



THE NIGERIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE



Fostering Inter-Academy Collaboration in West Africa: A Policy Brief

Introduction

National science academies are private, non-profit organizations of scientists, dedicated to the furtherance of science and technology, and facilitating their use for policymaking, for the benefit of the larger society. Primarily, science academies 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. Asides 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 the 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.

Currently in Africa, there are 28 national science academies under the umbrella body of the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC)¹. NASAC is a consortium of merit-based science academies in Africa, and aspires to make the “voice of science” heard by policy and decision makers within Africa and worldwide. In West Africa, there are quite a few national science academies (Table 1), which all work to bring science to bear on the strategic directions of their home countries.

Table 1: West African National Science Academies

Countries	National Science Academies	Year Established
Ghana	Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (GAAS)	1959
Nigeria	The Nigerian Academy of Science (NAS)	1977
Senegal	The Academy of Science and Technology of Senegal (ANSTS)	1999
Benin Republic	The Academie Nationale de Sciences, Arts et Lettres du Benin (ANSALB)	2010
Burkina Faso	Academie Nationale des Sciences Arts et Lettres du Burkina (ANSAL-BF)	2013
Togo	Academie Nationale Des Sciences, Arts et Lettres Du Togo (ANSALT)	2012

1 Member Academies. Available at <https://www.nasaonline.org>



In addition, West Africa has a number of young academies: Academy of Young Scientists of Benin (AJSB); Ghana Young Academy (GhYA); Nigerian Young Academy (NYA); and National Academy of Young Scientists of Senegal (ANJSS). Over the years, 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 ANSTS, collaborated with the NAS, 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 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 West African Academy Exchange Project

In 2021, the NAS, ANSALB, and a team of Liberian scientists (working towards the establishment of a national academy in Liberia), developed a project aimed at strengthening partnership and collaboration between science academies in West Africa. Specifically, this project, tagged *The West African Academy Exchange Project*, sought to create a platform for capacity building through knowledge sharing and learning between the participating academies, as well as foster mentorship and support for the effort towards establishing a Liberian national academy. The key activities implemented under the project were a pair of two-day exchange visits held in April 2022; the first to the NAS Secretariat in Lagos, Nigeria, and the second to the ANSALB Secretariat in Cotonou, Benin Republic. Unfortunately, the Liberian team could not participate in these exchange visits. These visits afforded fellows and staff of both academies the opportunity to share experiences, perspectives, and lessons in academy governance and operations. Discussions during both visits



covered areas including strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, science advocacy, resource mobilization, administration, financial management, project management, as well as proposal development. This brief summarizes the lessons learnt during this endeavour, and puts forward recommendations for fostering continued partnership and collaboration between national science academies in Africa and West Africa in particular.

Successes, Challenges, Lessons Learnt

- 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.
- Collaboration and Partnership – This project gave NAS and ANSALB the 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.
- Academy Governance – In the discussion around academy governance, there were many similarities noted in the strategic plans 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. Another difference is the restrictions related to the election of new fellows. ANSALB allows for a maximum number of 50 fellows, while NAS, which had a similar restriction in the past (with a maximum of 100 fellows per time), now elects a maximum of 10 new fellows annually (from recommendations by its sectional committees).
- Language- Both academies agree that though they have and continue to work together on various joint ventures, the language difference in both countries is a challenge. Benin Republic is Francophone, and Nigeria is an Anglophone country. This challenge extends beyond these two academies as the West Africa is a bilingual region.

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.

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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