Reviewer’s report

Title: Exploring health systems research and its influence on policy processes in low income countries

Version: 5 Date: 22 June 2007

Reviewer: Lalit Dandona

Reviewer’s report:

General

This paper is on a very important topic. However, in the current form it is difficult to read, leading to an impression of lack in clarity.

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

1. The description of various issues in this paper needs to be complemented with more tables and/or figures that summarise the sub-points under each issue. Another option is listing bullet sub-points under each issue. These approaches would help the reader grasp more easily what the authors are trying to communicate.

2. This paper repeatedly mentions innovations in health systems, but I failed to find any example that would highlight what the authors have in mind when they refer to innovation. As this project is being done in several less developed countries, it would be quite useful if an example from each country were used to explain what innovations in health systems the authors have explored or are exploring. This deficiency is particularly acute when reference is made to potential study designs and methodologies – without specific examples this section is simply too bland and theoretical.

3. It seems strange that while this project is being done by seven partner institutions, two institutions from developed countries and five from less developed countries, all named authors on this paper are from the two developed country institutions. Conceptual involvement of persons from partner institutions in less developed countries would seem to be critical as this project aims to benefit less developed countries. It would be useful to address this aberration.

4. The three proposed streams of influence are direct extensions of the three proposed entry points. Why is different terminology needed – entry points and streams of influence? Why not merge the entry point / streams description to provide better continuity?

5. Development perspectives 1 and 4 seem to have substantial overlap. Better justification is needed why they should be considered separately and not
together.

6. The framework presented in Figure 1 seems too simplistic. An attempt to give more meat to it would be useful.

7. Examples of the articulation of research-policy interface are cited for some developing countries. I am aware of at least one additional example from India (National Medical Journal of India 2002; 15: 226-231). It would be useful for the authors to do a more extensive literature search to assess if they might have missed other examples.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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