Reviewer's report

Title: Climate for Evidence Informed Health Systems Policymaking in Cameroon and Uganda before and after the Introduction of Knowledge Translation Platforms: a Structured Review of Governmental Policy Documents

Version: 1 Date: 26 September 2014

Reviewer: Kathryn Oliver

Reviewer's report:

In general, this is an interesting paper which uses a clear method to investigate a well-defined problem. The generation and analysis of empirical data to assess the attempts to increase evidence-use in policy decision-making, especially in LMICs, is important and useful. There are a number of excellent points made, and I like the approach of examining the problem of evidence-use in policy using such a holistic framework. I recommend some minor essential and minor discretionary revisions.

Minor Essential Revisions:

Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

Yes, although as I state below, I think it should be moved and expanded a bit.

Are the methods appropriate and well described and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

1. Some more detail about the policy science analytical framework would be welcome. I see there is a reference under “Design” on p7, but some description of what it is, why you chose it and how you’ve used it would be good.

2. Methods para 2, I would like here a bit more justification of your approach, e.g your statement starting “we posited that the appraisal of governance patterns….” Could be added to to explain how this is more than a proxy measure. Alternatively, this could be dealt with in the discussion.

3. Design, para 1. I’m not sure what a prescriptive thematic analysis is – if there is a reference you could provide and a brief description that would be helpful.

4. Coding procedures, para 1. Sentence starting “research was broadly defined to include..” - I am not sure I understand this, particularly the “system”. Please clarify.

5. Qualitative data analysis, (ii) (iii) (iv): Please explain why these keywords are not the same as in panel 1.

6. Qualitative interpretation of changes and explanatory factors: “constantly” – perhaps “iteratively”? It would be good to expand here on this sentence – which
strategies specifically. And perhaps a good place to explain how you are planning to use the Policy Sciences Analytical Framework.

7. The description of the data collection and analysis procedures are well-documented. During the results there are frequent referrals to comparisons across countries and over time/ between time periods. I would like to see (a) why you have chosen 2001-2006 and 2007-2012 as units of analysis (b) a description of the time frame of the study and how it is used in the analysis. Sometimes developments are charted by the year and at other times in the blocks described above. In Background, para 2, at the end of this paragraph you ask “are the KTPs established since 2006…etc”. This is a good research question, and as such probably belongs at the end of the introduction where you could use it to explain the two time-period design.

Are the data sound and well controlled?

Yes, I think so. A few points:

1. Results, The context in which the governmental policy documents were developed: I like the ‘formulation’ and ‘preparatory phases’ as analytical concepts but I’m not sure precisely what they refer to. Presumably these are distinct from the time periods 2001-06 and 07-12 – could you explain what they are.

2. Institutions featuring the climate for EIHSP: not “featuring” but “creating” or “playing a role in” or similar? (ditto the next few section headings). Also in this section: “tensions were described” – this sounds like you’re reporting a qualitative interview. Described by whom? “Inappropriate access” – bit of a value judgment. “New Public Management: - this needs referencing and a proper explanation.

3. Ideas featuring the climate of EIHSP: “Manifestations and determinants of poverty were richly described by populations” - not sure this is what you mean. Ditto, “in Uganda, traditions and cultural mindsets were underscored” – not clear to me.

4. Interpretive synthesis: I would like to see some more details here to back up some of your statements. E.g. para 4: “Business rankins had sehd ligh on poor performance…” How? How were linkages made explicit? What mechanisms were established? Etc.

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

Yes

Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

1. I would like to see more discussion about your findings in the context of other work, much of which you cited. E.g. a comparison with Simon Innvaer’s 2009 paper in which he conducts a documentary analysis of official Norwegian reports would be illuminating in terms of methodological strengths and weaknesses, but
also the meaning of your own findings. In the section “Findings in relation to other studies” I think you show the additional contribution of your study in terms of scope, but I would be interested in your comments especially on two topics: 1. The relationship between the number of citations in policy documents and the attitude of policymakers to evidence (you are assuming a positive correlation, but I’m not sure you’ve shown this in the study) and 2. The lack of systematic reviews and evidence syntheses (which you attribute to lack of access, but I don’t see why this would apply to syntheses and not other types of research).

2. In the thorough limitations section, I’d like to see if you made any attempt to address the first point. The second point, not sure I understand it.

3. I would also be interested in your thoughts on the meaning of your results with respect to the wider effectiveness of knowledge translation programmes and initiatives, as this could be seen as an attempt to evaluate K+ more widely!

Minor Discretionary Revisions:

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

Yes.

Is the writing acceptable?

1. In general the writing is of an acceptable standard. There are a few cases where the meaning is not 100% clear to me, due to slightly ambiguous terminology. For example, the term ‘featured’ is used regularly, but sometimes means ‘showed’, or ‘displayed’, or “described” (e.g. background para 2, results para 3,

2. Similarly, there are a few mentions of “poorly referenced” policy documents. This sounds like a value judgment, and would probably be better replaced by a neutral unambiguous term like ‘sparsely’. There are a few cases like this – e.g. Abstract, “use of evidence … has remained poor overtime” (should be over time); p21, “degrees of rationality” and “enduring undervalue of evidence” are both value-judgments which personally I would try and avoid, as it implies there is a right and wrong way of doing things.

3. A few instances in particular would bear revisiting:

4. Abstract: Global and national health stakeholders shall raise the profile (suggest ‘should’?)

5. Background para 2. Quote starting “research evidence is not valued” – who is this from?

6. Background para 3. Sentence starting “on the contrary” – Not sure we disagree with Liverani et al, and this sentence is a bit unclear.

7. Background para 5: could you reference the policy sciences analytical framework here, and explain what it is? This would also be a good place to move
your research question too.

8. Methods para 2: last sentence “bodes well” – perhaps “suggestive of”?

9. Results para 3: Sentence including “validated” – not sure what this means.

10. Results para 5: “poverty rate”, perhaps “poverty level”?

11. Interpretive synthesis para 5: ‘skewed’, not “eschewed” I think?

12. “Findings in relation to other studies”, para 1: Sentence starting “our results elucidate the currency of calls” is not clear.

13. Implications for researchers, sentence starting “Integrating evidence” – word missing?

14. Acronyms should be spelt out in full the first time only – a few have slipped through the net.

15. Finally, hyphenating some phrases might make some aspects clearer, e.g. evidence-informed decision-making, problem-solving, F-test, but that is a personal preference!

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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