Reviewer's report

Title: How do Health Extension Workers in Ethiopia allocate their time?

Version: 1 Date: 18 July 2014

Reviewer: Araya Abrha Medhanyie

Reviewer's report:

1- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The manuscript addressed an important issue of the Ethiopian health extension workers. The findings presented in the manuscript are crucial for policymakers and other similar community based programs in other developing countries. However, the manuscript, in its current form, is more of like a report of a survey. Thus, to enrich the manuscript and meet the requirements of a journal article, I suggest the following comments.

a. Introduction:

i. In the introduction, detailed information is given about the HEWs and HEP in Ethiopia. However, the rationale for studying HEWs' time allocation is not well described. It would be good if the authors could shorten the description of the HEWs and HEP in Ethiopia and add information on what is known and unknown (or show the gap in information) about community health workers time allocation in the literature so far (be it from Ethiopia or other developing countries).

b. Detailed information about the trial (COMBINE project) is given in the manuscript (Introduction (last paragraph) and Methods (second and third paragraphs) to show the context in which the time and motion study was conducted. Although it seems good to give details of the trial, it somehow distracts from the main focus of the manuscript which is the time and motion study. Hence, I suggest summarizing all the information about the trial in one paragraph and putting it under the study setting section.

c. The discussion section of the manuscript mainly focuses on methodological appraisal. Implications of findings are not discussed. Possible recommendations for further studies in relation to the HEWs' work time allocation are not indicated. Hence, I would suggest the authors to make brief and summarize the discussion they made on the methodological appraisal (Discussion paragraphs 2, 3, 4 and 5) and add discussions on the implications of the findings. It would be of great interest to policy makers and other researcher if the authors discussed the implication of their findings. For instance, implications of the findings on HEWs' time allocation as regards to HEWs performance. It would be nice if authors could suggest possible solutions to improve HEWs work time such as solution for minimizing HEWs travel time to work place. Based on the findings of the study, it would be also helpful if the authors could comment whether HEWs have enough time to shoulder all the activities of the HEP and other expectations.
d. Conclusion: last statement says “HEWs have an important role in improving health outcomes in Ethiopia...”. However, there is no supporting data in the result section to make a conclusion on HEWs role in improving health outcomes. Hence, it is good to leave out this statement from the manuscript or show the findings that lead to this conclusion.

e. References: The reference list or the literature review doesn't seem exhaustive, there are recently published articles on HEWs and the HEP in Ethiopia. Hence discussing and comparing the findings of this manuscript with findings and recommendations of these recently published articles would be helpful to enrich the arguments made in this manuscript. Below are the links for three of the recently published articles:


2. Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

a. To simplify tables 1-5, it would be good if the authors present only the figures in the “total” column and leave out the regional figures from the tables. Looking at the result and discussion sections of the manuscript, there are no inferences made by regions. Hence, it wouldn't affect the manuscript if the findings for regions are not presented.

3. Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

a. I indicated other minor comments which need discretionary revisions in track changes within the manuscript. Please find attached.

**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.