Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1 Date: 24 May 2019

Reviewer: Tim Martineau

Reviewer's report:

General comment

Many of my comments have been addressed, but the paper still lacks sufficient coherence. There are 3 main problems:

1. The labour market analysis framework is not sufficiently clear (see comments below) to the link between the two research objectives does not work

2. The Walt/Gilson policy framework is not used in a way that is sufficiently supportive of the findings and conclusions (see comments) below.

3. The concepts of absenteeism and retention are confused. It is not possible to link absence of health workers on the day (they may be legitimately carrying out field work, off shift or taking sanctioned leave) to retention. Therefore the link between the two objectives - #1 losses to the workforce and #2 potential gains to the workforce - don't link (this relates to the lack of clarity described in the first point above.

Original comments that have been sufficiently addressed have been removed; outstanding and new comments are listed below, with my responses (R):

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]

R: 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.).
2. 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

R: Still not clear. The problem stems from the fact the policy triangle is not sufficiently explained (and the reference given is unlikely to be accessible to most people whereas the original Walt and Gilson 1994 version will be available to most academics). 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.

3. 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

R: absence and retention are confused here (see comment able). And the method is not clearly stated here, but some hint is given in the results p8 ll5-7

4. 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." R: 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? Presumably this relates to objective #2, but the connection to "the availability of HWF education in relation to the labor market supply." and education profiles is unclear.

5. 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."
R: The heading related to "policy process" given is "policy development". This provides a few ideas on future policy content, but does not - in line with the policy triangle elements - explain the 'process' used to develop current policy "how issues get on the policy agenda and how they fare once there" (Walt and Gilson 1994 p355) which is often used to explain why is might be inappropriate and/or challenging to implement.

Detailed comments:

7. P7 ll17-18 clarify whether this relates to absenteeism or vacancy
A: absenteeism
R: see comment about absenteeism vs retention

New points:

8. Pp13-14 English: "interviews were conducted with …" rather than 'realised'; check throughout

9. P6 ll3 add "Forecariad is in central Guinea and is well accessible by road ….." to contrast with the later sentence about fewer government investments in Yomou.

10. P14 ll5 "imminent" is not an appropriate adjective here

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