Reviewer's report

Title: Mapping the use of research to support strategies tackling maternal and child health inequities: evidence from six countries in Africa and Latin America

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Reviewer: Elia Diez

Reviewer's report:

After the review, I'll suggest a Minor Revisions Minor Essencial Revision, although the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached.

The paper reviews a relevant issue, especially in African and Latin American countries.

As they state, research may play a main role in the decision making, definition and implementation of strategies against mother and child inequities and the paper may contribute to understand and impulse its development in each participant country.

The research question, and objectives, could be more precisely defined in the abstract and the main text. In the abstract, it should be clarified that the paper studies 6 countries in the framework of a widest project. I think that the MASCOT objectives are not useful in the abstract and the references in the text could be reduced. In the introduction it should be clarified why MASCOT worked with 11 countries and this study 6 of them.

The objectives of the study could be better defined in the 4th paragraph: to find out how did research influence MCH policies and programs. In the following introduction paragraphs, it seems that the main objective is to assess whether the countries research was instrumental, conceptual or symbolic (a clear question). But in methods and results, other very interesting objectives arise:
- number and names of research centres
- the research produced
- topics of the research
- funding
- intentions of the researchers
- evidence base of the plans and strategies
- dissemination
- inequities approach
- capacities

It would be good to describe what will be analysed in the objectives
About the strategy of analysis, the terms ‘inductive’ and ‘deductive’ used in the main text (introduction, methods and results), the abstract and the tables, may confuse the reader. Clarifying it only once would be better.

At the beginning of methods it could be described the type of study and design (qualitative, documental analysis...).

The tools (online survey, guides for the content analysis of documents and guidelines for interviews) are not described. The description of the main issues of the guidelines, questions, variables (in the case of the online survey) and categories of all the variables studied would help to understand how the research was done (and eventually could be replicated). Otherwise the reader can't understand how the information was captured and processed.

How finally research is ascribed to one of the three categories (instrumental, conceptual or symbolic) is not clear.

The period of the study should be clarified. Sometimes it seems 2012, sometimes from 2009-2012..

The first paragraph of results describes that the first ten research centres will be listed. This should be in methods.

The numbers and percentages should have similar formats in all countries.

Some conclusions don’t seem adequately supported by the results, especially in the abstract, and the same happens with the recommendations.

The typing and format of many of the references should be carefully reviewed.

Table 1. the first column describes the objectives of the document, the 2nd the type of tool, and the 4th could be eliminated (its difficult to understand). The titles of the columns could be renamed.

Table 2. Review the format, different between cells and countries.

Table 3: the last column explores the type of research (instrumental, conceptual or symbolic), but the cell related to Brazil doesn’t answer this question.

Figure 1. I’m not sure if it clarifies or would be better to rely only in the text and eliminate the figure.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests