Reviewer's report

Title: A Cluster-Randomized, Placebo-controlled, Maternal Vitamin A or Beta-Carotene Supplementation Trial in Bangladesh: Design, Methods and Innovations

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Reviewer: Betty Kirkwood

Reviewer's report:

This paper contains a detailed description of the field methods used in the clearly excellent conduct of the very large JiVitA trial in Bangladesh, and shares the experience behind the choices of methods. It will be extremely useful to any newcomers to field epidemiology or as a teaching example. Such details are rarely published which I consider to be a real pity and a major gap in the literature between the outline protocol (which I'm delighted that Trials publishes) and the brief description of the methods operationalising the protocol that is included in paper presenting the trial findings. I therefore strongly recommend publication but would like to suggest the authors make the following revisions in order to make this a definitive paper of field methods for their trial:

Minor and essential:

1. Clarification/additions of the following:
   a. Exact points at which consent is asked – it's mentioned in the text at enrolment to the trial and at the 3 month postpartum (PP) visit. But is it also asked when compiling the roster, carrying out pregnancy surveillance or at the 6 month PP visit?
   b. A table of the different data collection/field activities with the number and type of staff conducting them.
   c. Rationale for choosing 5 weeks for the pregnancy surveillance interval.
   d. Details of the blocking used for the randomisation – this is included in the paper with trial findings which coincidentally I have also been asked to review.

2. Rewrite of the conclusions section – at present this is brief and includes a summary of why the JiVitA trial was necessary and where it was done. This does not seem to me to be conclusions of this paper on field methods at all. The title promises “Design, Methods and Innovations” – at present the innovations are not made explicit – I would recommend that the Conclusions section is rewritten to list the innovations and lessons learnt.

Level of interest: An article of importance 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 declare that I have no competing interests