Author’s response to reviews

**Title:** Maternal and Perinatal Health Research Priorities beyond 2015: an international survey and prioritization exercise

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**Version:** 2  
**Date:** 11 July 2014

**Author’s response to reviews:** see over
Dear Editors,

Many thanks for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript. I wish also thank the reviewers for theirs suggestions, which certainly contributed to improve the report of our experience with prioritization of global research needs in maternal and perinatal health. I have answered the reviewers below and revised the manuscript, as I considered appropriate.

The referee 1 did not suggest any major compulsory revision and I hope to have complied satisfactorily with the minor essential revisions. I hope also to have performed enough changes and clarifications to satisfy most of the discretionary revisions.

The referee 2 states that is not certain whether the manuscript should be presented in its current format and suggested that it should be published as commentary in the Lancet. I respectfully disagree with this view. We have used the Lancet journal to report other similar exercises, but the group considers important to report all the process in order to ensure greater transparency in the research prioritization process. Considering the methodological aspects of this exercise (which require a detailed description such as we provided), I hope the editor will agree with us and see the value of reporting the research prioritization process in maternal and perinatal health the way we did.

The referee 3 approved the manuscript the way it was originally submitted and we are grateful for his assessment.

I have published several papers with the reproductive journal and other BMC journals; many of them have fortunately achieved a highly accessed status or resulted in several citations. By the nature of this manuscript, I am confident that this manuscript will achieve a similar success and be influential in inspiring researchers around the world to conduct research that fills knowledge gaps important to ensure progress towards ending maternal deaths and improvements of women’s and child health.

Sincerely yours,

Joao Paulo Souza

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Referee 1

Major Compulsory Revisions: None

**JPS: Thank you!**

Minor Essential Revisions:

- In the Discussion section:
  - The first and third paragraphs highlight that the research questions mainly focus on ‘Implementation research of existing effective interventions,’ yet there is no mention of what these existing interventions include. At minimum, I would suggest giving a few
examples...

**JPS:** changed accordingly

- **Training and awareness** – recurring theme that deserves more prominence in conclusions (including in the abstract)

  **JPS:** we avoided giving specific examples in the conclusion and, for the same reason, in the conclusion of the abstract because it would be difficult to establish clear criteria for highlighting one or another theme in that section. This theme is emphasized though in the text and abstract.

- When looking at the top 20 questions, cost-effectiveness seems to be a recurring theme. This could be elaborated on in the Discussion.

  **JPS:** changed accordingly

- In the third paragraph of the Discussion, it says, “It is no surprise that priority questions focused on the implementation/delivery of known interventions...Health systems research had the second most research questions...” Can the authors expand on this and offer their theories about why this is now the focus? Are these research priorities the same or different from the research priorities of the previous decade? Is this more of the same or are we at a different juncture?

  **JPS:** changed accordingly

**Discretionary Revisions:**

1. In the second paragraph of the Background section, it would be useful to include a citation in support of the statement, “Despite this relatively slow progress, it is widely believed that the interventions needed to reduce MMR.... already exist.”

  **JPS:** a reference to the statement was added.

2. In the Methods section (paragraph two, last sentence), it seems that recent Cochrane reviews could have also been consulted for developing a list of research questions. Was this considered? Perhaps the lack of science discovery questions could be attributed to the selective processes that were undertaken for identifying additional research questions.

  **JPS:** WHO has released guidelines on major causes of maternal mortality that were based essentially on the Cochrane Reviews. Research priorities identified through guideline development (and Cochrane reviews indirectly) were considered.

3. In the Results section, it would be helpful to know more about the stakeholders/researchers that participated in this exercise. Could you provide a breakdown of researchers vs. program managers vs. policy makers vs. donors, etc? Proportion of participants from developed vs. developing countries? Given that this is the largest exercise for research prioritization, involving a very large group of participants (as described in the Discussion), it seems important to discuss the composition of this group in greater detail. Any information that would suggest varying research priorities by participant type?
4. Last paragraph of Results section: Suggest replacing HDP with ‘hypertensive disorders of pregnancy’ for easier reading of paper.

JPS: Changed accordingly

5. With regard to the Discussion of the discovery questions (or lack of), an additional explanation is that some stakeholders are simply not aware of some of the new technologies that are in earlier phases of development/exploration. Thus, when asked to list research questions, they tend to focus on the technologies that they know about. Furthermore, the goal of this exercise was described as “to identify research questions with the potential to have an impact between 2015 and 2025” (second sentence of Methods). Was this goal/timeframe shared with the participants? If so, then it would make sense why so few questions were discovery questions. I would suggest clarifying this point in the methods/discussion. I also wonder if current funding streams (i.e. abortion or FP-related research) influence responses in this exercise. This could be added to the discussion.

JPS: I added the following sentences in the discussion: “An additional explanation is that some stakeholders are simply not aware of some of the new technologies that are in earlier phases of development. Thus, when asked to list research questions, they could focus on the technologies that they know about.”

6. Themes vs. Top priority questions (table 1 vs. table 2): I was curious to see that the terms ‘prevention’ and ‘treatment' were not included as themes under “Obstetric Hemorrhage” and “Hypertensive Disorders of Pregnancy” (prevention is included under HDP). Yet, the priority research questions under Table 2 include these terms ‘prevent’ and ‘treat’ in reference to hemorrhage. Were these terms not commonly found in participants’ responses?

JPS: Yes, they occasionally appeared.

Referee 2

Title: Maternal and Perinatal Health Research Priorities beyond 2015: an international survey and prioritization exercise

Version: 1

Date: 3 March 2014

Reviewer: Sennen Hounton

Reviewer's report:

Dear Editor,

I am not sure this exercise is worth a full publication in a scientific journal such as this one, but maybe a commentary to contribute to the post 2015 agenda. Although there is merit to find research questions at global level to advance a particular field, or build the evidence based for particular interventions, maternal and perinatal remains a health system issue which is predicated
upon and impacted by wider sociocultural determinants including gender inequalities, and hence will primarily remain contextual. I will respectfully request the authors submit a much shorter version as commentary to the Lancet.

Best regards

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: No competing interest

JPS: I respectfully disagree. We have used the Lancet journal to report other exercises, but the group considers important to report all the process in order to increase transparency of the research prioritization process. I hope the editor will agree with us and see the value of reporting in details this exercise.

Referee 3


Review report: 1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined? The question is not new but is well defined and deserves attention given the need to address post-2015 approaches and strategies.

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

The CHNRI method is well recognized and standard. I applaud the authors attempt to use such a complex method in this article given the enormous amount of data that needed to be filtered to make the exercise meaningful.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

Yes, found no issue with the approach. I agree the phased approach to narrowing down relevant research questions and efforts to reduce bias among the participants.

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

Yes.

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

Absolutely. The method of using such a large and diverse group of participants including researchers, stakeholders, policy makers etc. adds validity to the exercise and results seen.

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

Yes.

7. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes.

JPS: Thank you!