Author's response to reviews

Title: The readiness of the national health laboratory system in supporting care and treatment of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania

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Reviewer 1: Rudi Wisaksana

Comment 1: My greatest concern in this manuscript is the lack of data of laboratory performance for HIV service in Tanzania and in several levels. Simple performance indicator of HIV service, eg. Waiting time in clinic for HIV test, could help the reader better understand the problem

Response 1: The study obtained data from review of available literature and qualitative data. The issues raised by the reviewer were not within the scope of this study.

Comment 2: In my experience, external donor funding might have huge impact on the performance of the health care workers. Please show this issue in results and discussion section

Response 2: The results from the qualitative part showed that the improvement in the quality of services was possibly due to the support from donors.

Comment 3: Please consider to include process of supervision or quality control of HIV-related laboratory services in Tanzania

Response 3: Details of supervision and quality control processes are shown in the National guidelines for HIV diagnosis (Ref. 27)

Comment 4: Please include data regarding professional and non-professional laboratory staff in each laboratory site

Response 4: Data on the level of staffing in the country is shown in Table 2.
However, details about non-professional laboratory staff could not be obtained from the documents we reviewed.

Comment 5: Please include data regarding guideline development process in Tanzania
Response 5: The comment is highly appreciated but the requested information is beyond the scope of this manuscript.

Reviewer 2: Bachti Alisjahbana
Comment 1: There are a few typos which I have read but could not identify them yet. Authors can check again
Response 1: Spell check has been done and errors corrected accordingly

Comment 2: The authors have put enough information regarding the role of each different lab level. However, there is no clear description on what is the expected standard of QC/QA in Tanzania. And later in the results section there is no clear description to what has been done (or failed) on this QC/QA in various setting. This additional information is interesting to many experts working in this field as it is a complicated to establish. And it can be very valuable for future planning of Laboratory capacity strengthening.
Response 2: The expected standards of QC/QA are given in the National guidelines for HIV diagnosis (Ref 27). Since this study was based on literature review and qualitative data, it is difficult to provide an objective assessment of QC/QA implementation. However, the comment is very important and it will be worth exploring in future studies.

Reviewer 3: Edith A. Tarimo
Comments: None