Author’s response to reviews

Title: Community-based surveillance of unaccompanied and separated children in drought-affected northern Ethiopia

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Author’s response to reviews:

Reviewer 1 Comment Author Response
We thank the reviewer for this very lovely review. We appreciate your comment and have included language in the discussion section of the paper suggesting a smaller target area per focal point may be warranted.

Reviewer 2 Comment Author Response
1) Should provide more information about the methods and results on the feasibility of the study that support the conclusions you made. Findings about the distributions of the age, sex of the children and reasons of separation are not key findings.

Thank you for these comments. We appreciate the reviewer suggestion that more details on the feasibility of the surveillance system could be provided and we have added relevant text throughout the manuscript. Per this specific comment, we have added information on the methodology and outcomes regarding the feasibility of the system into the abstract.

2) The aims of this study should be stated explicitly. “This manuscript presents the findings …” is not a good statement of the aim.
We have expanded the description of the manuscript goal to directly incorporate both the assessment of the feasibility of the surveillance and system and the child separation-related findings.

3) There was a lack of details on the methods used for the ‘in-depth interviews’ that is a key component of this study. What are the questions/prompts/guides used in the interviews? Personal characteristics of the interviewer? Relationship with participants? Where were the interviews conducted? Audio recording? Number of data coders?

We thank the reviewer for this excellent observation and suggestion regarding the description of the in-depth interview component. The methods now expressly include each of these factors to more accurately describe the data collection and coding process.

4) Why was the Project Coordinator not interviewed? This person played a key role in the project and had a lot of insight knowledge.

Thank you for this question. The goal for the in-depth interviews was specifically to record the experiences and viewpoints of the participating focal points, those ‘closest to the ground’, with the Project Coordinator (a co-author on this paper) helping to design and implement the interview guide. His experiences contributed to the writing of this article but were not formally assessed as part of the study. We have included a comment in the limitations that any future iterations of the project might include a formal interview with the Coordinator.

5) The characteristics of separated children should not be the main outcomes because those would not related to the feasibility of the system.

As above, we have adjusted the manuscript to place increased emphasis on the feasibility assessment. Following from this particular suggestion, the child separation findings are no longer labeled as “primary”, placing them on an equal level with focal point performance, technical feasibility, and focal points’ experiences.

6) More analyses of ‘Focal point performance’ should be performed. ‘Correct messages’ is one aspect of focal point’s performance. That is not enough information to conclude about their performance and to make comparisons among sub-groups.
We thank the reviewer for this useful suggestion. We have adjusted the manuscript to include three aspects of performance: a measure of focal point consistency, the existing measure of correct messages, and an assessment of case report message frequency.

7) No information about statistical tests was provided
We have added statistical testing details to the Methods section.

8) Some p-values were not significant (>=0.05) but were interpreted as statistically significant.
Thank you for this observation; we have corrected any errors and more clearly delineated in any cases where significance may not be evident.

9) Details of the distribution of the overall satisfaction ratings should be presented.
We have added these details to the description of the satisfaction ratings.

10) Too few qualitative data/sub-themes were presented that raises concerns about the quality of the in-depth interviews.
We have incorporated additional qualitative detail yet have tried to maintain a balance between the multiple aims of the paper.

11) No quotations presented for ‘negative experiences’, ‘be compensated financially’.
Thank you for this helpful observation: quotations regarding negative experiences around the cellular network and the direct recommendation for compensation have been added to the qualitative results.

12) Any adverse events for focal points?
We thank the reviewer for this very important question, which is relevant for future iterations of community-based surveillance programs. The lack of any documented adverse events was added to the results.
13) The first paragraph should summarize and discuss the most important findings. The characteristics of the children are not, but the findings on the feasibility are.

We have altered the first paragraph to emphasize the feasibility findings.

14) As mentioned above, ‘Correct messages’ would not be interpreted as the whole performance of focal points. Therefore, the conclusions in the second paragraph of the discussion section should be moderated.

As above, more focal point performance measures have been added to the results to further contextualize this aspect of system performance and feasibility.

15) There is no data in the Results section related to the fourth paragraph. That kind of data is related to the technical feasibility that needs to be reported systematically.

Thank you for noting this oversight; findings and experiences related to technical feasibility are now included in the results section of the manuscript.

16) ‘Limitations’: should be separated for the limitations of the study and the limitations of the surveillance system.

We thank the reviewer for this comment and agree that the types of limitations should be separated. The section now includes paragraphs for the system and the study itself.