Author's response to reviews

Title: Factors from health systems research impacting policy change: lessons from the implementation of Rapid Assessment Protocols for diabetes in low- and middle-income settings

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Author's response to reviews:

Dear Dr. Gonzalez Block, Dear Dr. Hanney,

Health systems research as a tool for policy change: lessons from the implementation of Rapid Assessment Protocols for diabetes in low- and middle-income settings

We would like to thank you for having considered our submission and the reviewers for their comments. We have done our best to address these and hope that with the changes detailed below our paper can now be accepted by your journal.

Many thanks to Warren Kaplan for his positive comments about the aims of this paper. We fully agree that showing the link between health systems research and changes in policy is difficult and our grateful for his statement that this is a “laudable goal”. We recognize that 9 qualitative interviews is a small sample, although in qualitative research sample size does not matter, that is why these interviews were coupled with other methods to attempt provide a more robust overview as well as “triangulate” between the different methods.

The comment referring to Table 2 and citations and views has been clarified. As the Editors know certain online publications, including Health Research Policy and Systems, enable authors to see how many views their articles have had. Although we agree that it would have been good to include more about what was said by the different organizations’ reports mentioning the RAPIA due to space this was not done. We would ask if the overall statement included “either referenced the publications detailed in Table 2 or one of the RAPIA country reports” is sufficient to highlight that these publications used/referenced the RAPIA results in some way.

For Comment 6 – the following has been added to highlight the issue of what difficulties are mentioned: “around access to medicines and care”. In terms of the issue of the IIF (people implementing the study) versus the study methods
(RAPIA) it is hard to disassociate the two as they are both linked as the methods were implemented by a specific group (IIF) who also developed the methods (RAPIA). We feel that the lesson from this is the importance of the relationship and view of the researchers as well as the methods they use in impacting policy through health systems research as is detailed later on in our Conclusion.

The Comment on Page 7 is hard to respond to as this would entail a judgment call in terms of how different stakeholders see research as something useful. We feel that despite the limitations of few respondents from countries answering the questionnaire the overall article highlights the “utility” of the results from this work from different perspectives.

Page 10 – this has been clarified.

The point about this paper “analyses what people familiar with a questionnaire (i.e. health systems research) thought about how this research was implemented and what the enabling factors are to (possible) successful implementation. This in itself is worth publishing” is well taken. This issue is raised by the second reviewer when discussing the title of the paper. We have addressed this concern below with regards to Dina Balabanova’s comments and hope that the change proposed to the title addresses this issue raised by Warren Kaplan.

Overall the paper has been edited to take into account both reviewers’ overall comment about this.

The last paragraph, which the reviewer found weak has been changed and we hope these modifications are appropriate.

In addressing the comments from Dina Balabanova we have made the following changes. Overall the reviewer suggested editing the paper to highlight the results so that they come across more clearly. This has been done and we hope that these changes address this concern. As suggested we have also changed the title. We hope that this change addresses the concerns both reviewers had with regards to the scope of this research.

Changes to the abstract as suggested have been made. We have edited the sentence “The documentary review led to the identification of a variety of sources” in the results and changed this to “Stage 1 led to the identification of various types of documents referring to the results” as this is a result of the actual documentary review. We did not know what we would find, but found that a variety of sources used the results of the RAPIA assessments. Given the word limit constraints we are unable to give some examples in the abstract. The same issue arises for the inclusion of some of the topics discussed in the interviews. We have made some changes to the conclusion in the abstract to try to address some of the concerns raised by the reviewer.

The comments the reviewer makes about the introduction have been addressed. A box as suggested about the key features of the RAPIA have been added. On page 3 paragraph 4 as suggested some references and material have been added about health system research uptake.
Looking at the comments on the Methods – we recognize the inherent bias of the documentary review. The reviewer states that we should include something to highlight that this approach does not show impact, but more the dissemination of the results. We feel that the last sentence describing the documentary review already included does this “The aim of this search was to identify documents that had used or referenced material produced by the IIF using the RAPIA tool.” The use of the term individuals using the RAPIA material has been clarified. Issues around the sampling of Stage 2 have been included in the limitations. The comments on page 4 have been addressed. As requested the link highlighting the results has corrected. Table 3 “Use of IIF materials by the WHO” has the direct reference of which WHO document is used, it is unclear what the reviewer would like with regards to “Table 3 should include not only who quoted RAPIA findings but which paper was quoted.” The question with regards to the difference between local and international partners has been addressed. The reviewer asks how spontaneous comments or unexpected comments were collected. These were not included in this analysis and paper as the focus was on these different themes. The amount of information collected during the interviews was immense and the authors had to make decisions about what to include or not to make this paper as comprehensive as possible.

On page 7 the comment about the quote from Zambia – this has been further detailed to address the lack of clarity. The issue of legitimacy and credibility has been strengthened in the conclusion. The suggested change to page 9 and methods for policy analysis has been made as suggested. As per the comments from Warren Kaplan the conclusion has been edited and strengthened.

Again we thank the reviewers for their comments and hope that with the changes we have made our article is now acceptable for publication.

I thank you for the attention you will give this edited submission, and remain,

Yours sincerely,

David Beran