

The Response of African Science Academies to COVID-19 Pandemic

On 22 July 2020, NASAC hosted a Webinar on the Response of Science Academies to the Covid-19 pandemic in collaboration with the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP). Sixty (60) participants attended the webinar, mainly from the academies' membership and secretariat staff. Members of Young academies also attended the webinar. The report of the webinar was developed and released in September 2020. In it, the discussions on the efforts that academies have undertaken since March 2020, when Covid-19 was declared a pandemic, are highlighted.

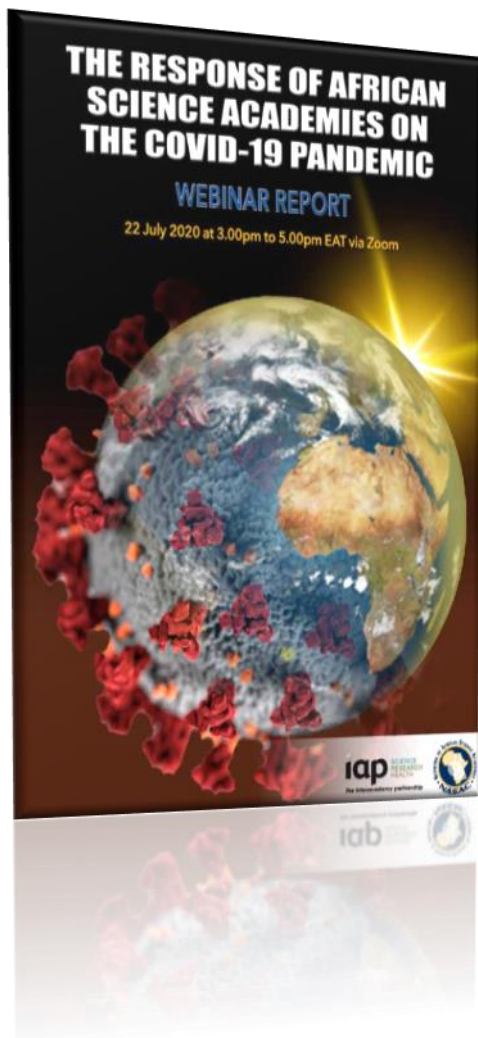
The President of NASAC, Prof. Norbert Honkonnou, and Dr. Peggy Hamburg of IAP called for adoption of appropriate scientific solutions to overcome the global pandemic in their opening remarks.

IAP had constituted an Advisory Group on Covid-19 drawn from experts from its regional networks to provide technical advice, besides issuing a communiqué. On its part, NASAC had issued a statement, undertaken a survey and organized the webinar in response to the pandemic.

Discussions by academies were captured in different sections of the report. Six key topics that were shared during the webinar included institutional management of Covid-19, funding for Covid-19 research, Covid-19 epidemic model, science-policy interphase with national governments on Covid-19, use of television to communicate Covid-19 to communities and regional collaboration to combat the pandemic. NASAC member-academies reflected on their role as science-advisors to the nations during the pandemic articulating their successes and challenges.

In closing, the report stresses the important role that academies should pursue as individual organizations and as a collective within the network to combat the pandemic. The lessons learnt include better utilization of the virtual space and continued member-support through a mentorship and peer review mechanism.

Overall, funding of research remains a critical challenge in Africa, even as academies seek innovative and trans-disciplinary ways to remain relevant during the pandemic.



A copy of the report can be found on the [NASAC website](#). You can also download a copy [here](#).

From the President



Academies have continued to support their nations in their efforts to manage and combat the pandemic in-

country. To support this effort and offer a platform for members to share their experiences, NASAC in collaboration with IAP hosted a webinar on *The response of African academies of science on the COVID-19 pandemic* in July 2020. From the deliberations of the Webinar, it became eminently clear that the role of academies during these trying times cannot be overlooked. Academies in Africa must take the scientific lead and offer innovative solutions to dealing with adverse effects of the pandemic in the lives and livelihoods of our people. We must take the lead despite the myriad of challenges that the continent still faces.

The presence of NASAC and its members must remain proactive on the virtual space, especially in scenarios where physical meetings and restricted movements are imposed due to the pandemic. Virtual trainings, like the one that will be hosted in November by Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (ASRT) in Egypt on *Intellectual Property Rights and Geographic Indications*, must be encouraged. Innovations should also be supported and move to open access of sharing knowledge, especially when led by young scientists.

Through IAP support, NASAC offered capacity building grants to five academies from

Botswana, Nigeria, Tunisia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

NASAC has also continued to look for opportunities to support academies, offer a convening platform for scientific exchanges between scientists, policymakers and communities. Unfortunately, this year, the Annual Meeting of African Science Academies (AMASA) will not take place due to the pandemic and the uncertain travel restrictions. However, the General Assembly will be held virtually on 12 November 2020. We remain guided by the GA on NASAC's policy direction and activities as we review 2020 and strategic plan for 2021. The participation of all our members in this decision-making forum is highly encouraged.

As we near the end of 2020, we remain steadfast to a prosperous new year. May the motto of NASAC - "*Networking Science for Prosperity*" - keep us encouraged as this tough year draws to a close.

We wish you a reflective final quarter of 2020!

Yours faithfully,

PROF. MAHOUTON NORBERT
HOUNKONNOU

NASAC President and Chair of the Board

Activities and Events

NASAC – OEC Webinar

NASAC collaborated with the Organization of Educational Cooperation (OEC) on 18 September 2020 in a webinar attended by the Secretary General Elect of OEC, Mr. Manssour Bin Mussallan. The President and the Executive Director of NASAC participated to discuss the role of science academies in addressing techno-digital and urban-rural divides, democratizing knowledge and informing policy. The ways and means of encouraging policymakers to embrace the [Universal Declaration of Balanced and Inclusive Education](#) remained a critical focus of the deliberations between NASAC and OEC.

Webinar on COVID-19 Public Health and Social Measures (PHSM) Implementation: A SADC Perspective

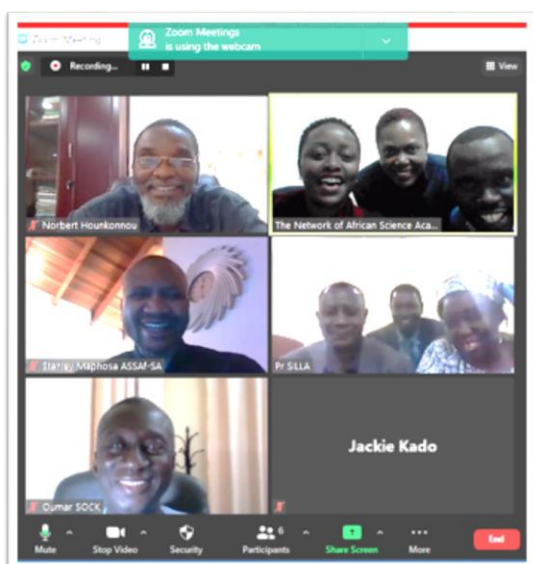
On 1 October 2020, the Academy of Science of South Africa in partnership with the national academies of science in Botswana, eSwatini, Mauritius, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the United States held a webinar on *COVID-19 Public Health and Social Measures (PHSM) Implementation: A SADC Perspective*.

The objective of the webinar was to engage experts and policymakers on key messages and recommendations of the policy brief on COVID-19 Public Health and Social Measures (PHSM) Implementation with a focus on the SADC region.

Speakers from the academies highlighted the key lessons of their respective countries regarding the pandemic. The webinar was facilitated by the Executive Director of NASAC, Mrs. Jackie Kado.

Central African Republic looking to establish a Science Academy

The United Nations Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries (UNTB/LDCs) is collaborating with NASAC in a project aimed at establishing academies in Africa. The *Academy Development Initiative* will be carried out for until December 2020. UNTBLDCs has engaged a Programme Specialist and Project Assistant on this initiative, and together with the NASAC Executive Director, they have steered discussions with stakeholders in six countries that do not have science academies. On 13 October 2020, the team was joined by NASAC President, Prof. Norbert Hounkonnou, NASAC Vice President, Prof. Oumar Sock, and two distinguished guests from the Central African Republic, Mrs. Amara Ginette, a Minister from CAR and Prof. Silla Semballa. The latter two are leading efforts to develop an academy in the French speaking country. In the screenshot on the left, the NASAC president is seen on the upper left, and on the upper right the NASAC Executive Director, Mrs. Jackie Kado, is flanked by the UNTB Project Assistant Esther Paul and the NASAC bilingual Communications Assistant, Bernard Magudha. The Programme Specialist, Stanley Maphosa, is seen on the middle section as is the team from the Central African Republic. At the bottom is Prof. Oumar Sock, the NASAC Vice President for Resource Mobilization and Development.



Announcements and Appointments

Fifteenth General Assembly of NASAC

In a bid to adapt to the new normal, the 15th General Assembly (GA) of NASAC will be held virtually on 12 November 2020. In this meeting, members will review the activity report for the year 2020 and plan for initiatives that will be undertaken towards enhancing the sustainability of NASAC in the future. Every year, members meet and interact during the General Assembly while being updated on current affairs within the Network and its membership. The GA also provides an opportunity for the review of new applications for membership into the network. All prior meetings have been held physically.

Survey on the State of Science Education in Africa

In January 2020, the NASAC Science Education Programme (SEP) Working Group met in Nairobi, Kenya and purposed to develop and administer a survey to establish the state of Science Education in Africa. The survey will look at Science Education in the broad context of the availability of **STEM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education throughout the curriculum of national education systems and is placed in the context of Inquiry Based Science Education (IBSE).

The survey falls under the [Science Education Programme](#) which is led by the NASAC SEP Working Group. Responses will be collected online from all members of NASAC in October and November 2020, who are requested to participate fully.

International Training Workshop on Intellectual Property

The Academy of Scientific Research & Technology (ASRT) in Egypt (*and provisional member of NASAC*) and the Centre for Science and Technology of the Non-aligned and other Developing Countries (NAM S&T Centre) from India are running an international training workshop (Virtual) on 11 and 12 November 2020. The workshop dubbed “**Capacity Building in Developing Countries in the Management of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and Geographical Indications (GI)**” targets participation from young researchers, scientists, government officials and policy makers, and representatives from industry and non-governmental organizations.

The Training Workshop intends to provide basic knowledge to professionals engaged in the fields of intellectual property and geographic indications through interactive lectures. Geographic Indications is a new field in the Intellectual Property Rights Framework that provides linkage between a product and a geographic location, useful for reputational attribution.

The lectures will be on various aspects of IPR which influence decision making in science policy, planning of R&D, exploiting results of R&D and international collaboration. The workshop will also facilitate the sharing of information on various aspects of IPR and discuss the role of GI in economic empowerment and human development.

Applications are accepted until 30 October, 2020. For more information on the workshop and to get the application form, visit <http://www.namstct.org/>.

On the Spotlight

NASAC/IAP Capacity Building Grants awarded

One of the strategic objectives of NASAC is to promote capacity building of member academies by strengthening their capabilities and facilitating national, regional and international collaboration. NASAC aims to improve the role of the academies in order to foster their independence as science advisors to their national governments. Through a call for Applications for the Capacity Building Grants scheme, five academies, whose projects are highlighted below, were awarded grants in September 2020, following a rigorous selection process.

BOTSWANA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES | Project title: *Advancing the participation of women in science communication* | Project brief: The project aims to build the capacity of women in science communication. Science communication plays a critical role in increasing the visibility of women and consequently their engagement in science activities at national level. The Academy will partner with Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) Botswana Chapter to take a data-driven approach to track women's participation in various platforms towards science communication. A survey will be used to track women's participation and to investigate the challenges faced by women in science communication. The survey results will inform capacity building in science communication to be conducted by the academy in collaboration with the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf).

THE NIGERIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE | Project title: *Mechanisms for Science Advice in West Africa-A Rapid Consensus* | Project brief: NAS in collaboration with the national science academy of Benin Republic (ANSALB), and the Nigerian Young Academy (NYA) will conduct a rapid consensus study on the mechanisms for science advice in West Africa. The goal of the study is to recommend how science advisors, and academies, in the sub-region can best provide evidence-informed science advice in emergency and non-emergency situations to relevant stakeholders. A committee consisting of Fellows and the secretariats of the said academies will examine various approaches, especially using the examples of NAS' past activities, and produce a study brief with recommendations.

TUNISIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE, LETTERS AND ARTS | Project title: *Virtual Communication and Networking* | Project brief: The Tunisian Academy recognized the need for efficient internal and external scientific communication for maximum public outreach and inter-academies networking. They further acknowledge their successful written communication and publishing arm and a gap in virtual communication that needs strengthening by the Academy. This gap was further identified as scientific communication on Covid-19 was limited despite the efforts of the Academy members. The project will incorporate technical, software and hardware support to reinforce necessary equipment and training of appropriate personnel on scientific communication thereby improving virtual communications within the academy.

ZAMBIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES | Project title: *Strengthening the Zambia Young Academy of Science (ZYAS) to enhance their mandate* | Project brief: The Zambia Academy project aims to strengthen the national young academy of science in order to contribute to the advancement of science, technology and innovation in Zambia. The project will support the finalization of systems and tools (constitution and strategic plan) for enhanced operationalization of the ZYAS. The national young academy will also be strengthened.

ZIMBABWE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES | Project title: *Resource Mobilization for Operational, Strategic Planning for Capacity Building, (RMOSPCB)* | Project brief: The Zimbabwe Academy project on Resource Mobilization for Operational, Strategic Planning for Capacity Building will support the development of a three-year strategic plan for the academy including a resource mobilization section, and the induction of new fellows. Both of these actions will enhance the capacity of the academy to fulfill its mandate.

Member-Academy's Feature

The Tunisian Academy of Science, Letters and Arts *Beit al-Hikma*



The façade of the Academy palace

The Tunisian Academy *Beit al-Hikma* was founded in 1992 (Law 116-92 dated 30 November 1992). The Academy took over from the National Foundation for Translation, Establishment of Texts and Studies, which was established in 1983. In 2019, the Academy updated its financial and administrative structure following support from the government through a decree (decree 315 dated 21 March 2019).

The Academy consists of the Science, Letters and Arts sections with five departments, namely: Science, Human and Social Sciences, Arts, Letters and Islamic Studies. It has a membership of 120 scientists who are freely elected after self-nomination and nomination/sponsorship by their peers. The president of the Academy is elected among his peers.

As indicated, the National Government of Tunisia provides the academy with financial support. The Academy, however, displays its independence by continuing to be merit based, providing free and independent science-based advice and opinions to the government. The aim of the Academy is to support Tunisian culture in Science, Arts and Literature and to enhance its authority by working on its influence. It gives opinions on important issues sought by the competent controlling authority or any other ministerial department or institution in the country.



The first floor conference room

The Academy contributes towards the enrichment of the Arabic language, seeing to it that it is correctly used, bringing together and developing its full potential for keeping abreast with sciences and arts. It does this through co-ordination with similar institutions that have the same vocation all over the world. The Academy serves as a meeting-place for distinguished scholars and platform for promoting research in different fields of intellectual and scientific activity as well as exchanging ideas and experience. It also organizes symposiums and conferences in fields that come within its remit, encourages creativity, diffusion and radiation of intellectual and artistic productions.



The throne room

Tunisia academy collaborates and maintains working relationships with science academies around the world. It continues to collaborate with the French Academy of Sciences, the Hassan II Academy of Morocco, and the Senegal Academy of Sciences among many others. Amongst the activities of the academy is the *Young Researcher Prize*, awarded annually to young researchers in different fields of science, letters and arts. Additionally, the academy compiles dictionaries, encyclopedias and translations and provides editing services for scientific publications. It releases no less than fifteen (15) publications annually.

The Academy is located at the city of Carthage in the capital Tunis. It is hosted in a beylical palace built in the middle of the 19th century during the Husseinite era where important historical events took place. These events include the solemn proclamation of self-

government for Tunisia (31/07/1954), the signing of the Code of Personal Status on 13/08/1956), and the birth of the republic of Tunisia (25/07/1957).

About NASAC

The Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) was established on 13 December 2001 in Nairobi, Kenya and is currently the affiliate Network for InterAcademy Partnership (IAP) in Africa.

NASAC is a consortium of merit-based science academies in Africa that aspires to make the “voice of science” heard by policy and decision makers within and outside the continent. NASAC is dedicated to enhancing the capacity of existing national science academies and champions in the cause for creation of new academies where none exist.

The Secretariat

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Ms. Rahab Gitahi
Programme Officer



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As at November 2019, NASAC comprised of the following twenty-eight members:

1. **African** Academy of Sciences (AAS)
2. **Algerian** Academy of Science and Technology (AAST)
3. Académie Nationale des Sciences, Arts et Lettres du **Bénin** (ANSALB)
4. **Botswana** Academy of Sciences (BAS)
5. Académie Nationale des Sciences du **Burkina** (ANSB)
6. **Burundi** Academy of Sciences and Technology (BAST)
7. **Cameroon** Academy of Sciences (CAS)
8. Académie Nationale des Sciences et Technologies du **Congo** (ANSTC)
9. Académie des sciences, des arts, des cultures d'Afrique et des diasporas africaines, **Cote d'Ivoire** (ASCAD)
10. Academy of Scientific Research and Technology, **Egypt** (ASRT) – *Provisional Member*
11. **Ethiopian** Academy of Science (EAS)
12. **Ghana** Academy of Arts and Sciences (GAAS)
13. **Kenya** National Academy of Sciences (KNAS)
14. **Madagascar's** National Academy of Arts Letters and Sciences
15. **Mauritius** Academy of Science and Technology (MAST)
16. Hassan II Academy of Science and Technology in **Morocco**
17. Academy of Sciences of **Mozambique** (ASM)
18. **Nigerian** Academy of Science (NAS)
19. **Rwanda** Academy of Sciences (RAS)
20. Académie des Sciences et Techniques du **Sénégal** (ANSTS)
21. Academy of **Science of South** Africa (ASSAf)
22. **Sudanese** National Academy of Science (SNAS)
23. **Tanzania** Academy of Sciences (TAS)
24. Académie Nationale Des Sciences, Arts Et Lettres Du **Togo** (ANSALT)
25. **Tunisia** Academy of Sciences Arts and Letters
26. **Uganda** National Academy of Sciences (UNAS)
27. **Zambia** Academy of Sciences (ZaAS)
28. **Zimbabwe** Academy of Sciences (ZAS)

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