Reviewer's report

Title: How do we sell the hygiene message? With dollars, dong or excreta?

Version: 3 Date: 25 May 2010

Reviewer: Laura Orlando

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Major compulsory revisions:

1. Page 2, paragraph 2 of the abstract is confusing. The paper states that the Vietnamese health authorities are asking farmers to compost human excreta in double vault composting latrines (DVC) for not less than 6 months and that what is at issue here is that some farmers use the excreta in 3 to 4 months, based on crop cycles.

The abstract implies the Vietnamese health authorities wish to “convince Vietnamese farmers to adopt different fertilizing methods.” Does this mean not using human excreta, composted or not? The body of the article implies it is a containment issue, not a primary material issue. Which is it?

2. Page 3, Paragraph 2: I continue to find the interchangeable use of the word “latrine” and "DVC" problematic. The authors state that single vault latrines are illegal, but then go on to say, “The farmers need cheap fertilizer and although they know that latrine content can be harmful to human health, they still believe it has a very positive impact on their agricultural production.” Are the authors implying that the contents of the DVC are known to be harmful to health? Or are they referring to the single vault, drop-pit latrine? There is a difference here – according to Vietnamese law and also with regard to potential exposure to pathogens. The phrase “they still believe it has a very positive impact….” Is also problematic. Does it or doesn’t it have a positive impact on agriculture? I am guessing it does, since the farmers continue to use excreta – composted or not – in their fields.

3. Page 4, paragraph 1: Please add information that reflects whether or not the stated helminth infections are a direct result of
unprocessed excreta reuse and whether or not composted excreta (in the DVC) reduces helminth density. This is relevant, as the authors leave the reader to assume the use of excreta in the fields is trouble – whether composted or not. (The Vietnamese health authorities seem to think composting for 6 months addresses health concerns, which we must assume, encompasses helminth infections)

4. Page 5, paragraph 1: It is important that the reader know if composting excreta in the DVC for 3 to 4 months, rather than 6, is inadequate to reduce helminth populations (or any other pathogen of concern). Again, the authors are asking the reader to assume that 3 to 4 months of composting is inadequate. But it seems to me such assumptions shouldn’t be made. A reference to relevant studies would be adequate.

Minor Essential Revisions:

5. Beginning on page 5, throughout the rest of the paper: Change “phosphor” to “phosphorus.”

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.