Reviewer's report

Title: Innovative approaches for improving maternal and newborn health - A landscape analysis

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Reviewer: Robert Fryatt

Reviewer's report:

This is a very broad analysis of new interventions to improve maternal and newborn health. It is largely well laid out and provides a good summary of a complex area. It is well written, with clear objectives and recognizes many of the limitations of this form of broad analysis. The paper would be suitable for publication but requires some amendments and clarifications:

Major revisions

1. Breadth of review. The authors have chosen a very broad definition of “innovation” so the scope of their review and analysis is very wide, ranging from new technology to public-private partnerships. This means that no single area is reviewed in any depth. This can be useful in reviewing the “landscape” as the title suggests, and reflects what many countries and health service managers are faced with when wanting to keep up with the latest evidence. However, the authors should reflect more in the discussion and conclusion on how such a huge amount of accumulating knowledge should be managed and be made more accessible to those that need to know.

2. Conceptual framework and HIS / ICT: This is partly based on the WHO building blocks but the building block on health information is missing. This is not explained. It also brings a major gap in the analysis as all the very many ‘innovative’ interventions related to new information technology and ehealth is not included in the review. This gap should be addressed either by including a review of these innovative technologies or explain why this was not included (for example perhaps it was omitted because it has been covered extensively elsewhere).

3. Quality improvement: Paper suggests that this is an “innovation” but in fact this is routine management of MNH services, or should be. Would be more useful to pick up new ways in which QI initiatives have been introduced or successively scaled up.

4. Discussion: this currently has a considerable commentary on specific interventions, which overlaps with the results sections and the accompanying tables and appendices. The authors should restructure so that the results covers the summary commentary on innovative interventions, grouped by building block, and keep the discussion section for generic and cross-cutting issues, such as knowledge management and dissemination.
Minor revisions

1. Summary text on equity: not clear and requires review
2. Use of the term “innovation”: the authors provide a definition earlier in the paper, but then go on to use the word ‘innovation’ in a very loose way, with phrases about “innovative” implementation and “innovative” evaluation. This should be amended so that the term is only used as defined.
3. Use of bracketing when describing studies, for example (controlled) RCTs is confusing and should be removed or made clear. The Term cRCT and RCT is used in the paper, yet Annex B does not clarify difference.
4. LMIC needs clearer definition (‘Low and Middle Income’ or ‘Lower Middle Income’)
5. Search criteria – not clear if this was only English language papers or not (important as resulted in very few from Latin America – not clear if this is a language issue or due to less papers)
6. Could comment more on the level of rigour of studies (usefully supplied in results tables) in different categories (workforce, technology etc) and why this is the case.
7. List of interventions in supplementary annex. Useful list but some are far too broad or oddly stand-alone – for example under Governance one intervention is “health system reform”. Another lists a case study on health extension workers as one intervention; the introduction of community health workers has much more written about it than one case study.

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