Reviewer’s report

Title: A technical assistance framework for building organizational capacity of health programs in resource-limited settings

Version: 4
Date: 9 June 2014
Reviewer: J N Nkengasong

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Minor essential revisions:

1. Abstract: Results focus on the toolkit that was adapted (not "developed" as stated) from an existing domestic and multiple additional assessment tools. However, the stated conclusions focus on impact of the adapted toolkit ("the CIASS framework can inform implementation strategies... "): conclusions should stem from the results.

2. "Desk review of available assessment tools...", pg 7: Where did the additional 13 assessment tools come from and what kind of clearances/collaborative arrangements were made with the "owners" of these external tools? That is not mentioned nor are these partners named in this paper. Ethically, since these tools were used to inform the CIASS framework, this should be clarified.

3. Piloting the CIASS proces, pg 7: Why was Nigeria chosen for the pilot? As an important step in the tool development process, this would be useful to elaborate on. Why Nigeria? How does this represent all the PEPFAR/other countries? Limitations, translation of Nigeria experience to any additional country?

4. Stakeholder feedback..., pg 8: Reference is made to "data analyzed using thematic analysis...". The data collection and analysis plan needs to be briefly presented to benefit the reader.

5. Results, pg.8 and 9: Only focus on the CIASS toolkit being developed and made available to public. Results should focus on observations and stakeholder thematic analyses outcomes and any changes/impact on program decisions being made in pilot areas, etc. There is a conflict in key message from this paper: is it focused on the process of developing/adapting a capacity building assessment tool? or it also wants to present the outcomes from the use of this adapted tool in pilot areas? Reader sees an interchangeable mixture of the two and this needs to be clarified.

6. While the processes detailed are essentially qualitative, most qualitative research does have clear indicators and measures. This paper could use some as the process descriptive language is very subjective e.g. pg. 11 last para, numbered list of characteristics identified from pilot uses terms like "sufficient" expertise (share median years of relevant experience observed), #2 needs an example to clarify as does #6.
7. From pg 12 description of methods it appears that CIASS substantiated the quantitative components of external tools with a qualitative, probing component (much like the traditional "fish-bone" management analysis). These can be more clearly shared by adding an appendix showing both, qualitative and quantitative questions under one assessed element.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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