Author’s response to reviews

Title: Trade and health in the Pacific: views from the insiders

Authors:

Jacinta Fa’alili-Fidow (j.faalili-fidow@auckland.ac.nz)
Judith McCool (j.mccool@auckland.ac.nz)
Teuila Percival (t.percival@auckland.ac.nz)

Version: 3 Date: 13 March 2014

Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor

RE: Trade and health in Samoa: views from the insiders

Thank you for the opportunity to revise our report for publication in BMC Public Health.

Our attached manuscript has been edited to address the reviewers’ comments. Our changes include:

- Provision of further information about the stakeholders that were interviewed
- Strengthened the links between the research question and the discussion.
- Correction of grammatical and typing errors

We appreciate this opportunity to revise our manuscript and look forward to the Editors response.

Yours sincerely

Jacinta Fa'aliili-Fidow
Reviewer 1:

1 Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
As stated in the abstract, the purpose of the paper is to portray the views of key stakeholders on the potential impacts of Samoa's free trade negotiations and agreements on health and wellbeing in Samoa. The question posed by the authors in this purpose statement is clear, although perhaps overpromises what can be delivered by the data in the paper, given that the number of stakeholders is seven in total.

We have provided further information about the roles of the stakeholders that were interviewed during the study, to justify the strength of the information and views presented. The seven stakeholders were the leaders (e.g. CEOs) of their organisation or department.

2 Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The methods are appropriate and well-described in portraying the views of 7 key stakeholders. Although it would have been helpful to have known a little more about who the stakeholders were, issues relating to anonymity are noted in the paper as precluding such disclosure.

We have provided more information about the roles of each stakeholder interviewed. Unfortunately we are still limited in the information we are able to divulge, as any further information has the potential to make the key informants immediately identifiable.

3 Are the data sound?
The data are sound to the extent that they represent the views of seven people, although as the paper itself acknowledges this cannot be regarded as sufficient numbers to constitute a representative group. The data certainly includes interesting and important points. Table 1 is very good as a summary of participants perceptions. The data cannot, however, be taken as representing a valid analysis of the implications of trade relationships and agreements for Samoa, although they are a contribution to any such analysis.

Noted, and we agree. We hope that by divulging a bit more information about the senior roles of the seven stakeholders, and alluding to their vast experience and expertise will provide further justification for the validity and strength of their views.

5 Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The main conclusion is that there is a range of views of benefits and risks Samoa among stakeholders in regard to trade; hence in a limited way this conclusion is supported by and is a restatement of the data. The discussion gives a balanced assessment of the data. Much of the discussion rests however on ideas which do not come from the data but on relevant literature. Views counter to the views of some informants are not based on the views of other informants, but would appear more to be the views of the authors themselves. For example, the section beginning “for some stakeholders, the enthusiasm or sheer determination... appeared to override suggestions of negative implications...”. Also 2 the next sentence: “the intrinsic trust [of informants] is elevated due to the lack of
data...”. As noted in my previous comments on the previous draft of this article, while it might well be the view of informants that the seasonal works scheme is an example of ‘free trade’, this does not seem correct to me. As noted before, it would seem in fact likely that the seasonal workers scheme might just as easily be given effect without any free trade agreement or prospect of one. Hence any benefits or disadvantages (such as having young men away) of the scheme, whether valid or not, are not really valid – except in the broadest possible sense – to benefits and disadvantages of free trade. I am also not clear why the potential for a specialised medical workers scheme to work in Samoa necessarily depends on a free trade basis (whether a good idea or not). However the sentences at the end – concerning the need for further investigation into the implications of signing trade agreements - both benefits and risks - are justified by the data constituted by the views of informants.

The aim of this study was to draw out key themes from senior experts in the trade and/or health fields in both NZ and Samoa that can be explored further should we choose to conduct a more in-depth study in this area. We acknowledge that there are limitations of the study, and we recognise that the two fields of trade and health do not naturally correspond with each other – trade experts do not give priority to health impacts and vice versa. Nevertheless, the stakeholders interviewed were the most likely of any other person in their organisation, and arguably their sector, to provide well-informed expert opinions on the given topic. We identified during the analysis that some initiatives/programmes mentioned by informants could possibly be addressed without a trade agreement, however as we did not restrict the conversation to trade agreements, some comments made about existing initiatives will be more relevant to trade in its broadest sense. And while some schemes may continue without a trade agreement, a trade agreement also has the potential to serve as a mechanism for expediting processes, and for negotiating greater health and wellbeing benefits for the people of Samoa.

6 Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
The paper states its limitations in numbers of stakeholders interviewed (at end of p 5) and the fact that they cannot be said to be representative.

7 Do the authors clearly acknowledge work on which they are both building?
Yes the authors acknowledge articles on this subject and other sources.

8 Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The title seems fine with one quibble: as we do not know who (in particular) the 4 NZ stakeholders are, it is not absolutely clear whether they are ‘insiders’ or not. The abstract is an accurate summary of the paper.

See Qu.2 – more information about the stakeholders roles have been provided

9 Is the writing acceptable?
The writing is not acceptable. The main reasons for this are: choice of words which are not apt, complete mistakes and clearly due to accepting (wrongly) spell check suggestions, sometimes wrong comma use, and a lack of good flow between some
sentences. A major example is the sentence in the secondary intro para:
“Nonetheless, the evolution of this geopolitical subgroup is a pliable example ….
Whereby the formally low and middle income countries…”. “Pliable” is probably
meant to be ‘plausible’. “formally” should be ‘formerly’.
A drawback which is less easy to demonstrate is that the logic between sentences is
often not clear. 3 The English generally is often unclear. Eg, the sentence which begins “the ideology
talks logic…. and, for small island developing countries, this is not necessarily the
case.” I can see what the writer is saying but this is not good English. Note comma
use ,eg sentence beginning ‘apprehension among the health sector..”/
Choice of words: I would say ‘designed’ rather than ‘triaged’ in sentence beginning
with “The list was triaged”
Stakeholder’s views – should be stakeholders’.
Referencing is not up to academic standards. For instance, the sentence noted
above refers to “7”. I do not see where/how this article cited can be seen as support
for the sentence. The sentence beginning PACER Plus under that heading refers to
the time of Nov 2013, and an article dated 2010 is cited.
Some needed refs are missing, eg the sentence beginning ‘Samoa’s recent lifting of
its bans on turkey tails etc.” need a source for this.
The actual list of references is very rough and careless. Ref one is not authorized by
Finance. Ref 9 incorrectly spells 44th. I had a look at ref 10 and did not see what
really the source said that supported the sentence in the article. Note that ref 17
spells the author’s name differently from ref 8.
One general structural issue: there is no conclusion headed as such, although the
last three sentences function as one.

Thank you so much for this feedback! We have amended the paper in response.
Reviewer 2:

The authors have generally responded well to the previous comments. I am however left wanting on a couple of the previous comments:

1. the question posed/aim of the paper is still not clear. It is not until page 5 that the authors write "our brief report provides an insight on the benefits and challenges of trade liberalisation for the Independent State of Samoa”. Benefits and challenges for what? everything for Samoan society, health, nutrition? and it would be better if it were stated earlier in the paper.

We have strengthened the study’s arguments in reference to Samoa.

2. It is still not clear where (which institution) the key informants were from - all I can see is Senior advisor, CEO and Government official

If we are to divulge this information some informants will become immediately identifiable, particularly as the interviewees were often leaders of their organisation or department. We have provided further information in the methodology section e.g. CEO of an NGO, however any further description will breach ethics protocols.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.