Reviewer's report

Title: Using targeted subsidies to improve access to skilled birth attendance for poor women: a case study of vouchers plus health equity funds in three rural health districts in Cambodia

Version: 2 Date: 19 July 2009

Reviewer: John Grundy

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NAME OF REVIEWER: JOHN GRUNDY

To the editors and authors,

Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper.

1. Overall I found this paper to be informative, well written and of high public health significance, and therefore in my view warrants publication. The methods are sound; the paper has logical flow and is clearly written and well referenced. The use of tabulated data and figures to complement findings in the text is excellent. Limitations of results and the operations of the operation of the funds are also clearly described. I thought the authors were convincing in assisting the reader to understand the impact of an intervention (vouchers schemes and HEF) when implemented simultaneously with other interventions that also have impact (in this case performance based contracting and delivery incentive schemes).

2. Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

2.1 Refer to the last sentence in the methods section. The use of % terms is a bit confusing for the reader. Would suggest clarifying these last two sentences

2.2 It is noted that the major operational weakness of the scheme was that only 39% of poor women were enrolled in the voucher scheme. Surely this must have been the major contributing operational factor to limitation of impact. This being the case, the potential of the scheme for impact is probably understated in the discussion.

2.3 As noted in this paper, there are now a range of studies in Cambodia on the impact of various pro poor schemes for maternal health. This study is an important addition. But what is the next step? Are the authors, based on this further evidence suggesting policy developments that recommend combining the approaches of performance based contracting, delivery incentives, HEF/vouchers systems and quality improvement? In this regard I think the final part of the discussion and the conclusion should provide more clarity on next research or policy recommendations.

3. Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use
of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

No comment

4. Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

No comment

**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' John Grundy