Author's response to reviews

Title: Increased fairness in priority setting processes within the health sector: the case of Kapiri-Mposhi District in Zambia

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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The Editor,
BMC Series

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: Letter responding to reviewer’s comments

Reference is made to the above subject.

Kindly be informed that necessarily adjustments have been made in line with the comments from reviewer. For clarity, each comment is quoted with our response added below it.

Comment I
“The distinction between 'legitimacy' and 'relevance' is confused throughout the manuscript and has to be clarified. Wide stakeholder participation improves legitimacy but relevance is related to the linkage between the reasons for the decisions and the context- i.e. the reasons have to be relevant to the context. As stated on page 26, wide participation MAY facilitate relevance but there is no direct linkage as seems to be implied throughout the manuscript”

Response:
The distinction between 'legitimacy' and ‘relevance’ has been further clarified in the manuscript. We have tried to show that legitimacy is a part of the contextual relevance in an AFR context. While relevance is related to the linkage between the reasons for the decisions and the context, legitimacy may facilitate relevance in priority setting (PS) in that it focuses among other issues on why particular stakeholders have authority to agree / accept on behalf of others on reasons or principles guiding the PS. Stakeholder participation enhances legitimacy because it facilitates broad contextual acceptance and support of priorities set (although it will not guarantee relevance). Below we try to show how the distinction has been made clearer in the present version of the manuscript.

Relevance: (Page 15, first paragraph) “According to the relevance condition of AFR, rationales for priority-setting decisions should aim to provide reasonable explanation of why they were taken. More specifically, for a rationale to be perceived as reasonable, it should be based on evidence, values, reasons or principles that are accepted as relevant by the stakeholders within the given sector, institution or locality.”

Relevance: Examples of principles applied in PS (Page 15, second and third paragraphs).

Legitimacy: (Page 16, second paragraph) “To ensure that the PS is perceived as fair, informants held that the district accommodated the views of a large number of and various categories of organizations and community members. Informants held that stakeholder participation in PS is important as it improves the likelihood that the decisions reached are
perceived as appropriate for the particular context. Inclusion of various segments of the population also enhances the experienced legitimacy and ownership of the final resolutions.

**Legitimacy**: (Page 16, second paragraph) “Legitimacy helps in understanding why, and under what conditions, authority over PS is placed in the hands of particular stakeholders.”

**Relevance**: (Page 27, last paragraph to page 28, first paragraph) “This more comprehensive composition of the DHMT has the potential of adding value to fair PS processes as new members are likely to bring with them different ways of addressing issues as well as principles deemed relevant, evidence and reasons that can guide stakeholders in developing priorities perceived as fair and relevant for the particular context. This seemed to strengthen the relevance condition of AFR which states that the rationales for a fair prioritization process must rest on the reasons that stakeholders can agree upon as relevant in the context, and rationales for PS decisions should aim at providing a reasonable explanation as to why certain rulings are made (13,15). Involving multiple stakeholders thus potentially helps to ensure that a wide range of relevant values and principles are taken into account, and that mutual accountability between the health sector, its users and their communities is supported [24].”

**Legitimacy**: (Page 28, second paragraph) “In addition to a broader platform from where to include values and principles in PS, broad participation in PS has the potential of increasing legitimacy of the PS and the likelihood of acceptance of priorities by the community. In addition, the contribution of stakeholders from outside the MoH creates potentials for tightening the checks and balances processes during the implementation process of priorities, a situation which is likely to result not only in improved PS processes, but ultimately in more efficient service delivery to the community.”

**Comment II**

"Even accepting that there is no formal 'pre' and 'post', wouldn't it make sense to review the status of each of the four AFR conditions at the baseline and then later?"

**Response**

The results are presently organized in line with the four AFR conditions in both the baseline- and the evaluation phase. The sub-titles presently read as follows:

**The relevance condition** (page 15)
- (Page 15) “Defining the AFR ‘relevance’ condition through equality and impartiality concepts - the baseline study.”
- (Page 18) “Modification of practices in line with the AFR ‘relevance’ condition - the evaluation study.”

**The publicity condition** (page 21)
- (Page 21) “The AFR ‘publicity’ condition - the baseline study.”
- (Page 21) “Increased visibility of the AFR ‘publicity’ concept - the evaluation study.”

**The AFR condition of appeals and revisions** (page 22)
- (Page 22) “The AFR condition ‘appeal and revision’ - the baseline study.”
- (Page 23) “Increased emphasis on the ‘appeal and revision’ condition of AFR - the evaluation study.”

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**The leadership and enforcement condition** (page 24)

- (Page 24) “The role of the AFR condition ‘leadership’ in promoting fair priority setting - the baseline study.”
- (Page 24) “The AFR conditions ‘leadership and enforcement’ key to improving fair PS - the evaluation study.”

**Comment III**

"The presentation of the results has to link much more clearly to the methods section. So the results could be presented by AFR condition, with a reference to the source for each key piece of evidence and how it was supported by the other sources (triangulation)."

**Response**

The present article draft has been revised to link the methods and the results section closer together in the sense that:

1) the results are presented with reference to each AFR condition (see comment II)
2) we have tried to reveal more clearly the various sources of evidence / methods employed for each piece of information presented. Please see the entire findings section for revisions.
3) a paragraph explaining the process of methods triangulation has been included, as reflected in the statement below:

Page 11, first paragraph: “The main sources of the evidence both for the baseline and for the evaluation phase of the study were the individual in depth interviews (IDIs). In the baseline phase, evidence from the IDIs was triangulated with data from focus group discussions (FGDs). During the evaluation phase the results from the IDIs were triangulated with data from the minutes and observations from the ART meetings.”

**Comment III**

Minor essential revisions:

“There are many errors of language that obscure the message. Examples are:
- “Equality and impartiality principles were said to be regularly be utilized during human resources planning sessions” p13.
- “Deduced from the audit report for the year 2010, which, compared to the previous years, had fewer audit queries” p22.
- “It should moreover be emphasized that during the project period seems to have had a leadership which in a particular way embraced and championed the need for observing objectivity,” p25.

**Response**

Language in the whole manuscript has been revised / proof read.

We have with these revisions tried to respond to the important comments in a thorough manner, and we hope that with these amendments our manuscript will be favourably considered for publication.

Yours faithfully,

Joseph M Zulu.