Author’s response to reviews

Title: Paniya Voices: A Participatory Poverty and Health Assessment among a marginalised South Indian tribal population

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Editors,

Thank you for the opportunity to re-submit the paper, which we originally submitted as a study proposal. As a correspondence, there was considerable more work to put in and we greatly appreciated the comments from the two referees whose suggestions, we feel, have greatly strengthened the paper. There are no points of disagreement. The specific changes are detailed below.

**Reviewer: M Chambers**

**Comment:**

The major compulsory revisions relate to the need for clarification of specific terms or insufficient explanation, for example, no description of the pilot study, the nature of informal engagement, the involvement of colonies in the preparation of materials for ethical approval and so forth. Reference is made to a vulnerability framework but no description of what this is. Similarly the research protocol is referred to again no idea what that consisted of. Having some indication of the shape and nature of the above would be important if the authors are sticking to the overall purpose of the paper. All of these important issues are identified on the text.

**Response:**

We have accepted all of the suggested changes and have provided detail where suggested. We have described more fully the feasibility study, provided details on the informal interactions with the Paniya communities, the involvement of the colonies in the ethical procedures, a description of the vulnerability framework we employed.

**Comment:**

A more detailed background would also help the reader get this project into context and where it resides within the overall larger study. The authors need to place themselves in the shoes of someone reading this that knows nothing about the project or their methodology (which is a very good one). It might also be useful to include something about the issues/challenges that the research team had to overcome and how other researchers might be able to avoid or avert these.

**Response:**

We have provided more detail on the broader action research project in which Paniya Voices is situated. We have attempted to insert details throughout the text that highlights the challenges faced and choices that we made. Current challenges are also highlighted in the final section.
Reviewer: Nikki Clelland

A. Major compulsory Revisions:

1 Comment: Is it the authors’ intent to describe an approach to research which they call ‘Participatory Poverty and Health Assessment’? Is this a previously developed & tested process? How does it differ from other participatory and/or qualitative approaches to research? Further background and rationale for this [PHAA] approach would help to clarify the appropriateness of the research design for the study and generalisability of the approach.

Response: Indeed, this point that was not clear in the prior draft. We have clarified that we developed the PPHA and included what distinguishes it from other approaches, notably participatory rural appraisals (see background, page 3).

2 Comment: On p10, section ‘Data recording, management and analysis’, and in the conclusions of the paper, the authors’ discuss plans for future work (eg. stages 2 & 3 of data analysis & further workshops to discuss findings) which add little ‘to providing guidance for other researchers’. Completing these aspects of the study and describing the approaches taken & challenges encountered would be of significant interest to the broader readership.

Response: We have since completed the analysis of the data and have had workshops with the Paniya participants to ensure accuracy of the data. We have described the analysis and some key findings (page 12). A large forum will be held in the spring 2010 (with a large representation of Paniyas from the district) followed by further meetings, we hope to disseminate this first part of the study to researchers and policy-makers as part of the forum, which is why we are submitting this paper at this point. Certainly, as another reviewer suggested, it would be appropriate to add a joining paper at a later date on this process and results.

3 Comment: There certainly needs to be more work done in developing and applying culturally appropriate research techniques but I am unclear how the concluding remarks contribute to ‘provide researchers with a potential approach to working with marginalised communities in low-income settings.’

Response: On re-reading the conclusion, we agree that this statement was not appropriate. We have rewritten the conclusion to identify our current challenges and next steps (page 12-13).

B. Minor Essential Revisions

1 Comment: I am unclear about what the aims and objectives of the action research project ‘Vulnerability and Health in Wayanad, Kerala’ or details of the 2006 feasibility study (see p8 para 2) and their connection with the present study.

Response: We have clarified the aims and objectives of the broader action research project and how Paniya Voices fits in with that project (page 4). The details of the feasibility study have also been added (page 9).
2. **Comment:** Please provide detail on the process for selecting and recruiting communities to the study.

**Response:** We have clarified the process for selecting and recruiting communities (page 8).

3 **Comment:** On p5, in the para on ‘study population’ the sentence ‘The Paniyas are predominately landless (75% of Paniya households own less than 10 cents of land)… Should read ‘10 per cent’

**Response:** This is not a typo, 10 cents is correct. We have defined what cents for the reader to indicate it is a measure of land size (page 5).

4 **Comment:** Figures are not labelled or titled. A map that provides context of the Paniya colonies and their relation to India and the world would be more helpful.

**Response:** Figures have been titled. Such a map, while interesting idea, is not feasible due to the low global prevalence of Paniyas in Kerala.

5 **Comment:** I would like more explanation on Figures 2 and 3 and what they illustrate.

**Response:** We have explained what Figures 2 and 3 illustrate (page 11).

6 **Comment:** I'm not entirely clear on who conducted what aspects of the study. For example, Page 8 ‘Data collection’ para 1: the PPHA was undertaken by a local non government organisation’ page 10 section ‘Data recording management and analysis’ para 1: ‘data and field notes were recorded by handwritten diaries[whose diaries?] ‘transcripts were translated into English and reviewed [by who?] to ensure logical translation’

**Response:** We have clarified who has done what on the various aspects of the study (page 11).

7 **Comment:** More explanation on ‘policy-relevant data on the views, experiences and priorities of an ST group’ would be helpful as this is a point often cited but with no explanation of what this actually means.

**Response:** We have defined what we mean by policy-relevant data in the background section so that the reader may know what our understanding of this is (page 3).

C. Discretionary Revisions

1 **Comment:** It would be useful to see the authors include a brief account of Indigenous capacity and development outcomes from involvement in the research, whether this was for Indigenous researchers or Paniya community people.

**Response:** Interesting, we have included in the conclusion one of the challenges in the study is that the lack of appropriation of the Paniyas of the study findings (due to their high levels of resignation) and we are currently attempting new mobilization strategies, hopefully we would have more to report on this dimension in the future.
2 **Comment:** The current title could be rewritten to improve clarity on the purpose of the manuscript.

**Response:** We have revised the title.