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 reports:

Karen M.T. Turner (Reviewer 1): This revision is a substantial improvement on the earlier draft in moving this from a primarily descriptive analysis of a feasibility pilot of the surveillance system. If the quantitative data on feasibility are to be included, they need to be reported 1) clearly, 2) consistently and 3) interpreted correctly.

1) The author response suggests they will include data on consistency, accuracy and frequency. The manuscript would benefit from subheadings to this effect, with clear description of the measure/s of each construct.

We thank the reviewer for these recommendations. A description of the three measures has been added into the Methods section, and subheadings into the Results section.

2) The results should then be analysed systematically for each section. For example:

- For consistency analysis, there is data presented for elected vs leadership, and male vs female, but not for age groups or population density.

Thank you for this observation. The Results section has been re-organized and now describes analysis of all four demographic characteristics for each of the three measures.
- For accuracy, there are no chi square analyses reported. What is the data behind the claim that "male focal points were more likely overall to have a high rate of sending correct reports, there was minimal difference between sexes among those who always sent correct reports (50% of men and 60% of women sent correct reports for 100%...) - this is unclear.

We appreciate this useful comment. The chi square measures have been included where relevant and this sentence has been adjusted and clarified to eliminate confusion.

- For frequency, this is unclear - is this just adding incorrect and correct message consistency? It would be helpful to clarify how frequency is a helpful measure and how it differs from consistency.

The measures are now described more clearly in the Methods section, with specific definitions for each.

In summary, the measures need to be more clearly defined and analysed consistently. A table of these results could be helpful.

We thank the reviewer for this general (and the other more specific) comments on the measures and results. As mentioned above, the text now includes specific mention of all measures and variables analyzed.

3) The results must be discussed accurately. It is incorrect to note "The probability of reporting at this high level of consistency was much higher, although not significantly so..." A trend cannot be interpreted as "much higher." The same applies to all results reporting a difference such as "higher" or "more likely" but then saying it was not a significant difference. If it is not significant it must be reported as "no significant differences were found..."

At best, patterns of results could be discussed noting interpretation with caution. The null results could be discussed in terms of low power given the sample size.

Thank you very much for this comment and general guidance throughout. The results have been updated to more accurately describe the findings, including explicit mention of outcomes that are not statistically significant. Those that are approaching statistical significance but do not reach the required level have also specifically been identified as such.

I think the greater detail in this draft improves the quality of the paper but it now requires more accurate analysis and interpretation.
Reviewer 2 (Reviewer 2): REVISION ASSESSMENT FROM THE ACADEMIC PEER REVIEWER:

Has the author addressed your concerns sufficiently for you to now recommend the work as a technically sound contribution?

Yes

Reviewer comments: The authors have addressed all of my comments carefully. However, I still have two minor concerns.

1. The Results section of the Abstract was too short and did not include many main findings of the study.

Thank you for these comments. The abstract has been updated to include more detailed findings of the study, particularly the outcomes of the analysis on feasibility and focal point feedback.

2. The aim "to describe the findings from the second pilot of the community-based surveillance system in this new context" is not a scientific aim and should be removed.

We thank the reviewer for this important observation. The introduction has been updated to more appropriately discuss the aims.