Reviewer's report

Title: Human Resources for Primary Health Care in Sub-Saharan Africa: Progress or Stagnation?

Version: 8 Date: 24 July 2015

Reviewer: Yohannes Kinfu

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Comment on authors’ responses: Minor Essential Revisions

In several parts of the paper the authors make reference to “poor countries” and in other instances use terms such as “low-income countries”. I think there is a need to be consistent with use of terminologies in the paper. I think the authors also need to avoid using these two terminologies interchangeably as they do not necessarily mean the same. There is a strict definition of what poverty entail and the rich economic literature (as well as lead institutions such as the World Bank) also no longer classify countries as such but rather use “low income” or “lower and middle” countries. Given these (and also the diverse nature of the economy of the countries under study), the latter designation seems more appropriate in the present context.

Regarding the comment on limitations and data quality, the authors responded by saying that “Most of these unpublished sources were not explicit about their methods, so it is not possible to evaluate the reliability.” I think this is a fair response. However, this exact statement needs to be clearly and explicitly reflected in the text, if not inserted as is. In addition, the paper also needs to contain a statement which clearly indicates that results of the analysis should be treated with care, and the authors themselves may also want to refrain from over interpreting the data whose reliability remain unknown.

Earlier it seemed to me that the reference to “colonial experience”, and the assumed subsequent effects on health systems organization, was to distinguish former French and British colonies, from the countries which were under the occupation of other European countries, but the mere removal of the word ‘colonial’ without other required amendments created even a further confusion. For instance, one would ask why make specific analogy out of only these three countries—Angola, Mozambique and Congo—as there are others that were either not colonized or were under the occupation of other European countries other than the three mentioned African countries. I think the sentence should be crafted with care so that it is accurate and fit to the purpose.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:
None