Author’s response to reviews

Title: The contribution of international health volunteers to the health workforce in sub-Saharan Africa

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
To: The Editor  
Human Resources for Health

Re:  
The contribution of international health volunteers to the health workforce in sub-Saharan Africa

Dear Daniel,

Hereby, we send you our revised manuscript. Below, we explain our reactions to the comments and suggestions made by the reviewers and indicate how we took these in consideration in reviewing the paper.

Moreover, stimulated by the reviewers’ comments, we restructured the paper and did some major editing, resulting in a shorter paper, which we hope will be more enjoyable to the readers.

Hoping for a positive reaction,

Sincerely yours,

Wim Van Damme
Reactions to the final review by Prof. G. Dussault

“More specificity in the formulation of objectives: something like " to quantify the contribution of volunteers, to explore the perceptions of African health sector managers of those volunteers, to identify factors of successful contribution of volunteers to health services, ...".
- We rewrote the concerned paragraph.

“The a. should present a simple conceptual framework which gives meaning to the questions which they address.”
- The framework that was used to analyse the data has now been added to the section on methodology.

“Add information about participants to the focus groups”
- This has now been added.

“Any information about how countries manage the entry of volunteers and control the quality of their work?”
- Unfortunately, we did not collect any information on this.

“Any differences between English, French, Portuguese-speaking countries?”
- Here, too, information is insufficient to draw conclusions.

“In table 1, what is "logisticians"?”
- ‘Logisticians’ are public health/environmental officers, responsible for plan and facility (electricity, communication, water and wastage management, infrastructure and maintenance). We rephrased this into ‘public health technicians’.

“p. 11: in paragraph 1, explain the basis/justification of the estimates.”
The estimates are based on a reasonable extrapolation of the data and informed by our field experience. Given that the most likely source of underestimation would be the many small organisations that send out less than 10 volunteers, the ceiling we propose seems reasonable.

“p. 12: paragraph 4: the list of countries with absolute shortages is based on opinions of "many informants". Either reference is added and "absolute shortage" defined or the sentence should be deleted.”
- We added references and defined ‘absolute shortage’.

Reactions to the final review by Prof Baltazar Chilundo

“The methods section should be rewritten to become more explicit in terms of study design (sites in both north and south, sampling size to the survey). How survey data were analyzed? What were the sub Saharan countries visited by the researchers? When? How long? What were the characteristics of the focus group discussions? These are some questions which seems not to have been covered in the methodology.”
- The methods section has been rewritten to better explain the methods used in data collection and analysis. There is no need to discuss the sampling procedure, since it was not done. No countries were visited. We described the sources of data better to avoid such confusion. Also the group discussions are now better explained. It should be noted that they are now called group discussions, instead of focus group discussions, to better reflect their nature. Finally, the discussion now contains a discussion on the constraints and limits of the study.
"In general the description of the findings lack clear examples. Some gaps are: under pg 4
"Coverage of organizations", the sentence starting 'with Their sizes vary from very large....’
should be followed by a concrete example.'
- We added a few examples where appropriate. The section indicated by the reviewer was
removed to avoid duplication.

"In pg 6, under Perspective of volunteer organizations, in the end of the 1st paragraph there
should be another clear example."
- In our opinion, this is sufficiently clear, and another example would not add much...

“Finally, the findings arising from focus group discussions come more in analytical way without
bringing the original key quotes from the interviewees. Definitely it would be desirable to consider
some.”
- Indeed, but we did not tape and transcribe the group discussions. As mentioned earlier, we
renamed them group discussions instead of focus group discussions.