Reviewer's report

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

**Version:** 3  **Date:** 13 October 2009

**Reviewer:** Nikki Clelland

**Reviewer's report:**

Dear Editors

The authors have taken the time to consider and respond appropriately to my initial comments in re-submitting this paper. The additional effort, particularly in completing further data analysis, has added new insights into the study. However, I have a number of recommendations for improvement before a decision on publication can be reached.

A. Major compulsory Revisions:

1. The major compulsory revisions relate to the need to clarify the purpose of the paper by clearly stating the aims and objectives for the paper. Two purposes could be interpreted from the current wording: the focus of the paper is to present the findings of the study as stated in the abstract (ie. policy-relevant data on Indigenous perceptions of health) and/or to describe a culturally appropriate research methodology as stated on p4 (ie. PPHA experience). On reading the response to comment 3, it seems the intention is on publishing the findings of the initial stages of the study.

2. Following on from the above, separating the preliminary findings from the data recording, management and analysis would improve clarity on the key messages emerging from the study and the next steps. A conclusion (rather than next steps) would help to 'wrap up' the key messages of the paper.

3. The concluding remark ‘ultimately the success of Paniya Voices depends on the extent that the findings reach policy makers’ raises a number of concerns for me. Firstly, the researchers have lead participants to expect ‘change and not merely to undertake a research study’(p10); secondly, the ultimate aim of PHAA is ‘to collect in-depth information that can be quickly disseminated to decision makers’ (p4). Given the importance of the methodological approach and the effort taken in harnessing Paniya Voices, the paper requires are much stronger and more thoughtful concluding statement (particularly for the abstract where readers make a decision on whether to read on).

B. Minor Essential Revisions:

4. Some care needs to be taken with the superficial use of terms and language. Further explanation, critique or referencing of specific terms throughout the paper would greatly strengthen the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study. For example, specific reference is made to approaches used in
participatory rural appraisal that are similar to the PPHA (p4) but no explanation of what these approaches entail; terms such as post-positivism and Western models (p3); proper research standards (p10); and so forth.

5. p5, 1st para, last sentence requires re-wording to improve clarity ‘Further, our conventional health surveys based on responses........Thus, there was need for taking a different approach to understand there situation’.

6. Figure 4 ‘example of vulnerability trap’ is missing.

C. Discretionary Revision

7. To effectively implement the second guiding principle ‘trust building’ obviously takes time. How is the ultimate aim of the PPHA, ‘to collect in-depth information that can be quickly disseminated to decision makers’ achieved? Are there any lessons that the research team can share in balancing the importance of community trust building with timely dissemination of information to decision makers? These experiences/suggestions would be a useful addition in the conclusion.

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

**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.