Reviewer’s report

Title: Household food access and child malnutrition: Results from the eight-country MAL-ED Study

Version: 1 Date: 12 May 2012

Reviewer: lawrence L. haddad

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

The contribution of the paper is to show that the household food access insecurity score (HFAIS) (a) is feasible and acceptable to collect in its original form in diverse settings, (b) at a pooled level is associated, within a multiple regression framework, with HAZ. I like the paper, but...

The paper implies (not explicitly) that the magnitude and significance of the relationship between the HFAIS and ZHA is similar in all countries (lines 225-227: "did not vary significantly"), I assume an F test was conducted comparing a model with and without the 7 country dummies interacted with HFAIS (please be clearer), which rejects the interaction model at 0.17 (again I am guessing). This is quite a weak test-- would some of the interaction terms would be significant individually even if as a group they are not? Can we seem some more exploration of this or is the power too low? Can we at least see the regression with the interaction terms included? This is important because we want to know if the index works better in some contexts than others in identifying children at risk of growth faltering.

Minor Essential Revisions

Pls explain why the final model is better than the full model.

Discretionary Revisions

I would also like to see some more discussion of why the ZWH estimated coefficients on HFAIS were not significant.

It would be good to get a better sense of the magnitude of the results on ZHA (elasticities perhaps?) and also in relation to other studies using some version of the HFAIS which aim to link to anthro.

I did not find the diagrams helpful, I would drop them.

Conclusion

Accept, but after compulsory changes made... they really should also make the discretionary ones, but I suppose OK if they do not...
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests: 
none