

## Reflections on the inaugural Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize : The meaning and legacy of Hideyo Noguchi to Africa and its medical and health challenges

The launch of the Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize by the government of Japan is an unique and clarion call for change in the way the international community addresses, recognises and rewards global health challenges. The Prize is major incentive to intensify quality health research and service to address Africa's health challenges *as the most serious and urgent challenge on the global health agenda* in the context of the international global agenda and it challenges Africans to capture the opportunity to demonstrate by deeds their commitment to overcome avoidable health inequalities in a generation; health disparities that have impacted negatively on their education, their economies and their development. The Prize conscientises the global science and health community through this mission-driven award. The Prize is an inspiration and a challenge for the individual/s or organization/s recognized and rewarded to create a better and humane world. In combining research and service excellence with strong human values of dignity, the prize has opened a new approach.

The Noguchi Prize is the first and only public global award of its kind in history, established by a government and its people in which research and service excellence are recognized and rewarded equally and independently within the same prize; in which diversity in decision-making is integral to the award process and in which research and services excellence are combined with human values and spirit. Named after a remarkable individual who embodied scientific excellence and outstanding humanitarian values and focused these to the African continent—a continent often marginalized and ignored. Through his efforts he pioneered a lasting partnership between the peoples of Japan and Africa. With a reward value of 1m USD for each of the two categories, the Noguchi Africa Prize already rivals any of the major established scientific awards making it highly competitive and sought after. The Prize has excited and captured the imagination of the world, particularly the scientific community. It represents a new hope for a world yearning for human rights, human dignity, equality and transparency.

Several of the major scientific prizes that have shaped modern medical scientific advancements were established by private citizens through foundations eg the Nobel, the Lasker, and the Shaw. Their thrust has been on individualistic scientific achievements without a direct link to society or a focus on global health burden. For these reasons they have advanced science and health research in a particular way ie esoteric and science for science's sake; have become prizes of the elite and advantaged science and scientists of the developed world and have been detached from real global health problems. As a result, while prestigious, international or global, in reality they have been exclusive and excluding of health realities and of developing countries sciences, scientists and services. Often the processes and structures of their decision-making have been shrouded in secrecy; lacking diversity; lacking internationalism or global perspectives. It will be interesting to see how these established awards rise to the challenges of the modern world and in particular to the impact of this prestigious newly launched Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize whose founding principles represents a totally different and radical approach. Finally, it is worth recalling how Japan by proposing the Global Fund for Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria initiative at the occasion of the G8 in Okinawa altered and shaped the course of treatment for these three major infectious epidemics and consequently human history.

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