Reviewer's report

Title: Building Capacity for Knowledge Translation and Communication across Schools of Public Health in East and Central Africa

Version: 1
Date: 28 January 2014

Reviewer: Wanja Mwaura-Tenambergen

Reviewer's report:

General comments:

This manuscript presents important findings on the capacity of higher learning institutions in their role in translating knowledge into evidence-based solutions for better policy making in the health sector in East and Central African countries. The paper is well written and authors have adequately answered key questions with regard to institutional capacity. The research question in this study is new in the context of East and Central Africa where there has been little information documented on the capacity of various Schools of Public Health to conduct KT activities. The research question is well defined and clear.

As I read this manuscript, I would like to mention that I am not deeply read on the concepts of knowledge translation that the authors draw upon and therefore I may not be I cannot judge how well this paper builds on past research.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Methods

1. The authors did not describe the inclusion criteria of the respondents, e.g. paragraph 2 line 4 “….staff within the institution who has a stake or interest in HSR...” Was it just because they were part of the institution or what selection criteria was used to include them in the study? This could have potential selection bias and therefore difficulties in comparing results from the different SPHs. Suggestion: include inclusion criteria.

Results

1. It is not clear what the authors meant by “leadership support” in this study. Is it at individual or the institutional level support? Another term is the "communication staff". Are these staff researchers themselves or another cadre of staff within the SPHs? Suggestion: For clarity, include operational definition of these terminologies "leadership support", and "communication staff"

2. Use of only one primary data collection tool “self-assessment” in this study could pose a bias - bearing in mind that the respondents were to grade their own institution performance. For example, paragraph 7: Research uptake: it would be interesting to know through the key informant interview results, why the linkage between SPH and media was scored very low (1.3) yet media campaigns have been documented as tools in promoting health policies. Suggestion: Results from
key informant interviews and document review would enrich the study findings.

3. The sample size of some of the SPHs was too small in some institutions e.g. National University of Rwanda School of Public Health, Rwanda (4 respondents), and University of Nairobi, School of Public Health, Kenya (5 respondents) and therefore the results may not be a representation of the SPH’s capacity to conduct KT activities. Suggestion: Add an explanation on how the study has managed this.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The authors have used different names and abbreviations of the study institutions e.g. CPHMS in one part, Jimma in another paragraph and different in the Tables. Suggestion: Be consistent in use of names or abbreviation throughout the write including Tables for ease of reference.

2. Results paragraph 5: last line add respectively

Paragraph 7: typo range should be 3.0 and not 30.

3. Paragraph 2: List the names of the four SPH ....

4. List of abbreviations used – check capitalization of full names.

Discretionary Revisions

1. Recommendations: Other than institutional capacity, I think there is need to develop strategies to improve individual researcher’s capacity to translate knowledge as indicated in your results Table 3 particularly for Nairobi and Kigali.

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"