Reviewer's report

Title: Health Research Profile to assess the capacity of low and middle income countries for equity-oriented research

Version: 4 Date: 2 February 2006

Reviewer: Barbara Starfield

Reviewer's report:

General
The authors are congratulated for their efforts to make the manuscript more readable and the message clearer. There are, however, some technical issues that need to be addressed through further clarifications.

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

1. What is meant by 'all fronts of the equity debate', as mentioned in the Conclusions section of the Abstract. Are these equity issues or research issues? Please specify what these 'fronts' are.
2. Background para 5, last sentence: change 'a' to 'as'
3. Background para 6: please indicate the aegis under which the GLobal Forum operates. Is it a WHO effort, an independent group, or what?
4. Page 5 (Developing the indicators): what is a 'catalytic question'? Please explain or delete the word 'catalytic'. Also, in the same sentence, only 'priority setting' is addressed. What about developing indicators for the other 4 components?
5. Page 7, 1st para of Targeting Inequities: delete the words 'socioeconomic factors of', as there are sociodemographic indicators included, and the adjective is unnecessary anyway.
6. Page 8, third para of Resources, last sentence: Are the researchers in Mauritius and Chile internal? (This is important to specify, as one of your points is the (unfortunate) reliance overall on external experts.)
7. Page 8 (re Indicator 12): It is not 'proportion' of researchers but, rather AVAILABILITY of researchers that is at issue.
8. Discussion. first paragraph: The findings are not exactly 'consistent' (as there is at least one exception); perhaps 'robust' is more accurate word.
9. Discussion para 3, first sentence: Wording is awkward and inaccurate. Re-word as ....framework that optimally depends on existing data; in its absence, we relied on the knowledge of....
10. Discussion, para 5: Is this Report a WHO effort? If so, insert (WHO) after mentioning it. IF not, please indicate the aegis.
11. Page 12, second para of Knowledge Management is awkward. I think you mean "We need to evaluate mechanisms to use knowledge to improve health equity. For example, how effective are the efforts of Thailand and Africa to engage diverse stakeholders (including....) in improving health equity?" If this is not your meaning, then you need to make it clearer as to why Thailand and Africa are examples, pursuant to the first sentence.
12. Conclusions, third para: I still cannot understand whether 'institutions created by COHRED' is good or bad. Should or shouldn't countries be relying on these institutions, and why or why not?
13. Figure 2 is mislabelled Figure 1. In this figure, the term 'general' in item 9 is of unclear meaning. From the text, I infer that you mean DIFFERENT fields. If so, could you change the word?
14. Your text implies that there was suboptimal sording of some of the items on the questionnaire (e.g., number of research institutions). As future researchers may want to use your questionnaire, you should provide some guidance as to items or wordings that should be changed. (Point 13 above may be an example of this.)
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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

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