Author's response to reviews

Title: Developing health systems research capacities through north-south partnership: an evaluation of collaboration with South Africa and Thailand

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Version: 2 Date: 17 June 2008

Author's response to reviews: see over
Response to Reviewers Comments on paper ID:  
MS: 1690099285199555

Developing health systems research capacities through north-south partnership: an evaluation of collaboration in South Africa and Thailand
Susannah Mayhew, Jane Doherty and Siriwan Pitayarangsanrit

The authors would like to thank the two reviewers for their helpful comments. We indicate below where in the text we have addressed their recommendations.

Reviewer 1 (MAGB)

- Describe objectives and funding of the program as well as how it was developed and managed
This is covered in the ‘Background’ and ‘Partners’ section, to which some additional text has been added on p.3.

- Describe the MOUs
Description has been added on page 3.

- Evaluate extent to which programme objectives were met
Discussion of this added in Conclusions on p.11-12.

- Assess similarities and differences of the two types of partnership
Substantial text added to address this in various sections on p.7,8 and in the Conclusions on p11-12.

- What did N partner learn?
Substantial new text added to Conclusions on p.11-12.

Reviewer 2 (SP)

- Wrap discussion up with ref to COHRED recommendations
This is an interesting suggestion, but the complexity of financing makes it impossible to give a % income from the Programme that went on capacity strengthening. This is because many ‘capacity strengthening’ activities were done as an integral part of ongoing research activities – such as analysis or report writing workshops or project meetings. These have their own budget line and were not specifically labelled ‘capacity strengthening’. Moreover, the core-funding for HEFP was not extensive and additional funding was often attracted for research activities during which capacity building took place. To respond to the reviewer’s point, these problems of cost-attribution are now acknowledged in the conclusions on p.12.
- Expand discussion of concepts of ‘trust’ and ‘equal partnerships’ and include recommendations on this
  Extensive text has been added in the ‘institutionalising trust’ and ‘sustaining capacity’ sections on pgs 7-8 as well as in the conclusions. The entire section headed ‘Equity in North-South partnerships’ already deals with the issues that contribute to ‘equal partnership’. Further text has been added in this section on page 10.

- Discuss ‘good practice’ relationships in relation to Figure 1
  Extensive new section on ‘South-south relationships’ added on p.10 to discuss this.

- Clarify units presented in Tables
  Done. Sub-titles have been added to the ‘Totals’ columns of Table3 and Table 4 to clarify that the totals refer to persons (not person years)
  Table 5 already contains footnotes that make it clear that the papers involving the joint staff member are reported separately and are NOT included in the totals reported for Partner 1 and HEFP.

- Check language in 2nd cell of last column, Table 1
  Done

Reviewer 3: KB

Major revisions
- Comment on benefits to northern institution of this collaboration
  Discussion of this point has been added in the following places: ‘Negotiating policy relevant research priorities’ (3rd para) on p.9; Financing section (last para) on p.10 and Conclusions (1st para) on p.11.

Minor revisions
- Title: suggest change ‘in’ to ‘with’
  Done

- Abstract Results: avoid word ‘significant’
  Done – ‘substantial’ substituted

- Abstract conclusions – inconsistency with finance section
  Checked and revised

- Methods – typing error, ‘qualitative’
  Amended

- Methods – more detail on qual analysis
  Now given on p.4

- Results: joint projects and income
  Detailed financial data were not made available to the evaluators and therefore cannot be reported here. Interviewees, however, indicated that in South Africa joint projects generated significant income. Their views are included in the text.
• Results: T5 should incorporate conference presentations
Data on conference presentations were not part of the original indicators and were therefore not systematically collected. We therefore do not have data to report on this.

• Institutionalising trust: repetition
This whole section has been revised in response to other review comments. We have checked and believe that the points we make under this section are different from those in the results section.

• Sustaining capacity – confirm whether all staff ‘lost’ remained in SA
Yes they did – the word ‘all’ now added to the text to clarify

• T2: wording of footnote clumsy
Word revised

• T3: are the students all postgrads?
Yes – this is specified in the table (MSc and PhD)

• T4: totals do not tally with sum of staff per year
Amended

• T5: New projects total 19 but sum is only 18. Total number of new joint projects doesn’t tally with institutional totals.
‘19’ was a typing error – now corrected to ‘18’.
All other figures checked and are correct – we think the reviewer misread the table. ‘Joint projects’ have not been double counted so, for example, in Year 2000-2001 the total new projects is ‘4’ of which HEFP lead on 2 and joint-lead on a further two together with Partner one. HEFP and Partner One therefore both report two joint-led projects, but these are only counted once in the total (since they are the same two projects, not four separate ones) making a total of 4 (not 6).