Reviewer's report

Title: Analysis of the contribution of JICA health-related projects to health system strengthening using the WHO framework of the six building blocks

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Reviewer: Federica Secci

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Analysis of the contribution of JICA health-related projects to health system strengthening using the WHO framework of the six building blocks.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to review this manuscript, which address the important (and often misinterpreted) issue of health system strengthening.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Background

The authors should state clearly why this study is important and needed, why they chose to adopt the method they decided to use (why they had to construct a matrix from the six building blocks), and why this method is important and innovative.

Data Sources for JICA Projects

The introduction to the Project Design Matrix (PDM) is not quite clear. The authors should rephrase the first part of this section to make it more easily accessible to those who are not familiar with the JICA: why does it need a logical framework? What is the Logframe Matrix? Why is it mentioned? How and why was it modified? How is this linked to the PDM?

It would be very useful if the authors could provide a diagram to illustrate what the PDM does and link activities, output, purpose and goal of the project (if Figure 1 is supposed to serve this purpose, the authors might need to think about a way of complementing it). It would be even more useful if they could provide one of the PDMs they used, so that the reader can see the "raw data". Otherwise, it is quite hard to picture the process by which the authors went from the project data to the matrix based on the building blocks and the reader has no way of accessing the data and have to rely only on the analysis provided.

The authors mention they included projects conducted between Jan 2005 and Dec 2009, as well as those ongoing. They should be more specific and clarify whether they included projects that: (1) started or were ongoing in this period, (2) were completed in this period, (3) started and were completed in this period, or the like. They should also say why they made that choice and why they chose this period of time.
Analysis of the JICA Projects

The authors seem to treat Governance in a different way compared to the other building blocks. However, it is not clear why they decided to do so and whether or not governance really needs to be treated differently. This should be clarified and justified.

The authors should explain why they chose correspondence analysis for their assessment of JICA projects and how this choice of method supports the purpose of the paper.

Conclusions

I would encourage the authors to be more critical and less descriptive about their findings, and to provide insights on lessons that can be learnt from their analysis. As an example, they could point at financing as a possible area on which to focus in the future, given that it has been overlooked so far. In addition, given that they used a new matrix constructed on the building blocks, they might want to mention for example how this approach could be useful to other studies or why it should be adopted by other studies on health system strengthening.

Minor Essential Revisions

The authors should revise the first sentence of the Methods section of the Abstract as it is not clear. I suggest that they focus on the data they analyzed in the first sentence and mention the matrix they developed in the second sentence, in a similar way to what the authors do at the very end of the Introduction.

What do the authors mean by "method itself" in the third sentence of the Introduction? Can the state this sentence differently to make the massage more clear?

Discretionary Revisions

The title of the paper can be made sharper. At the moment mentioning "using the WHO framework of the six building blocks" does not add much relevant information regarding the contents or the contribution paper. On the other hand, the authors could spell out the acronym JICA, with which not all readers might necessarily be familiar. The title could simply be something along the lines of: "Contribution of the Japan International Cooperation Agency health-related projects to health system strengthening".

It would be very helpful, if possible, if the authors could provide more information or a table with an overview of the projects that were analyzed, including information such as the country in which they were implemented, the duration, and the amount of funds. I understand data were drawn from the PDMs, but I wondered whether the authors might be able to provide important contextual information which could be useful in interpreting the study findings # e.g. variety as opposed to concentration of funds on a small number of countries,
complementarities/synergies between projects in the same country. I would really encourage the authors to provide such information if available.

Minor issues not for publication.

In the last paragraph of the Introduction, the authors say: "However, although approximately 40 technical health-related projects have been implemented annually..." Do they mean that 40 new technical health-related projects are implemented each year? If so, it might be useful to rephrase it.

"Technically" in the first sentence of the Analysis of the JICA projects might be misspelled and should read "technical".

The authors should make sure that all acronyms (including EPI, ATM, MCH, and RH) are spelled out in the text and in the List of Abbreviations.

General comments

In conclusion, I appreciate the authors' attempt to analyze the JICA health-related projects with a focus on health system strengthening by using a novel matrix. However, I encourage them to be more explicit with the justification of the study and the methods, to be more clear in the explanation of the matrix and the methods they used, and to be more critical in their analysis and conclusions. It would also be very helpful if they could provide more contextual information about the projects.

I do hope the authors find my comments helpful and I wish them all the best with their revisions to the manuscript.

**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:**

NONE