Reviewer's report

**Title:** Growth of a cohort of very low birth weight infants in Johannesburg, South Africa

**Version:** 2  **Date:** 18 March 2011

**Reviewer:** Petteri Hovi

**Reviewer's report:**

For some reason I see the figures for the first time now. See comments R2.1 and R2.2 in the following.

The authors have responded to my requests relatively well. The total deletion of the international VLBW comparison is a good decision and makes this clearer.

**Major Compulsory Revisions**

Point numbers from my original review:

3. To account for individual measurement bias can be performed at least by simply applying the attendants name as a categorical value in a model. I asked for such an analysis and no additional information gathering.

5. I asked the authors to describe what kind of statistical testing they performed in the first comparison. This is still missing.

16. Stunting prevalence as an explanatory factor removed from abstract, that is OK. However, the authors have now added same idea in the first sentence of the 3rd paragraph, in Discussion. I find the idea illogical and I will stick to this opinion irrespective of where in the manuscript it is stated. The point here is that, clearly, the reasons for stunting contribute to the poor catch up. It is the form of writing stunting as an “additional factor contributing to slower catch up growth”, I advice the authors to reconsider.

**R2.1** In figures 1 to 4, the authors should state what the dots and the vertical lines stand for. Means and 95% confidence intervals for the means, I presume.

The figure legends should also refer the source of population for Z-scores (WHO-reference population).

**Minor Essential Revisions**

5. In data analysis, explanation of z-score calculation, the expression “population” is not clear enough. I presume it could be written as “WHO reference population”. This change is optional, because the message can be understood form the context.

15. In the abstract Z-scores 0.8 and 0 would be, in my opinion, uniformly formatted if written 0.8 and 0.0.

**R2.2** In the figures, larger font size would be helpful in the axis titles and all the
labels. Omitting the repetition of “n=” below the horizontal axis could also help alignment of the number of subjects and make the figures clearer.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests