Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 2 Date: 1 July 2008

Reviewer: Miguel Angel Gonzalez Block

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The authors evaluate an international, North-South research capacity strengthening program funded by DIFID through the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The study is placed in the context of the literature on capacity strengthening and attempt to assess the impact of the partnership through a variety of mostly qualitative indicators. The study is relevant to current issues and the methodology, whilst simple, is adequate for the purpose at hand. The paper could be improved by describing the objectives and funding of the program, as well as how it was developed and managed by the principal institution. The MoU subscribed between institutions could also be described in terms of their objectives and management processes, attending to similarities and differences. It would be particularly appropriate to address the extent to which the program met the original expectations, and how these were modified as the program developed. On this basis, the evaluation could use both the stated assessment criteria, as well as those proposed by the authors on the basis of the international literature.

The paper could also be improved by assessing the similarities and differences across the two sharply distinct types of partnerships involved: one with a policy institution following a chain of command approach, as opposed to an academic institution within a traditional university environment. One question to address would be the extent to which the partnership was more productive when two academic institutions were involved, as opposed to when it referred to a relationship between an academic and a policy institution. Could such differences be more important than language differences, or management styles? What did the N partner learn with respect to the relationships in both cases?

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable
**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.