Reviewer's report

Title: Research-policy partnerships - experiences of the Mental Health and Poverty Project in Ghana, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia

Version: 1 Date: 8 June 2012

Reviewer: Giuliano Russo

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript reports on an interesting case-study in research policy partnerships in the health sector, exploring the issue of how research and policy-making institutions interact. It looks at one specific collaboration experience for a mental-health project covering four countries and eleven institutions, and arrives at elaborating an original conceptual framework to understand research-policy partnerships. I believe the work fits broadly within the scope of the journal. As some parts of the paper sound more convincing than others, perhaps I can offer some advice to improve the least strong bits.

Minor revisions - General comments

1. The qualitative evidence presented appears at times thin, as it is based on 11 interviews only, and is not always presented in a systematic way. As a consequence some of the conclusions from the authors do not always look grounded in the study findings. It may be worth taking steps to strengthen the link between evidence and concepts expressed, for example:

2. Show more of the findings, and use more ways to present your evidence than just simple quotations. It would be good to see some tables contrasting views from different interviewees, for example;

3. Explain more of your data/sources, saying for example what proportion of the total project participants were interviewed, and why you think their views were a true representation of what happened in the partnership;

4. Discuss the caveats of relying on a small number of interviews beyond the three limitations mentioned in pag. 26.

5. The conceptual framework is probably the most original contribution of the paper, and deserves being given more prominence. I would suggest trying to ground it more on the literature, justifying why the authors selected particular concepts and definitions, and decided to focus on the present influencing factors and effects. I would probably suggest presenting the conceptual framework within the methods section (after the background), as I see it belonging to the methodology employed by the study.

6. The paper fails to explore the issue of leaderships and participants’ roles within the partnership, which according to the management and organisation literature represents a determinant aspect in collaborations. It would be good to explain such omission.
7. Methods. It would be good to explain what form of qualitative analysis was carried out on the data, so to help the reader understand how you arrived at your conclusions. In order to strengthen your results, it would be useful to say how you triangulated your findings across different sources.

8. I could not find an abstract in the uploaded material – I believe it would be useful to have one to signpost the reader through the manuscript.

Minor revision - Specific comments

9. Please revise grammar and punctuation in chapter 1 pag. 2.
10. I am not entirely convinced by your use of headings and subheadings – what are the paper’s main sections? Do we really need all these subheadings as in pag- 3 through 7?
11. Table 1 is rather a figure (pag. 8).
12. It would be good to include as an annex the interview guide used for your data collection.
14. Findings. In your short introduction on the structure of your findings chapter you forget to mention the final section on “Lessons learned from the partnership influence…” which does not follow the stated logic of presenting findings according to the components of the conceptual framework (last paragraph pag. 11).
15. Quotes. Please put some reference on what type of informant your quotes are from (eg, pag. 14).
16. Conclusions. The manuscript concludes a bit abruptly enumerating the five most important implications of your work for research policy partnerships. It would be good to have a final concluding paragraph on future areas of research.

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