Reviewer's report

Title: Combining evidence and values in priority setting: testing the balance sheet method in a low-income country

Version: 2 Date: 11 September 2006
Reviewer: Rob MPM Baltussen

Reviewer's report:

General

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

Revisions have been made to this paper, but all remains a bit unsatisfactory.

1. The paper still misses an adequate framework which includes the criteria for priority setting (initial review comment 1). The authors state that their framework of 'efficiency and fairness' includes criteria as budget impact and burden of disease, but I really do not see how. The framework must be laid out to convince the audience, or must be changed to something else that does entail all mentioned criteria. This remains a critical issue that cannot be stepped over too easily.

2. The initial review point 2 has been dealt with only partially. On page 15, weaknesses of the study are mentioned, and I wonder what differs point 1, and point 3 here, as they seem to discuss the same issue, and could better be combined. Also, what is the conclusion of this weakness (tool is useful for marginal decisions, but not for a complete ranking of all options)?

3. Comment 6 and 7 of the initial review are serious limitations of the study design, and should be mentioned in the discussion of the paper, I guess.

4. Page 14, the reference to the work in Ghana is now correctly spelled, but is not put in the right context. This study did not make use of a 'similar multi-criteria approach', but used DCE techniques. Please state it in the right way.

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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)

5. Comment 19 also applies also to page 17 (WHO's generalised ce database), and this should accordingly be changed.

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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 of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

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