Reviewer's report

Title: Thirty years after Alma-Ata: A systematic review of the impact of community health workers delivering interventions against malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea on child mortality and morbidity in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Version: 1 Date: 6 February 2011

Reviewer: Julie Cliff

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Please include an Abstract

Minor Essential Revisions
1. Clarify if and why treatment in clinics is allowed under the inclusion criteria. Table 1 states that, in the Gomoa study, the treatment was in clinics. This is not mentioned in the text.

2. Characteristics of CHW Programmes. State how many of the studies included CHWs who dispensed ORS.

3. Box 1 Title. Does this refer to determinants of effective CHW programmes (text) or simply of CHW programmes.

4. Study settings. The two studies in the same population differed not only in when impact assessed, but also in age group (1-4 and 1-5).

5. Corrections to Table 1.
5.1. Studies should follow a discernible order. In particular the two studies in the same area with the main difference in the followup period should be together and in calendar order.

5.2. Column 2. Consistency in use of (as above)

5.3. Column 3, Second row. Was this the only study with supervision ? Text says all supervised. The Gambian intervention was supervised by community nurses.

5.4. Column 7. Consistent use of in mortality

6. Table 1 says that both Ghana programmes were initiated by a research institute, therefore one was by a research institute and NGO, not a research institute or NGO as in the text.

7. Population size is not included as a confounder. Note that the 1991 article by Alonso et al on the Gambia programme mentions the difference in size and other characteristics such as ethnic group between PHC and non-PHC villages as possible confounders.
8. Page 20. The statement that a short period of good adherence to ITNs or chemoprophylaxis may have given larger mortality reductions in the Gambia implies that the transmission season is short, when in the ITN trial area it was from July to December. To sustain this argument, examples of countries which are less seasonal should be provided.

Discretionary Revisions

1. Did the MRC have any involvement in the Gambian programme, which could have contributed to its success? This possibility should at least be discussed.

2. The second paragraph on page 17 could be more carefully worded. The statement that studies suggest that programmes reduce mortality may be too strong, given the biases in the studies.

**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.