Reviewer's report

Title: Analyzing the sources and nature of influence: How the Avahan program used evidence to influence HIV/AIDS prevention policy in India

Version: 2 Date: 15 October 2012

Reviewer: Stephen Mills

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

- Literature review needs to be more comprehensive; For example, there is evidence that development partners have little impact on host country polices and practices – this is not noted.
- The authors note that research evidence is disseminated only through peer-review publications and scientific meetings. This is a limited view of research dissemination. New research evidence can and should appear in revisions of standard operating procedures (SOP), trainings, trainings, and policy formulations. This should be cited in the paper.
- While the authors discuss the influence of “research and studies,” they do not mention the influence of surveillance data. Indeed, AVAHAN invested significant funding into what was called the Integrated Bio-Behavioral Assessment (IBBA), a type of surveillance surveys that provided partners with info on HIV/STI prevalence, risk behaviors, and the impact of interventions. It is hard to tell whether respondents in this study were asked about the IBBA and its influence or whether this was somehow skipped over. The authors should specifically discuss this.
- The authors sometimes have a naïve view of development. For example, on page 7, they use a quote from the interviews saying that AVAHAN was successful because states asked AVAHAN to extend their programs there. We know that governments ask for programs sometimes because it means financial resources for the government, not because of any commitment to the interventions. The paper needs to be more self-critical.
- During the initial discussion in the Results section, the authors correctly mention that the time period of the mid 2000s there was substantial debate regarding the size and trajectory of the HIV epidemic in India. However, the authors do not cite any details of this, namely, that there was debate over whether India should initiate substantial “general population-based” interventions vs. those appropriate in a concentrated epidemic. This should be elaborated on more fully.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

none

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.