Reviewer's report

Title: A community programme to reduce salt intake and blood pressure in Ghana.

Version: 1 Date: 8 September 2005

Reviewer: Richard Cooper

Reviewer's report:

General
This manuscript reports an ambitious and complex community trial of salt reduction in West Africa. Hypertension is the most common CV condition in the world and there is an urgent need to develop effective prevention strategies. This topic therefore has substantial public health importance. The trial was well conceived and well designed. As is all too often the outcome in community-based trials, however, adherence was not adequate and the formal hypothesis regarding the intervention could not be tested rigorously. Nonetheless, this experience is unique in the field and deserves widespread attention.

The investigators provide a very clear and straightforward report of the results. They have described the original design, the relative success and failure in the implementation, and the primary results. The reader can take away an unbiased understanding of the results. In terms of the primary outcome, it appears that on average the ‘intervention – control’ effect on sodium was null (6 mmol/24 hr). It is to be anticipated, therefore, that no BP difference would be observed. The secondary analyses, using regression methods, suggest by-cluster effect, although as the authors point out this result is difficult to interpret.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
I have relatively few critical observations to offer. In my view it is essential that we accumulate experience in this area and this trial provides many important lessons. In terms of data presentation, however, I would strongly recommend that a table be added which provides the mean values for BP and Na and K at baseline and follow-up in the 2 trial arms. I recognize that the data in Table 3 is what will be used to test the underlying hypothesis, nonetheless I think it simplifies the reading process to have mean values

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare I have no competing interests.