Author’s response to reviews

Title: Analysis of selected policies towards Universal Health Coverage in Uganda: the Policy Implementation Barometer protocol

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Author’s response to reviews:

Responding to the reviewers comments

Reviewer reports:

Reviewer #1: Your protocol is already suitable for publications; however, I would like to suggest a few ways of improving it. I don't know what is your room for manoeuver to take my suggestions into account, considering you have already been granted ethical approval. However, these may be useful on the one hand to improve this publication, on the other hand during future implementation steps of your protocol.

My two main concerns and related suggestions are the following:

1. Your study rests on a cross-sectional survey. However, for several reasons, I think it could be useful to transform it into a longitudinal survey, by administering the same questionnaire say 1-2 years after (possibly to a reduced sample, and/or only through online interviews). Indeed, this could help you assess whether your intended feedback effect is useful - especially since you mention that: "For objective 5, we plan to learn from the process of dissemination of the
PIB findings. The main methods of data collection will involve the active documentation of stakeholder reactions and responses to the findings" (page 17) and that you attempt "assessing progress in policy implementation". You mention that the study on the 3 policies is just a first wave, but will be followed by 2 other waves. Please briefly explain how will be performed these following waves and whether it can be treated as a longitudinal survey.

It is indeed true that we plan to conduct three PIB surveys. The first survey is the initial situation analysis survey which will assist the implementation of policies in the Project’s lifespan. The second survey will be conducted in the third year of the project and the last survey will be final evaluation. We plan to use the same tool and approach in order to capture any changes whether positive or negative. Therefore, as suggested this study will be longitudinal.

2. Your study implicitly assumes that there are systemic barriers to programme/policy implementation (you acknowledge on page 20 that "The selected policies are not mutually exclusive meaning that some issues may overlap") but also specific barriers. The systemic issues should appear more clearly. Both in your questionnaire and in the way you analyse it and present results, I think it would be worth disentangling between (i) systemic issues/barriers & enablers (common to the 3 policies) and specific issues/barriers & enablers (to each policy/programme). Moreover, you mention the importance of understanding the ToC, include it in the Barometer questions (#2) and briefly mention them on page 15, but do not explain them in the protocol. I guess you have already elaborated a draft ToC, which can possibly be adapted based on respondents' appraisal - and which forcefully integrate systemic/transversal issues - but your draft ToC should explicitly appear in the protocol (main text or annex), and not just in the questionnaires.

We acknowledge the concerns raised above. However, our concept was to explore the barriers and enablers of policy implementation during the study itself. Upon analysis, these barriers and enablers will thus be categorised to be systemic or not.

Similarly, the concept of theory of change will be explored during the study itself. One of the approaches is document review which will involve the examination of particular policy documents and establish if there are clear TOC and in them respect assess the knowledge and understanding of the TOC by the respondents.

Specific comments:

- Title: Consider revising the title of your manuscript, which is not very appealing and imperfectly reflect the contents of the paper; try and make it more precise, for instance by mentioning the PIB or at least selected policies to reach UHC.
The title has been revised to capture the views raised by the Reviewer. The new title is “Analysis of selected policies towards Universal Health Coverage in Uganda: the Policy Implementation Barometer protocol”

- Abstract: Please rephrase the sentence starting by "While", and explain how this study is located within the 3 barometer surveys. The fact that this is a theory-driven research could also be mentioned.

This has been revised in the abstract to reflect that the survey is the first survey of the three planned PIB surveys.

- Page 5: "Where it exists, it is often about what frontline actors should do to improve policy outcomes but less focused on the upstream actions that support implementation processes…": and also systemic barriers & enablers. The next sentence is a repetition. Next §: spelling of indicator.

The spelling of Indicator has been corrected

- Page 7: do you have references regarding the section on policy standards?

This description was extracted from reference number 11 and has since been acknowledged in the section

- Pages 9-10: this section is long and there are duplications, consider synthetizing it.

This section has been revised and possible duplications have been addressed.

- Page 11, Box 1: question #2 is of a different nature than the others (which deal with respondents' opinions); consider explaining a bit more into details how you are going to deal with that question.

This is similar to concern number two by the reviewer 1. Our idea is explore if TOCs exist in the specific policies and assess the knowledge and understanding of respondents about them

- Page 12: why introduce the concept of UHA? This does not seem very helpful.
This was a typing error. It is supposed to be Universal Health Coverage (UHC) as already described in the background.

- It would be helpful to describe a bit the study setting, i.e. the three policies/programmes studied (either in the main text, or as an annex).

The specific policies will be described in detail from the document review during collection of secondary data.

- Sampling procedure: among the 120 expected respondents at national level, I guess some should be considered as transversal or outside the 3 policies - e.g. representative of the MoH dept. for planning, financing, HR, etc., who can help understanding systemic issues (cf. my 2nd main comment).

It is indeed true that some of the respondents will come from crosscutting fields hence the recognition of purposefully identifying the respondents.

- Page 20: ) missing on line 28, "to" should be suppressed on line 49.

These have been noted and corrected

- It would be helpful to give more details about the practical implementation of your research: how is the research team composed of, who will perform the surveys, etc.

This has been highlighted on that research assistants will be trained and deployed in the selected districts to conduct the face-to-face interviews. We plan to engage five research assistants per district. After this a selected number of the RAs will be assigned to conduct the interviews at national level.

- Page 22: "thank" missing on line 27.

This has been noted and corrected

- Table 2 should be simplified because many elements are the same across the 3 programmes; you could have for instance a common module and a specific module for each of them.
This table has been revised accordingly and the specific indicators of a policy domain have been highlighted in bold and italics in the column of indicators categories.

- Figure 1: what is its title? Source?

This is provided in the section of list of figure just after the list of references

- Spelling should be check in the questionnaires

Spellings have been checked and corrected accordingly

Suggested additional reference on policy-implementation gap:


This is indeed a good reference. It has been included as reference 24 in the manuscript