Reviewer’s report

Title: Capacity for health economics research and practice in Jordan, Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territories and Turkey: needs assessment and options for development

Version: 0 Date: 02 Feb 2020

Reviewer: Hassan Dib

Reviewer's report:

The authors performed a great job on this research paper. There are few comments I would like to address:

1. The methodology of selection and evaluation is quite good

Remarks and questions about the survey such

a. It is not clear how the recruitment process took place. Still the method of selection is vague, which needs to be made clearer and clarified in a chronological order. As I understand the authors came down to 556 articles after the evaluation and selection process. It is not clear how the authors chose the 280 respondents. I understand they took the emails listed on their publications but how about those non-academics. So why only 280? why they didn't go up to 556 emails and contact details? the description of the selection process has to be clear.

b. The survey was an online one. How long the respondent needed to fill it. The authors claimed that the participation was low, I guess if the survey long that will diminish the participation.

Also, the authors didn't mention whether there was an incentive to fill the survey (even though the survey long with the appropriate incentive would have gathered more data, but no too late)

c. Was there a back to back translation of the survey to make sure of avoiding losing the meaning of the questions

In general the authors mentioned about scarce resources in capacity development, which is a difficult task since resources are nearly absent in that part of the world apart from Turkey. The economic strength of Turkey allowed it to play a crucial role in the domestic and international politics and alternatively impacted on its economy, health, education, research, etc. While the other three countries (which are considered newborn countries-I will describe them in such context- after the division of these countries post WWII among the Allies) their economies faced and still many challenges with the political instability, coup-detat (Syria and 2011 war till now), corruption, political stagnation in Lebanon and its long term wars and the Israeli-Palestine conflict. All these factors contributed and still contributing to the scarce research because either lack of funds, or funds are diverted leading towards corruption, and because there is major concern which is concentrating on survival with doing only the job rather becoming innovative. i.e. , and as the authors acknowledge, if the population is living in a peaceful and
prosperous economy then people will be able to divert their way of thinking towards progress and innovation, while when the country facing continuous turmoils the attention will be diverted towards how to survive rather on innovation and progress. THESE FACTORS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED that is attributing to the low output of economics research capacity development.

One last remark I would like to address is about cooperation in research among the four countries. This is still not matured yet in that region of the world because I believe it is a cultural behaviour where each one wants to lead rather working in teams (in general) now there are few collaboration among same school, or different schools within each country but the regional and international cooperation is still at its lowest level because lack of trust and lack or interaction with international and regional level of scholars whether in person face to face in conferences, during post docs, or visiting professorship programs.

As for the recommendation of improving capacity development, there is a need of establishing a regional institution that will supervise the funding to these four countries and will be supervised and operated by the donor country(ies) to develop a framework of performance and connectivity between the four countries in addition to what the authors the mentioned in their recommendations. By following these steps will ensure transparency of the funds how and to where the funds are directed. An there is a need for and quarterly, semi, and annual back reports sent by each country to the regional centre of health economics about their

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