

## **Author's response to reviews**

**Title:** A cross country review of strategies by the German Development Cooperation to strengthen Human Resources for Health in low-income countries

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### **Author's response to reviews:**

Basel, 14 April 2009

Re Manuscript: Former title "Strategies to strengthen Human Resources for Health from the perspective of development co-operation: A cross-country comparison".

This has been revised, upon the advice of the first reviewer, to the current title "A cross country review of strategies by the German Development Cooperation to strengthen Human Resources for Health".

Dear Mr Shaw,

We have received the feedback from the two reviewers found to take part in the open review process. We greatly appreciate the comments from Professor Gilles Dussault and Dr Pascal Zurn. They were very helpful.

Please find enclosed the revised version of our paper, which addresses the points raised by the reviewers. Below you find a point by point response to observations and comments raised by the two reviewers.

We look forward to learning your opinion on this suggestion and thank you very much for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Ricarda Merkle & Kaspar Wyss

Responses to First Reviewer's Comments:

Reviewers comment: I suggest changing the title to something like "Review of International agencies interventions in HRH in 5 low-income countries":

Our reply:

The title has been tightened up and a precise reference made to the German Development Cooperation. The suggestion to say it is an International Review has not been taken up. The reference to a cross country comparison has been maintained but it has been stipulated that the paper refers to the 4 low-income and 1 low-middle income country.

Reviewers comment: In terms of the structure of the paper I suggest the following: issue, objective, framework of analysis (section to be developed), organization of the paper.

Countries surveyed

Brief description of German Cooperation organization and modalities of functioning

Presentation and analysis of German Cooperation interventions

Our reply:

This comment has been addressed and taken up. The objective of the paper is explained in the background section. Next the countries under review are mentioned. The paper now provides a brief description of the different instruments available to the German Development Cooperation. A classification of the instruments into those that provide more traditional technical and financial cooperation and the agencies that have a more pronounced focus upon human resources development has also been included. The various interventions that these agencies support are then described in a generic way.

The more indepth information for each of the countries has been left in the findings section to be in line with the instructions from the editor.

Reviewers comment: Discussion. Here the focus should be on the effectiveness of bilateral cooperation in HRH and its determinants. The authors should show how their observations compare to what can be found in the literature (for instance assessments of SWAps)

Our reply: The discussion has been reworked so to provide indications on the role a bilateral agency can play in addressing HRH as an individual actor as well as within the context of programme-based aid and as part of a Sector Wide Approach. The role bilateral can play in advocating for this issue to be addressed in a cross cutting way via other national processes is also described. The bibliography of the manuscript has been extended – a comprehensive comparison and literature review is however beyond the scope of the paper.

Reviewers comment: I attach a WORD copy of the paper with suggestions of modifications inserted.

Our reply: These suggested modifications have been taken up in the paper, in particular the comment regarding the intention and meaning of the WHO data outlining at what level the numbers of physicians and other health workers, per 1000 of population can be considered to be critical.

Reviewers comment: A review of the punctuation is needed, some language

corrections are needed.

Our reply: The paper has been edited by a native English speaker. These concerns have been addressed.

#### Responses to Second Reviewer's Comments:

Reviewers comment: It would be important to specify whether the article wants to have an exhaustive review of initiatives of international partners to strengthen HRH, with a particular focus on the role of the German cooperation, or to indicate that the article will focus on specific initiatives.

Our reply: We took this point up by underlying that the papers' focus is on the role of the German cooperation as an example for one international donor. We also said more clearly that the review at the same time provides an overview of HRH initiatives in general in the five countries.

Reviewers comment: One question is also why the German Development Cooperation has been chosen, is it because it is a key player in HRH international partner programmes ?, in particular in those five countries (Cameroon, Indonesia, Malawi, Rwanda and Tanzania). Do we have information on what represents the German Development Cooperation in the total cooperation (and if possible in HRH support) in these countries ? In that sense, it would be good (if possible) to provide more quantitative information. For instance, which percentage of the German Development Cooperation is devoted to Health Systems Strengthening and which one to HRH ?

Our reply: We added an explanation stating that the German Development Cooperation was chosen because it is a relatively large donor that has initiated a stronger focus on initiatives to strengthen HRH. The criteria for country selection was that a) they are priority countries of the German Development Cooperation to health sector development, and b) HRH development is a recognized priority issue. Given that HRH initiatives are usually an integrated part of health system strengthening initiatives, no specific data with regard to quantitative information for health spending of GTZ for HRH.

Reviewers comment: It would be also be good to have a Figure of the different elements of the German Development Cooperation involved in HRH, and indicate their respective importance in terms of budget devoted to HRH support (GTZ, KfW, DED, InWEnt, etc.).

Our reply: In line with a comment of reviewer we have added information on the role of the different organizations of German Development Cooperation with regard to HRH. As explained above, the data on spending specifically for HRH does not exist given that HRH initiatives are often a part of broader health sector support programmes.

Reviewers comment: In the part Results and Discussion, it would be good to review the structure in order to facilitate comparisons. 1) It would be good to have for each sub-heading, a review country by country. 2) It would also bring

more clarity if there is a similar approach within each of the sub-heading. For instance, a general overview of the key international initiatives, and then a review of the involvement of the German Cooperation or focusing first on the involvement of the German Cooperation, and then placing it in a more general context. Now both approaches tend to be mixed and this creates some confusion for the reader.

Our reply: We agreed to that comment by having a more similar approach within sub-headings, and clearly distinguishing between general initiatives and those of the German Cooperation.

Reviewers comment: It would also be interesting to have some information on the impact of the programmes supported by international initiatives.

Our reply: The impact in terms of health outcomes of HRH interventions has not been measured given the complexity of such research based on a randomized study design. There is even little information on effects in terms of programme outcome and processes. This review is a contribution to the latter.