Reviewer's report

Title: Task-shifting and prioritisation: a situational analysis examining the role and experiences of community health workers in Malawi

Version: 1 Date: 17 December 2013

Reviewer: Maryse Kok

Reviewer's report:

Discretionary Revisions
1. In background. “CHW interventions are effective against malaria”. This statement is general and at the same time strong: what exactly was the role of CHWs (preventive/curative). Can really been said CHWs are effective based on this evidence (7 non-RCT studies)? Smith Paintain et al. 2012 might be also interesting to read in this respect.

2. In the background: “new activities are regularly being added to the HSA role”. Is this officially via the job-description? (Later in the paper it seems that this is often unofficially). Could you clarify this in this part of the paper?

3. Could you explain shortly who exactly are HSA supervisors (assistant environmental health officers/ senior HSAs?).

4. In methods. Sampling of sites: did you sample to have a wide range of different areas? It seems so. The text could be clearer regarding this. Did you select sites with challenges and strengths or sites with either challenges or strengths?

5. In methods. FGDs were conducted in each cluster’s largest health centre (7 clusters). Where was the 8th FGD? In the district hospital? How many study sites were included for the interview part? In every cluster 1 site (so 7)? Or were they 10 (because in total you included 17 health centres)?

6. In methods. Purposely chosen HSAs for observation and diaries: what were their specific characteristics? What made them to be chosen?

7. In abstract, result section. Regarding considerations for policy makers: I would suggest to add “division of” before “roles”

8. In background. Non-communicable disease interventions: is not a role as such. Suggestion: “implementation of non-communicable disease interventions”

Minor Essential Revisions
9. In abstract. 70 HSAs participated in study. In full text 75 HSAs. Please adjust the text in the abstract.

10. In methods, data collection. “Three” used 2 times after each other. Could you construct the sentence differently to make it clearer?

11. Please use past/present tense consistently when reporting qualitative data.
12. Check spelling/sentences of some quotes.
13. In conclusion: “health” instead of “heath”

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.