**Reviewer’s report**

**Title:** Strengthening Capacity to Use Research Evidence in Health Sector Policy-Making: Experience from Kenya and Malawi

**Version:** 0  **Date:** 15 Jul 2019

**Reviewer:** Yvonne Erasmus

**Reviewer's report:**

This paper presents a detailed account of a project implemented to support the strengthening of capacity in ministries of health in Kenya and Malawi to use evidence in policy and programmatic decision-making. The authors recount and reflect in detail, and with a critical lens, on project successes and challenges drawing on their own internal project evaluation as well as an external evaluation commissioned by the funder. As such it contributes to a growing body of knowledge not just on challenges in strengthening capacity, but how such efforts play out in practice. It is recommended that the paper be published subject to minor revisions and considerations outlined below.

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**Minor revisions/considerations:**

Key messages p. 2 line 42. Considering expanding the sentence to explain why capacity remains weak.

P. 6 line 118. Please elaborate by adding a sentence explaining how the needs assessment was conducted, e.g. through a desk review and interviews.

P. 8 It would be useful to the reader if a summary sentence is included under the table that highlights similarities and differences between the needs identified in the two countries.

P. 16 line 337. The authors mention staff inertia here when attempting to obtain greater access to evidence, but on p.24 line 524 say that access to evidence was identified as a barrier to greater evidence use. It would be useful if the authors could add a sentence reflecting on this apparent contradiction. For example, are those who expressed the need for access to evidence different from those who, through the project, are tasked with accessing evidence?

P. 20 line 434. Mention is made of Malawi operating on an austerity budget. Could the authors reflect on whether the reliance of the Malawi government on external funding for a substantial part of their budget has any bearing on how those in government might view the use of evidence in decision-making, if this is something that they picked up on in project implementation. For example, does this in anyway encourage the use of evidence?
Spelling/grammatical errors:
Policy-making vs. policymaking. Check for consistency throughout.
P. 2 line 45. But these to be. Considering revising.
P. 4 line 77. LMIC. Provide explanation for acronym.
P. 5 line 99. Should be government agendas.
P. 8 column 2, second bullet. The ; should be replaced by a .
P. 12 line 250. Should be him/her to discuss.
P. 18 line 381. The word evidence is repeated.

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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