Reviewer’s report

Title: Fulfillment of the Brazilian Agenda of Priorities in Health Research

Version: 2 Date: 29 April 2011

Reviewer: Ayo Palmer

Reviewer’s report:

The commentary provides information on an important topic for countries seeking to align research to national health needs particularly in middle and low income countries. I would certainly like to learn more about this topic. The commentary seeks to provide first hand experience of how a prioritized national research agenda was implemented to address national health issues. The background in the commentary provides a clear justification for the need to align research to national health priorities within Brazil. The decentralization strategies used to make research more exclusive are interesting.

However, I do not think the paper as it stands should be published.

The authors state that the purpose of the commentary is to analyse how the research support policy fulfilled the National Agenda of Priorities in Health Research. Yet, what the authors present is a narrative of processes used to fund selected topics in the national agenda. Unfortunately the level of detailed analysis needed to explain how the content of the Research Support Policy led to the fulfillment of the National Agenda has not been presented to justify publishing the paper. The key messages and lessons for other countries to learn from and therefore the value of the paper are unclear.

Major Compulsory Revisions

To strengthen the paper I would suggest the authors:

1. Explain the aims and strategies of the Research Support Policy and show how the National Agenda of Priorities in Health Research is linked to this Policy.

2. Provide more clarity on how the final priorities were selected for inclusion in the National Agenda of Priorities in Health Research and how this is linked to the Research Support Policy. For instance was prioritization based on criteria that are defined in the Research Support Policy? If so how and why were these criteria selected? How did the Policy guide the analysis of the public comments (p.3)?

3. Provide more concrete details on the contents of the National Agenda of Priorities in Health Research beyond the list presented in Figure 1. The priority list is very broad in scope covering the major areas that one would expect in any health sector. It is unclear what kind of prioritization was done to arrive at this comprehensive list. Are the priorities listed in order of importance? Are the 24 sub-agenda topics of equal importance? Was there a further prioritization of the
listed priorities to arrive at more specific topics? It would be helpful to explain the choice of the sub agenda topics selected for special mention in the commentary out of the 24 sub-agenda topics.

4. Offer more details on how decisions on budgetary allocations are made at the national level for the implementation of the National Agenda of Priorities in Health Research. For instance why was US$10.5 million invested in Health Technology, US$12.7 million devoted to malaria and dengue and US$49 million provided for the National Network of Cell Therapy? This point also relates to Figure 2. What was the basis of the differences observed in funding for each of the 24 sub-agenda topics? For instance the top 3 topics with the most funding are listed as numbers 12, 13 and 19. What is the basis for this whereas topics listed ahead of them received less funding.

5. Undertake a more detailed analysis and reflection on how the Policy was used to implement the National Agenda of Priorities in Health Research. This would include critiquing processes used to implement the Agenda; exploring obstacles to implementation and documenting lessons learned.

Minor Essential Revisions

Specific gaps that need to be addressed:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the decentralized Research for SUS programme? To what extent did this programme meet its objective to reduce regional inequities as measured by pre-defined indicators, the distribution of Masters and Doctoral theses and patents. The analysis could be further strengthened by comparing regional inequities before and after the finalization of the National Agenda of Priorities in Health Research in 2004.

2. Mention is made that the Brazilian Cochrane Centre conducted systematic reviews in 2004. Did these reviews influence decision-making processes in the health sector in any way?

3. Figure 2 is confusing and the diagram looks awkward. I would propose a tabular format indicating the number of projects for each sub agenda and the percentage of the total funding allocated to each sub agenda.

4. Given the broad scope of each of the 24 agenda topics it is unclear how the projects were classified.

5. For Figure 3, if feasible, a before and after analysis of each sub agenda item with respect to the number of projects and financial resources would be more informative.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'