Reviewer’s report

Title: Training for Heath Services and Systems Research in Sub-Saharan Africa - A Case Study at Four East and Southern African Universities

Version: 1 Date: 4 October 2013

Reviewer: Hugo Mercer

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Suggested revisions:

a. In page 8 para 3, needs to be revised

b. In page 11 "By any standard, the number of HSSR PhD trainees at these universities is very small". It will be convenient to explain which are those standards. In addition, is there a possibility that the shortage could be covered with a different combination of trainees; coming from other disciplines and not only health sciences?

c. Could the authors explain why the way to reach a critical mass has to be through PhD trainees in HSSR? Could it be another appropriate road for SSA universities? Are they compelled to follow the European and American experience?

d. The interesting findings related with administrative constraints may guide the identification of other solutions beside increasing the number of trainees.

e. Perhaps 24 trainees well equipped, financed and connected to the global research community could be the start of the critical mass.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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