Reviewer's report

Title: Community Health Workers: to train or to restrain? A longitudinal survey to assess the impact of training community health workers in the Bolama Region, Guinea-Bissau

Version: 1 Date: 16 October 2013

Reviewer: Miriam Hirschfeld

Reviewer's report:

This is a very informative paper on a most relevant topic.

1.) minor comments:
   a.) On page 4 - it seems that not only "on equity" grounds it is important to evaluate how care is provided, but also on quality and effectiveness grounds
   b.) page 5, para 2 - typo - Chronicle dehydration
   page 5, para 4, based on (not in) rigid guidelines

2.) substantial questions:
   Based upon your findings, I believe you must address the policy question of continuing to rely upon CHWs in the longer run, or investing in atleast 'mid-level' personnel (e.g. nurses, health officers...). Even if a country is very poor, just over 50% ability to correctly diagnose and treat severe dehydration, or dysentry does not seem to provide a population with an ethically defendable level of care.

   If already competence decreases after 3 months (and that with only training for one health condition), the question arises, if this is an adequate health worker category, albeit cheap. While midlevel personell also require continued training, supervision and support, would this not be a wiser investment over time?

   You state on page 9 that "improvements vanish over time". On the same page you state that "CHWs can treat simple diseases at low cost" - but is the issue only "stock ruptures" and "catastrophic expenditures" when you document before how spurious the quality of health provision is? Also the quote of "increased coverage ....can contribute to improvements in health indicators" does not seem to correlate with your own findings.

   In summary, I believe that in the discussion and the conclusion sections you need a serious discussion on the policy question of whether countries should continue to rely on CHWs, instead of seriously planning for and investing in qualified HRH groups.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'