Reviewer’s report

Title: Demand-side financing for maternal and newborn health: what do we know about factors that affect implementation of cash transfers and voucher programmes?

Version: 0 Date: 21 May 2016

Reviewer: Ayesha De Costa

Reviewer's report:

The article is a review of factors influencing the implementation of demand side financing programs.

While I appreciate alot of work has gone into this review, and the authors must be commended for this, here are some concerns/areas for improvement:

If the studies are overall of poor quality, then it defeats the purpose of this review. The authors say that there are insights to be gained despite this (not really clear how if they are weak/ lack validity). That would make one question the validity of the exercise and whether it really can contribute anything to furthering understanding beyond what is already written up in the weak studies.

I found it hard to see what this review contributed, ot

The findings are not new - one would not expect them to be, many are rather intuitive. Researchers/ program managers/ policy makers working in this area are familiar with most of these. Importantly, one would expect a synthesis like this to provide more than a listing. (see point about frameworks below). Also a number of the factors that are barriers to implementation are extremely context specific and are not really valid in other settings. The review puts some of these together without enough reference to the contexts in which they specifically were problems.

If the aim is to support policy makers, it would be helpful to conceive a more appropriate framework in which to present the results. For example: Would be useful to look at this from a health systems perspective and place different factors in different segments of health system utilization. There possibly are a number of frameworks in which to fit these results and present them more comprehensively than a listing at different levels which is less helpful.
The division of factors is somewhat arbitrary, some of what is presented under stakeholder perspectives are clearly barriers. Would suggest that the authors look for a more comprehensive framework within which to 'hang' together the results, so that they are not placed in arbitrary categories but form a synthesized 'whole'.

Limitations: the low quality of studies that authors had to use for their synthesis is mentioned early in the paper. Will be good to discuss more on this section on what exactly these limitations were and how they might influence the outputs of this synthesis. What did the authors expect to include in their synthesis that they could not find because of low quality?

Minor comments:

What is the Johanna Briggs institute method? Why just this method? Are there others? What are the strengths of this method vis-à-vis others?

Expand on the SURE framework in the methods - bit more detail explaining what it is.

Why was JSY not considered a conditional cash transfer? It is conditional upon facility birth.

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**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

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If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

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