Reviewer’s report

Title: Improving Local Health through Community Health Workers in Cambodia: Challenges and Solutions

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Reviewer: Sérgio C Lopes

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Major reviews:

- The Abstract Background refers the research identifies how a policy translates into practice. While the ambition is welcome, it must be acknowledged that policy implementation cannot really be evaluated with this study only. A complete set of evaluation with different stakeholders and using a whole range of approaches would be required to ensure this task is properly accomplished. The sentence is far from what is said in the Introduction text where it is said this study identifies how contextual factors influence the implementation of the policy.

- Abstract Conclusion repeat some of the Results that do not bring conclusion per se. Conclusion in the Abstract is lengthy and should be reviewed

- The methods section does not provide full information on the context of research. It is not clear if it was taken to assess the policy as stated above or in the context of a specific program (as there is reference to a program to reduce child mortality). Considerations for selection of CHW does not detail which programs were considered. As an example, Village Malaria Workers program has been described as a success model for malaria elimination in Cambodia but is not described if these particular program oriented CHW were included. Strongly suggest a review of Methods section providing further details:

- On the selection criteria for FGD and IDI participants and details on their characteristics

- IDI guidance. Only two questions are detailed? Were these the only ones used? Was the Interview guide done based on any other tool?

- Not clear on the data analysis methods employed. While it is clearly stated Analysis was conducted using open coding to identify themes and sub themes which were cross checked across interviews and focus groups to identify commonalities, it is not clear
which was done first and how it was done (by one researcher, all, done during IDI/FGD?)…

- On page 8, from line 47 onwards, it is not clear if the skills required were identified by CHW (expected in this section of the manuscript) or by the authors. If the latest, this should be a theme for discussion and not included here. If these were identified by the participants, then proper quotes should be added.

- There is a lack of contradictory/reasoning argument throughout the manuscript. Most of the readings from the quotes are done without any contradictory argument which may be caused by: a) highly homogeneous sample of participants experiencing the same things (eg costs associated with activities were described by all? No one saying it was OK?) b) small geographical implementation of the surveys (Kratie and Mondulkiri are relatively close and CHW programs may experience similar challenges), c) informant bias (towards preferences or the need to state things that they believe it may bring some benefit. it is common for participants to over state problems when they believe it can be another way to improve their lives, particularly among the most poor). d) researcher bias (towards the analysis based on pre conceived ideas/experiences. These kind of discussion should come up later in the manuscript to improve the reading of these findings.

- In Discussion section, the first paragraph seems too ambitious for the Findings reported and the methodology used. While it is understandable to represent the Policy delivery as unstructured and reactive, it is, in my opinion, over use of findings to state a point. whereas opinions from other implementers (PHD, OD, Program leaders, NGO, …) are not considered in the research, there is not other point of view considered. A policy implementation viewed solely from the community side will always be limited and should be carefully seen. The manuscript jumps from a study using CHW to a policy implementation, which is not only not recommended but also not possible. Recommended review of this paragraph to understand the research as an important part of policy implementation analysis but not as the whole policy implementation analysis.

- There is no reference to limitations of the study: design, tools, bias… please check my previous points on this and reflect those and other potential limitations in the final manuscript.

Minor edits:

- In Results Section, allquotes should provide minimal info about the authors (minimum: age, gender, location and method of collection IDI/FGD) as some of the perceptions may be influenced by these factors.
- On page 7, line 20, the quote is too long and capturing too many elements. Recommended to reduce this quote to be better targeted to the subject. On line 34, not clear what: The main work I do right now is the media maternal and child health project. Is media here considered as a CHW work?

- On page 8, what does it mean having time in the first sentence: Other motivations included building self-confidence, enjoyment, interest in health issues, improving knowledge about health and having time.

- on Findings section, the Activities description is confusing and would benefit from a revision stating what activities are done by who and under which circumstances. It is not easily understandable what range of activities are done by the CHW participating in the study.

- Page 13, first lines: Several times, the idea of 'model families' or 'real life people' demonstrating how they made positive changes and how it affected them was considered a good idea. By CHW? Is it possible to add a quote to that?

- In discussion section, there is no positive examples given about some CHW in Cambodia which may not capture the full reality of some government led programs implementation: Check Canavati et al. Malar J (2016) 15:282 for some ideas about training, planning and supervision.

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