Reviewer's report

Title: Health workforce issues and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria: an analytical review

Version: Date: 11 July 2006

Reviewer: Ann L. Lion Coleman

Reviewer’s report:

General
none

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
none

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
1. On page 3, you quote that there is a shortage of 2.4 million doctors..... Is this world-wide or Sub-Saharan Africa? I believe the figures from JLI are 4 million worldwide...main thing is to add the geographic scope of your numbers.
2. Page 5, third paragraph where you mention the budget ceilings for the public sector which have been imposed by the IMF. When I have asked the IMF and the World Bank about these ceilings, they have specifically told me that the countries are using this as an excuse for not hiring, and that the policies are internal and not imposed. So, to cover yourself, I would get some very concrete facts on this paragraph.
3. page 7 first paragraph where you mention that "...it is difficult to demonstrate the requested direct link between spending on health workforce and the effects on the patient/target population:...this contradicts your first paragraph in the Introduction (all three references).
4. page 9 section on training: as a reviewer of a number of PEPFAR country operating plans, a key effort which is lacking virtually everywhere is a coordinated country training plan. I suspect that the same exists with the GFATM.
5. page 10: Overall section on support of the training institutions. I am confused in this section whether we are talking about in-service training institution or pre-service training institutions. Clarity would be useful and rather easy to do.
6. page 13 paragraph 3: by only mentioning the lack of training capacities, you are inadvertently reinforcing the view that HRH strategies are mainly training. I would suggest you flesh out the list to include the other strategies you mention in the overall section.
7. p14: first sentence: the addition of "upgrading lab faciities and equipment" seems out of place here.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
1. I feel the following is key:
I am more and more convinced that the level of productivity of the health worker is an unsung variable in the HRH equation. If we were able to increase productivity by X% (25?) then we would be able to decrease the new supply of workers by that percentage. It would be interesting to include productivity along with the other variables you assess. You begin to touch on it in the revised evaluation indicators on page 7.
2. It seems that under the overall "Specific HR interventions in the proposals", HR information systems should be another one. In all the countries I am familiar with, accuracy on who is where and what the staffing needs are is sorely lacking.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.