Author’s response to reviews

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

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Version: 4 Date: 02 May 2019

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Dear editors,

We thank the reviewers for their valuable comments and the Editor for the positive assessment of our paper entitled, “Community-based surveillance of unaccompanied and separated children in drought-affected northern Ethiopia” being considered for publication in BMC International Health and Human Rights.

Following the suggestions in the most recent correspondence, we’ve included a table (below) detailing the edits made based on feedback by the Editor and reviewers. We hope to have been able to address the comments thoroughly.

As is customary, this letter should serve to certify that the enclosed correspondence is not being considered for publication by any other journal and that there are no conflicts of interest among any of the authors. If there is any other information you require, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Reviewer 1 Comment:

1. We thank the reviewer for this excellent observation; the sentence has been updated to match the suggestion.

Editor Comment:

1. This has been updated.

2. Thank you for this note. Ethical review was sought and gained locally from the Ministry of Women’s and Children’s Affairs and a separate group of local experts from outside the government structure. In addition, Save the Children’s Ethical Review Committee reviewed and approved the study materials. A statement has been added to the Declarations and Methods section to this effect. Given the unique emergency setting, these approvals were deemed sufficient by the Columbia IRB.

3. Informed consent was gathered in several ways to ensure maximum adherence to the ethical well-being of communities and children. Community leaders were individually asked to give permission for work in their towns and villages, and those communities were also gathered together by each team for a “communal” consent process. This included an explanation of the project, the risks, the benefits, and other important ethical factors so that the entire group could agree. The communities and leaders were informed that there was no penalty for declining participation, though all agreed to participate anyway.

As the project expressly focused on avoiding direct interaction with separated children, the researchers and ethical experts agreed that a formal assent/consent process would actually increase the risk. Due to their nature as being unaccompanied or separated children, and the focus on using publicly available information rather than direct interviews, no parental or guardian consent process was possible without further increasing risk. This has been clarified in the manuscript.
4. Thank you for this clarification; this has been added to the manuscript.

5. This has been added to the Authors' Contribution sections.

6. This has been added.

7. Two additional files have been added: the community liaison codebook and the key informant interview guide. Both documents have been cited in the manuscript and included in an “additional files” section after the References.

8. This section has been added to the manuscript.