Author’s response to reviews

Title: Successful Programmatic Approaches to Facilitating IUD Uptake: CARE's Experience in DRC

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Author’s response to reviews:

Response to reviewers:

(please note that line references from reviewers correspond to the original submission, while lines referenced in our response correspond to the revised manuscript)

Editor Comments:

The authors have addressed some of the comments by reviewers but some issues remain. These are outlined below for the authors to consider.

A. GENERAL COMMENTS

1) In most cases, the authors start by using an abbreviation (e.g. DRC, FGD) and then defining what the abbreviation stands for much later in the text. The rule is usually that the abbreviation should be defined the first time it is used with the abbreviated form in
parentheses, after which the abbreviated form can be in subsequent text without defining it again.

Response: This has been addressed for the abbreviations. For FDGs and IDI, we chose to not abbreviate in the main text and made revisions accordingly.

2) Introduction:
   a) The authors state that their aim in the paper is to identify the reasons for the high IUD uptake under the project (second last paragraph, page 5, lines 133-140). However, as noted below, this does not come out clearly from the way the findings are presented. In other words, the way the findings are presented do not show a clear link between the program’s activities, the factors the activities influenced, and whether such influence translated into actual use of IUD. For the authors to confidently say that they examined the reasons for high IUD uptake under the project, that link needs to be clear (see more explanation below under comments on results).

Response: We appreciate this input and have addressed this in the results and discussion sections accordingly.

   b) The hypothesis as stated (last paragraph, page 5, lines 142-148) also does not show any relationship to program activities. The hypothesis here ought to have been formulated along such lines as “… by doing abc, the program positively influenced xyz, which in turn contributed to improved uptake of IUD.” In that way, the hypothesized relationship between the program activities, the indicators the program influenced, and the outcome is very clear, and will even make it easy to understand the theory of change presented later on in the paper.

Response: We appreciate the editor’s perspective on how to clearly connect the hypothesis to the findings and have revised this section accordingly.

3) Methods:
   a) An issue raised by one of the reviewers and which has not been adequately addressed is the nature of selection of project sites (page 10, lines 271-274). The authors state that four sites were randomly selected and then those sites that were not accessible were replaced with accessible sites with similar characteristics. As the reviewer noted, this is no longer random selection but purposive selection of sites. Random
selection gives each site an equal chance of being selected and once selected through such an approach, the site has to be included in the study regardless of accessibility. Selecting sites based on accessibility is purposive.

Response: This has been revised accordingly in lines 272-273.

b) The description of measures to ensure confidentiality and security of the data (page 11, lines 290-294) are standard procedures that are not unique to this study and can as well be deleted.

Response: This section has been deleted.

c) On translation (page 11, lines 295-299), the authors should add a statement that there was no back-translation and give a reason for it – which in most cases is due to resource limitations in terms of time and finances. This could later on be added as one of the limitations i.e. that without back-translation, some meanings may have been lost in the process.

Response: We added a statement that back translation was not carried out and included this in the limitations.

4) Results

a) As noted by previous reviewers, this section is unnecessarily long and is still uncoordinated despite the changes made in response to the reviewers. There are too many quotes used with limited interpretation from the authors. It is not necessarily the case that every statement should be supported by a quote. The authors should not allow the quotes to take over their own interpretation of what participants said as a way of guiding the reader on the key messages of the paper. Rather, the authors should reflect on the key issues that the program influenced and how these contributed to increased uptake of IUD. Take, for instance, the case of demand for FP in general or IUD in particular, what activities did the program undertake to influence individual knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding the method(s)? How did the activities influence these attributes (e.g. increased awareness, positive attitudes, and increased demand for the methods among women)? Did changes in these
Attributes translate to increased uptake of IUD in particular and FP in general? Definitely the answer is yes, and they have some program data to support that. If the discussion around individual demand is organized along these lines, the authors will find that they only need three quotes from users to support their assertion (i.e. one on improved knowledge, another of changed attitudes, and another on increased demand for the method).

Response: We appreciate this guidance to make the connection between objectives and results stronger. This section has been shortened significantly, excessive quotes have been removed and the connection between barriers, program activities and observed results has been clarified.

b) Beyond individual-level attributes, there are community-level barriers to FP use including spousal influence and community perceptions regarding FP. Again, the authors can go through the same questions. How did the program address these barriers? What impact did it have in addressing the barriers (e.g. increased spousal or community support for FP in general or IUD in particular)? Did that impact translate to increased use of IUD? The authors will again find that they need only about two to three quotes to support their argument here. And that same line of thinking should be extended to supply-side factors such as human resources and skills, method mix, commodity security, and quality of care including addressing method-related concerns. In that way, there will be a clear link between the program’s activities, how the activities addressed the barriers to IUD uptake, and whether that translated into increased used of the method in order to effectively respond to the

Paper’s objective. In its current form, that clear link between the program, the barriers and the outcome is missing.

Response: We appreciate this important feedback. As above, this section has been shortened significantly, excessive quotes have been removed and the connection between barriers, program activities and observed results has been clarified.

5) Theory of change

The theory of change reads more like what the authors ought to have presented in the results section, supported by appropriate quotes from participants, but expanded along the lines suggested above. In presenting the theory of change based on the results (presented along the lines suggested above), the authors will then just be focusing on describing how the findings inform the theory of change (i.e. inputs, interventions, outputs and outcomes), how the different elements of the theory of change relate to each other, how that relationship helps us understand
approaches to improving FP uptake, and how the elements can be operationalized so that a researcher who wants to apply it elsewhere will know exactly what kind of information to collect? In its current form, many of the issues being alluded to in the theory of change do not come out clearly in the way the results are presented, which makes it difficult for the reader to link the results to the theory of change.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

6) Discussion and conclusion

a) If the authors adopt the suggested approach, they will find that the discussion will be very straightforward. In particular, and as suggested by one of the reviewers, they will now just be reflecting on the key findings of the paper, how they compare with what we already know based on existing literature, and their implications for programs, policy or research. A big chunk of the discussion is devoted to the development of the theory of change, what it entails and its utility (pages 30-31) but that is not important. What is important is what programs, policies or research can gain from the findings and the resulting theory of change.

Response: The reflections on the literature surrounding the TOC had been added in response to a reviewer’s request to do so: “The authors also prescribe a theory of change with no reflections on its sustainability and yet they argue it can be replicated. Apart from a critical reflection on sustainability of the intervention, they need to scholarly compare their theory of change with other theories of change out there, which I guess are quite a number in the literature.” We had agreed with the reviewer’s suggestion that we needed to address the various ways in which a TOC such as this one may be applied in other settings in order to contribute to the practical utility of this TOC. We also addressed the issue of sustainability in accordance with the reviewer’s input. However, in response to the editor’s input, we have eliminated the introductory part of this section.

b) In its current form, the paper does not have a conclusion, which should be a separate section on its own. The conclusion should be a short paragraph with key messages of what the authors want the reader to take home from the paper based on the findings. In that sense, the last paragraph in this section is not a conclusion. The authors should instead ask themselves, “What do we learn from the program in terms of improving uptake of FP in general and LARC in particular?” Constructing a short paragraph around this question should make a very good conclusion to the paper.
Response: The conclusion has been added as a separate section according to the input above.

B. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

1) Introduction:
   a) First paragraph, last statement (page 4, line 103): Rephrase the last part to read “…only 0.5% of urban women … were using IUD at the time …”

   Response: This has been revised accordingly.

   b) Fourth paragraph (last statement, page 5, lines 137-140): Rephrase to read: “We use qualitative data collected through this project to examine the reasons …”

   Response: This has been revised accordingly.

   c) Last paragraph, last statement (page 5, lines 146-148): Change “extend” to “extent”, and “true” to “underlying”, since we can never be sure of “true unmet need” for family planning.

   Response: This has been revised accordingly.

2) Study context:
   a) First paragraph:
      • First paragraph, third statement (page 5, line 157): Insert “to” between “access” and “long-acting”.

   Response: This has been revised accordingly.

      • Eighth and ninth statements (page 6, lines 163-167): Change “urban woman” to “urban women” in both statements.

   Response: This has been revised accordingly.
b) Second paragraph:
• Second statement (page 6, lines 173-175): It is not clear who “the authors” being alluded to here actually refer to since the previous statement does not mention any authors, yet the phrase connotes that we are talking about a specific group of authors who have already been introduced.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

• Last statement (page 7, line 185): Change “family planning projects” to “family planning programs”.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

c) Last paragraph, third statement (page 7, line 194): Change “now extended” to “which was extended”.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

3) The SAFPAC Project:
 a) Second paragraph, seventh statement (page 8, lines 219-222): Insert “on” between “emphasis” and “addressing”. Also, this paragraph largely talks about training providers, yet it is mentioned in this statement that part of the emphasis was on addressing rumors in the community. How can provider training address rumors in the community?

Response: We agree that, where initially placed, this statement is not entirely clear. We have moved it to the beginning of the paragraph, then go on to explain training and community interventions separately to illustrate this introductory sentence.

b) Last paragraph:
• Third statement (page 9, line 255): Delete “have” from the statement.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

• Last statement (page 9, line 257): To avoid beginning a statement with a number, the authors can consider rephrasing it to read: “Over 10,000 clients …”, and delete “an” after “represents”.
Response: This has been revised accordingly.

4) Methodology:
   a) Change “methodology” to “methods” both in the sub-title and in the first statement of the first paragraph, since “methodology” refers to a system of “methods”.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

b) Fourth paragraph, first statement (page 11, line 280): Change “primary levels of education” to “primary level education” since “primary” is just one level.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

5) Data analysis (last paragraph):
   a) Second statement (page 12, lines 321-322): Change “which appear” to “that appear” to avoid repeating “which” in the same statement.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

b) Fourth statement (page 12, lines 327-328): I couldn’t understand the meaning of the phrase “provider perspectives on training and service delivery and community…”

Response: We agree that this sentence is not clear (likely due to earlier revisions) and have removed ‘and community’ to resolve this.

6) Results

I had some edits in this section but since it requires an overhaul along the lines suggested earlier, the edits may become irrelevant at this stage.

7) Theory of change, third paragraph (third statement, page 28, line 755): Insert “of commodities” between “availability” and “were” so that it is clear what we are referring to here.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.
8) Discussion and conclusion:

a) First paragraph (page 29, lines 788-992): The authors’ arguments here do not come out clearly from the way the results are presented. The arguments can only stand if they organize the results along the lines earlier suggested showing a clear link between program activities, the elements influenced by the program, and the outcome of interest.

Response: This has been revised accordingly in way the findings are now presented.

b) Second paragraph, second statement (pages 29-30, lines 795-798): The authors talk of a “combination of quantitative and qualitative results” but there is not much quantitative results—it is all qualitative. Also, what is alluded to here does not come out clearly in the results i.e. the results do not show that improved uptake of IUD was a result of expanding the method mix as the statement connotes. As the authors noted in the introduction, there was low use of IUD at the beginning but it was not because it was not part of the method mix.

Response: We agree that we cannot speak of ‘quantitative results’ here and replaced this with ‘contextualized by routine monitoring data’. We also rephrased this statement to make the link between expanding method mix and IUD uptake clearer.

c) Second paragraph, third statement (page 30, line 798): Delete “that” between “given” and “the”.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

d) Third paragraph, first statement (page 30, line 803): The authors talk of “several limitations” but they only mention a few. Also, as previously noted, they should mention the limitation of not undertaking back-translation i.e. some meanings may have been lost in the process.

Response: This has been added accordingly.

e) Fourth paragraph, first statement (page 30, lines 813-814): It is not clear how the findings contributed to the development of the theory of change given the disconnect between the program’s activities, the elements the program influenced, and the outcome of such influence. For this statement to hold, the authors will need to reorganize the interpretation
of the results and the presentation of the theory of change along the lines suggested earlier.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

f) Fifth paragraph:
   • Third statement (page 31, lines 829-830): I guess the last part of the statement should read “a broad interpretation referred to as “political literacy””.

Response: We appreciate the editor making us aware of this oversight. This sentence is meant to read they [the authors] refer to as “political literacy”.

   • Sixth statement (page 31, lines 838-839): It is not clear what the phrase “be addressed simultaneously” here means given the way the statement is framed.

Response: This was re-stated as ‘At the same time, consideration should be given to the sustainability of any similar programs, which could be promoted by strengthening an understanding of the importance of addressing specific supply and demand elements simultaneously and within the context of a rights-based approach and strengthened partnership.’

9) Abstract:
   a) Background, second statement (page 2, lines 35-37): Change “This study seeks” to “The objective of the paper”, since “seeking” is not definitive i.e. it is not clear whether what was sought was found.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

   b) Methods:
      • First statement (page 2, line 40): The statement is incomplete; its meaning is therefore not clear.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

   • Somewhere the authors should indicate the period when the data were collected and the number of participants involved.
Response: This has been revised accordingly.

c) Results:
• Third statement (page 2, lines 50-52): To avoid beginning a statement with a number, the authors should consider rephrasing the statement to something like, “Over 10,000 clients chose…” Also, delete “an” before “30%”.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

• The issues being highlighted here did not come out clearly in the way the findings are presented given the disconnect between program’s activities, the elements the program influenced, and the outcome of interest.

Response: This has been revised accordingly.

d) Conclusion: What is stated here are not conclusions i.e. they are not what we can learn from the program regarding improving uptake of IUD in general or FP in particular. If the hypothesis was appropriately formulated as earlier suggested, the conclusion would be very straightforward assuming that the findings supported the hypothesis e.g. “The findings of the paper showed that by doing abc, programs can influence xyz, and thus improve the uptake of LARCs, even in settings experiencing conflict.”

Response: This has been revised accordingly.