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

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.

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.

- 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)

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).

3) Too many acronyms are used in this paper – it becomes confusing for the reader. These should be very selective.

4) P. 20 “as a sub” – needs better wording

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

6) Same paragraph as 5 – too long a sentence beginning “However..”

**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