Author’s response to reviews

Title: Contemporary Issues in North-South Health Research Partnerships: Perspectives of Health Research Stakeholders in Zambia

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Reviewer 1

1. Limiting the sample to Lusaka-based researchers is problematic. It would be good to include researchers at other universities—for example, Copperbelt U. (and the long-standing research centre in Ndola)

Response: This was a small phenomenological study conducted to explore the lived experiences of researchers based in Lusaka and thus motivate a wider study. Including perspective from researchers in other universities such as the Copperbelt University (CBU) would have strengthened study, however, permission to conduct this study was only obtained for the mentioned study area and any additional inclusion would further require additional ethical clearance. Further on, limiting the study to Lusaka based researchers is one of the limitations acknowledged, see line 601 to 603.

2. The Bergen Model is useful, but not well known in the global health research field. Has it been validated in Africa?

Response: The BMCF has previously been used as an analytical frame to examine case studies of several collaborative working arrangements in Africa and described as a useful tool for evaluating partnerships, see line 196.

3. There is little mention of active Zambian leadership that is doing much more than "donkey work". Examples are the Zambia Forum for Health Research (ZamFOHR)—although
admittedly ZAMFOHR is "quiet" just now after the passing of Dr. Kasonde. Still his paper (with Campbell) should be referenced. A more recent example is the creation of the National Health Research Forum (NHRA) of Zambia, that has published national health research priorities, and is directed by Dr. Godfrey Biemba (I hope he was one of the interviewees). Another example of strong African research leadership is the Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA). Also the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) based in Nairobi.

Response: A paragraph has been added on Zambia’s Health Research System highlighting the work the National Health Research Authority (NHRA) is doing and the Zambia Forum for Health Research (ZAMFOHR) in leading health as referenced by Kasonde and Campbell (2012), see line 112 to 124. The National Health Strategic Plan 2017 has also been referenced, see line 578 to 581.

4. There are examples where research was funded by Canada's International Research Development Centre (IDRC)--an agency that explicitly funds research and capacity building in the "South". As examples, see the publications where Prof. Fastone Goma is the lead author.

Response: The work of organisations such as IDRC has been noted as cited by Prof. Fastone Goma see line 507 to 510.

5. The bibliography is missing some major and important references about "north-south" research partnership. For example the outstanding work of the Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries (particularly the 2012 update), and the work of the Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research (that developed the "Partnership Assessment Tool").

Response: More references on north-south research partnerships have been added, see highlighted references.

6. The title is off-putting--cheap and in fact inaccurate. There are many examples (some mentioned above) where African researchers are providing primary leadership, including with "northern" partners.

Response: The title of the manuscript has been changed, see line 2 and 3.
Reviewer 2

RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVE

The rationale of the study /objective needs further clarification and improvement. In light of the literature review, one does not really see the gap that the study is seeking to fill. North-South partnership has been criticized in a substantial body of literature as providing less benefits to southern countries involved in such partnerships. The debates have included issues relating to research agenda setting, power and capacity imbalances, access to and control over funding. Partners from HICs have also been reported to include implicit and explicit conditions which comparatively disadvantage Southern partners. Several authors have also emphasized the inequitable sharing of Post-research benefit including unequal access to intellectual properties resulting from the collaborative work.

Response: The rationale of the study/objective has been rewritten see line 95 to 111.

METHODOLOGY

The description of the conceptual framework should be discussed as part of the methodological approaches underpinning the study.

Response: The conceptual framework has been discussed as part of the methodological approaches underpinning the study see line 195 to 233.

RESULTS

Several themes seems to have emerged from the data analysis but it is not clear why the author focused attention only on factors negatively affecting the functioning of partnerships -input process, throughput processes and output processes.

Response: Result presented focus on both achievements and challenges, results begin with presenting the achievements in health research partnerships see line 243 to 283 and further presents synergy under outputs see line 399 to 407.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The interpretation of the study findings are supported by sufficient data but some results appear overly interpreted with too many repetitions. A good number of frameworks exist to address these issues of inequity in North-South Partnership, for example; the Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries. Guidelines for research in partnership with
developing countries, it would have been quite interesting to interpret some of the results in light of any of these agreed upon principles.

Response: Results have been discussed using the Swiss Commissions guidelines see line 499 to 599.

OVERALL

The paper should be copy edited, a few typos identified:

Line 146, include 'the ' after 'of, The study explored some of 'the' elements........

Response: ‘the’ has been included see line 228.

Line 288, remove ‘the’, in addition to having......

Response: ‘the’ has been removed see line 299.

Line 315, remove 'in'....among southern partners

Response: ‘in’ has been removed see line 335.

Line 458, recognition of southern partner's ability to contribute or southern partner's contribution....

Response: The sentence has been revised and the statement removed.

The sentence in line 181-183 is quite unclear and must be reconstructed.

Response: The sentence has been reconstructed see line 148 to 154.