Reviewer's report

Title: Trust, private sector participation, and global health: The case for complementary foods

Version: 2 Date: 16 February 2010

Reviewer: Melissa Bernstein

Reviewer's report:

1. Does the debate present a novel argument, or a novel insight into existing work?
   Yes

2. Does the debate address an important problem of interest to a broad biomedical audience?
   The manuscript addresses an important problem of interest to a broad international public health audience. Although this reviewer is not convinced of the practical implementation of the principles that this paper suggests.

3. Is the piece well argued and referenced?
   Yes, although authors spend somewhat too much time on historical events and 'blame' for current state of relationships. This aspect of the paper discredits authors to some extent and makes them appear too biased against industry to be presenting a balanced solution.

4. Has the author used logical arguments and sound reasoning?
   Yes

5. Is the piece written well enough for publication?
   Yes, however, title and abstract should be revised. Title is misleading and abstract devotes too much space to historical background. Abstract should instead outline principals more clearly.

- Discretionary Revisions

1. Define “stakeholder” at first appearance in text

2. “catalyse” correct spelling to catalyze


4. Page 8: “The sustainable exploitation of natural resources…..” Change exploitation to “use”

5. Page 8: “We undertake to conduct our activities in furtherance of realizing our
common goal........” “furtherance of realizing” is awkward language, suggest revising.

6. Page 9: “We recognize the need to exploring innovative.....” Change to explore

- Minor Essential Revisions
1. Revision of title to more clearly and accurately reflect content of paper.
“The Shared Principles of Ethics on Complementary Feeding Products for Infants and Children in the Developing World” For example, seems to this reviewer to more clearly state what this manuscript describes.

2. Revision of abstract.
Shorten historical background. More description on “Shared Principles....” that authors propose.

3. Authors should present a more balanced historical background.
While, industry may be to blame (in large part or fully) for the present situation, this reviewer did not feel the authors presented an unbiased historical perspective and should consider revision of their strong position towards past industrial wrongdoing so that the goals of this manuscript i.e. to build trust among stakeholders and achieve the beginning of
“a process of authentic trust-building that will ultimately result in coordinated efforts amongst parties. We hope the proposed set of principles and subsequent evolution will catalyse the scale-up of low cost, high quality, complementary foods for infants and young children, and eventually result in the eradication of infant and child malnutrition in the developing world.”

For example: The following quote from page 3 should be deleted. Breastfeeding advocacy groups are notoriously anti-formula industry and therefore a biased and unreliable resource for a manuscript attempting to bridge relations.

“In describing some of the practices of Nestle in the 1970s, the breastfeeding advocacy website breastfeeding.com states:“In order to sell more of its infant formula in third world countries, Nestle would hire women with no special training and dress them up as nurses to give out free samples of Nestle formula. The free samples lasted long enough for the mother's breast milk to dry up from lack of use. Then mothers would be forced to purchase the formula but, being poor, they would often mix the formula with unsanitary water or 'stretch' the amount of formula by diluting it with more water than recommended. The result was that babies starved all over the Third World while Nestle made huge profits from this predatory marketing strategy” [13]"

Page 4:
“Industry, in turn, has become suspicious of breast-milk advocates and activists, seeing such parties as hostile to their business interests and unnecessarily wary of their secondary humanitarian goals.”
Delete “secondary”

4. Principle four Equality (page 6), middle paragraph “In particular, we will, at all times, adopt the principle of the equality of rights........” is vague and unclearly written. Suggest revising.

5. Page 9: Define “Scaling-up”

6. Page 10: “Similarly, this principle is intended to emphasize that consumers are key stakeholders in the complementary feeding arena, and that they have a right to truthful and relevant information to make informed decisions about complementary feeding products. This principle is also intended to emphasize that governments have a key role to play in ensuring that effective regulatory guidelines are established to promote and protect consumer rights.”

Changes suggested in red

7. Page 10 Conclusion:

“We recognize that no set of principles is a panacea that will automatically restore trust in a situation where it has been lost, such as in the infant and young child nutrition arena. However, The shared set of principles set forth in this document can create an enabling environment for those (stakeholders?) who must work closely together to save lives, to begin to do so. There is a huge opportunity cost (risk??), measured in millions of lives, of not collaborating and engaging the private sector in scaling up of infant and young child nutrition. The lack of trust is a key barrier along the critical path to optimal infant and young child nutrition in the developing world. The principles outlined here are a modest attempt, but a start that might bring to the table people who normally rarely find themselves in the same room. We are also aware that our approach may very well not work if any of the parties does not genuinely want dialogue, believing that their current approach is serving them well. It is our hope that in making such principles explicit can serve as a platform on which various parties in the complementary feeding arena, and the broader arena of infant and young child nutrition, can begin a process of authentic trust-building that will ultimately result in coordinated efforts amongst parties. We also hope the proposed set of principles and subsequent evolution will catalyse the scale-up of low cost, high quality, complementary foods for infants and young children, and eventually result in the eradication of infant and child malnutrition in the developing world.”

Changes suggested in red

- Major Compulsory Revisions
  None

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
**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.