Reviewer’s report

Title: A scoping review of training and deployment policies for human resources for health for maternal, newborn, and child health in rural Africa

Version: 2 Date: 15 August 2014

Reviewer: Yotamu Chirwa

Reviewer’s report:

The article is a useful review of training policies and deployment policies in Africa. It could be a useful resource to provide information on the spectrum of HRH policies in developing nations, their focus, effects and relevance in the dynamic contexts in developing nations. I have however noticed a few areas that I feel should be given more attention to make this contribution more clear to make it appealing to individuals and entities interested in and involved in policy reviews, formulation, implementation and evaluation.

1. Abstract

2. In the section on results the statement, There was an overall paucity of evidence based training and deployment policies for HRH and for MNCH in rural Africa. What is meant is not clear, is it that there are few evidence based policies, below a certain optimal level or that the policies that were evidence based that were found were very few.....(page 3) - Minor essential revision

3. The following sentence in the results section: The majority of included primary research studies employed a variety of both qualitative and quantitative methods and representation of doctors, nurses, and midwives was equitable. is not clear - the last part is not properly linked with the preceding idea. It is better that the issue of representation be made clear, is it that the research studies were selected to ensure that studies on doctors, nurses and midwives were equal .....(page 3) Minor essential revision

4. In the conclusion section the sentence, “Future research requires the expansion of the search-terms, included providers, and research methods for a more comprehensive picture of the content and scope of existing policy
information”. needs revision, the word included seems to be out of place or there could be a missing word so that it reads “ to include” .....(page 4) Minor essential revision

5. Background

I. The sentence “-have less than the World Health Organization (WHO)’s minimum recommended density of HRH to provide basic health care to their populations, averaging less than one of doctors, nurses and midwives per 1,000 population” is not clear to me I think it needs to be made more clearer. .....(page 5) Minor essential revision

II. The following sentence, “Although information on different countries’ HRH policies and practices exists, gathering and reviewing relevant evidence is often beyond the time and resource constraints of many country-level policy maker” needs revision I feel the word constraints after resources makes that whole sentence lose meaning.....(page 6) Minor essential revision

III. The sentence which reads, “ The purpose of this paper is to present the findings from a scoping review designed to identify and classify publicly accessible evidence on policies for the training and deployment of doctors, nurses, and midwives in rural Africa for promoting MNCH” could read better if we remove the word designed and state that scoping review which identified and classified publicly accessible evidence on policies.....(page 6) Minor essential revision

6. Methods

I. The methods section is alright but I think it could be tightened a bit especially where the authors state that, “The identified publications – peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed - were used to determine what literature is available on this subject to create a narrative of existing evidence and associated....” It would be useful to provide more explanation on how exactly the identified publications were used to determine what literature is available was it by following up on references in these sourced peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed publications.(page 6). Minor essential revision

II. The following statement I think needs review “The scoping review results were used as a preliminary step to inform an in-depth policy analysis for a sub-set of eight African countries” which implies that there was something else done which “is the indepth analysis” How this was done has not been discussed in the methods section except in passing in the statement above.(page 7) Minor essential revision

a. Peer- reviewed articles

This sentence needs revision “Searches of the following online databases from were conducted: PubMed, CINAHL, Econ Lit, Psych Articles, Psych Info, Informa Health Care e-books, the Cochrane Library, ABI inform, Web of Knowledge,
4 Results

1. The following sentence needs review, “The scoping of electronic database returned a total of 548 peer-reviewed articles, including 122 duplicates “I think it should be databases.” Minor essential revision

1. The following sentence needs review “Policies that focused exclusively on training and deployment were limited, with the majority of the literature addressed both training and deployment either directly or as embedded components of broader policies” (page 11). This should be “addressing” am I right? Minor essential revision

1. General comment on results

I. I think a bit more could have been said on the results of the literature search with regards the area of focus which is training and deployment of HRH for maternal and newborn and child health in rural Africa. The assertion that, “Policies that focused exclusively on training and deployment were limited, with the majority of the literature addressed both training and deployment either directly or as embedded components of broader policies” needed to be developed further for example which policies across the countries had embedded in them deployment and training and were there countries which had specific standalone policies on training and deployment of HRH involved in MNCH. I see that later you zero in on some policies in specific countries which is commendable but it would be useful to give an overview in brief under your results and then get into greater detail as you did. Major compulsory revision

2. Policy foci of peer reviewed Literatures

I. I find this sub heading problematic, what is the focus in this section, is it the literature or the policies that are being discussed? My reading is that the discussion is about policies on training that were identified in the literature that was searched for and reviewed in the scoping exercise in two countries Ghana and Nigeria. I also think there should be a description of each of these policies, why they were adopted and then the successes. There is need to strengthen the discussion on the policies. It is also important to state clearly when the training programme started and ended and the effect on retention. The following statement in the discussion needs review “Thirty seven of the 38 specialists who successfully completed this program from its initiation in 1989 to 2006 remained in Ghana to practice, the majority practicing in the public health sector “to show duration of training, who the benefitting HRH involved in MNCH and for how long they remained in employment post training. Major compulsory revision

II. On deployment, recruitment and retention the comma after and on the sub title should be removed. I also suggest that the two strategies adopted (The 2004 Rural Allowance policy and the Occupation-Specific Dispensation Incentive strategy,) in South Africa be described then followed by the discussion provided. It is stated that the two strategies were described to have significant weakness
but it is not clear by whom I think we need to state forthrightly who described the strategies as weak. Minor essential revision

III. Review the following sentence, (page 12)” Upon qualitative evaluation, this policy demonstrated a lack of evidence-based design alongside poor communication and definition of implementation parameters i.e. which providers were eligible for the allowance and why, what qualified as a rural zone, and an absent monitoring and evaluation mechanism” I think the last part could be put in a better way. Minor essential revision

VII Review the sentence(page 12) “…was pushed forward prior to many preconditions being met, such as a complete and accurate specialized nursing registration databases from the South African Council of Nurses” Were there several data bases for nurses? Minor essential revision

Dual focused policies
There is need to state what dual focussed policies are because the first policy that is discussed has five facets. What is the duality that is being referred to the same applies to the Zambian example. There is need to make the reader understand this classification (page 13-14). Major compulsory revision

Embedded policies
I. (page 14). In this section reference is made to MNCH training which is not the case in the policies discussed earlier am I right that all the other policies were specific to Rural MNCH if so this must be stated if not then this also should be stated. Major compulsory revision

II. On page 15 the sentence “Niger’s Rural Health Improvement Program also aimed to increase PHC coverage by upgrading rural health facilities and dispatching newly-trained village health teams; access to the former led to a significant increase in MNCH service uptake and a 32% decrease in the likelihood of under-five mortality in the area of evaluation”. needs review so that what is being stated is clear with respect to what led to the increase in uptake. Minor essential revision

Discussion
I. The statement (page 18)“First, there was an overall paucity of evidence and information on training and deployment policies for HRH for MNCH in rural Africa” needs to be developed further, no evidence to this effect has been presented in the scoping review it only appears in the abstract and the discussion there is need to develop this further in the results. Major compulsory revision

II. The assertion on page 18“This bias is illustrated by the abundance of articles specific to developed regions versus low and middle-income countries “has not been supported by evidence in scoping results but is stated in the abstract and in the discussion Major compulsory revision.
III. On page 19 the aspect of non-monetary incentives is discussed but nothing on it is presented in the scoping review results. Major revision.

IV. In the discussion on the policy on cervical screening in South Africa the authors discuss issues that had not been raised in the scoping review results and I think it is important to include these in the results as well. On page 16 the paper states," Additionally, South Africa's Cervical Screening policy mandated nurse training in Pap smear provision, again recognizing the potential of upgrading skills of previously deployed HRH" and in the discussion they go on to assert that, (page 19) “An evaluation of South Africa’s Cervical Screening policy indicated that technological and task-shifting interventions were not sufficient on their own, and required the concurrent addressing of other HRH issues such as training, attrition, skills-mix, and workload management for success”. There is need to develop this discussion further so that we can be able to understand the issues at stake especially the question was the policy poorly conceived if so why. Major compulsory revision.

V. “The scaling-up of integrated management of childhood illness (IMCI) in Uganda was limited. IMCI training alone was found not to be adequate in itself to improve child health and that a supportive infrastructure, work environment, and political context were also required” this policy or programme is only raised in the discussion but not in the scoping review results it should be excised or raised in the results section as well. Major compulsory revision.

VI. The paragraph beginning with “The majority of the included primary research ..” (Page 20) is a methods issue which I think should have be discussed and resolved in the methods section. It does not add anything to the discussion in my view. Major compulsory revision.

VII. The paragraph beginning “it is evident that attempts are being made...” page 20 ...contradicts an earlier assertion that there is paucity on information on HRH which I have raised earlier. There is need to review this and also include the discussion on the various perspectives from which literature was drawn in the scoping review findings, Here you mention ethical, anthropological and sociological and biomedical but this has not been mentioned anywhere else. Major compulsory revision.

VIII. I do not see the value of dwelling on the excluded policies as you have discussed the inclusion criteria in the methods section. I do not think this is important. I think the two paragraphs on this exclusion aspect do not fit in the discussion at all Major compulsory revision.

IX. .

Conclusion

I. The conclusion needs to address the objective of the scoping review which was to identify and classify publicly accessible evidence on policies for the training
and deployment of doctors, nurses and midwives in rural Africa for promoting MNCH. What are the major HRH policy issues that are emerging from the scoping review and what has been their effect. Major compulsory revision.

List of abbreviations

Include all abbreviations used for example AG, IMCI Minor compulsory revision

I declare that I have no competing interests'

Yotamu Chirwa

**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 i have no competing interests