Reviewer’s report

Title: “Posting policies don’t change because there is peace or war”: staff deployment challenges for two large health employers during and after conflict in Northern Uganda

Version: 0 Date: 18 Dec 2018

Reviewer: Giorgio Cometto

Reviewer's report:

Dear colleagues,

I would like to start by commending your efforts in attempting to document a poorly researched topic in a very difficult operational context.

I think the paper has a number of key strengths, which include the intrinsically interesting topic, the identification of an important gap in terms of its application in conflict or chronic complex emergency settings, the systematic attempt at analyzing the policy and governance environment in which the phenomena under study occurred, and finally a very clear and informative presentation.

Elements that might further strengthen the paper include:

MAJOR COMMENTS

-no evidence is presented on the quantitative results of the conflict and especially the application of different deployment strategies. if available data allow it, I would advise that you attempt documenting - even based on the probably imperfect administrative data - different outcomes in terms of vacancy rates, attrition, number of staff available (per population, or per hospital bed) in the different facilities; if this is not at all possible because of unavailability of underlying data, at the very least this should be explicitly acknowledged as a limitation of the analysis.

-a linkage could be made to a formal analysis of the roles, staffing and functions of the HRH deployment and management policies that you examine; the policies (and the absence of their adaptation to the context) were probably determined or at least informed by the capacity and operational autonomy of national and sub-national health authorities; more information on this might help better contextualize the differential application and interpretation of the common set of policies and regulations.
MINOR comments

-while well referenced in relation to current workforce literature, the manuscript might consider referencing more explicitly seminal work by Joyce Smith and Enrico Pavignani, among others, who have examined challenges and responses in HRH management in chronic complex emergencies and settings characterized by violent conflict;

-the application of a standard policy framework (e.g. Walt and Gilson's policy triangle) might help in systematizing and categorizing the presentation of the evidence.

I hope you can consider these suggestions and I look forward to seeing your revised paper eventually published.

Best wishes,

Giorgio Cometto (WHO)

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An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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