt cheated when they were only given prescription to buy medications which were not in stock.” And I didn’t quite draw this conclusion from reading the appropriate results section. Just make sure your main discussion points are also clear in the results section

3) I know the authors stated they went back and reviewed the quotes, but I would again emphasize the need for the quotes to be properly contextualized and that they support your analysis. For example, this quote below describes an attitude or belief by a FGD participant that the government doesn’t provide enough drugs, but the issue of government supply is not discussed in the paragraph above.
"The population is big and the drugs the government send us are not enough"

Minor Essential Revisions

1. There is also a section that includes one quote about how in some facilities where there was a shortage of qualified staff patients would be attended by a cleaner. Was this true of most the facilities or was this an extreme example? If, so it should be clearly stated that this was an extreme case. And was this something that you investigated at the particular facility?

2. English revisions: below are some sentences that need to be reviewed

• These linkages emphasis the need to use system wide approaches in assessing the performance of health system strengthening interventions. [should it be ‘emphasized’]

• Community groups organized with the help of local leaders and community health representatives who helped in informing community members about the dates and time of the interview. [should it be “community groups were organized….”]

• Two separate key informant interview guides targeting health workers and community representatives and one focus group discussions guide for collecting information from community members. [were developed?]

• It is there essential to apply systemwide approaches when evaluating health systems due to close linkages that exist between subsystems. [therefore?]

• Some drugs were in stock because there were few cases to be treated not because there was a good supply! [I don’t think you meant to use the exclamation point].

Discretionary Revisions

3. I suggest adding “of the selected” just to be clear since the study design doesn’t suggest you can generalize to all health facilities.

The result showed that though most [of the selected ]health facilities indicated that they did not charge user fees to patients or clients, in reality there seemed to be indirect payments through forcing clients to buy books from a health facility or shop.

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