Author’s response to reviews

Title: Learning sites for health system governance in Kenya and South Africa: reflecting on our experience

Authors:

Lucy Gilson (lucy.gilson@uct.ac.za)

Version: 1 Date: 20 Mar 2020

Author’s response to reviews:

Thanks for the opportunity to respond to these comments. All revisions are noted in track changes.

Reviewer #1:

1. In pages 5-6, further description of your work is needed as it is not clear what the "programme of work" is composed of.
   
   • Response: Text edited to clarify. However, please note that Box 1, which is situated at this point in the text, provides a full overview of the research and intervention work we have conducted. Further details of our data collection and other activities are the focus of subsequent discussion.

2. You have too many long sentences 4 lines and more through the manuscript that makes it hard to follow;
   
   Some sentences have brackets within brackets also makes it hard to follow.
   
   • Response: Text revised throughout.

3. The manuscript could be organized/structured differently to ease the flow and make it read easier with short sentences such as:
   
   Under "Learning site activities: where did we work, what did we do and how did we do it?" you could add subheadings like "where did we work", another subheading "what did we do", and a 3rd subheading "how did we do it". Under each subheading you include related content.
The same would go for the heading "What are the achievements and challenges of the learning site approach?"

- Response: text revised to include the proposed sub-headings.

4. Specific comments:

Page 7, line 121, write PHC in its extended form then abbreviate: Primary healthcare centers (PHC)

- Response: the abbreviation PHC has now been inserted into the text the first time the phrase primary health care is used (page 6), so that the subsequent use of the abbreviation on page 7 is clear.

Page 7, line 125, you write "these features", what features? What are you referring to? If you mean the health expenditure per head and the PHC performance, which later you did not consider for selection sites, then why are they mentioned?

- Response: Text revised to clarify the meaning at this point.

Page 8, lines 154-159, very long sentence that needs editing for spelling such as focused which is more widely/internationally acceptable compared to "focussed" and unclear content such as "for example, see [31]; what is 31?

- Response: Text revised to address points raised (now page 9)

Page 8 & 9, all paragraphs of the 6 features are long convoluted sentences that makes it hard to follow and includes instructions such as "see 31; see 34; see 39; see 44, 29 and on"

- Response: Text revised to address these points (now page 9-10)

Page 10, lines 198-200, the following sentence is not clear: However, they all, first, sought to strengthen the researcher-manager relationships underpinning learning site activities, including by allowing better understanding of each other's organisational worlds."

- Response: Text revised to clarify meaning (now page 11)

Page 16, line 343, the sentence needs revision:"It has been not always been possible to work consistently and effectively up the system, ..."

- Response: Text revise to clarify meaning (now page 17)

Page 18, line 397, the sentence "Through the learning sites we have been able better to understand the micro-practices" needs revision
Reviewer #2:

Major revisions

1. In the last paragraph (Page 6 lines 96-100) the authors make an assertion that "the programme of work has fed back into policy and management discussions at higher levels of the health system" both locally and internationally……. Please include your documentary evidences as references.

   • Response: The text has been revised to clarify that this point is part of the overall introduction to the paper. However, the linked activities are presented in detail in Figure 1 and Table 2, with discussion p.11-12; the impacts of the work are then described in Box 3 and 4, and discussed on p.12-13.

2. Page 6 lines 109-111: Please simplify the description of Mitchell's Plain sub-district as was done for Kilifi and Sedibeng. Currently, the description is very difficult to follow or understand

   • Response: Text edited

3. There are inconsistencies in the referencing style (in-text citation) throughout the whole manuscript. For instance, in page 5 line 94 the in-text citation reads 'see also 9'. The authors should maintain consistency in their referencing style and delete all 'see also' as this is not acceptable.

   • Response: Text edited throughout the paper.

4. From your experience, could you reflect on the potential and possible ways a prior history of engagement between research teams and local health managers may have influenced the research and learning sites process. This would be very useful to other researchers who may want to replicate or adapt this strategy for strengthening health systems governance (transferability).

   • Response: We note that this point is already addressed on p.7-9 and p.14. However, point 4 in the conclusions (p.20) has also been revised to address it.