Reviewer's report

Title: Human resource development for community based Health Extension Program: Case study from Ethiopia

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Reviewer: Luke C Mullany

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Comments on Ethiopia Paper

Human Resources for Health

The authors have provided a description of the design of the HEP program and follow this with a qualitative examination of data before and after the HEP was initiated.

The long background description of the HEP program may or may not be necessary. If the goal of the paper is to present the indicators on the HEP program and compare these to the preHEP period, it is likely that the longer presentation of the program in the background is not necessary.

There appear to be many statements in the background section that should be cited in order to strengthen the claims made by the authors.

Overall, the citations throughout are not very recent - There are a couple of citations from the prior 2 years, but most are ten years old or older. Could the authors update their citations?

The description of the HEP appears to be somewhat divorced from a presentation of the health status of the country. A closer link between the aims of the HEP and the actual national statistics on maternal, neonatal, and child health would be helpful, along with a discussion of how the interventions within the HEP correspond to widely agreed upon essential interventions for MNCH.

The authors should provide a critical analysis of how this model does and does not fit with the many other models of community-health worker programs in other countries. This would be helpful for meeting their goal of having this case study contribute to the design/implementation of programs elsewhere.

The statements about the program describe what the program is supposed to do on paper, but this does not necessarily reflect the reality on the ground. Can the authors strengthen their argument by citing actual data on whether or not the HEP has met these goals of coverage?

There is little information about the Health Development Army, and how this more recent development of the health system fits with the HEW program and HEP.
There is no description of the source of data for the analysis of the pre-HEP vs post HEP implementation indicators of coverage. Where does this information come from? How should the readers understand the quality and reliability of these data? Where are the citations for these data?

Why should the reader believe that the changes in indicators have anything to do with the HEP program?

What is the status of funding for the HEP program? Is it fully funded by the Govt? Is it reasonable to recommend that they double the number of HEWs from 2 to 4, when there is little evidence that health service utilization has increased?

There are many sweeping statements that appear to be too general, and thus are not helpful. For example, "Emphasis should be given to the expansion of referral health centers with functional CEMOC to address the high maternal mortality rates. However, this would not be effective without creating demand and establishing a practical referral system [46].". We can say this about any health system in any low resource country in the world. Thus, it is not very helpful to simply state this, and move on. Rather, perhaps the authors should provide actionable specific recommendations as to how to move forward on this issue in Ethiopia.

Overall, I'm not sure how this commentary on the HEP contributes to our understanding for how to solve problems related to human resources. It might be valuable as a description of how the program was initially designed, but only if such a description is not already publicly available.

**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:**

I declare that I have no competing interests