**Author's response to reviews**

**Title:** Approaches and impact of non-academic research capacity strengthening training models in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review

**Authors:**

- Lambert Mugabo (lambertmugabo@gmail.com)
- Dominique Rouleau (dominique.rouleau@gmail.com)
- Jackline Odhiambo (ojacklineatieno@gmail.com)
- Marie Paul Nisingizwe (nisimariepaul@gmail.com)
- Cheryl Amoroso (cheryl.amoroso@gmail.com)
- Peter Barebwanuwe (barebwa@gmail.com)
- Christine Warugaba (chrisw1093@gmail.com)
- Lameck Habumugisha (habumugisha4@gmail.com)
- Bethany Lynn Hedt-Gauthier (bethhedt@gmail.com)

**Version:** 3  
**Date:** 11 May 2015

**Author's response to reviews:** see over
May 11, 2015

To the Editorial Board of Health Research and Policy Systems:

I am pleased to re-submit our revised manuscript titled “Approaches and impact of non-academic research capacity strengthening training models is sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review” along with point-by-point responses to the reviewers for consideration of publication in Health Research and Policy Systems journal. In this study we explored strengths and weaknesses of various research capacity strengthening trainings in non-academic settings and we provide critical factors to consider for future development of successful programs.

We have submitted the first revised version of the manuscript in March 2015 and one of reviewers gave us a few comments to address. Reviewers’ comments were comprehensive and helped us, once again, to improve the manuscript. We have provided point-by-point response and made corresponding changes in the manuscript and we believe that the revised paper will achieve its full impact. Changes in the manuscript have been underlined and responses to the reviewers are contained in subsequent pages of this document.

We believe that this review will be of interest to readers of Health Research and Policy Systems for the following reasons: First, the paper provides a summary of existing approaches of non-academic research capacity strengthening activities which stimulates ideas for other organizations interested in this mission. Second, one of the important messages of this paper is to encourage organizations with existing research capacity strengthening activities to share complete information about their programs in public domain to help the replicability.

In conducting this systematic review, we have learned much about research capacity strengthening activities and we are convinced that publication in Health Research and Policy Systems journal will disseminate these lessons to the interested audience.

Looking forward to your feedback!

Sincerely,

Lambert Mugabo

Corresponding Author
Note to reviewers: I am, once again, thankful for your reviews which contributed to the improvement of this manuscript. Below are responses to each comment and changes in the manuscript are highlighted.

First Reviewer's report
Title: Approaches and impact on non-academic research capacity strengthening training models in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review
Version: 2
Date: 26 March 2015
Reviewer: Alan Boyd
Reviewer’s report
The authors have done a good job of responding to reviewer comments, and the paper is much improved as a result

Major compulsory Revisions

Review 1:
The use of the term "non-academic" training is potentially confusing and not fully made clear. As I understand it, the major distinction made between non-academic training and academic training is that it does not lead to a formal academic qualification (and as a consequence will tend to be shorter).
At some points, it is mentioned that non-academic training does not take place in academic settings (i.e. presumably not within higher education institution buildings), but I suspect that some of the training programmes (E.g. the ones involving visits to another country) did sometimes make use of HEI buildings.
This could do with some clarification and
Many of the training programmes appear to be delivered by academic staff, so I think referring to them as "non-academic" is potentially confusing.
I am not sure what the best label would be. The search criteria refer to "not a formal programme", but this could be misleading. Possibly "training courses not leading to a formal academic qualification", or "non-HEI accredited training". "short courses" might be another possibility, but not all of the courses were short in terms of contact time.
I think the paper needs to include a bit more discussion around this, and a more explicit and fuller definition of the label that is used - whether a different label is used (as I would suggest), or "non-academic" is retained

Response:
Thanks for this thoughtful comment. In recognizing the potential confusion that the term “non-academic” may create, we have inserted a sentence in background section which clarifies the meaning of this term. On page 4 now reads: “The term “non-academic” is used throughout this paper to refer to training programs that do not lead to formal academic qualifications, although they may use academic training staff and/or infrastructure.”
Review 2:

Regarding the insertion in the discussion "We focused on articles published in peer-reviewed journals as we believe such publications will ensure broader dissemination and possible replication of activities than grey literature alone", I don't think this is relevant to the methodological issue of the completeness/representativeness of the review coverage, so at the very least I think this should form the start of a new paragraph rather than following straight on from the previous sentence. I don't share the authors' confidence - there are lots of caveats - E.g. open access publication, the word limits that academic journals have, and the formal writing style, which may be a barrier - all of which are less problematic for grey literature publication. The main advantage is I think more permanent accessibility in future years (E.g. via a DOI). I would suggest deleting this sentence. I would also suggest inserting a sentence which considers the implications of the limitations of the review that have been identified (E.g. might there be systematic differences between programs published in the academic literature and those published in the grey literature only, such as being less successful, less "innovative", and having less academic input on the training side? etc.).

Response: Thank you for this comment. We have deleted the sentence in the discussion section that reads “We focused on articles published in peer-reviewed journals as we believe such publications will ensure broader dissemination and possible replication of activities than grey literature alone”. Also we have added another sentence on the limitations of the review which reads “Though grey literature may offer more detailed information about training programs, their use is hampered by difficulty in accessing reports years after their production and limited information on the individuals involved in producing the report. However, because of publication bias in scientific literature, this review may have missed training programs that were deemed less successful, less “innovative” or may have had less academic collaboration.”

Minor Essential Revisions

"Trainings" doesn't scan well. I suggest changing this to "training programs" throughout.

Response: We are in agreement on this issue and grateful for careful review. On that note we have changed “training(s)” to “training program(s)” where necessary and highlighted those changes.

Second Reviewer’s report

Title: Approaches and impact on non-academic research capacity strengthening training models in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review

Version 2
Date: 20 April 2015
Reviewer: Helen Smith

Reviewer’s report
The authors appear to have addressed all the major and essential revisions and the paper is much improved.