Reviewer's report

Title: Using a human resource management approach to support community health workers: experiences from five African countries

Version: 3  Date: 11 April 2015

Reviewer: Asha George

Reviewer's report:

Congratulations on completing substantive revisions to the manuscript. It has significantly improved and was a pleasure to re-read and is a very useful overview, with valuable exploratory findings across different programs.

I have the following comments

MAJOR/ SUBSTANTIVE COMMENTS

1) Considering that several of the programmes you assessed relied on older, volunteer women, but also some CHW programs with men, where there any gender dimensions of CHW expectations and management in your data? if you did not explore this, please list in your limitations section. Would strongly recommend adding a few sentences in your discussion section about this. The work by Mumtaz, George, Daniels, and even the more recent literature review of context and CHWs, discusses gender dimensions of CHW programs. If female CHWs struggle with legitimacy and need to negotiate approval from family members/ spouses, as well as work against community norms...should HRM practices take more cognizance of this dimension?

2) p.11, CHWs reported being overworked, having job creep. In the discussion section or the limitations paragraph, you may want to comment on the dearth of time motion studies for CHWs, the challenges in undertaking them, and the lack of good evidence on how much time CHWs spend on their CHW work and the effects on their livelihoods

MINOR COMMENTS

3) on pg.7 at the end of your methods section you state "The analysis of the data will show what HRM practices would need to be improved". This sounds rather deterministic, ie you already knew which HRM practices needed improvement and your analysis was meant to validate or "show" your pre-determined understanding. Do you mean instead something like: "Data analysis aimed to understand HRM practices to identify areas needing improvement".

4) p.20, you conclude "the HRM approach normally used for salaried staff is also appropriate for volunteer CHWs". Your arguments do not substantiate this conclusion. While it is reasonable to suggest that a focus on worker expectations and how they interface with HRM practices is valid for all personnel, whether workers or volunteers, the specific contexts and characteristics of the personnel...
in question would change what this looks like in each instance, which is what your data suggests.

5) In your abstract you state "management challenge...include attraction, retention, performance"...are these necessarily challenges? aren't they functions/tasks or roles that would work well as well as poorly...therefore are not always challenges if they function well?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests