Reviewer’s report

Title: Can we assess public health systems capacity at the local level?

Version: 2 Date: 29 May 2009

Reviewer: Mamuka Djibuti

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The question posed by the authors is well defined

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
More details should be probably given on the following:
• How these 20 senior managers were selected?
• When interviews were conducted?
• The authors say that the state government is responsible for setting policy, regulation and program funding, however it would be helpful for readers to know what programs are implemented at this level
• What analyzes was conducted to identify the major themes?
• More details on the workshops that were carried out after in-depth interviews (which public health experts were the participants, setting, method used, etc)
• How the self-assessment instrument was piloted (which organizations, number, etc)

3. Are the data sound?
In the results section, the authors discuss some of the findings, and some references are also given to support some of the statements (e.g. ref 30, 31, 32). These should be moved to the discussion section.

The authors present the data on as to what concerns were made while piloting the tool, however what exactly has changed and why needs to be clarified more explicitly.

It is not completely clear is the Likert-type response format used for “Policy environment” category or other categories too. Whereever it is used, Likert-type response format should be probably included in the instrument.

In the current version, the Tables 2-5 present separate categories of the tool before the refinement. However, the final, i.e, refined version should be included too.
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

For some components, e.g., human resources (authors include it in “organizational resources” category), there are commonly accepted frameworks, e.g. Human Resources for Health Action Framework, by Dal Poz. This framework could be used well by the authors in this study.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

This is to declare that I do not have competing interests in relation to the paper.