Reviewer’s report

Title: 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

Version: 1 Date: 18 February 2015

Reviewer: Warren Kaplan

Reviewer’s report:

When assessing the work, please consider the following points:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The authors have developed a multi-level tool (RAPIA) for assessing the different elements that influence access to diabetes care, including access to insulin. In this paper, the authors attempt to identify the factors that enabled this RAPIA assessment process to inform and influence policy makers. This document makes no attempt to provide insight into the challenges present for access to diabetes healthcare, as this paper is limited to understanding how the RAPIA tool was implemented, a laudable goal.

The question is well-defined—whether or not the authors have succeeded in their attempt is another question entirely. The question of understanding how health systems research can impact policy is relatively new so this paper does add to the field of knowledge. The paper has some limitations which need to be acknowledged. See below

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

The qualitative methods are generally appropriate. There are sufficient details to replicate the analysis of the RAPIA implementation, although I am bothered by the fact that “… in depth interviews [were] with one partner from [each of] the 6 countries…as well as just one “Global Diabetes Advocate” . This may be enough, but it certainly raises a question of “sample size” in my mind.

By the way, there should be line numbers associated with this document as this would have made review much easier.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

Generally YES and no need for any ‘control’ in this type if qualitative review.

I have some questions about Table 2 as discussed on page 5. What do the authors mean by ‘citations and views’? Do they mean citations and number of ‘hits’ in the search? To me, the context of mentioning RAPIA is all important. Specifically, it would have been very interesting to actually read what Hanoi, NCD Child, Novo, NCD Alliance had to say about RAPIA. Was RAPIA mentioned just in passing? or was an entire paragraph devoted to it? What was the tone of
the reference Positive? Negative?

4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?  
Yes

5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?  
Yes

6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?  
Yes, overall, although some of the language, to my mind, begged a bit more further detailed discussion. One example is on page 6: “The WHO Country Officer stated that the IIF was able to build trust and a relationship with local partners and address difficult issues.”  
What were these ‘difficult issues” and did the WHO officer mention anything about how the RAPIA assessment did this, as opposed to the IIF?  
Page 7: “In Vietnam the partner stated that the results and report were read by many and this was useful to different people and not only policy makers as the wealth of results was useful for everyone.” What does ‘useful’ mean? Indeed, as the authors themselves said in the “Limitations” section:

“Overall the low number of local respondents and low rate of response from local partners to the online questionnaire, the main people involved in the RAPIA process, limits the assessment of what truly happened on the ground.”

On page 10, the authors state the following:

“The implementation of these recommendations would have been a good way to assess the impact of the RAPIA on policy. This was done in Mozambique with a reassessment of the RAPIA showing some progress in terms of initial recommendations.”

What was this ‘progress’?

The authors should summarize it as this appears to be the only place in this document where the impact of RAPIA was actually quantified in some way (e.g, first comprehensive non-communicable disease plan in sub-Saharan Africa/strengthening of the diabetes association/increased healthworkder training in diabetes care / development of patient education materials/expansion of public awareness)

I would argue that this paper is not analyzing policy or impact. 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.
MAJOR REVISION
These key factors should be given ‘bullet’ points or otherwise subdivided into
different domains. The section of the discussion relegated to these factors needs
more emphasis. Isn’t that the point of this paper?. To wit, separate subheadings
discussing: taking local control of data/formalized-evidence-based approach/local
data for local problems/trust between local and int'l partners based on 'credible'
partners and results/ etc.

7. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes

8. Is the writing acceptable?
Overall yes. There are some awkward sentences such as:

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS
For example, “The RAPIA is structured as a multi-level assessment tool for
health systems research of the different elements that influence the access that
people with diabetes have to care in a given country.”
This is quite a sentence.

Or this: “From a policy perspective the RAPIA resulted in Kyrgyzstan with
diabetes being included as part of the existing cardiovascular disease program,
thereby expanding the area of NCDs within Kyrgyzstan's health program, “Den
Sooluk”.
How about: “ From a policy perspective, the RAPIA resulted in Kyrgyzstan
including diabetes as part of the existing...”

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS
Most interestingly, there seem to be a singular lack of commas in this article !
And commas are sorely needed.
“The data collection process provides a country situation analysis regarding
diabetes care, including access to medicines highlights the strengths and
weaknesses of the health...”
Comma needed after "medicines”. The commas seem to have disappeared. A bit
disconcerting to read and I will not copy edit this document further.

The last paragraph is weak. Why talk about Peru suddenly, when in my opinion,
a larger, final view on factors influencing how evidence can be translated into
action on the ground would be more appropriate.

Level of interest:An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

Quality of written English:Needs some language corrections before being
published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests