

Strengthening Young Science Academies in Africa: A Continental Dialogue on Voice, Influence, and Sustainability

Convened by: The Global Young Academy, the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC), and the South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS)

Date: 20 August 2026

Time: 1500h EAT

Format: Virtual

Background and Rationale

Young Science Academies (YSAs) have become critical actors in national and global science systems, providing platforms for early- and mid-career researchers to contribute to science advice, policy engagement, public trust in science, and interdisciplinary collaboration. In Africa, the establishment of several Young Academies in recent years reflects both the growing scientific capacity of the continent and a recognition of the need for inclusive, future-oriented scientific leadership.

Despite significant progress, YSAs in Africa operate within diverse and often challenging contexts, characterised by uneven funding, varying levels of institutional support, and complex policy environments. While individual academies have demonstrated innovation and impact, there remains a limited opportunity for structured continental dialogue focused on shared opportunities, collective learning, and strategic alignment.

This dialogue is convened through a collaboration between the Global Young Academy (GYA), the South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS), and the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC). The GYA brings its global network and experience in supporting young scientist leadership worldwide; SAYAS contributes as an established African Young Academy with a strong track record of institutional development and continental engagement; and NASAC provides the convening authority and reach of its continental network of science academies, including its biannual platform for African Young Academies. Together, the three organisations seek to create a dedicated space for reflection, exchange, and co-creation among African Young Science Academies.

Objectives

The dialogue aims to:

1. Examine the current roles, contributions, and value of YSAs in the science and policy ecosystems in Africa.
2. Explore opportunities for enhanced collaboration between YSAs, GYA, and NASAC, drawing on SAYAS's experience as an established Young Academy to inform peer learning and strategy development.
3. Strengthen institutional linkages between the YSAs in Africa and NASAC, by exploring the value addition and existing opportunities of Affiliate Membership within the network.
4. Co-develop priority actions to strengthen the collective voice, influence, and long-term viability of Young Science Academies in Africa.

Approach and Format

The dialogue will be conducted as a 2-hour interactive virtual session, emphasising participation, peer learning, and solution-oriented discussion. The session will be jointly facilitated by representatives of the convening organisations. The format includes:

- Facilitated small-group dialogues focused on three priority questions, with one representative from each convening organisation serving as note-taker and discussion prompter in each group;
- Plenary reports and discussion to identify common themes and actionable recommendations;
- A synthesis and priority action-setting session led by SAYAS to define next steps.

The dialogue is intentionally designed as a thinking and strategy space, rather than a reporting platform.

Expected Outcomes

Key outputs and outcomes include:

- A synthesis brief capturing insights, challenges, and priority actions emerging from the dialogue;
- A jointly developed report and/or policy brief documenting the contributions and challenges of Young Academies in Africa, intended to inform advocacy, strengthen support for these institutions, and promote greater collaboration across the continent;
- Strengthened networks and alignment among African Young Science Academies;
- Identified areas for coordinated action and support involving GYA, SAYAS and NASAC;
- Enhanced understanding among African Young Academies of the value of NASAC Affiliate Membership, with actionable insights into how to strengthen and expand this engagement.
- A foundation for follow-up initiatives, including policy engagement, leadership development, and resource mobilisation.

Target Participants

The dialogue will be held as part of NASAC's biannual meeting of YSAs in Africa, providing an existing and well-established platform for broad continental participation. Participants will be encouraged to send more than one representative to ensure rich and diverse engagement. The convening organisations will work together to ensure inclusive representation across sub-regions and career stages.

Strategic Value

At a moment when science systems globally are called upon to respond to complex and intersecting challenges, from climate change to public health to sustainable development, the role of young scientists in shaping evidence-informed policy has never been more important. In Africa, this moment presents both an opportunity and an urgency: to invest in the institutions that support emerging scientific leadership before fragile Young Academies are lost to chronic underfunding or isolation.

This dialogue aligns with broader continental and global efforts to:

- Strengthen science systems and science advice in Africa;
- Support emerging scientific leadership;
- Enhance the contribution of science to sustainable development and societal wellbeing.

SAYAS's co-convening role reflects a commitment to African-led ownership of this process, ensuring that the dialogue is grounded in lived institutional experience rather than externally imposed frameworks. NASAC's convening authority and continental reach provide the institutional legitimacy and network through which outcomes can translate into sustained action. GYA's global connections position the dialogue within the wider international landscape of young academy development.

By centring YSAs in Africa, this dialogue contributes to building locally grounded yet globally connected scientific leadership and to ensuring that the voices of Africa's next generation of scientists are heard where it matters most.

Proposed Programme:

Time	Segment	Description	Lead
TBD + 0:00 – 0:05	Welcome	Brief remarks from the host introducing the dialogue and the convening partnership among GYA, SAYAS, and NASAC.	GYA
0:05 – 0:15	Scene-setting	Contextualising the dialogue within the African Young Academy landscape and the NASAC biannual meeting. NASAC reflects on the growing contributions and value of African Young Academies to national science and policy ecosystems, the significance of this moment for their continued development, and the importance of structured continental dialogue to strengthen their collective impact.	NASAC
0:15 – 1:05	Facilitated Small-Group Dialogues	The moderator opens with a brief 3-minute framing statement recalling the key themes and tensions that motivate the dialogue, before participants are assigned into three groups of 4–5 for focused discussion. Each group is assigned one of the following discussion questions: Group 1: What has your Young Academy contributed to your national science and policy ecosystem, and what are the greatest challenges you face in sustaining and building on this work? (Consider: funding, institutional support, and policy influence) Group 2: What would meaningful collaboration between African Young Academies, and with GYA and NASAC, look like in practice? Group 3: What would make Affiliate Membership of NASAC more valuable and accessible for your Young Academy?	Moderator and one rep from GYA, SAYAS and NASAC

		The convener representative in each group will serve as note-taker and will report back 2–3 key findings and one priority recommendation on behalf of their group in the plenary	
1:05 – 1:20	Plenary Reports	Each convener representative reports back 2–3 key findings and one priority recommendation from their group (5 minutes per group).	Moderator + one rep each from GYA, SAYAS, and NASAC
1:20 – 1:40	Plenary Discussion	Moderated discussion drawing out common themes, tensions, and connections across the three groups, guided by: What common thread runs across all three groups? and Where do we see the greatest opportunity for collective action?	Moderator
1:40 – 1:50	Synthesis and Draft Priority Actions	SAYAS summarises key themes emerging from the plenary discussion and presents a shortlist of 3–5 draft priority actions for participants to affirm, refine, or add to.	SAYAS
1:50 – 1:55	Closing Remarks	Conveners reflect on the significance of the dialogue and express appreciation to participants and convening partners.	NASAC, SAYAS
1:55 – 2:00	Next Steps and Close	Moderator notes that a joint report and/or policy brief will be produced from the outputs of the dialogue and shared with participants. GYA closes with appreciation to all.	Moderator, GYA