Reviewer's report

Title: Towards fair and effective North-South collaboration: realising a programme for demand driven and locally-led research

Version: 0 Date: 29 May 2017

Reviewer: German Guerra

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The article provides an extensive and robust documentation about the experience of a North-South partnership between Ghana and Netherlands. An analysis is proposed with solid methodology and analytical framework. There are some remarkable findings that, supported by interview verbatim, shed some light on the complex relationship between funders and receivers of funds for global health research.

The most important analysis that I consider to be missing should be found in the discussion where the results are not sufficiently analyzed under the analytical framework that was previously proposed. Half part of the discussion section seems to be a periphrasis of the results section and the more analytical aspects (such as the oppositions to HRDP by the Science councils or the "North" problems faced to continue with the programme) are slightly exposed. The analytical framework should be used to analyze the results.

I will point some concrete suggestions that might help to improve this already good work:

Page 3, lines 48-55: It would be interesting to propose a specific dimension of what is understood by "local". It can mean "local" as opposed to "global" and this relates to the differences between countries or regions (rich vs. poor countries; South vs North). But it also could mean local as the differences within same countries or regions. This way, something local can be sub-divided into a state, municipality or community in the same country, but with different health needs, disparities and inequities within the levels of "locality". This is seldom exemplified in the article and could be useful to know about the degree if disaggregation the HRDP aimed to.

Page 4, lines 48-55: The focus of this work is on the low-income experience and how the "research on research" is conducted there. Therefore I would suggest not comparing how these studies are carried out in "industrialized countries", even if there are similarities in methods or theories, since it can mislead the reader to a need of "emulation of procedures" from the South to the North, to be accepted as scientifically sound. The concrete recomendation would be to
removes the lines: "A similar distinction between three different levels is made by scholars who study the functioning of modern science in industrialised countries [25, 26]."

Commenting on lines 29-31, page 6: It would be interesting to know -and also if publisher constrains allow- the list of these 30 research projects to add in an annex.

Page 10, lines 56-58: The information in these lines is repeating with lines 11-12. It can be removed.

Commenting on page 17, lines 43-47: How can the small participation of Dutch researchers be interpreted? There are no interpretation on this, and providing one could be insightful as the article is about North and South collaborations.

Commenting on page 23, lines 11-13: The interesting notion of sponsorship constellation is fundamental for the analysis, but is ambiguously defined in terms of stakeholders (or type of stakeholders) that comprise it. Which sectors this sponsorship came from? Were they from public-private partnerships in Netherlands? Only the Dutch government? Any other?

Figure 2, "Selecting research proposal" element. There is a not defined acronym "JCP"

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