Reviewer’s report

Title: The last one heard: The importance of an early stage participatory evaluation for programme implementation

Version: 1 Date: 14 October 2013

Reviewer: Laura Nichols

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Overall the paper is well-researched, complete, and presents an interesting issue in programme implementation and intriguing findings. Background information on the issue and programmatic response is thorough and well-documented with research. The greatest revision needed are clarifications about the sample and methods as well as better correspondence between programme theory and the findings: particularly the key programme components that are presumed to be effective.

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Compulsory Revisions: More information is needed about the in-depth interviews: who took advantage of those, were they key informants only or women who chose that over a focus group? There is also not enough information about the purposive sampling employed. How were women actually identified, asked to participate, and then screened for appropriateness for the study?

FINDINGS

The finding that women who had been part of the programme were empowered to impart knowledge to others is key. Like many programmes, it is often trust in staff and the relationship that has an impact rather than the content of the programme itself. This is often a limitation as staff changes—are there protections in place if staff CHW leave? The unintended consequences of increased partner involvement and understanding is an interesting finding.

2. Compulsory Revisions: From the findings it is difficult to determine if the findings are consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the purpose of the programme itself, or evidence that the programme is not working as intended and thus needs to be altered as a result. Therefore, a stronger discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the programme early on, matched against the later-reported findings, would help the reader understand the true value of a formative evaluation.

3. Essential Revisions: Related to above, the article does not have any discussion of the proposed use of the findings of the research in influencing programme design and delivery. I would thus urge the authors to either change the title so it is more focused on the findings of an early-stage evaluation or include a discussion about how the findings impacted programme delivery. For example, the finding that the programme empowers women to be more knowledgeable about their health: are there projects to train them to be
information resources in their communities?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.