

# Letters to the Editor

## Epidemiology and public health research productivity in Africa

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Nachegea and colleagues make a comprehensive review of the current status and future prospects of epidemiology and public health training and research in the WHO African region.<sup>1</sup> We note, however, that the number of papers adjudicated to the Seychelles in the considered period (1981–2010) was substantially underestimated. If this occurred for other countries, it could have led to a commensurate underestimation of the true productivity in the region. The authors attributed 28 peer-reviewed articles that included at least one local co-author affiliated with an institution in the Seychelles. However, we are aware of at least 128 peer-reviewed manuscripts meeting the criteria, most of which have abstracts freely available on PubMed (a list is available from the authors). Many of these papers were published in high-impact medical journals, with the majority relating to population-based epidemiological research on noncommunicable diseases. Admittedly, research in Seychelles

(a country with a very small population and where a university was only recently created) benefitted from collaborative agreements with a number of large universities globally. These arrangements helped build, strengthen and sustain local research capacity. We agree with the encouraging conclusions reached by Nachegea and colleagues on the increasing research capacity in the African continent, but also call for renewed scrutiny when assessing papers published in the continent.

### Reference

- <sup>1</sup> Nachegea JB, Uthman OA, Ho YS *et al.* Current status and future prospects of epidemiology and public health training and research in the WHO African region. *Int J Epidemiol* 2012;**41**:1829–46.

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## Authors' Response to: Epidemiology and public health research productivity in Africa

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We fully agree that the results of bibliometric analysis published in *IJE*<sup>1</sup> may be conservative given that our methodology may not have captured all the existing publications from some countries (e.g. Seychelles). We adopted the 'absolute country counting' method, where each country contributing to an article received

one paper credit based on the first, last or corresponding author originating from such country. Although we have attempted to eliminate potential flaws in our bibliometric analysis, some limitations were inevitable and are linked to the inherent problems of bibliometric analyses. For example, one possible