Author’s response to reviews

Title: Optimizing decentralization for the health sector by exploring the synergy of decision space, capacity, and accountability: Insights from the Philippines

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[*Responses below are also provided in tabular form in our cover letter. We invite the Editor and Reviewer 2 to refer to our cover letter instead for an easier reading of our point-by-point responses.]

Reviewer 2: Thomas J Bossert

a) “… I suggest a few additions to clarify the criteria used to judge decision space… New Table 2 is very helpful, although I think they might offer a bit more explanation for the assessment of wide, moderate, and narrow than they do on page 12 - again I tried to offer more specifics for each function in the 1998 article. Although in the narrative they offer some specific explanations for the choice, it would be good to have more explicit expression of criteria that go beyond the judgments based on author's summary of interviews.”

* Thank you again for pointing out the importance of describing how we assessed decision space into wide, moderate, or narrow. We reviewed the content of the article (i.e. Bossert 1998, cited in our manuscript as Ref. #21) once again and adapted from Table 2 of that article in order to include a new Table 3 in this revision (see Table 3 on page 14, and also lines 6-9 on page 12). The new Table 3 draws inspiration from Bossert’s 1998 article and also reflects our reasoning in making a judgement of decision spaces. We hope that the addition of Table 3 makes our criteria for assessing decision space clearer and more explicit.

b) “The use of illustrative quotes in New Table 2 and 3 is extremely helpful; however, again the authors need to be more explicit in the text about how representative these views are, especially since the respondents come from different administrative levels. For instance, are the views of DOH central office representative of respondents from municipalities? …I
suggest they use some of the material from the Comments section of the Supplementary Material to explain their conclusions since these comments seem to account for... how representative or consistent the views of different administrative levels are…”

* Tables 2 and 3 are now Table 4 (page 17) and Table 5 (page 23), respectively, in this revision. In order to disaggregate where the views were coming from (i.e. whether from central or local levels), we have revised the Supplementary Material so that the levels for each quote are clearly indicated (see Supplementary Material with tracked changes). However, we are able to make this distinction in the Supplementary Material only and not in Tables 4 and 5 in the main text due to limitations in space (i.e. we cannot include more quotes in the main text). We also recognize that the views between central/regional and local levels may be different for some functions, and we have provided a comment about this in the Discussion (page 27, lines 10-21). We hope that these changes in the main text and the Supplementary Material explain how we synthesized the views even if these may differ between central/regional and local levels for some functions.

c) “For these Tables and for the Supplementary Material it seems to me that although the interviewees are not identified by name, it might be possible to identify them by position and experience so the authors either need to get their approval or should disguise them more.”

* We reviewed all the quotes both in the main text (new Tables 4 and 5) and in the Supplementary Material and made revisions to ensure that the interviewees could not be identified. All these changes have been tracked (see Revised Manuscript and Supplementary Material with tracked changes).