Reviewer's report

Title: Challenges and Opportunities Associated with Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Intersectoral Integration Programs

Version: 3
Date: 14 December 2014

Reviewer: Giuseppina Ortu

Reviewer's report:

Manuscript / Public Health Research article
Elizabeth A Johnston, Jordan Teague and Jay P Graham BMC
'Challenges and Opportunities Associated with Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Intersectoral Integration Programs'

Opinion of the reviewer:
An article of importance in its field

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

General comment:
The paper is relevant for the field and certainly it would be good to publish it after revision; however it seems that interesting comments from the interviewees could have been exploited a bit more by those that have performed the interviews. It seems that a lot of information and/or opinions were somehow not explicitly expressed, and the authors did not take the advantage of in-depth interviews to further investigate. I see this paper as a missed opportunity to further discuss important points with those people that accepted to be interviewed. Whether this result is due to a limited amount of time the interviewer had for each interview or to the unwillingness of the interviewees to discuss further certain issues, it is not clear. A more in-depth discussion and critical approach may help the manuscript, and the impact of this investigation, at least for some of the aspects mentioned by the interviewees.

1) Figure 1 is mentioned but it does not appear in the downloaded document – please enclose it for review.

2) The manuscript does not specify what type of stakeholders where interviewed: were they from pharmaceutical companies, charities, international health organizations, academic institutions? And mainly did the authors interview representatives of the Ministry of Health involved in NTD control and WASH programmes? It is important to highlight which stakeholders were interviewed and why, and if some of the major stakeholders were not included, the reason for
excluding them. These details should appear in the methods, and at the moment there are no details. Overall, it seems from the manuscript that actually representatives of the Ministry of Health or Water and Sanitation were not included in this type of investigation, and that the paper is simply investigating what major donors think about integration and what type of barriers they encountered, without actually looking at the country representatives’ prospective. If this was the aim of the investigation, then in the objectives the authors should somehow explain that this investigation was meant to be targeting major international stakeholder that are in charge of delivering aid support, and not investigating the barriers from the beneficiaries’ prospective (which are also part of the stakeholder arena, and definitely those that are the most affected by barriers to NTD and WASH integration). I would suggest the authors to add at least the criteria of selection for this investigation and review the objectives of this manuscript, if representatives of in country stakeholders are not included.

3) I would recommend adding as supporting information the outline of the semi-structured interview, and the questionnaire posed to each interviewed person at the end of the interview.

4) The discussion somehow does not go into a deep analysis of the answers provided within the manuscript. For instance:

Line 159: “This is a challenge, the WASH organizations have their own objectives, their own goals” This point is relevant and in the discussion there is no comment about this. What does it mean? This topic could be elaborated or better, further questions should have been asked to the interviewees to develop this point.

Line 250 on lack of information sharing. Also, did the interviewers ask the reason why information is not shared?

Line 326, one of the interviewee states that: “For the water sectors their measure of impact has primarily focused on coverage rather than utilization”. This is an extremely relevant point to discuss and to further investigate. From my modest experience, I can say that even when integration is done, and WASH activities are done, the measuring of the impact only via coverage can completely hide the wide problem of the general absence of follow up in WASH programmes, which should include monitoring the usage of water and sanitation structures after delivering them to the community, following up the maintenance of these structures in place, and community engagement in this part of the programme. The authors did not even comment on this line which I believe is relevant and should be addressed and commented in the discussion.

Another point is the disproportionate focus on medication. This is also an important point that deserves to be discussed in depth. Why do we have this disproportionate focus on mass drug administration? Is this relevant when there is high disease prevalence? Does the focus on mass drug administration decrease or change when the prevalence of disease decreases and in this case would integration with WASH make a difference? Mass drug administration is
important as it decreases morbidity but its importance depends on the context and on the disease burden. This issue has not been discussed and in an in–depth interview, opinion of interviewees should have been requested.

Line 274: “Something needs to change higher up…” - What does it mean? The authors should have asked a bit more about this statement.

I would expect the authors to comment a bit more on the above. The discussion seems to be more a repetition of the results than some sort of further evaluation. Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

Table 4 has the list of the position covered by interviewees. In the “Limitations” paragraph the authors acknowledge the lower number of field staff interviewed as limitation. This is a very important factor that can bias the whole investigation. Field personnel could have a completely different prospective from personnel at the headquarters level and, possibly, a more bottom-up prospective of these issues because of their work in the community. Wouldn't be worthwhile to have more people to interview from this group before publishing this manuscript?

- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Line 289 – educational advocacy for whom? Stakeholders or beneficiaries? I think this should be clarified.

Line 311 - who is “them”?

**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