Reviewer's report

Title: Networking between community health programs: effectiveness, barriers and enablers

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Reviewer: Richard Alan Batley

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Review of paper: Networking between Community Health Programs: effectiveness, barriers and enablers

If this paper can be considered for publication it would be as a case report. It gives an account of an attempt to bring together a number of NGOs in one state of India with the purpose of facilitating their networking for mutual support and access to funds. The institutional background of the support programme is hinted at - the ‘community health global network’ - but it is not explained.

The paper analyses the research data according to a number of factors: nodal players, ties and ‘homophily’, ties and self-interest. It then assesses first the effectiveness of networking efforts according to a number of criteria, and second the factors that acted as barriers to networking. This is followed by a discussion. At present, the paper is written as if it were the first draft of a working paper, listing itemized points under the different factors that are considered but without making any serious attempt to establish their relative importance. The reported data are almost entirely limited to quoted comments from among participants in the network.

It bases this approach - i.e. the factors to be considered - on a number of texts including a methodology espoused by one of the authors. At the outset, on page 2, it reports that there is little research on health networks in developing countries or specifically India. This ignores a massive literature on networks and partnership in developing countries - for reviews of the literature (much of it Indian), see for example:

- Teamey, K., and Mcloughlin, C. 2009. Understanding the dynamics of relationships between government agencies and non-state providers of basic services: Key issues from the literature. NGPA working paper series, No. 38. London School of Economics
  http://www2.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/NGPA/publications/WP30_Issues_Teamey_Web.pdf

• See also the considerable output of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (based in New Delhi) http://www.pria.org/

At several points in the text (e.g. page 15), the authors write that these are early findings and that more data will be forthcoming. I suggest that revision of the text be postponed until these data are available.

My responses to the points that reviewers are asked to assess are as follows:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The purpose is reasonably well defined on page 3

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The methodology is set out in a series of brief points on page 3

3. Are the data sound?
The data consist largely of a series of assertions supported by reported comments of participants in the network without explanation of why their particular views were sought. The ‘data’ read like commendations. The authors should find some more objective and thorough form of data

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
See point 3

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
I don’t think the discussion and conclusions are adequately supported by the data

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
No limitations are stated except to the effect that these are early findings (page 15)

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
They do refer to published work but they ignore a large literature on NGO networks and relations with government

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
They do, but the abstract seems unnecessarily long

9. Is the writing acceptable?
The paper is written in semi-note form as if it was a working paper - some of it was perhaps extracted from a working paper. More explanation needs to be given of the context, the method and the findings; the writers assume that readers will understand. There are many typographical errors throughout the text; many of them are careless - for example ‘charismatic modes’ become
‘characteristic nodes’ on page 6; some of them seemed to be based on the writers’ own unawareness - for example they write ‘zero sum gain’ for ‘zero sum game’.

I would therefore conclude that this at best a case for

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

In my view, the article should wait until the writers have advanced further in their research.

**Level of interest:** An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests with the authors of the paper, neither in terms of finance or in any other respect.