

# EVIDENCE REPORT

No 20

Rising Powers in International Development

## Senior Development Fellowship Report (Zhang Xiulan)

Gerry Bloom

August 2013

The IDS programme on Strengthening Evidence-based Policy works across seven key themes. Each theme works with partner institutions to co-construct policy-relevant knowledge and engage in policy-influencing processes. This material has been developed under the Rising Powers in International Development theme.

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## SENIOR DEVELOPMENT FELLOWSHIP REPORT (ZHANG XIULAN)

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# Introduction

The RPID Senior International Associate programme had a very successful first year. The first two Associates are both highly experienced analysts of health and social policy. Rômulo Paes de Sousa is an expert in monitoring and evaluation and has had long experience of working on targeted cash transfers and on health system development. He has also served as a Deputy Minister of Social Development in Brazil. Xiulan Zhang is the Director of the School of Social Development and Public Policy at Beijing Normal University. She works closely with the Ministries of Civil Affairs and Health and has been involved in many aspects of China's social sector reforms. In this report, an outline of the experiences and achievements of each Senior International Associate follows a general discussion of the programme.

Both Associates have been intimately involved in national policy processes in their country, but have had very little opportunity to reflect on lessons that have emerged from this experience. They used their time as Senior International Associates to undertake a review of their country's experience in managing major health and social sector reform. They worked closely with Gerald Bloom in developing a framework for their reviews, ensuring that they identified lessons for other countries. They presented their findings to an international audience at a major conference and at a variety of consultative meetings. They are completing reports for publication and are producing policy briefs on key lessons for policy actors in low and middle-income countries.

The two associates have also participated in reflecting on the challenges of building mutual learning between health and social policy analysts and actors in the BRICS and other low and middle income countries (LICs and MICs). The IDS RPID programme organised a successful consultative meeting at the DFID Office in Beijing to explore opportunities for mutual learning between the BRICS and policy actors in other LICs and MICs, the challenges faced and strategies for overcoming them. One major conclusion which emerged was that policy analysts in China and Brazil have focused most of their energies on helping their governments manage a major change process and now need to build their skills in undertaking systematic studies of this experience and communicating lessons to people in other countries. They suggested that this is an area to which DFID can add value. We have distributed the conclusions of this consultation within DFID and to potential partners in the BRICS, and Rômulo Paes de Sousa presented his reflections to a meeting at DFID in December 2012.

We plan to continue to involve the two Senior International Associates in further work on building mutual understanding about the management of health system change. We have agreed with the Department of Health in South Africa to organise a consultative meeting of health policy analysts and policy actors from the BRICS in Pretoria, before the next meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Health (November 2013).

We will organise the meeting in collaboration with a leading South African centre of health policy analysis. Government officials will participate in the meeting on an informal basis. The aim is to continue to create opportunities for mutual learning with

senior policy analysts in the BRICS and to explore ways of making lessons from their experiences available to counterparts in other low and middle income countries.

FIOCRUZ, the key Brazilian government agency engaged in health sector development cooperation in Africa, has expressed interest in joining these discussions. Preparatory meetings with the FIOCRUZ Africa Office in Maputo and head office in Rio de Janeiro took place in April 2013, building on initial contacts established through Senior International Associate Rômulo Paes de Sousa (who is a FIOCRUZ associate researcher), and through the RPID programme's collaboration with the BRICS Policy Centre in Rio de Janeiro.

We are also exploring with a Kenya-based NGO, which specialises in evidence to policy linkages, possible activities for facilitating effective communications between the Senior International Associates and other senior policy analysts from the BRICS and their counterparts in Africa.

An informal network is emerging of senior policy analysts from the BRICS with an interest in building mutual learning between their countries. This is creating a forum within which discussions can take place about how to make lessons from their development experience available to counterparts in low and middle income countries. We are taking forward plans to link the policy analysts from the BRICS to existing networks of health policy analysts in Africa.

## **Selection of Professor Zhang**

Professor Zhang was selected because of her wide experience as an analyst of Chinese social and health policy and her close collaboration with policymakers in that country. In addition, the School of Social Development and Public Policy, of which she is a Director, has already established a postgraduate course on development studies for students from a variety of low and middle income countries.

## **Review of policy experience**

Professor Zhang undertook a study of the formulation and implementation of strategies for the reform of rural health services in a context of rapid change. She worked closely with Gerald Bloom, of IDS, to develop a framework for this study, which draws on recent thinking about the analysis of change in complex and dynamic contexts. She also participated in a workshop in Beijing on the application of a complex systems approach to the study of health systems and read widely on new thinking about complex systems. Professor Zhang employed a young researcher to review policy documents and carry out in-depth interviews with policy makers. She has completed a draft report on the findings and has presented these findings to academic and policy audiences.

## **Presentation of findings to policy actors**

Professor Zhang has presented her findings to the following policy actors and policy analysts:

- Panel at the Global Symposium on Health Systems Research in Beijing in November 2012, including an international audience of researchers and policymakers.
- Senior Chinese health policymakers, January 2013: this meeting allowed Professor Zhang to test the validity of her findings.

## **Outputs for dissemination and policy influence**

Professor Zhang is producing the following outputs:

- Draft report which is to be published as a paper as part of a special issue of a peer review journal.
- IDS Policy Briefing on key lessons from the Chinese experience, aimed at policy analysts and policy actors in other low and middle income countries.
- Recording of a presentation on the findings of her review to be used in future meetings with policy analysts in other countries, and made available as an open-source video.

## **Participation in consultations with DFID and other policy actors**

Professor Zhang presented her findings to a meeting between Chinese policy analysts working on global health and two senior Brazilian policy analysts hosted by the DFID Office in Beijing. They explored opportunities and challenges for building mutual learning between policy analysts and policy actors in the two countries and with counterparts in low income countries. A report on this meeting has been disseminated within DFID and to health policy analysts in the BRICS.

## **Planned contributions to future work of the RPID Programme**

Professor Zhang has agreed to continue in her role as a Senior International Associate for the next three years. This will include the following activities:

- Dissemination of her findings of key lessons from the Chinese experiences to meetings of senior policy analysts and policy actors in the BRICS and in other low and middle income countries (in person or electronically).

- Completion of an IDS Policy briefing and publications of the study findings in a peer review journal.
- Participation in the construction of an informal network of senior health policy actors.



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