Reviewer's report

Title: Governance in Health Systems: towards a new framework for assessment

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Reviewer: Wolfgang Hein

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(1) The focus of my work is on global governance, in particular global health governance. Though the article refers to some issues and concepts which are also discussed in the GHG discourse, I felt in a totally different world; I did not come across any of the main authors and titles of GHG (e.g. Kelley Lee, David Fidler, Kent Buse etc.), and, while I totally agree that "understanding governance issues is especially important for fragile health systems in less developed countries" (p.3), at first sight I did not find any "deeper exploration of governance issues in the text".

Major compulsory revisions

(2) O.K., the second part of the title is "towards a new framework for assessment". In my view (just using an argument immanent to the text), the contribution of the text to the health system governance issues should be assessed in a more modest way: they claim to "propose a new and practical framework...with a view to guiding health system-level interventions" (p.3). The "example of an application" (p. 15ff.), however, shows that a matrix of governance building blocks and governance elements might help be an important heuristic tool to collect and systematize information on factors influencing the issue of health worker absenteeism but I could not find any concrete method which might guide interventions(see p. 16: no method for fourth and fifth step). Either, the explanation of this example has to give more hints on (may be hidden;reference 11?) methodologies or the claims be reduced. In the latter case, however, the method might prove to be heuristically useful, but still some of the information included in table 3 should be explained in the text, to be of more value for the reader.

(3) In the discussion the authors claim that their framework "encourages the applier to see the health system as a set of continuous and synergistic relationships". This is nothing new in the governance discourse. Figure 1 and 2 can be applied to any sector (exchanging "medicines" for something else); the article shoud explicitly refer to the general literature in political science and then explain what are the specific synergistics (and conflicts!!) in health.

Minor essential revisions

(4) The introductory part should focus more on the "framework for assessment" aspect of the article as it should not raise expectations which the article cannot fulfil. Yes, "understanding governance issues" is important to "manage a plethora
of stakeholders and Global Health Initiatives", but the reader of this article does not receive much information on how to deal with this governance issues.

(5) The chapter on "methods" deals with the definitions and conceptions of "governance in health systems". Some of the aspects refer to a more general discourse on "governance", some on "governance in health", some on "governance of health systems" which are quite different things. Many of the approaches on "governance" want to give proposals to "governors" without defining who they are and how they are related to each other, other just define governance through "how a society steers itself" (Rosenau), as the "management of the course of events in a social system". Governance is always linked to stakeholders with specific interests and in different positions of power; all this should at least shortly referred to.

Discretionary revisions

(6) The example of application given (health worker absenteeism) concerns a topic essential to the operation of health sectors, but not specifically typical for health, as the problem is as serious in most other sectors. Why take an example which might link the contribution more to central discourses in global health governance (e.g. brain drain of health workers; coordination of a myriad of aid-giving institutions with developing an integrated public health system etc.)?

**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.