

Abstract

As we look forward to the end of this Century and the beginning of the next, our politicians are busy telling us about their plans to turn our countries into New Industrialised Nations (NINS) by the year 2010 (or is it 2020?). Most of us dismiss this as mere political rhetoric. But as medical researchers, perhaps we ought to look at this 2020 business more carefully. Let us assume that a few African countries will indeed become New Industrialised Nations by the year 2020. Shall we, as medical researchers, have contributed to this industrialisation process through our research efforts? Perhaps to answer this question one needs to look at the state of medical research in most African countries at the moment. In the majority of our countries, research output in the form of publications in reputable medical journals has fallen in recent years. Perhaps the only exception is research on AIDS/HIV, but only because of external funding and/or collaboration with other centres outside Africa. In addition, most of the prominent African medical scientists trained in the sixties and seventies have either retired or will soon retire. What they have left or will soon leave behind are institutions which are so run down due to lack of resources that proper research and training no longer takes place. The tragedy of all this is that Africa is not producing enough well trained young medical scientists to continue with the good work started by those retiring now. Some countries in South East Asia have become New Industrialised Nations through aggressive training programmes and incentives for their young scientists (including medical scientists). Can African medical scientists be optimistic about the year 2020, given the meagre resources we are operating with at the present time? I am not