Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 21 October 2008

Reviewer: Barbara Isobel McPake

Reviewer's report:

The paper is addressing an important topic and aiming to fill a clear gap in the literatures of both decentralisation and HRH but there are a number of shortcomings:

1. There is no theoretical background. There was a need to define better the nature of decentralisation in Tanzania and develop hypotheses (need not be formalised) about how recruitment and distribution might be influenced by alternative models of decentralisation and the processes under alternative models of decentralisation affected by other contextually relevant factors. This helps locate the data in relation to what is specific to Tanzania and what might be generalisable beyond - and to where.

2. The findings are reported as if everyone interviewed said exactly the same thing. While there might have been broad consensus in the points reported, the extent of divergence is important - even if only of relative emphases. Quotes would also help to present a more nuanced picture of the opinions of the interviewees. Different categories of interviewees were included - what does an analysis of differences in responses between the categories suggest? Was there more insight into some than other aspects of the process from different categories?

3. The discussion in places represents the views of the interviewees as if facts. For example 'In some instances, the number of health workers required in a particular district have ... been changed' (p21). This statement appears to be based on a single report that may be rumour - although it is difficult to tell given the style of reporting of results.

4. A number of points are made that are not clearly relevant to the question of the paper - such as the importance of the strength of the local private sector for parallel income earning, or the importance of improving living and working conditions in remote districts. These points are well established from other work and are not relevant (or effectively made relevant) to a focus on the impact of decentralisation.

5. The text requires a great deal of editing for grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? Yes
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? Reasonably
3. Are the data sound? Reporting style makes it difficult to tell.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? No.
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? No.
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? No.
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? Yes, I think so.
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes.

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