Author’s response to reviews

Title: Success of a South-South Collaboration on Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) in Health: Case of Kenya and Zambia HRIS Collaboration

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Author’s response to reviews:

REVIEWER #1

General Comments

The article is a welcome contribution to the growing body of expertise in establishing procedures and guidance for effective South-South collaboration in the area of human resources development within a triangular partnership. It documents very well how to establish knowledge exchange between participating countries and their health development partners and the triangular benefits thereof. The reductions in terms of time and funding to establish a functioning Human Resources Information System based on the experience in a neighboring country are impressive. Other countries can equally benefit from the processes described and use existing
guidance material, case study knowledge and local expertise gained from successful local and international cooperation. Prior to publication, a number of issues and observations need to be addressed and corrections need to be undertaken.

Response: Positive comment. This is much appreciated.

Reference style Authors need to check the HRH Journal editorial policy and guidance to re-adjust the reference method to an established style (Vancouver) i.e. numbering the reference indications throughout the text and replacing the current references in brackets throughout the document with distinct numbers indicating sources in the reference section. This will avoid cumbersome identification of references used (e.g. line 49 refers to "Buenos Aires Plan of Action". This is actually listed under the author "16. Benn D. Bueno Aires plan of action. 1978". (see also misspelling of Buenos Aires).

Response: References checked. Revised and updated

Check the document of spelling errors and correct punctuation.

Response: Manuscript checked for spelling errors, grammar and punctuation

3. Specific observations by running line numbers

Line 18: add "the" after "with", add "study" after "case"

Response: Revised and Updated


Response: Revised and Updated
The paragraph in lines 60 to 67 lists HIV/AIDS specific mortality for both Kenya and Zambia. Please add a sentence or two on the relevance of this information for the HRH situation/workload in both countries, and the relevance to have a well developed HRIS in this context.

Response: Revised and Updated. Added a statement on the HRH situation to show the shortage of HRH in both countries.

Line 78: please add a reference at the end of the sentence.

Response: Revised and Updated

Line 81: add a reference (references cited in line 84 refer only to the Kenya HRIS, not the information:

Response: Revised and Updated. The section has been modified and citation added to document the impact of the Kenya HRIS.

Line 97: replace "service's" with "services"

Response: Revised and Updated

Line 100: "The Kenyan" with "In Kenya, the"

Response: Revised and Updated
Line 104: add ")" after "WITS"
Response: Revised and Updated

Lines 125/125: should the sentence "Furthermore, the overall ...." read: "Furthermore, the overall project cost was minimized by eliminating wastage caused by inadequate practices which were identified during earlier implementation in Kenya."?
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 153: add "the respective" after "bodies and"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 169: it may be preferable to replace "US" with "overseas" as this points to a more generic issue of exchange of local expertise versus the need for international input.
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 180: replace "services" with "services'"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 183: replace "it's" with "it is"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 185: replace "adapted" with "transferred", replace "Example" with "For example"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 189: replace "to the" with "to a"
Response: Revised and Updated
Line 190: replace "e.g" with "e.g.", re-word "mobile money payment" to read "financial transactions by mobile telephone"?
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 191: replace "payment was not" with "payment which was not as", replace "despite it" with ", as opposed to". Please explain why the lack of "mobile money payment" posed a problem, this may be useful information for future systems technology transfer in other countries.
Response: Revised and Updated. Added information on why the mobile payment was an issue.

Line 197: replace "that the" with "correct", delete ""is done correctly"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 204: replace "should:Be" with "should be"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 206: a specific internet based telephone service is mentioned, it may be preferable to indicate "internet based calls" as there are a number of systems
Response: Revised and Updated and all occurrence of this updated

Line 207: replace "Schedule" with "schedule", "Designate" with "designate"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 209: replace "team" with "teams"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 215: delete "the"
Response: Revised and Updated
Line 231: replace "south-south" with "South-South"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 249: same comment as under Line 169 applies. Thus, replace "American" with "sponsoring" and "Americans" with "sponsoring agency and associated consultancy and other personnel"
Response: Revised and Updated

Lines 251, 254, 255, 261: along the same line of thinking and to be more generic, replace "African" with "local"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 262: replace "US who have a" with "donor country resources at"
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 282 to 284: It is not immediately evident why project software can easily be shared as it is funded from donor country resources. If the support agreement includes entry of software developed by the project automatically into the public domain, it should be mentioned. If that is the case, after "countries" in
Response: Revised and Updated

Line 284 add: " as it becomes public domain software".
Response: Revised and Updated

Lines 299 ff: Organize all abbreviations alphabetically, re-check the text for complete listing of all abbreviations used (e.g. PPD missing)
Response: Revised and Updated
Line 331: add full stop at the end  
Response: Revised and Updated

Lines 346 ff. References Check all references for completeness and accuracy. For example, current reference 3 (Modi R, editor. South-South Cooperation ….) lacks the subtitle (“Africa on the Centre Stage”) or reference 12: Identify the author correctly (Global Health Workforce Alliance/World Health Organization) and cite the reference according to required reference style.  
Response: References checked. Revised and updated.

REVIEWER #2

General Comments

This article is a case study of the lessons learned and challenges encountered in using a South-South collaboration between Kenya and Zambia to develop an HRIS system.  
Response: Positive Comment

Overarching Comments

Many readers may not be familiar with the South-South approach.  
Consider moving the description of the South-South framework currently in the discussion (pages 13-15, lines 231-280) to the background section. This would also frame the paper better than some of the current text currently in the introduction which jumps right into the South-South framework without any explanation.  
The authors could delete the text from lines 39-59.  
Response: The background section has been revised to include the UN definitions of South-South Collaboration that had been put in the discussion section.
The authors feel that deleting lines 39-59 as suggested will make the readers miss-out on the background of South-South Collaboration. Lines 39-59 gives a background on why countries are engaging on South-South Collaboration this is stated by the statement “Decolonization, rising demand for equality in world affairs by developing countries, increasing political will and determination, and more equitable distribution of technical advances and resources, have led to a call for more self-reliance and less reliance on high-income countries (Partners in Population and Development, 2015)…. Countries in the south are engaging in collaborative models to share innovative, adaptable, and cost-effective solutions to address development challenges.”

The paper would be strengthened by:

* A much stronger and detailed description of why HRIS is important to informing policies regarding the production, deployment and regulation of the health workforce. Expand on the text in lines 68-74 to discuss more specifically how HRIS helps identify workforce needs by profession and region and informs the education, regulation and practice of the workforce. Provide more information about what HRIS systems do to inform "scale-up of the health workforce" beyond the brief sentence in lines 83-84 that the development and impact of the HRIS system in Kenya has been documented elsewhere.

Response: Added statement to define what is HRIS, what is collects and how policy makers are using it. “HRIS collect and manage routine, national level, multi-cadre data on the health workforce including supply (i.e. training, exam, registration, licensure, intent to out-migrate, and continuing professional development) and deployment (i.e. health facility of deployment, date of appointment, workstation in the facility, date of promotion, disciplinary actions, date of exit, and transfers) (Oluoch et al. 2015). The collected data is used by policy makers to make informed decisions on health workforce forecasting, deployment and management”

* Consider revising the abstract and aims of the paper to be clearer that the authors aren’t really providing "evidence-based practices". They are outlining a case study to illustrate the steps and resources needed to undertake a south-south implementation of an HRIS system and identifying the successes and challenges in undertaking such a collaboration. The paper is a road map for other countries who might want to use such an approach to develop their own HRIS.

Response: Abstract revised as advised. Included a statement to mention that it’s a case study to illustrate steps and resources needed to undertake implementation of HRIS through a South-South collaboration.
The aim of the papers has also been revised to be “road map for establishing a HRIS through South-South collaboration”

*One of the things I found most confusing about this paper is who the "client" or "customer" was for the HRIS. In various parts of the paper, the client seems to be the Health Professionals Council of Zambia and the General Nursing Council of Zambia (and maybe the MOH?). If this is the case, more detail on how/why and HRIS is important to inform regulation would be useful. The authors note in lines 94-98 that the needs assessment sought to identify "existing gaps" but more detail on what these gaps are (data, information systems etc.) and how they hinder regulatory functions would be useful. It would also set up the later findings on lines 178-181 that the HRIS improved regulatory compliance etc.

Response: The authors have added a definition of HRIS system mentioning the data it collects. They have further added a sentence on how policy makers use the data from HRIS “…data is used by policy makers to make informed decisions on health workforce forecasting, deployment and management”. The mandate of the regulatory boards has also been mentions which can be linked with the HRIS functions or data it collects. The authors have also added on the findings of the needs assessment. The authors have included what the needs assessment sort to find out and also some of the findings from the assessment.

*No real mention is made of how the HRIS would benefit training institutions although this is clearly one of the audiences for the HRIS output and they are stakeholders who were part of the "sensitization" step.

Response: Added a statement on the mandate of the training institution and the reason why its important to include them as stakeholders. This has been added in the needs assessment as it was identified as a gap hence the reason why the training institutions were included in the sensitization as they were identified as critical in the agencies realising their mandate of regulating training of health care workers.

*Under the "Establishing the Project Team" more detail on the skills needed to establish the HRIS such as data programming skills, analytic skills, IT skills, project management, rather than position titles would make it clearer what the gaps were in Zambia and how the South-South partnership with Kenya addressed these gaps. A discussion of skill gaps would be useful to other countries considering a South-South collaboration to develop an HRIS.
Response: Added a statement with the skills set of the Kenyan Team. The authors further states that the skills required for Zambia were at a lower level.

*On page 9, line 151, the authors introduce a project structure that includes the Joint Regulatory Collaborative which makes it even more confusing about whether the HRIS was developed for the JRC, the General Nursing Council, the MOH, other regulatory agencies or some other group? An organizational chart that shows the relationships between the various countries' agencies engaged in developing the HRIS might improve clarity.

Response: Added a figure 1 to show the organization structure of the project showing the Kenyan team, Zambia team, MOH and regulatory boards (JRC)

*Pg 10, line 170-173, this sounds like a formative evaluation process?

Response: Yes, This is a formative evaluation of the project. Authors have revised to – Project Formative Evaluation.

*Lines 178-181 are very strong in terms of demonstrating the impact of the HRIS and are another reason that: 1. an explicit discussion of the regulatory clients' needs; and 2. a discussion of evidence of how HRIS improve regulatory functions are needed in the introduction to frame the importance of this work. Minor comments While generally well written, there are places where the manuscript is a little choppy and could be grammatically improved. Some examples:

Response: A statement has been added citing importance and the impact the HRIS has had in Kenya.

*Drop multiple uses of "on the other hand"

Response: Revised and removed multiple use of “on the other hand”

*Page 7, line 123, do the authors mean "hasten" and not "fasten"?

Response: Revised and updated
The tense changes in different sections of the paper. It should all be written in the past tense since the project was already implemented (example line 197, change "is" to "was")

Response: Revised the tense as suggested

Lines 201-229: the tone of the text changes suggesting it was written by another author. Fix grammar/punctuation in this section. There is also repetition in this section from other sections (the information about the point of contact and the weekly conference calls)

Response: Changed the tone from Line 201-229 as suggested

Line 276-Who is the "Task Team on South-South's cooperation's report"?

Response: Revised to read “A report by Task Team on South-South Cooperation”

REVIEWER #3

General Comment:

I congratulate the Authors for this very interesting article which in my opinion highlights the 'beauty' and usefulness of South-South collaborations in the timely, quick and less expensive transfer of skills, knowledge and technical know-how amongst developing countries in the South-South region. Nevertheless, I have a few suggestions that may help improve the manuscript, as follows:


1. Please rephrase the following statement in the Abstract to become less confusing for readers: As a result of the collaboration, Zambia was able to implement the project within two years while Kenya took five years which is less than half the time it took Kenya. The statement would probably read better the following way: As a result of the collaboration, while Kenya took five years Zambia was able to implement the project within two years which is less than half the time it took Kenya.

Response: The statement has been revised as suggested.
2. Typo line 104: Complete the bracket for WITS
Response: Revised to include the bracket.

3. Typo in line 126: 'associated with using bad practices'
Response: The statement has been revised with the words ‘associated with using bad practices’ removed

4. Typo in line 151: perhaps 'has proven' should read 'as proven'
Response: The statement has been revised as advised.

5. Typo in line 190: 'of the some' should read 'of some'
Response: Revised and updated

6. Please arrange the list of abbreviations in a particular order - alphabetic order.
Response: Abbreviation list arranged in alphabetical order

7. A clear reference to the time period of the 'study' in this 'case presentation' involving collaboration between Kenya and Zambia is missing. Please state the precise time and duration of the observations in this triangular collaboration.
Response: Added statement to include the precise case presentation period on line 100 & Line 103.

8. Because this was essentially an attempt to display or highlight high-level workability of South-South collaborations involving transfer of skills, expertise or knowledge between two developing countries of differing or unequal developmental (infrastructural, technical and human resource) capacities (Kenya and Zambia), perhaps including a Table that highlights the essential differences in relevant pre-existing infrastructures and other capacities used in the collaborative approach that helped foster the successful transfer of intended skills, knowledge and technology in the study including the necessary human resource capacities of the concerned agencies in two
countries would help give readers a clearer background with regards to the potential success or usefulness/appropriateness of such South-South collaborative models. This makes the model attractive to be adopted for other potential beneficiary countries with equally dissimilar levels of developments in the South-South. Such a table which summarizes the differing country capacities, implementation challenges, and lessons learnt etc would present readers with an at-a-glance overview of implementability of the model and further justifies/clarifies how it took Zambia (with less developed capacities than Kenya) unexpectedly less than half the period it took Kenya to implement her own HRIS.

Response: Added a figure 2 to that summarize the collaboration model which include the process, outcomes, challenges and lesson learnt.

9. In lines 53, 54 & 55 in the Background section Authors should please cite few of the several Reports published by PPD that highlighted the challenges and successes of South-South collaborations in Health

Response: The statements have been deleted an another citation on SSC challenges added and cited.

10. Typo in line 65 Background section: HIV/AIDS rather than HIV/AID

Response: Revised to HIV/AIDS

11. Typo in line 338: gave the final approval********

Response: The statement has been revised as suggested.