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:** 7 July 2008

**Reviewer:** Supasit Pannarunothai

**Reviewer's report:**

- **Minor Essential Revisions**

1. The research questions posed by the authors are well defined. The authors can answer the questions well, but in the end should wrap up the discussions in relation to COHRED’s recommendations to build up research capacities in health to absorb 2% of government health budget, or 5% of international development aid. At least, readers can grasp the level of investments and outcomes in this partnership as compared to previous efforts by international donor agencies.

2. The methods used are appropriate and well described. Quantitative method leads to tables with counts of activities and outputs and number of international publications. Qualitative method delivers some quotes to the concepts and themes of partnership and capacity building.

3. The numeric data in tables need specific clarifications of units presented (such as; whether persons or person-years are summed). The last column on totals can be either summation without repetition (e.g. number of papers published) or with repetition (i.e. same people have been jointly appointed as HEFP/P1 staff members, etc.). Qualitative data have been presented adequately. However, the concept of “trust” in the partnership has been mentioned only once with limited discussion but leading to significant conclusion.

4. The manuscript adheres to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition.

5. Most of the discussions and conclusions are well balanced and adequately supported by the data. Two major concepts “trust” and “equal partnership” should be made clearer in order to set more practical policy for funding agencies. The authors should summarize whether the design of the collaboration as presented in figure 1 is a good practice. A vertical relationship from HEFP to P1 and P2 with horizontal line between P1 and P2 is more
productive (from other contextual data). What if a vertical line from HEFP to P3 with horizontal lines to P1 or P2, would it be more productive but also more costly.

6. Limitations of the work are clearly stated with various contextual data at international, national and institutional levels.

7. The authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished.

8. The title and abstract accurately convey what has been found.

9. The writing is acceptable, but needs some language checks before being published particularly the content in the second cell of last column in table 1.

**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.