Reviewer’s report

Title: From targets to ripples: Developing a capacity building assessment tool for use by multi-sector groups in remote Australian Indigenous communities

Version: 2 Date: 17 April 2014

Reviewer: Helen Vidgen

Reviewer’s report:

The paper offers a useful insight into capacity building constructs and their application across different groups. However I thought there were several areas in which I needed more information as a reader. I believe the paper requires major compulsory revisions regarding the following.

1. It would have been useful for the introduction to discuss capacity building a bit more. The term is used so differently that it would have been useful to have some more discussion on this. For example, capacity building can refer to growing the size of a workforce or developing the skills of a workforce or the capacity of a group overall. The capacity typically relates to addressing a health issue and so there is some measurement of how that issue was addressed. I think this is important because it impacts on what a measure will look like. The introduction talks about “capacity to address food security” but also “health leadership capacity”.

2. The results talk about the language of existing models changing. I wonder if in the introduction or in the discussion it would be useful to clarify if the authors were motivated to conduct the research because they thought existing measures failed to identify important constructs of capacity building or if the language used to describe these constructs was inaccessible to community members.

3. Method: Please provide more detail of the recording of observations. Were these looking for particular behaviours? Did each author do them independently and then how were the results compared? Blindly? What was the authors relationship to the people they were observing?

4. Method: study setting. Is the information about the stores relevant to this study?

5. Method: participants. Please provide more detail about the number of times the groups met. 3-10 seems very variable – is there a median number of times? Eg did most meet only once a year? Were meetings the main way the group interacted or were there other interactions eg emails, phone calls? Was the project community co-ordinator from the community?

6. Method Assessment and development: step 1: why was only one community chosen and why this one?

7. Step2. What further analysis happened? Were data coded independently and then cross checked? What was the process here?
8. Figure 2. If step 1 happened before step 2 and informed step 2 then the diagram should be modified to reflect this.

9. Step 3. Was the observational data from the group meetings another method? I’d understood step 3 to be more about the group feedback.

10. Results and Discussion: Please provide more information about the limitations. Particularly regarding the participation by groups. The implications of why some communities participated in all aspects and others didn’t? Who is in the groups?

11. Discussion. Provide more data in the results to support the first sentence in the discussion.

12. Discussion: the fourth finding: this finding needs more explanation.

13. Discussion: final finding. This paragraph refers to “did not attempt to place priority on different measures” however throughout the article the relative value of measures is discussed.

14. Discussion: The discussion talks about different stages in the lifecycle of groups. The methods should discuss when this study took place eg year 1 in the project year 3 etc.

15. Discussion: limitations: sentence which begins “for example, many models of capacity development…” refer to comments made at about the introduction. Capacity building measurement is often criticised to be not focused enough on the outcome ie the food group was formed to address food supply. Is this paper saying that changes in the food supply do not need to be measured if the capacity of the group has shifted? Is a change in the capacity of the group a reasonable enough end point in itself? I think the article needs to talk about the position of capacity building in measuring the success of a program/investment.

16. Also consider use of the terms “assessment” and “measurement”. The article seems to be about constructs that should be considered when measuring capacity rather than the development of a measure. For example, how would the group determine if it had successfully built on strengths? In this regard I think what has been produced is a model

**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