Reviewer's report

Title: Experiences of community members and researchers on community engagement in an Ecohealth project in South Africa and Zimbabwe

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Reviewer: Maureen Njue

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Title of Manuscript: Experiences of community members and researchers on community engagement in an Eco-health project in South Africa and Zimbabwe

Generally this is a well written paper, with a clear presentation of ideas around what works well in a community engagement strategy.

COMMENTS

1. In the background section the paper mentions that literature provides for particular aspects of Community Engagement strategy instead of a 'Complete CE strategy'. Clarify what you mean by having a 'Complete CE strategy', what does it include? (Page 5; line 1-5)

2. In table 1: Distribution of participants, maintain consistency in the use of the sites names, stick to either using the country or using the specific site name ….the top part of the table South Africa and Gwanda are used, the lower bottom South Africa and Zimbabwe are used.

3. To appreciate the communities' 'research naivety/inexperience' finding, it would be helpful to provide more information about the study sites with regards to whether there were other previous research activities in the areas, large or small- was MABISA the very first research to be carried out in the areas cited? - Some of the quotes from participants suggest encounters with other researchers.
4. I'm wondering which additional measures you are referring to in this section (page 16) - 'The researchers also noted that the PRA method by nature was not going to be enough for complete community diagnosis and sensitization of large areas and these additional measures needed to be put in place [34].' - If the additional measures you are referring to are in the manuscript referenced (34) - I think for ease of reading and avoiding having to read additional material to understand when is being referred to highlight/summarize some of the measures you think are important to this study

5. The paper suggests that the MABISA project through its intensive consultation and involvement of the community attained 'equal partnership'. The idea of equal partnership should be unpacked a little more in this paper, since it assumes that the community has equality with the project in terms of decision making, power dynamics, information/knowledge and resources - from the results it's not evident that the community attained equal partnership with the research project

6. The CE strategy seems to have had positive outcomes for both the project and the communities involved, however, I wonder did the project experience any perverse outcomes from the process?
   - A considerable number of the gatekeepers held political positions, were there any instances where the study meetings were used to advance the gatekeepers political ambitions or personal agendas- if so how did the MABISA team deal with this?
   - It's not uncommon to have people 'overly encouraged' by the gatekeepers to participate in a study that is considered beneficial to the community - were those involved in the community engagement strategy involved in the day to day activities of the study? Any effects on the informed consent process?
   - Encounter with the study team seems to have generally been appreciated, were there any forms of benefits or compensation provided for those engaged- these have been known to contribute to enthusiasm in participation
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

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.
Yes

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Not relevant to this manuscript

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