Author's response to reviews

Title: Partnering to proceed: scaling up adolescent sexual reproductive health programmes in Tanzania. Operational research into the factors that influenced local government uptake and implementation.

Authors:

Jenny Renju (jenny_komrower@yahoo.co.uk)
Maende Makokha (maemak@gmail.com)
Charles Kato (charlesfkato@yahoo.com)
Lemmy Medard (lmedard@coolgoose.com)
Bahati Andrew (bht_andrew@yahoo.com)
Pieter Remes (p.remes@sphsu.mrc.ac.uk)
John Changalucha (jchangalucha@yahoo.com)
Angela Obasi (angela.obasi@liverpool.ac.uk)

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear HARPS Editorial Team,

Thank-you very much for the chance to revise the article we sent you in the light of the comments from the reviewers.

We have made the requested revisions and below we provide a point-by-point description of the changes made in accordance with the each of the reviewers comments.

With best wishes

Jenny Renju on behalf of all the authors

Response to Reviewers
Our responses are italicised and bullet indented.

Reviewer's report
Title: Partnering to proceed: scaling up adolescent sexual reproductive health programmes in Tanzania. Operational research into the factors that influenced local government uptake and implementation.
Version: 2 Date: 1 March 2010
Reviewer: Jocelyn DeJong
Reviewer's report:
This is an important contribution to the literature on scaling up health programs that addresses the question of identifying constraints to scaling up interventions developed as a non-governmental program pilot project to a large-scale governmental program. Despite its importance, this is a topic which has not yielded a significant literature. The case in question was a multi-faceted adolescent sexual and reproductive health intervention in Tanzania that was previously evaluated through a community randomized trial. The trial found that the intervention did not improve biomedical outcomes, but did improve knowledge, attitudes and reported sexual behaviors in the medium term and led to retained improved knowledge in the long-term. The paper addresses whether the preconditions for successful scaling up of such initiatives as laid out by Simmons et al are sufficient to facilitate scaling up in this case.
The topic is important because it is well-known that many interventions in this field have not been evaluated at all, but have also not been successfully scaled up. It is also significant because a key constraint to scaling up initiatives such as this one is fostering government ownership over them so that they may be incorporated within existing systems which operate at greater scale than that of non-governmental organizations.
The strength of the paper lies in the fact that there is little documentation of ASRH interventions designed for scale up through governmental programs in Sub-Saharan Africa and the researchers undertook a major multi-method assessment over a significant period of time to document and assess this process.

I recommend that the following points be addressed in revision:

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1) More detail is needed on the methods. For example, what topics were addressed in the interview and group discussions (see p. 9)?

- All the topics for each of the interview rounds and focus group discussions are listed in detail in Table 1. We have referred the reader to the table for more details.

More detail must be given so that the reader can judge whether the conclusions drawn are warranted.

2) It was not always clear what findings derived from what methods. For example, there was an important finding that in those districts where TA were able to “stand back” more governmental funding was committed to the program but it is was not clear how this was assessed (via what method, what finding).

- In most cases the findings were derived after triangulating the results from multiple methods, thereby enabling a complete picture to be presented. We have included a sentence at the beginning of the results section to further emphasize this point: “After triangulation of the data from the multiple methods various thematic areas emerged: firstly concerning the implementation of trained and supported district teams; secondly the integration of the programme into the LGA structure; thirdly the role of the technical assistants and finally the situation of activities within the National Multisectoral strategic framework. Outcomes within these thematic areas are presented here”.

- Additionally we have added the following sentence to the aforementioned point concerning the TA’s ability to stand back. “Triangulation of the observations of the NGO monthly meetings and the interviews with the district heads of department indicated that only the first TA in one of the districts was able to stand back and allow the DTS to learn from their mistakes”.

3) The identity of the research team needs to be made clear to assess potential biases – were they based in Tanzania? University team?

- We have added the following sentence “an independent team conducted the research, the team was from the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) Tanzania was led by a research coordinator from the Liverpool School of tropical Medicine.....”
4) A fundamental issue not addressed at all is whether there were major salary differentials between the NGO and governmental staff. Many of the challenges were presented as those related to scaling up but fundamentally concern NGO-government relations which are often fraught. More detail about the players involved and the background to their collaboration would be helpful.

- **The reviewer raises an interesting point, however in this instance we feel that the pay differential was of lesser significance than the fact that the TAs presence maintained the district ‘presence’, in the paper we do discuss how some of the districts felt this role should have been conducted by someone on the district pay roll, but there was no discussion of the differences in salary. On the contrary, the district officials generally fared better than the NGO paid staff when it came to allowances for meetings, workshops and travel, with the government rates being 2-3 times that of the NGO rates (depending on the Cadre of staff).**

- **Regarding NGO-government relations, this is an important theme that we discuss within the paper; specifically in regard to an inherent reliance on the NGO for implementing rather than supporting. However to further emphasize the point we have added another sentence into the intervention section to highlight the long-standing relationship the given NGO has with the programme districts.**

5) The diagrams can be improved – figures 1-3 are too full and detailed to send a meaningful message. Figure 4 is much more readable.
We agree that the figures contain a lot of information, however these serve only to provide additional information to the reader, the key information from each of the figures has been discussed in the text. Given that the other reviewer found the figures useful we feel it would be beneficial to leave them.

- **Minor Essential Revisions**
The text is slightly loose and rambling and could generally be tightened.
1) p. 9 – “Data ...were conducted.” (doesn’t make sense – needs rewording)
- We have addressed the typos and have tightened up the language throughout the paper.

2) p. 10 “Data on ...were more likely to indicate the quality of integration...” (the meaning is unclear – do you mean data on this type of integration revealed more? Needs rewording).
- We have reworded this paragraph (page 10) to clarify the meaning.

3) Too many acronyms are used in this paper – it becomes confusing for the reader. These should be very selective.
- We have checked through the list and reduced the number of acronyms e.g. ToR terms of reference and MoU for Memorandum of Understanding. All others are
clearly listed in an abbreviations section which we have presented at the end of the paper.

4) P. 20 “as a sub” – needs better wording
   • We have changed ‘sub’ to ‘subsidiary’

5) P. 21 – scale up ‘needs” (not need)
   • Addressed

6) Same paragraph as 5 – too long a sentence beginning “However..”
   • We have modified the sentence.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
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

Reviewer's report
Title: Partnering to proceed: scaling up adolescent sexual reproductive health programmes in Tanzania. Operational research into the factors that influenced local government uptake and implementation.
Version: 2 Date: 13 December 2009
Reviewer: Jim Todd

Reviewer's report:
This is a brave paper, that attempts to explain some of the constraints in scaling up interventions from clinical trials. These issues could, and should, be discussed at the planning stage of the research, but it is good to see this debate at this time. The question of how research results can be scaled up is extremely important, and this is an area where more reports, and papers, are needed. Adolescent sexual health programmes have been well funded by international donors mostly in response to the perceived threat of HIV to adolescents. Multi-sectoral collaboration has been encouraged in Tanzania, and this intervention brings together many different sectors in local government. But despite these push factors, this paper shows that the programme has not been integrated into local government activities. This is an important paper as it highlights the scale up of a programme is more than just a large-scale version of the original trial, and requires ownership and buy-in at many different levels. The methods used here are well described, and can be used by other projects wishing to scale up the results.
The manuscript is well written, and uses both quantitative, and qualitative data
Points for consideration (discretionary recommendations):

Authorship. For a paper like this, which needs to bring in the views of donors, implementers from the NGO, and the local governments that will deliver the program in the future, I would have thought an author from the local governments would be beneficial and useful.

- We agree that it would have been interesting and potentially fruitful to write this paper with a local government official, however we also feel that this could have compromised the objectivity of the report. In the paper the district workers were key informants to the data. Further it would have been logistically challenging to involve the districts in the writing process owing to the physical distance between the authors and the district officials and their lack of access to the internet. However the qualitative nature of the study did allow for detailed discussions of the researcher observations with the different district officials over time and these discussions certainly enriched the information. We have duly acknowledged the district officials for their work and their contributions to this research in the appropriate section.

The MkV team trained an impressive number of teachers and health facility workers in ASRH education. It would be nice to have the views from LGA as to whether and when it would be possible to integrate this training into regular teacher training, and health worker training programmes in Tanzania? This would make the training more sustainable, more efficient, and less onerous, which in turn might improve the interaction with the district staff.

- This has already taken place and has been reported on elsewhere (papers forthcoming), e.g. lessons from the MkV health component were used to inform the development of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare’s youth friendly service training. Also further the lessons from the education sector have been used to inform the UNESCO led development of the pre-service teacher training. Whilst pre-service training is vital for increasing the coverage, refresher training and continued supervision will still be fundamental should such interventions become integrated and sustained over a longer period of time, and this paper provides lessons to inform such processes.

The results mention the mismatch in timetables, and the effect of delays in the project funds, but do not say what the financial mismatch might be. How much were the MkV funds compared to the district budget for education and health? I would have liked to have seen more on the roles of local government officials, to see whether, and how, they would have taken on such an intervention. One of the quotes does indicate that districts thought they could take on the project, and role of TA, but it is unclear what the barriers were to them doing this when presented with the opportunity.
• We have clarified the roles of the different district officials (DTS and the heads of departments), at two different points in the paper, highlighting that all DTS and HoDs had official responsibilities that aligned themselves with the MkV activities.

More information on the interviews and meetings with the head of departments, CHAC, DACC and other district officials. The details of the topics has been presented in table 1 for ease of reference.

In the discussion, it would be good to have more on the role of the TA. It seems these are crucial to the success of this kind of scaling up, and yet initially they did not have terms of reference, or even specific training for the job. Reading between the lines it seems the success of the TA was not something that was initially seen in the NGO, and perhaps there were tensions between what the NGO wanted them to do, and what the districts would have liked to have done with the TA. I think this may need a little more development in the discussion.

• Agreed, the reviewer’s interpretation of the paper is very much in line with the situation as we found and subsequently presented it. We have added further clarification in the text.

The list of abbreviations at the end of the paper was very useful as there are a lot of acronyms, and it is nice to have these explained in one place. However some have been missed, eg RTS, TCHR (perhaps also AMREF and ASRH) and it would be good to have these listed in alphabetical order, or some other order which enables easy scanning. Perhaps having one abbreviation per line would also help when quickly scanning the list.

• We have added the missing acronyms and listed them alphabetically to aid rapid scanning.

Table 2 has several training outcomes as Rate Ratios and 95% CI. While these are interesting, they don’t seem to be mentioned in the text, or given a reference where they can be looked up and more details found. The reader may be left puzzled as to how they were measured, what the favourable responses were, and the relevance of this to the bigger picture within the districts. These training outcomes might be removed, and/or referenced to papers which adequately describe the way they were conducted.

• We have removed the above mentioned details. We have produced another paper which details the training outcomes, this has been accepted subject to minor revisions, and we are currently making these revisions and will be resubmitting the paper later this month. In the text we have said the paper is forthcoming, we can add in the actual reference when proof reading the final pdf version of this paper prior to final publication.

Minor essential revisions
Results: Financial integration. I wonder if the sentence “This together with the
funding delays discussed above meant that the NGO could support District inclusion of MkV2 activities into districts annual plans prior to their submission for National level approval.” Should have been “could not” rather than “could”

We have changed this.

Table 1 is unreadable at present, as several lines are over-printed on each other.

• Addressed

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest 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 have had no financial interest in this work, and have had no reimbursements from authors, or any organisation which has financial interest in the publication of this paper.

I am currently working with a different project within National Institute for Medical Research, Mwanza, Tanzania, and know the authors professionally.

I did work on the first Mema kwa Vijana study in 1997-2000, which was the trial that led on to the concept of the study reported in this paper.

I have no competing interests, either financial or non-financial, with this paper.