Author's response to reviews

Title: Strengthening health workforce capacity through modular work-based training

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Author's response to reviews:

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The Editor
BMC International Health and Human Rights

Dear Editor,

Re: Response to Reviewers’ Comments with regard to MS: 6263321387580946

We thank you for reviewing the above-mentioned manuscript and for providing us with an opportunity to revise it for your further consideration.

We have revised the Manuscript as advised and provided further explanation to help the reader under the context of the study.

Please find below our point-by-point response to the comments raised.

Sincerely,

Corresponding Author

POINT-BY-POINT RESPONSE TO COMMENTS ABOUT MS#:
6263321387580946

Reviewer #1
The paper now has a different focus and is clearly restricted to a description of the training programme only. Nonetheless the programme is of interest in and of itself and thus a contribution to knowledge among those interested in methods to improve health systems and those who design training programmes. The description of how they have dealt with the challenges they have faced is also instructive.

We thank the reviewer for this important observation and the suggestions made to improve the manuscript.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The one aspect that seems to be missing from the discussion is why so few public sector employees have made use of the programme and if this is a problem. For example if the public sector serves most of the population then this is a challenge that needs to be addressed. However if the NGOs include mission hospitals who may in fact serve a significant part of the population this may be less of a challenge. Nonetheless some comment in the discussion seems to be warranted.

We have acknowledged as a challenge the fact that our program enrolled more of NGO-sector employees than public health sector employees. Indeed, this was not intended. We have indicated steps that are currently under consideration to improve enrollment of public health sector employees, including those working with district local governments, since districts serve as a center of focus in Uganda’s decentralized health service delivery system (see last paragraph, page 15 for details).

A few additional points below:

2. In the abstract it is claimed that “projects which resulted in improved access to health care services, reduced waiting time for patients; strengthened M&E systems; and improved data collection and reporting. Trainees’ skills and competencies in M&E and CQI were enhanced and shared with other staff, with minimal interruption of their work.” It seems that the authors are not taking on board previous critique of this article which indicated that unless they have proof of this, which they do not as the programme is as yet not evaluated, they cannot have this kind of statement in their abstract. The most they can say is that …. projects undertaken addressed issues such as improving access to health care services, reducing waiting time for patients; strengthening M&E systems; and improving data collection and reporting …. They can also say ….. The project aimed to improve skills and competencies in M&E and CQI and the design of the project was such they could share these skills with other staff, with minimal interruption of their work.

We have improved the wording in the abstract to reflect the fact that we don’t yet have proof to substantiate the original statements made with regard to the project outcomes, since our training program is not yet formally evaluated. The revised statements now read as follows: “Trainees implemented 66 projects which
addressed issues such as improving access to health care services; reducing waiting time for patients; strengthening M&E systems; and improving data collection and reporting. The projects implemented aimed to improve trainees’ skills and competencies in M&E and CQI and the design of the projects was such that they could share these skills with other staff, with minimal interruptions of their work.” See page 2.

3. In the body of the article in the introduction sentence “Mentors, including institutional supervisors at the place of work, serve not only as role models, but provide professional advice, feedback, and general support during the implementation of selected projects.” Insert “who” after “work,”

We thank the reviewer for this correction. However, we feel that introducing the word ‘who’ into the sentence might change its structure, and have therefore opted to not include it. The sentence is meant to show that mentors serve not only as role models but provide professional advice, feedback, and general support during the implementation of selected projects. We feel that this sentence should remain as it is.

4. It is not clear, if doing a project was part of the programme, how – if 120 people completed the programme – there were only 66 projects?

We thank the reviewer for this observation. We should point out that the 120 trainees were enrolled from 66 institutions. For each institution, only one project was supported. This means that trainees from the same institution worked on the same project together as part of a team. This is the reason why 66 and not 120 projects were supported. We have made this clarification on page 8 (paragraph 2).

5. In the discussion … “Our training program builds trainees’ capacity to be able to critically analyse work and management processes as well as systems through the initial face-to-face interactive sessions. Remove “be able to”

We have made the correction as suggested by the reviewer, and dropped the phrase “be able to” in the sentence beginning, “Our training program builds trainees’ capacity…” See page 11.

6. Under your section on challenges… “Our assessment shows that majority of those who did not complete the training either took jobs with other institutions mid-way the training or were laid off by their respective institutions prior to the end of the training.” Add “through” after “mid-way”

We have made the correction as suggested by the reviewer and added the word “through” after “mid-way” in the sentence beginning, “Our assessment shows that majority …” See page 13.
Reviewer #2

The authors have responded appropriately to all my comments and suggestions. I do not suggest any further revisions.

We thank the reviewer for this important observation and for the useful suggestions made in improving the manuscript.