Reviewer's report

**Title:** Policymakers' and other stakeholders' perceptions of key considerations for health system decisions and the presentation of evidence to inform those considerations: an international survey

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 5 December 2012

**Reviewer:** Fadi El-Jardali

**Reviewer's report:**

The paper is important and timely given the need for tools to support complex health systems decisions. Such tools are needed to assess and grade the quality of evidence provided to support those decisions. This is important in light of the difference between the nature and scope of clinical (GRADE) and health system decisions (DECIDE framework). The survey used for this study is useful to finalize the selection criteria for the DECIDE framework.

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
   Yes

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
   Yes

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
   Yes

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   Yes

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   Yes but some additional information is needed

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   Yes

7. Is the writing acceptable?
   Yes,

**Major Compulsory Revisions** (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
- There are many interesting components and dimensions in the survey and certainly the primary analysis, if expanded, can enrich and strengthen the paper

- It would be useful to elaborate on the sampling framework that was used to select participants in each country. In terms of the 10 participants target in each country, was the intent to have a mix of all stakeholders in each country. It seems that in some countries, some stakeholder groups did not respond. Or is it that partners have more established links with some stakeholder groups in some countries, thus affected the overall response.

- There was no indication of whether the survey was pilot tested or translated to another language (was that needed given that respondents were from several countries)

- Given that the survey was distributed to diverse respondents, it would be useful to report findings by type respondent as this may impact their views and perception on some questions.

- The survey was administered online and as such informed consent would have been challenging. What measures did the authors take to maintain respondent confidentiality? The limesurvey application includes a page that shows which respondents completed the survey which may have some ethical implications. Was the protocol for the study approved by an ethical review committee / board?

- How can authors explain about the partially completed surveys

- While around 90% of respondents stated that they knew what systematic review was, it would be useful to reflect on why only about 60% has used evidence from systematic reviews to inform decisions

- Around 38% of respondents said that the grading systems should be the same for clinical and health system decisions. It would be good to mention about the characteristics of respondents. The same applies for those who indicated that different grading systems should be used

- The conclusion can be strengthened by discussing about next steps for this work including user testing and the application of the framework to health system decisions. And if / how the results of this survey will inform user testing and further application of framework to decisions, hence the final selection of criteria included in the framework

**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