

# Can Africa set the science agenda?

This edition of the BBC Africa Debate comes from Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, where the BBC is hosting a science festival. We bring together scientists from across Africa and around the world to consider the state of science on the continent. With the majority of funding coming from outside the continent, are African scientists in control of their own research agendas? Is African science meeting Africa's needs – and can it be used to drive growth on the continent? One Ghanaian doctor cites the fact that many children who were admitted with cancer come from a particular area of the country, but there doesn't appear to be any effort to research the reasons why.

Funding bodies themselves insist that it is local partners who design their projects. Sir John Savill, Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council in the UK, insists that his organisation has a "grass roots up" approach, which results in researchers based in Africa setting the local MRC agenda. Some African countries have tried to move away from the old reliance on outside funding – although not always to great effect. Uganda's government chose not to renew a low-interest science loan from the World Bank in 2010, for example, pledging to provide the money itself. But the money was not allocated in that year's budget. The Ugandan government has also so far failed to establish a promised science ministry.

Ghanaian-born Nasa scientist Dr Ashitey Trebi-Ollennu, believes that scientists in Africa need to be pragmatic. If it wasn't for foreign funding, there would be no research happening on the continent at all. At least students are trained, labs are built and infrastructure is put in place. Some will argue that, when much of the continent's population is still living without basic necessities, is it right for vast amounts of money to be spent on experiments that may never yield tangible results for years, or even decades?