Reviewer’s report

Title: Improving the implementation of health workforce policies through governance: a literature review

Version: 1 Date: 15 February 2011

Reviewer: Lucy Gilson

Reviewer’s report:

This paper is on an important, and as it makes clear, under-investigated issue. It is generally well structured and written. Overall, I recommend it be published if the following two compulsory revisions are addressed:

1) I would like an initial discussion and justification for the governance framework that is used. I do not fully understand the dimensions of governance as identified – for example, the category ‘performance’ and why it covers the specified elements, and why decentralisation is part of ‘performance’ and not a dimension in its own right?; or what ‘equity and equality’ means in this context (which I initially took to be an element of performance) and why ‘equity and equality’ are different from ‘partnerships and participation’. As these dimensions are ultimately used to draw conclusions about the state of the knowledge base I think it is important to have more clarification both of what the dimensions are and why they have been selected – clearly this goes beyond a usual literature review but is important to the conclusions drawn from the review.

2) I think the language of the review needs revision, as it sometimes overstates the strength of the conclusions that can validly be drawn, given the evidence base. For example:

p.10 Given the limited number of studies identified in total and per dimension of governance, and the level of information available about governance, I would suggest that the statement ‘governance issues can and do have considerable impact on HRH policy development and implementation ... etc ’ is too strong for the evidence base

p.11 the conclusions about the impact of donors and GHIs on HRH policy seem to be based on very few studies – again I would suggest the need to tone down the strength of these statements

p.12 similarly the conclusions on the role of community partnership in fragile states

Search approach clarifications required:

• Why only search from 2006 to 2010?

• What mean by using a ‘case study approach’ (in search strategy) – and why this term was included?
Editorial points

p.5 Evidence based policy formulation – the discussion of Indonesia requires reference to ‘after decentralisation’ to make sense

p.10 in what respects was improved equity and equality a goal of interventions? (equity and equality in what?) and what does ‘to guarantee the corresponding desirable health workforce scenario’ mean?

p.11 what forms of partnerships would you expect to be important in HRH policy?

p.12 is it possible to support/justify further the questions posed in the conclusion – these are interesting, but are they backed up wider evidence?

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