Reviewer's report

**Title:** The decentralisation-centralisation dilemma: recruitment and distribution of health workers in remote districts of mainland Tanzania

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 7 October 2008

**Reviewer:** Sarah Atkinson

Reviewer's report:

0. overview of paper: the challenges of human resource management in low and middle income countries is both enormous and seriously under-researched. Combining this with the processes of health reforms is welcome and timely. The paper is well presented, well researched and clearly written. I have a few comments that I feel will strengthen the paper to enable the authors to really make the most of this study.

1. Major compulsory revisions: I don't think my comments fall into this category.

3. Minor compulsory revisions: whilst I like the theme of the paper, I think the authors could make more impact with their results if they reworked the structure in the following way:

   a) The addition of discussion and the identification of an implicit model(s) of what is expected from decentralisation in terms of impacts on HR. There is reference for example on p5 to potential impacts on internal labour market competition. More could be made of this to lift the study from a rather descriptive account into something more analytical that raises questions beyond the specifics of Tanzania. This is not a call for a simplistic cause and effect type of discussion. Quite the opposite. Discussion of the intended and likely impacts will indicate that these are contested, different studies may indicate conflicting implications etc. So an attempt that tries to tease out different possible pathways of effect will be useful for the subsequent research that tries to identify what the effects have indeed been under different organisational arrangements.

   b) The results then can refer back to these theoretical debates, model(s) and contestations of how decentralisation/centralisation impact on HR issues. Again the results have a largely descriptive quality - more might be done with them if there is a set of issues and implicit model(s) to refer back to.

   Although this sounds a major criticism, the information is pretty much all in the paper already and just would benefit from putting some shape on it from the beginning.

   c) there are a few small grammatical slips - a quick run through the grammarcheck on word will pick them up. Overall the writing is of good quality.

2. Discretionary revisions. None to add.
**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