Reviewer's report

Title: Vertical Funding, NGOs, and Health System Strengthening: Perspectives of Public Sector Health Workers in Mozambique

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Reviewer: Marko Vujicic

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All of my comments are major compulsory revisions:

Intro could benefit from some basic data on aid flows. How much is through multilateral, bilateral, and private channels.

Intro needs to answer 'what does this add'. There has been a lot of qualitative work based on expert opinion on this topic. What is missing is much more rigorous, data driven papers. This is why I think this paper's contribution is minimal.

Pg 5 – What are the data or references to support the statement: “A much larger proportion of vertical support is channeled directly to NGOs that center on specific projects whose funding, planning, and implementation are conducted outside the MOH. In both forms, vertical funds have generally not supported cross-cutting administration, human resources, logistics costs, or basic training institutions of the MOH.”

Pg 5 – The workforce shortage figures-do these refer to open funded positions or normative staffing targets?

It appears this paper was written a few years ago. Why did the authors focus on the 2008 government documents and not something more recent? The references are also out of date. This is a problem. References need to be updated because a lot of recent work has gone on in this area. In terms of the starting point, I think it is ok to have this a few years ago, just need a note saying analysis started in 20XX. In terms of references, a key one missing is:


Need clarification of the sample. Are these all MOH employees, stakeholders? You explain this as a shortcoming, but why did you not interview NGOs and other non-MOH key informants. Having worked in many similar environments (although not Mozambique) I am somewhat weary of drawing too much from interviews and focus groups with solely MOH officials. Just my view, but if there are any data available to back up some of the views – have there been any health worker
labor market analyses done? Is there any data from published papers, or secondary sources on wage differences? What about at least citing analyses in other countries?

On the methods, there are much more sophisticated ways to analyze qualitative data of this nature. The authors need to describe why they did not do this. I am thinking papers by Pieter Serneels, Magnus Lindelow, there is a chapter in Analyzing Health Equity Using Household Survey Data by the World Bank that should be referenced.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None