Reviewer's report

Title: Thirty years after Alma-Ata: A systematic review of the impact of community health workers delivering interventions against malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea on child mortality and morbidity in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Reviewer: Angela Oyo-Ita

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REVIEW OF ARTICLE

TITLE:
Thirty years after Alma-Ata: A systematic review of the impact of community health workers delivering interventions against malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea on child mortality and morbidity in Sub-Saharan Africa.

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
Question posed by authors is topical.
The interventions delivered by CHWs are not qualified to be either preventive or curative in the title. This distinction is made in the text to be “curative care, with or without preventive services.” I’d suggest that the title should qualify the intervention as curative to justify the search strategy for the review. Otherwise the suggestion in question #2 below should be considered.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
Method of data collection is appropriate and clearly stated.
However, the search criterion for intervention is biased towards curative care. The title did not limit the interventions to curative but is rather open ended. It is difficult to appreciate why the focus is on curative intervention as a means of evaluating “the effectiveness of CHW in improving access to health care rather than with their role in primary prevention.” CHWs are usually engaged in delivering preventive health services. This also has the potential of improving access to care.
If the authors’ criterion for intervention is preventive care with or without curative care, it may be possible to retrieve more studies. It may also be possible to stratify studies within groups with only preventive intervention, curative intervention, and studies that combine the two, given that co-delivering preventive intervention will confound the effect of curative intervention on the outcomes.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
Data extracted from studies are appropriate and relevant
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Yes, it conforms to the structure of Cochrane systematic reviews

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Authors conclude that CHW programmes that deliver ITNs and malaria chemoprophylaxis have high impact on child mortality. Could there have been an interaction between the composite interventions (curative treatment, health education) that could have accounted for the level of impact observed? This could have been evaluable if there were studies that had these preventive interventions without the curative component.

The review seeks to evaluate the effect of the interventions (curative, with or without preventive interventions) on mortality and morbidity of malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhoea and nutritional status of the target population. (See section on effectiveness outcomes) Authors have not provided information on two of the stated outcomes viz. morbidity and nutritional status. It will be informative to report if the included studies did not consider these outcomes.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
If the search strategy is modified, the title will be said to convey the findings. The search strategy differs from the title and gives a twist from the focussed question posed in the title. As it is, it is uncertain that the criteria for searching the literature were adequate to pull all the studies on the review question.
Abstract not available

7. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes, it is acceptable for publication.

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 that I have no competing interests