Reviewer’s report

Title: Public-non-governmental organisation partnerships for health: an exploratory study with case studies from recent Ghanaian experience

Version: 0 Date: 28 Feb 2016

Reviewer: Anne Cockcroft

Reviewer’s report:

This paper covers an important topic. However, as it stands, it does not really add to knowledge or understanding about this topic.

General

The paper is much too long. It would be improved by shortening to about half the present length, removing a lot of padding. The language and grammar needs attention.

My main criticism is that the paper offers no real analysis of the different partnerships described, and does not draw any lessons from them that could help to guide effective development of such partnerships.

Introduction

This is too long. In particular, the section on p5-p6 about definitions of terms is unnecessarily longwinded.

The sentence on p4-5 "It is timely" may be true, but it is not what the paper actually delivers.

P6, line 26-28, says that "consequently public-NGO partnerships for health are evaluated against alternative modes of organising" but the paper does not evaluate the partnerships described against alternative modes of organising.

Methods

P7, line 26-28 mentions that 5 of 11 partnerships, themselves identified purposively, presumably to give a spread of types of partnerships, were contacted. The others were said to be excluded because the participants were "not available at the time of the study". What does this really mean? One is left with the impression that perhaps those partnerships that were more successful or comfortable were the ones that agreed to be studied. This could mean that the opportunity to learn why some partnerships were not successful was missed. At the very least, readers need to be told more about why less than half the initially selected partnerships were interviewed.
Results

Each partnership is described separately, at some length. This includes some unsubstantiated statements, such as p9 line 35-42. This talks of improvements in maternal, newborn and child health indicators, attributing these to the partnership. Where is the evidence that there were improvements? And how could these be attributed to the partnership?

Conclusions

On p16 lines 1-6 the author claims that this is the first study to provide evidence of the emergence and flourishing of various forms of public-NGO partnerships. I think this claim is unlikely to be true globally. It may be the case for Ghana specifically. Even for Ghana alone, one needs to be much more cautious about generalising from the study of just five selected partnerships.

P16, line 19-21. Every collaboration requires a different partnership. One cannot reasonably conclude this, having studied only five partnerships, selected intentionally to demonstrate a range of different types of partnership.

P16, line 37. The added value of NGOs in partnerships. As mentioned earlier, the partnerships studied were selected initially and further self-selected by those (5/11) that agreed to participate. It does not allow any general conclusion about the added value of NGOs in partnerships.

P17, line 14 onwards. Success factors. The factors listed cannot really be sustained on the basis of the evidence presented in this paper.

Recommendations (p18)

The recommendations, while not unreasonable, are not well substantiated by the description of the partnerships presented in the paper.

Limitations p19

The author recognises the limitation that the work was carried out only in Ghana but suggests that the findings can be generalised within Ghana; given the methodology and sampling this assertion is questionable.

The author recognises that the analysis did not address the impact of the partnerships on intended beneficiaries because it was cross-sectional. The study also lacks any sort of comparison group, even though the introduction p6 line 26-28 suggested that comparison with different methods of organising services would be part of the analysis.

Way forward
The author could prepare a shorter paper describing the five case studies, and perhaps combine this with some information about the number and type of public-NGO health partnerships currently operating in Ghana. It could include some very cautious conclusions from the five selected case studies, but making it clear that these are not necessarily generalizable, even within Ghana.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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