Author’s response to reviews

Title: Health workforce development and retention in Guinea: a policy analysis post-Ebola

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Author’s response to reviews:

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Dear Editor, dear James

Dear reviewers, thank you for the useful and constructive comments.

Please find hereby the revised manuscript. Kindly note that the title of the manuscript has slightly changed to be the following:

“Health workforce development and retention in Guinea: a policy analysis post-Ebola”. This seems more appropriate.

We have noted the requirement to edit the manuscript. This is understandable as the original extensive study report was written in French. An editor has looked at it and also helped to reduce the wordcount. This is now below 5000 words. I hope that this is acceptable, given that we had to take quotes out of the original boxes into the main manuscript to improve the coherence and logical flow.

I have uploaded a revised version with amendments (marked in yellow).

Please find the responses to the reviewer’s comments below. I hope this provides the required change required to strengthen the manuscript. Let me know if there are remaining questions.

Best regards, on behalf of all authors.
Reviewer #1:

Background The research objectives need clarification and to be more clearly linked to a workforce framework to provide focus for this study.

A: Two main research objectives are sharper formulated and reduced from three. Reference to conceptual framework is included, being a HWF labor market dynamic framework[19]

Methodology The way the policy triangle is used and whether the focus is on the development or implementation of policy should be clarified.

A: done, in L24-L5

Explain how the methods used addressed the study objectives. How, for example, were retention rates calculated?

A: done, L8-9, page 7: At district levels, HWF registers were consulted and retention rates were calculated using the civil servants’ registry

Explain how ethical approval was obtained

A: All participants received an information sheet and provided a signed consent to be included in the study. L10-11

Explain how were respondents selected Provide more information on the study sites (eg. what were the very different rural contexts?)

A: L11-20, page 6

Summarise the content of the interview topic guide and the relationship to the research objectives.

A: L305, p7: “Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews based on pre-tested interview guides. This included questions on how education profiles match with labor market needs, HWF retention dynamics in the rural districts and recruitment policies.”
Results The structure of the section needs to be explained with regard to the conceptual framework and research objectives.

A: L14-17, p7 “The results are structured according to the two main research objectives. The first objective on HWF retention is presented along the 4 interrelated components of the health policy triangle: situational context, policy content, process, and actors involved. The quantitative results on HWF education are presented afterward.”

Quotations need to be integrated into the main text as it is difficult to make the connections (and therefore probably reduced due to word count).

A: They are now integrated in the text. Boxes have been removed.

The narrative is difficult to follow as reported facts are mixed in with opinions of respondents without clear linkages. The data on policy content is mostly based on wishes of the respondents rather than actual content.

A: in results section, several clarification have been provided (see yellow parts) whether something was opinion of respondent or actual policy content.

The Walt and Gilson model refers to the development of policy as "policy process", whereas the reporting under this heading refers to policy implementation.

A: this has been amended. L14, p10

The analysis of actor in the Walt and Gilson policy triangle relates to: "actors, their position in power structures, their own values and expectations". This is not what is described in this section of the results.

A: this has been clarified L8, p 11

The information on training outputs makes no link to demand in order to support research objective #3.

A: this is clarified now in the research objectives that has excluded the demand side. This is also referred to in the ‘limitations’ section.
Discussion The Walt and Gilson model continues to be misused in this section.

A: Policy triangle elements have been restructured and renamed in the discussion

New data is added into the discussion eg on work location of females.

A: This has been taken out and replaced by a reference on the need to include gender analysis . L206, p14

The two recommendations fail to adequately address the aim of the study.

A: recommendations, especially the first one, have been rewritten. This should now better link with the two research objectives (L9-17, p18)

Conclusion This is not adequately supported by the findings and discussion and there is no clear link to the title.

A: maldistribution and policy momentum post-ebola have been added to the conclusion. Some parts have been left out. Hope this clarifies better, also in relation to future followup studies and governance requirements

Detailed comments: P4 18 use 'policy window' as in Figure 1

A: amended

P7 114 define shortage (against sanctioned posts or absolute)

A: clarification that this is against SDG index indicator

P7 ll17-18 clarify whether this relates to absenteeism or vacancy

A: absenteeism
P8 l11-2 how is the finding that "this cadre hopes so to be prioritised ..." derived from the methods

A: Sentence rephrased, now clear that it’s the respondents that argue for this. L8-10, page 8

P8 l13 Which participants?
A: P8, L11 Participants in the districts

P8 l12-14 more detailed linked to the table, included differences between civil servants and contract staff and volunteers is needed.

A: More clarification provided in L19, p8 – L3, p9 on what is now the relation with table 2.

P8 l16 provide evidence for statement about ageing.
A: Reference is now made to literature [4]

P12 l17-9 It is not possible to see Lower Guinea on the map
A: it should be now I think

Reviewer #2:
The data in the paper is valuable and well written at times, however the methods section is weak and difficult to understand, especially in relation to quantitative methods.

A: The methods section has expanded and restructured. It also explains how quantitative data have been obtained.

In addition referencing is lacking throughout. The results and discussion section need revisiting and connecting better.

A: 3 additional references have been added. In relation to the interviews and quotes used in the results references are now provided. Results and discussion section have been revisited and parts
of discussion have restructured and with some amendments and linkages should connect better now.

Abstract The methods in the abstract lacks detail. I suggest adding how many interviews and some characteristics.
A: This is done now

Results in abstracts could be more concise. It is not clear why intersectoral working would anticipate policy issues, wouldn't they rather review policy or re-design? I think it needs revisiting.
A: intersectoral workinggroup has been removed

Background Lines 14-16 need references.
A: This is done now (reference 13)

Line 16 - variations between urban and rural in which way? Also needs a reference
A: see clarification and reference [4]

Methods: The methodology section is week, it is not clear what 'form' was used to collect quantitative data and references are required throughout.
A: Information is provided on what form and how quantitative data was collected

Also the analysis and ethics process lacks detail.
A: both on ethics (informed consent, information sheet) and how data was analysed information is now provided.

* Lines 2-4 in the methodology section need a reference – check ref 20 *
A: Done, reference (now 21) has been amended

The following line is still quite vague, what did the visit entail and what methods were used to gain the overview? The seven administrative regions of the country, each with a health professions school, were visited for an overview of the health personnel trained in the educational centers during the last 5 years, as well as to assess whether these educational institutions are functioning in the post Ebola period.

A: This is clarified now in p6 L20- p7L2

It is clear that interviews were conducted but lacks demographics of participants, gender, age, experience and where were they from, 56 were conducted but the reader needs to know more about why they were selected and how. A table showing who and where the interviewees were from would be useful.

A: A table has been produced outlining the positions and categories of respondents. Gender and age were not included in the interview list as separate categories. This weakness is noted and will be collected in follow-up studies.

* Page 6 line 21 and 22 - What type of analysis was conducted, very unclear 'An analysis was conducted to determine the professional graduate trends by year and type of personnel.'

A: this includes now” A quantitative analysis was conducted to determine the professional graduate trends by year and type of personnel, which provide insights on the decentralized supply of HWs in the regions”

* On page 6 the analysis section lacks detail and references.

A: See above

* Lacking ethics detail, were interview participants provided with information sheets, the chance to ask questions and was signed consent gained? *

A: yes this is now also included
Discuss why the study only chose rural areas and why those two areas in particular.

A: Yes this is now included (L15-20)

Results Overall the results section has valuable information and at times is written well but the tables of quotes were hard to follow in relation to the narrative. The use of boxes in the results section for quotes disconnects the data from the summaries. I suggest adding the quotes where they belong in the narrative of the results for ease of understanding and flow. Word count maybe an issue but some words could be cut from the background so that the data has more space.

A: Quotes have been taken out of the boxes and are now included in the results section. (6 in total). We have edited the text and background, and managed to be now below 5000 words

Other points are: * On page 7, the first paragraph says there is a shortage of staff but a shortage in relation to what specifically, global recommendations, local policy?

A: clarification that this is SDG index threshold.

* The last paragraph on page 7 speaks about retention but in relation to being 'present' at the post or not. It is not clear how you knew this, was it a visit, could the staff have simply not been at the health facility that day. The lack of detail in the methods and a lack of detail as to how you assessed retention rates makes the results confusing for the reader.

A: We know refer to this as absenteeism (L5-10) and have clarified.

* Lines 1-2 on page 8 need evidence from the data, quotes for example.

A: Done, L16-18

* Ministry of Health should be capitalised throughout.

A: Yes this is applied now

* There is a description of quantitative methods in the results section, this needs pulling out and better describing in the methods section.

A: Yes, this has been done now in the methods section A: This is clarified now in p6 L20- p7L2
Discussion The discussion has some good points but at times blurs between results and discussion. References to wider literature is lacking which could strengthen some of the points. Consider being more concise and clear of what is results and what is discussion. Also, some subjective accounts that lack evidence weaken the arguments.

A: 2 additional references have been provided in this part and explicit references to results section are provided to clarify between data and subjective accounts

Other points:
* Page 14 - lines 19,20 and 21 require references
A: This part is taken out now, rather a l reference to requirement to conduct gender analysis is added [23]

* Page 15 line 10,11 and 12 indicate that HWs might feel replaced, this is an assumption and if there is evidence it would need to be in the results section.
A: Reference to the results section included

* Page 18 line 3 'Some countries have developed an observatory to monitor HRH trends.' This is a good opportunity to link with literature, state which countries and how.
A: included, with a reference to HRH observatories and policy developments in Sudan and Indonesia [33]

* Linking the recommendations on page 17 to literature would strengthen these, where has this been done elsewhere and what was the outcomes?
A: Linkage to the labor market framework [19] is now included