Reviewer's report

Title: Process evaluation of two Community Health Worker programs in Kenya

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Reviewer: Kate Ramsey

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Introduction/Background Section

The question is very appropriate given the current movements towards increasing community health worker programs globally, and particularly in Africa. As the authors note, there is a dearth of information on implementing these programs and more process evaluations will contribute to the field.

Major compulsory revision: I am, however, concerned that as they state, “is to enrich our perspective on the policy relevance of the MVP,” which might be useful for their program, but is not a pertinent framing for a global scientific publication. They should endeavor to do a real comparison or at least description of both.

Discretionary revision: In the background, it would be useful to mention that another challenge of the global evidence base is that we often compare different types of CHWs as if they are the same – such as one that is solely engaged in malaria prevention compared to a CHW that provides a more comprehensive package for primary health. And whether the latter does counseling and education only, or is also involved in curative services, provision of family planning methods, etc.

Minor revisions:
- I suggest including a clearer description of the official task profile for each of the types of CHW in the background section when describing the programs. This will assist to understand the later descriptions of perceived and actual profile in relation to the standard.
- I find the description of the Community Unit for the national program to be unclear. I would revise this sentence.
- Clarify what Community Health Extension Workers are and how they differ from the CHWs in the National program. Are they paid and trained?
- Distinguishing between the two different programs also would be easier if the authors would choose one set of labels and use them throughout (e.g. MVP and National CHWs or Ndere and Sauri CHWs). For someone not as familiar with the programs/Kenyan context the MVP/National labeling might be easier to follow.

Methods Section

Major compulsory revisions: The methods are generally appropriate, although the
authors need to provide more details. They might reference for instance the COREQ to determine what is missing (see Tong et al, International Journal for Quality in Health Care: 19(6). Here are a few points:

- Selection of the study sites: How was the Sauri village chosen? What about the Ndere Village?

- More description of the study setting: Understanding the context is an essential element of process evaluation, yet we are given very little description of the study setting. Is it rural? Is the population density high or low? Are the populations fairly homogeneous? In what ways do the two villages differ? e.g. do either of them have a health facility in the village?

- They describe the potential sources of bias due to their involvement in the MVP program, but do not really explain clearly how they overcame them. What did they do to ensure reflexivity? Did they share the findings with the interviewees for validation? Or with other outside partners?

- Who developed the themes from the Carroll et al’s conceptual framework? Was it one person or a team? Who did the coding? Was there a second coder for at least a sample of the interviews?

- Was there approval from an ethics committee in Kenya (KEMRI)? Or permissions sought from at least local authorities?

Findings section

Minor revisions:

- I would suggest that it would flow better if the recruitment and task profile descriptions came before training. It is hard to assess whether the training was adequate without a clear understanding of who is being trained and to do what.

- Training:

  o When describing the Ndere CHWs what do you mean by ‘four weeks with a range of between 3 days and 3 months within a year’? Were the trainings carried out over the span of a year?

  o In the same paragraph, there are two acronyms CCFMC and FRACODEP that need to be explained. You might be able to summarize this also rather than listing each topic by which agency.

- Management and supervision

  o Where are the ratios reported in the abstract? They should appear here and you should explain how you established them considering that your methods are qualitative. Was it described by an informant? Did other informants corroborate these figures?

  o When describing the VHCs role in the MVP villages you say that they were ‘expected to play a more active supervisory role.’ Do you mean formally they were requested to do different tasks from the VHCs in the Ndere village?

  o Discretionary: I don’t see anything about supplies here. Did you ask about regular sources of supplies?
- Recruitment
  o Explain what a baraza is for the reader
  o You state that information collection is essential to the core work of CHWs when describing that the Ndere could not perform this task. On what do you base this? Were they expected to fulfill this role?

- Task Profile
  o How does what they describe as their task profile align and/or differ from the actual formal task profile? This an important comparison for grounding our expectations of what CHWs can do in what amount of time.

- Motivation
  o You state that they were motivated by financial incentives – yet in the remuneration section it is noted that the Ndere are not paid at all and the Sauri think they don’t get enough. So why do they keep working? They must have some other source of motivation that keeps them going from house to house every day! It would be good to look back into your data on this – or note this limitation if your interviewers didn’t probe enough on it.

- Coverage, frequency and duration
  o In this section in the second paragraph, you state that the supervisor to CHW ratio is 1:35, but this is very different than what is in the abstract. This needs to be verified and be consistent throughout the paper. Discretionary: this sentence should probably be in the supervision section.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

They have done a good job of searching the literature for relevant examples. Two recent reviews on CHW programs would also be good to reference as they highlight the major gaps. They are:


As stated above, I would consider it compulsory that the conclusion be reframed for a broader audience concerned with CHWs and implementation rather than focusing on how the MVP program should be revised.

Minor revisions:
- In the conclusion, you discuss attrition issues extensively, but these data do not appear anywhere in the findings. What is your source for this? I suggest that you put these data in the motivation section or as a separate section in CHW responsiveness.
- In the paragraph on training, you state that the evaluation emphasized the value of training performed “in a regular fashion”. What do you mean by “in a regular fashion”? please clarify.

- You mention regarding costing of the MVP CHW program that policy makers need to assess what would add value to the national program. What are you recommending as essential based on your evaluation?

Discretionary revision: It would be useful to know if and how the findings have been shared with national policymakers and if they were involved at all in designing the evaluation or interpreting the findings.

Title and abstract

The title is accurate, but doesn’t convey much.

Major compulsory revisions: The abstract needs quite a bit of work. The results paragraph reflects data that appear nowhere in the results section of the report. Some of these data I am also skeptical about, e.g. they say that the National program had a CHW to supervisor ratio of 1:25. Are there really 25 supervisors for every CHW? This data also does not appear in the results section of the report. Similarly, the conclusion should reflect the findings presented in the abstract more clearly. For instance, there is mention of lack of transport, but it is not in the abstract results paragraph. The same is true regarding training.

Overall writing.

The writing is acceptable, but there is a need for proofreading and some grammatical editing. Some of the sentences are awkward or too long. The language could be more precise as well, focusing on the substance and cutting the word count so the reader focuses on the essential points.

One minor comment that would help reviewers – please include page numbers! This helps us to reference where in the text we are commenting!

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

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