**Our hope lies** reformist change

Sometimes it seems that we Africans are so mesmerised by

figures and acronyms - SAPs, GDPs, GNPs, economic/

inflation/interest/currency/growth rates and the rest - that

we lose sight of farther-reaching policies and priorities.

Whatever is the sacred cow of the moment (liberalisation

perhaps, economic reform or structural adjustment)

becomes the be-all and end-all of public life; a state of

Nirvana will be achieved, the fashionable belief goes, if only

Kenyans worship. long and humbly enough before the

current economic dogma.

We are not, in adopting this sardonic vein, suggesting

that economic reform is not the way ahead for Kenya - God

forbid; our nation has lacked discipline and vision in its

economic and financial policies for far too long and now

that most of our managers and planners appear committed

to the path of integrity and self-restraint, we pray as

devoutly as the rest that this will lead us to the promised

land.

In passing, we might just ponder the irony that it is, as

ever, the poor who pay the price, tightening their belts

under the demands of SAPs made necessary because of

laxity; greed and mismanagement by Kenyans who do not

know what it is to go hungry - and, in fairness, by some

painful recessionary conditions around the globe.

We trust that the Government will have the strength of

will, whatever socio-political problems accrue, to sustain

the painful measures it has already accepted are necessary

to cure our economic ills. It. is essential, in Kenya, as in

other sub-Saharan countries, to break out of the cycle of

dwindling growth and rising inflation and population.

Finger-in-the-dyke policies must be a thing of the past;

well-managed economies and poverty-reducing strategies

must take priority in our thinking.

The alternative is becoming too ghastly to contemplate.

Recent Swedish research suggests that the poor in sub-

Saharan Africa will increase by almost 50 per cent to 265

million in the year 2000. This will be a third of all the

developing world's poor.

The continent cannot sustain this sort of degradation and

the risks of conflagration, indeed revolution, are selfevident.

Africa's planners must start looking closely at·

where resources are being used and whether they are best

employed in those areas.

Recent data indicate that 27 out of 37 African countries

spend more money on the military than on agriculture.

There are also outrageous imbalances between funds voted

to ceremonial occasions, flying the flag and government PR

and those set aside for social welfare programmes.

.With so many unsolved problems ahead, now is the time

to .debate whether more funds should not be put into

important areas of research, particularly scientific

investigation, perhaps also "think-tanks" - no matter how

extravagant such an idea may seem to the tight-lipped

financial controller.

Such demands are usually far down the priority lists of

African governments because research is slow, academic,

hard to understand difficult to communicate to the cash providers

and rarely; achieves swift, spectacular or visible

results. If you want to impress, it is much easier to tarmack

a road or build a clinic.

The argument of the researchers is that the road might be

provided quicker, the clinic not even needed if they were

allowed to pursue their studies whilst generously funded

and free of political interference. Look at the possibilities:

Insect- and plant-related research are crucial to the

future of agriculture while farmers are waiting for cost

effective and home grown technologies.

There is a whole field of animal diseases and behaviour

crucial to African agriculture demanding serious

exploration from home-grown scientists ..

When it comes to diseases in humans, the continent need

look no further than Aids. Horrifying figures are released

almost daily about the effects of the HIV epidemic, one

being that it is reducing Africa's Gross Domestic Product by

somewhere between 15 and 25 per cent.

. All the world's researchers seem to be working frantically

for an Aids cure. It can do no harm if Africa's brightest

minds join in the quest to end a scourge which seems to.

have attacked Africa with particular Virulence ..

The brain drain problem could be ameliorated by the

growth of indigenous research institutions to offer

conditions and challenges equal to those being met by

young Africans in greener pastures overseas.

Research institutions will have to sustain constructive

dialogue with the scientific establishments and the policy

makers and there is no reason why this should not be

achieved. Given idealism, sensible financial control and

commitment from government, Africa could take a major

step forward in confronting its own multifarious problems.