Reviewer's report

Title: Payday, ponchos, and promotions: a qualitative analysis of perspectives from non-governmental organization program managers on community health workers motivation and incentives

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Reviewer: Maryse Kok

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The abstract is unclear. The reader doesn’t know who are the 17 program managers (at which level, in which countries etc.)? This is only clear from the text of the main document. The sentence “Results illustrate the unique opportunity for governments to both lead the development their national CHW programs and provide clear guidance to partnering NGOs” is not clear and not telling the reader a lot. The sentence “program managers are increasingly interested in developing career paths and innovative financing schemes…” raises the question if this is a statement or if this is a finding from this particular study. It also leaves questions open: what are these innovative schemes? In summary, the abstract is unclear for readers that haven’t read the whole document and is currently not really convincing in why this research is adding on what was already known and what it can contribute to improving CHW programs.

2. Introduction. “After decades of diverting CHW cadres as agents of horizontal programs, there is renewed interest in core principles of Alma Ata, and strengthening health systems as a whole”. This is, in my view, incorrect. If you replace the work “horizontal” to “vertical”, the statement is correct according to me. The same is there in the first paragraph of the background.

3. Introduction. Health program managers “who directly oversee”: this is vague. Are they in direct contact with CHWs and how? Please explain. This comes back in the background, last paragraph.

4. Introduction. The study is about CHW motivation schemes. Is it not about incentives schemes leading to (de)motivation?

5. Background. I miss a definition of motivation, an explanation why this is important and how motivation in related to CHW performance and CHW (program) effectiveness.

6. Background. Last sentence of paragraph 2 is not clear (on gaps in research).

7. Background. End of 4th paragraph: the example of Massachusetts doesn’t seem to relate with what is said above. Example of what?

8. Background. NGO code of conduct: not clear. Of which country? General? The
reference doesn't make it clear. The last sentence of this paragraph is not clear.

9. Background. Start of 6th paragraph: these policy shifts: what are you referring to? This is not clear. In this paragraph you say “gendered” but there is no explanation. Is this about the remuneration of female CHWs against male CHWs? Last sentence “sense of community”: not clear.

10. Introduction and background: I advise to integrate them. There are duplications and part of it can go to the discussion section.

11. Methods. Bhattacharyya’s review formed the theoretical framework for the questionnaire. Why don’t you present (some details) of this framework? Can you present the major themes you refer to? Moreover there are no references in methods section. There is little information on the tool used. A questionnaire seems not to fit with qualitative nature of the research.

12. Results. Last part of paragraph 2: “incentivize performance” please explain. Are you referring to performance based incentives?

13. Results. Under innovative financing schemes: please explain in the first paragraph what the innovation entails. The order is unclear for the reader. The box in the additional file is not clear to the point.

14. Results. Under “it takes more than money”. Second sentence: you refer to performance, satisfaction and retention. Where is motivation? And again, how do these issues relate with each other? Third paragraph in this section: consistency was a challenge. Do you mean inconsistency?

15. Results. There is no reference to incentives (other than recognition) coming from the communities. Did you come across examples of other community incentives? As the paper is written from a health systems perspective, what can the health system do to also stimulate these community incentives?

16. Discussion. Six key influencers: it was not clear to me where they are coming from. The same for the statement in the last sentence of paragraph 1: it is not clear where in the result this has been discussed. The dynamic online forums: is this what program managers wanted or is it already there? This is not clear from the text. Last statement of paragraph 3: this paradox described in this study, I didn’t find it back in the results section. It is not clear. Gender has been hardly discussed. In paragraph 4: the opinion leader: who was this? One of the respondents? The last sentence of this paragraph is unclear. Paragraph 5: potentially gendered bias: not clear what you mean here.

17. Conclusion: call for operations research couldn’t be found back in other sections of the paper.

Minor Essential Revisions

18. Background. Start of 4th paragraph: for consistency, you would have to mention the program names in Ethiopia and Malawi as well.
19. You use “Inf 4” etc. You need to provide an explanation somewhere on what this means.

20. Background. Quote of 2008 recommendations: the word “other” before non-financial incentives needs to be deleted I think, as the examples before are financial incentives.

21. The references are not well typed. For example: 1, 6, 7, 14, 15, 22, 29, 30, 31

22. Results. Under monetary incentives, the quote in the 2nd paragraph of Inf 15: delete “motive”


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