Author’s response to reviews

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

Authors:

Remco van de Pas (rvandepas@itg.be)
Delphine Kolie (dkolie@maferinyah.org)
Alexandre Delamou (adelamou@maferinyah.org)
Wim van Damme (wvdamme@itg.be)

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear editor and reviewers,

Thank you for the constructive and precise comments

Please find hereby an amended version of the paper, with an integration of elements being addressed. Below please find a point-by-point answer to your remarks. Kindly note that the manuscript has expanded with 200 words given the need to address some comments. I hope that this second amended version addresses all concern.

Kind regards, Also on behalf of all authors

Reviewer 1:

1. What aspects of Fig 2 paper are used? There should at least be references to the link between supply and retention. The more frequently quoted Sousa et al framework based on Vujicic might be more appropriate (Sousa, A., R. M. Scheffler, J. Nyoni and T. Boerma (2013). "A comprehensive health labour market framework for universal health coverage." Bull World Health Organ 91(11): 892-894.).
R: yes, reference to this framework instead. Sentence included: “The study aimed to assess whether a regional pool of qualified health workers could be a basis for attracting unemployed HW to be recruited to work in rural areas”

2. The problem stems from the fact the policy triangle is not sufficiently explained. This is important to enable to reader to understand in the methods section "… a coding grid that corresponded to different elements of the health policy triangle”. These elements are eventually provided, but not explained, at the beginning of the Results section, but this is too late for the reader.

R: reference to original Walt and Gilson article included. Clarification in p6: 3-8

3. absence and retention are confused here And the method is not clearly stated here, but some hint is given in the results p8 ll5-7

R: correct. Retention is replaced by absenteeism, including a clarification in footnote. Method clarification p7: 15-17

4. Unclear what "education profiles" refers to. Is this collective e.g. the number of midwives, doctors, etc produced; or relates to the skill set of individual graduates?

R: This has changed to “aggregated professional graduate numbers”.

5. The heading related to "policy process" given is "policy development"

R: Correct that it is actually not ‘policy development’ but “anticipated policy implementation”. This has been changed throughout the text. Also notification that policy formulation will be analysed in another study in future.

6. See comment about absenteeism vs retention:

R. clarification in footnote. Changed in text from retention to absenteeism.

7. "interviews were conducted with …" rather than 'realised'
R. changed in text.

8. P6 113 add "Forecariad is in central Guinea and is well accessible by road . . . ."

R. Added

9. P14 15 "imminent" is not an appropriate adjective here

R. removed

Reviewer 2:

1. Abstract When you say mixed methods you must describe the methods used, not just one method, and how they come together to give an overall picture of the issue being explored.

R. This has been clarified and added. P2: 16-20

2. P6. Lines 4-7 again you only describe interviews after identifying it is a mixed method study
   Lines 8-9 you need a reference for snowballing as a method

R. Added clarification plus reference to snowballing as method.

3. Page 7. You describe that quant analysis was conducted but more detail is still required, how many records from how many schools, what was the analysis process? Later on you mention a pre-tested form, you need to state what this is and then reference where it has been pre-tested. How were retention rates calculated?

R. see p7: 3-17 for further clarification of methods. Abstention rates were actually calculated not retention. This has been changed. Also a reference to fig.3 where trends are produced. The word analysis has changed to “an overview was generated”.

4. I think the detail is in Table 2 so maybe refer to this and say how you calculated. Also define what is meant by contractual/volunteer. Also, the reader doesn't know what Type A, Type B
The table needs explaining with text and referring to better. You state you only chose rural sites, but urban sites are referred to in the table. This is slightly confusing, can you clarify?

R. calculation is now clarified in methods. Contractuals and volunteers, plus types (A, B. C) are clarified in text just above table. Additional referencing/ text would be redundant. “Urban sites” in table has been changed to “urban centre of the district”.

5. Page 10-11 I don't think the following quote reflects a lack of transparency, can you ensure the quote's match the points please? 'Nevertheless, others said that the lack of state transparency in HWF management is a demotivating factor in practicing health services in rural areas.

R. changed to: “the lack of state transparency in HWF recruitment is a demotivating factor in seeking employment in health services in rural areas”.

Page 16 line 1 I think the word 'been' should be 'being'

R. amended

Page 14 I am not sure why gender is brought up here, it is important to mention but if you have not looked at it in this study it would be more relevant to state this in the study limitations.

R. it is already important for the discussion (being such a central issue).

That’s why its mentioned here, and not just in study limitations, and the need for inclusion in future studies.