



THE NIGERIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE



The West African Academy Exchange Project

PROJECT REPORT



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About the Nigerian Academy of Science (NAS)

The Nigerian Academy of Science (NAS), established in 1977, is the foremost independent scientific body in Nigeria. NAS is uniquely positioned to bring scientific knowledge to bear on the policies/strategic direction of the country and is also dedicated to the development and advancement of science, technology, and innovation (STI) in Nigeria. The aim of the Academy is to promote the growth, acquisition, and dissemination of scientific knowledge, and to facilitate its use in solving problems of national interest. Over the years, the Academy has done this by:

- Providing advice on specific problems, of scientific or technological nature, presented to it by the government and its agencies, as well as private organizations
- Bringing to the attention of the government, and its agencies, problems of national interest that science and technology can help solve
- Establishing and maintaining the highest standards of scientific endeavour and achievement in Nigeria, through the publication of journals, organization of conferences, seminars, workshops, and symposia, as well as the recognition of outstanding contributions to science in Nigeria, and the development of a working relationship with other national and international scientific bodies and academies.

As with academies in other countries, NAS is a not-for-profit organization with total membership (since inception) of 296 Fellows elected through a highly competitive process. The Fellows are scientists who have distinguished themselves in their fields both locally and internationally. Some of the Academy's members have also served as vice-chancellors of universities, directors-general of government parastatals, and ministers in federal ministries. The Academy, given its clout, can also attract other experts from around the country and internationally, when needed. NAS is Nigeria's national representative on such bodies as the International Science Council (ISC) – the umbrella body for all science associations and unions, and the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP) – the umbrella body for all national science academies globally. The Academy is also a founding member of the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) and the West African Network of National Academies (WANNAS).

About the National Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters of Benin (ANSALB)

L'Académie nationale des Sciences, Arts et Lettres du Bénin (ANSALB) is the foremost independent scientific authority of the Republic of Benin. It was founded in 2010 by top national academics in the teaching and research sector. It was subsequently recognized by the government of Benin as an independent and lasting, non-profit scholarly society by Decree No. 2016-243 of April 4, 2016.

The ANSALB's objectives are:

- the democratization of scientific research in Benin and the provision of knowledge, know-how and knowledge in all areas for the integral well-being of each Beninese;
- the promotion and dissemination of Sciences, Arts and Letters.

The ANSALB aims to advise decision-makers from the state or the private sector, national or international, in a completely free manner, with the sole constraint of the competence of its members, the objectivity of their interventions, respect for ethics and dignity.

The ANSALB freely develops cordial and working relationships with sister academies in our region, our continent and the world for the deepening of scientific, artistic, literary questions or relating to any other area of knowledge, know-how in a knowledge society.

ANSALB plays an active role in the development of international scientific relations:

- by establishing relationships with foreign academies that could result in the creation of common structures, cooperation and exchange agreements, the organization of conferences or the joint drafting of reports;
- by ensuring the representation of Benin in scientific institutions with similar missions and objectives, in particular the International Science Council (ISC), the Inter-Academies Panel (IAP), the Network of African Academies of Sciences (NASAC), the Interacademic Group for Development (GID);
- by integrating into its ranks by election foreign associate members;
- by defending women and men of science and culture who are victims of human rights violations.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Significance of Inter-Academy Partnerships

National science academies across the world serve as a channel for science advice, providing independent and non-partisan evidence-based science advice to decisions makers, to aid evidence informed decision making. Besides from their functions at the national level, through partnerships and collaborations, national science academies may also provide a collective voice on shared issues of concern at regional and global levels, and contribute to the promotion of science diplomacy. In addition to the promotion of science advice and science diplomacy, such collaborations also help to encourage knowledge sharing between academies in different countries, thereby fostering capacity strengthening.¹

Science academies of various countries have formed several partnerships over the years for the purpose of strengthening capacity, promoting the visibility of individual science academies as science advisors, and increasing engagement. For example, the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) was established to serve as a platform for African science academies to come together with a collective voice on problems of scientific significance common to their home countries and provide evidence-based advice to relevant stakeholders². To achieve this, NASAC routinely organizes opportunities for engagement and collaboration among its member academies - conferences, seminars, workshops, expert groups, participation in international partnerships for development, and issuing joint statements on relevant topics³.

Similarly, the West African Network of National Academies of Sciences (WANNAS) was recently set up (in 2023) to create a framework for collaboration between the national science academies of the ECOWAS region. It is expected that the WANNAS would serve as an instrument for scientific advice and diplomacy, as well as a platform for sharing experiences, best practices, and capacity building among the member national academies⁴.

¹ The Evolving Science Advisory Landscape in Africa: A Consensus Study Report. The Nigerian Academy of Science (2020)

² The 2021 Annual Meeting of African Science Academies (AMASA-2021) Report

³ The Evolving Science Advisory Landscape in Africa: A Consensus Study Report. The Nigerian Academy of Science (2020)

⁴ Constitutive General Assembly of the West African Network of National Academies of Sciences (WANNAS): Concept note

National academies in West Africa have established a cordial working relationship, often collaborating on initiatives to address shared challenges. Recent examples of these are:

- In 2021, the Académie Nationale des Sciences et Techniques du Sénégal (ANSTS), collaborated with the NAS, Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (GAAS), and scientists from the Gambia to organized a virtual workshop themed, *“COVID-19 Response in West Africa: Strengthening Knowledge Sharing and Best Practices”*. This workshop discussed the social, political, and cultural aspects of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) interventions, as well as promoted collaboration on COVID-19 response strategies across the West African sub-region.
- The NAS worked with the national academies of Ghana, Senegal, Benin Republic, and Burkina Faso, to undertake the *“Disseminating Evidence-Based Policy Briefs on COVID-19 in West Africa Project”* between July and October 2020. The project disseminated the content of policy briefs/reports on the COVID-19 pandemic, developed by Resolve To Save Lives (RTSL) Consortium, through a series of four bilingual webinars.
- In 2020, the NAS, ANSALB, and the Nigerian Young Academy (NYA) constituted a study committee comprising of experts from within and outside Africa to conduct a rapid consensus study on science advice in West Africa, particularly in health emergencies. The committee was tasked with examining the existing mechanisms for science advice in West Africa, their effectiveness in health emergencies, and provide recommendations for strengthening science advice in public health emergencies.
- In 2018, the NAS offered technical support to ANSALB towards the hosting of the 14th Annual Meeting of African Science Academies (AMASA-14) Conference. themed *“Sustainable Development in Africa: The role of Young and Senior Science Academies”*.

Furthermore, the academies of Nigeria, Benin Republic, Ghana, and Senegal have jointly developed proposals for initiatives aimed at solving problems of sub-regional/regional concern including COVID-19, waste management, disease surveillance and response, as well as strengthening science advice.

The NAS and ANSALB have thus developed a good working relationship over the years. Both academies have worked together on joint initiatives including NAS providing technical and programmatic support to ANSALB towards the hosting of the fourteenth Annual Meeting of African Science Academies (AMASA-14) in 2018, as well as both academies jointly coordinating a rapid consensus study (the first in the sub region) on science advice in health emergencies, in 2020.

1.2 WAX Project: Rationale, Aims, and Objectives

The Nigerian Academy of Science, in collaboration with the ANSALB, first conceptualized the West African Academy Exchange (WAX) Project in 2021. The project was aimed at strengthening partnership and collaboration between the two academies, by creating a platform for capacity strengthening through knowledge sharing and learning. Additionally, the project aimed to foster mentorship and support for efforts towards the establishment of a Liberian national academy.

The objectives of the project were:

- To create an avenue for knowledge exchange and learning between older and newer academies in the West African sub region.
- To strengthen the existing partnerships between West African academies (NAS and ANSALB).
- To support efforts and foster mentorship in the establishment of new academies in West Africa.

Through the project, it was expected that the functionality of the participating academies would be improved, allowing both academies benefit from each other in terms of best practices and experience. Also, for NAS and ANSALB, it would be another milestone in the already existing partnership. The project did contribute to strengthening the capacity of the NAS and ANSALB secretariats; in fact, feedback from ANSALB indicated that the secretariat's administrative processes were better.

Following the successful completion of the project activities in 2022, both academies decided to embark on a second phase of the project. Specifically, in the second phase, there were further areas of knowledge exchange - meeting management, proposal development publication management, and financial management. Also, the NAS and ANSALB embarked on a strategic partnership session with the aim of producing a proposed partnership plan. This plan would serve to further strengthen collaboration between the two academies.

Chapter 2: Summary of Project Activities

2.1 WAX Project Phase 1

The first exchange visit took place on the 25th-26th of April, 2022. A team from Benin Republic (comprising a key ANSALB executive and a staff member of the ANSALB secretariat) took part in a learning visit to the NAS Secretariat in Lagos, Nigeria. This two-day visit served as an avenue for interactions aimed at knowledge exchange and learning, with the NAS leadership and secretariat staff. The NAS leadership shared from their experiences on various issues including academy governance, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, science advocacy, and resource mobilization. The visiting team members also had interactive sessions with the NAS Secretariat staff to discuss their roles and responsibilities including administration, financial management, project management, proposal development, and communications.



The ANSALB team at the NAS Secretariat during the first exchange visit

Following the first visit, a team from Nigeria (comprising the NAS President – Prof. Ekanem Braide FAS, and Miss Mobolaji Dasaolu – Administrative Officer, Communications) in turn paid a second two-day learning visit to the ANSALB Secretariat in Cotonou. Similar to the first visit, the visiting team from Nigeria got first-hand exposure to the operations of the Benin Academy, and its Secretariat through learning sessions with ANSALB fellows and Secretariat staff. Additionally, there were discussions as to how lessons learnt during both visits may be translated/adapted in the Nigerian, and Beninois contexts.



The second exchange visit

2.2 WAX Project Phase 2

The third exchange visit took place on the 14th-16th May, 2024. This time, the ANSALB team (composed of an ANSALB Fellow, and a secretariat staff) took part in an interactive visit to the NAS secretariat in Lagos to discuss experiences and perspectives on key aspects of

secretariat functioning. The learning sessions at the NAS secretariat covered the areas of meeting management, budgeting and financial management, NAS publications management, as well as NAS' proposal development process.

In addition, the ANSALB team participated at one of NAS' major events – the induction ceremony of new fellows. They had the opportunity to sit in at NAS' Council meeting, held on the 15th May, as observers, and learn about NAS' governance processes. Finally, the ANSALB team held a strategic partnership session with some of NAS' leadership with the aim of producing a proposed partnership plan to further NAS-ANSALB collaborations.

Through the various activities, the ANSALB team had an opportunity to not only interact with the NAS secretariat team, but also participated at the induction ceremony, and interacted with NAS Council members and other Fellows who were present at the event.



The ANSALB team on a tour of the NAS Secretariat



One of the interactive sessions with the NAS Secretariat staff



Professor Martin Chobli of ANSALB at the NAS Induction Ceremony

Chapter 3: Project Outputs

3.1 Policy Brief

A policy brief, titled *Fostering Inter-Academy Collaboration in West Africa* was produced as an output of the first series of exchange visits held in 2022. The policy brief summarized the lessons learnt during this endeavour, and put forward recommendations for fostering continued partnership and collaboration between national science academies in Africa and particularly in West Africa.

3.2 Training Documentary

One of the objectives of the first phase of the WAX project was to foster mentorship and support for the effort towards establishing a Liberian national academy. In addressing this, a video documentary was produced with presentations on academic governance, programme management, fundraising, communications, and journal publication which was shared with stakeholders working to set up a Liberian academy as a resource material. The documentary was also disseminated across other West African academies to serve as a reference tool for other groups intending to set up national science academies. The policy brief and educational video produced through this project are useful tools for communicating the lessons learnt from the project, as well as capacity development for African science academies.

3.3 NAS-ANSALB Strategic Partnership Plan

The NAS and ANSALB share common goals in the advancement of science and technology in their countries, and across the sub region. Being science academies, they serve as channels for science advice, providing independent and non-partisan advice, and ensuring that decision-makers have access to the most reliable scientific information when forming policies that impact society. Furthermore, through collaborations and partnerships, the academies can extend their influence beyond national borders, addressing shared global challenges and promoting science diplomacy.

A strategic partnership plan was therefore produced following the strategic partnership session between the visiting team from ANSALB and NAS' leadership. The document sets out the terms under which the NAS and ANSALB would design and implement a partnership plan with activities aimed at strengthening NAS-ANSALB collaboration. The partnership design covers three main strategic areas - knowledge sharing and capacity building, policy advice and advocacy, as well as public engagement.

Chapter 4: Challenges, Opportunities, and Lessons Learned

- **Language** - During the project, language difference created a barrier in communication between both academies - Nigeria being an anglophone country and Benin being a Francophone country. However, this challenge was addressed by engaging translators. It is important to note that the language challenge extends beyond NAS and ANSALB as West Africa is a bilingual region. Given the various activities planned between NAS and ANSALB under the strategic partnership plan, and the push for increased academy collaboration across the West African subregion, there is need for NAS and ANSALB, and indeed other academies in the region, to take definite steps towards bridging the language barrier.
- **Knowledge Exchange** – Staff of the two secretariats were able to exchange knowledge and experience as related to their roles and responsibilities. Ideas were exchanged on project management, fundraising, communications, budgeting, auditing, in addition to policies and management. NAS’s perspectives on project management, fundraising, the use of social media, and media awards were particularly useful to ANSALB.
- **Academy Governance** – In the discussion around academy governance, there were many similarities noted in the strategic directions of both academies, especially with respect to sections on mission, vision, and core values detailed in the strategic plans of both institutions. A major difference noted between both academies is the allocation of statutory funding which is the case for ANSALB, and not NAS; though NAS on occasion received funding from government ministries, departments, and agencies towards the implementation of specific projects. NAS has in recent years increased advocacy to the Nigerian government towards getting statutory backing for the academy. The ANSALB situation provided further motivation for NAS towards that drive. Recently, in March 2024, the NAS conducted an investiture of the President of Nigeria as the Grand Patron of Science. The NAS is also advocating for the signing of a NAS Bill into law.
- **Collaboration and Partnership** – This project gave NAS and ANSALB another opportunity to learn from each other. Both academies agreed that national science academies in the region cannot afford to exist in isolation. It was reiterated during the interactive sessions of this engagement that continuous partnership and collaboration

among the academies should be sustained, with a view to ensuring evidence informed decision making on the continent.

Overall, the project has created opportunities for increased NAS-ANSALB partnership, strengthening the science advisory role of both academies, and developing good working relationships with relevant stakeholders from both counties. It is expected that NAS and ANSALB would increasingly collaborate on advocating for evidence-based policies at the national and regional levels. The academies would work together to provide scientific advice to policymakers, promote science-based decision-making, and address societal challenges through policy advocacy initiatives.

Chapter 5: Strengthening Collaboration among Science Academies

5.1 Recommendations

The following are put forward as recommendations for fostering inter-academy collaborations among national academies in Africa, specifically West Africa:

1. Foster Continued Knowledge Exchange: National science academies and NASAC should continue to create avenues for regular interactions and engagement. Exchange programmes, similar to this project, should be a matter of routine between academies in the sub region. Also, the Annual Meeting of African Science Academies (AMASA) and similar meetings should be encouraged and sustained.
2. Share Lessons from Activities: Academies usually produce reports to document their activities (workshops, lectures, conferences etc). Another vehicle for knowledge sharing amongst academies in West Africa, is the dissemination of reports of such activities across academies.
3. Strengthen Partnership and Collaboration: Though there have been major achievements in terms of partnership and collaboration between academies in West Africa in recent years, more can be done in this regard. They should participate in regional activities that will enable communities of practitioners, policy makers, science experts, and researchers collaboratively solve problems, and learn from each other's implementation efforts. This will further strengthen science academies in West Africa because the challenges are similar, and the continued collaboration will help the older academies to assist younger ones in their establishment.
4. Devote Resources: Funding partners should assist by dedicating funds to foster capacity strengthening through partnerships. Once partnerships and networks are established, resources (including human) need to be devoted to maintaining them. This is necessary to facilitate the collaborations, and to help maintain communication among partners.

5. Monitor and Evaluate: Collaborations, networks, and partnerships between academies should be monitored to determine how well they are functioning and make changes when necessary.

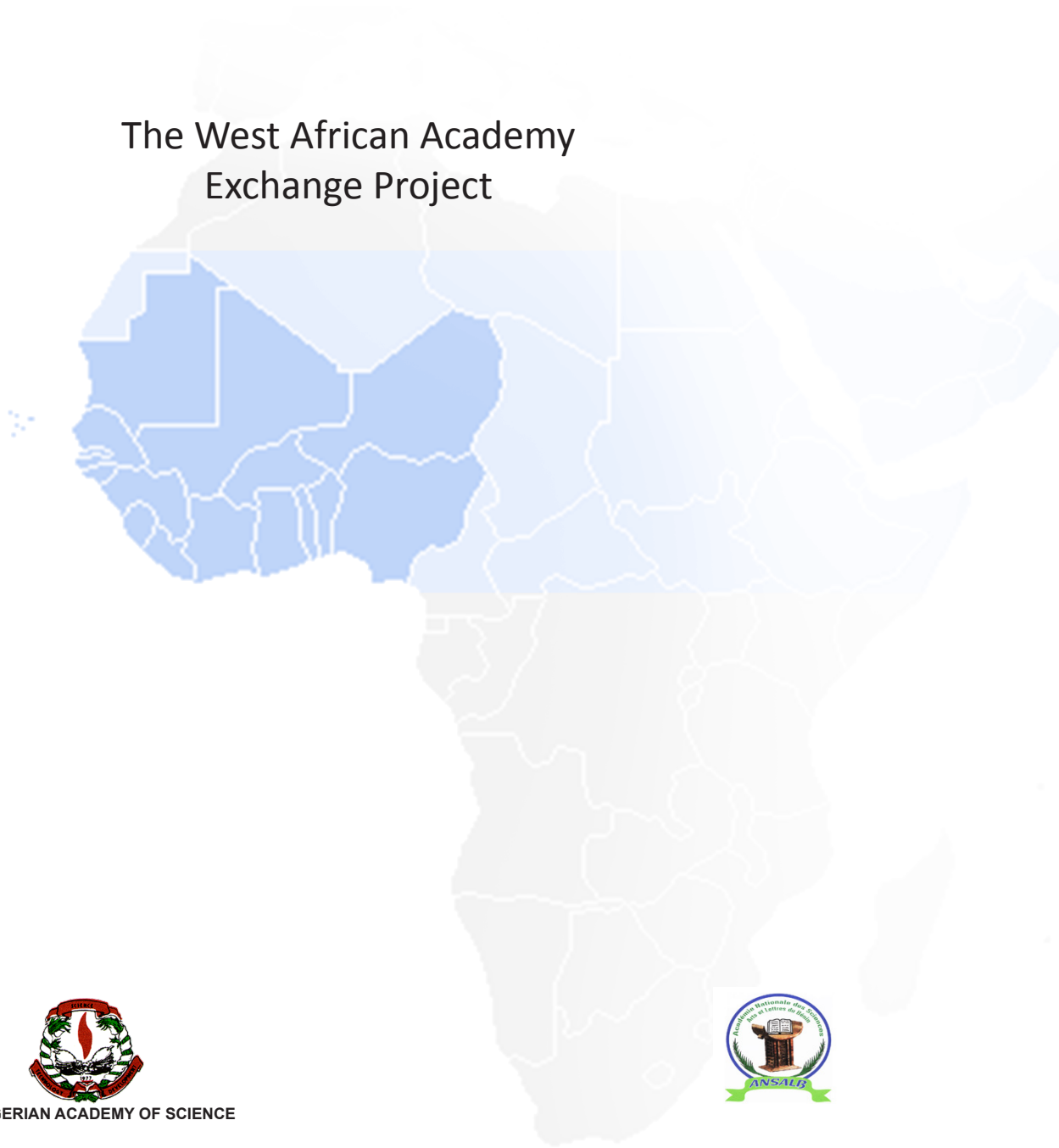
5.2 Conclusion

Countries in Africa, and particularly within sub-regions such as West Africa, have similar challenges. So, partnership and collaboration on all fronts between governments, researchers, and academies would be key to shaping a continent whose people would enjoy the dividends of science, technology, and innovation (STI). Consequently, deliberate steps must be taken to foster and sustain such collaborations.

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