

The African Science Academy Development Initiative

African Science Academies as Partners in the Policy
Development Process



Annual Meeting IV Brief

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PHOTOS

Page 3: (1) Image adapted from ASADI Annual Report, Progress and Promise found at the following website: <http://www.nationalacademies.org/asadi/>. (2) Policy makers responding to questions during the roundtable discussion on November 4, 2008. (3) Hon. Patrick Amuriat Oboi, Member of Parliament, Uganda seen with Dr. Speciosa Wandira, ASADI Board Member and Fmr Vice President of Uganda in London, 2008. (4) Slide adapted from the talk by Hans Hagen given on November 4, 2008.

Page 4: Artist's rendition of UNAS President, Professor Paul E. Mugambi publically announcing the Presidential signing of the Uganda National Academy of Sciences' government charter granted on 28 January 2009.

Page 5: (1) Consensus study report cover on HIV/AIDS, TB and Nutrition by the Academy of Science of South Africa found at: <http://www.assaf.org.za/>. (2) Consensus study report cover by the Uganda National Academy of Sciences on malaria vector resistance found at: <http://www.nationalacademies.org/asadi/>.

Page 6: (1) Quote by Hon. Patrick Amuriat Oboi in keynote given on November 4, 2009. (2) Dr. Patrick Kelley, ASADI Board Director speaking on November 4, 2008.

Page 7: Hon. Dr. Ham-Mukasa Mulira, Minister for Information and Communication Technology, Uganda giving the closing keynote address on November 5, 2008.

Page 8: Representatives from the African Academies speaking with the representative from the US Department of State, London, 2008.

Page 9: (1) Slide adapted from the keynote address by Hon. Ham-Mukasa Mulira given on November 5, 2008. (2) Photo of representatives from African academies networking with a representative from the UK, London, 2008. (3) Photo of Jackie Olang, African Academy of Sciences in discussion with Fon van Oosterhout, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Page 10: African academies' networking reception on November 4, 2008.

African Science Academy Development Initiative ASADI

ASADI is a 10 year effort to strengthen African science academies in providing independent, evidence-based advice to their national governments. Launched in 2004, and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the initiative focuses on informing African government policy making and public discourse related to improving human health. The initiative also aims to foster a deeper appreciation on the part of African governments of the benefits of decision making based on evidence and analysis.

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The African Science Academy Development Initiative

ASADI



FEATURES

4 Background

This document is an overview of themes that were emphasized throughout the 2 day conference.

5 A Trusted Voice for Effective Policy Advising

To write effective policies, decision makers need access to evidence-based scientific and technological information. They also need trusted advisors to translate the often complicated information into terms that can be drafted into policies.



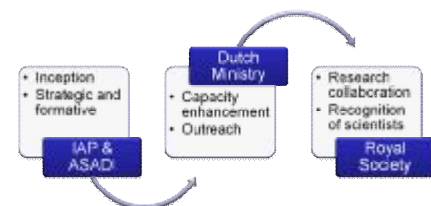
7 Investing in Africa: the Role of African Academies



Academies can be asked to respond to questions using their rigorous, transparent processes.

8 Effective Partnerships for Future Development

Considerable effort has gone into forging international partnerships that promote development and support the work of African academies.





Background

Almost 150 years ago, President Abraham Lincoln signed into being the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS). Established to honor top scientists with membership, the academy also provided the nation with a trusted source of scientific advice during the tumultuous Civil War. This trust carried into the 20th century and over time the academy expanded in both size and scope. Today, the NAS is one of three national academies referred to collectively as the US National Academies. The other two academies similarly emphasize honor to and service of their members in the fields of medicine and engineering.

This tradition of combining honor with service—that is part of the US National Academies' framework—is now extending to academies in Africa. The emphasis is on providing elected leaders, policy makers, and the public with expert advice based on sound scientific evidence.

The African Science Academy Development Initiative (ASADI) is a 10-year effort by

the US National Academies to strengthen the service component of African academies. To that end, ASADI works with African science academies to develop mechanisms for providing governments with independent, evidence-supported advice. With funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the initiative supports capacity building efforts with the science academies of Uganda, South Africa, and Nigeria. Partnering with these academies helps develop infrastructure, personnel, relationships between the academy and its government, and rigorous procedures for providing policy advice. The grant also provides modest support to the academies of Ghana, Cameroon, Senegal, Kenya, and the regional African Academy of Sciences for strategic planning efforts.

An eight member, international board of science and policy experts oversees the activities of ASADI. Every year the ASADI Board brings together US and African academy representatives (along with policy makers and subject matter experts) to dialogue about a specific issue of great

importance to Africa. These meetings place a special emphasis on what academies in Africa can do to impact policy pertinent to that issue. In previous years the focal areas were: water, food security and the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Rather than address a specific health concern, the 2008 Annual Meeting brought together international funders with a particular interest in Africa. Since the intent was to broaden the African academy stakeholder base, the central location of London at The Royal Society—the national academy of science of the UK—was selected to maximize attendance of international stakeholders, particularly those based in Europe.

At the meeting, academy representatives and others heard from governmental and non-governmental agencies about their “advisory” needs and interests in Africa. There was a policy maker roundtable to discuss the priorities of governments in countries where ASADI has partners as well as ample opportunities for academy representatives to educate the audience on the unique role academies play through their independent, apolitical, evidence-based advising and convening activities.

This document is not meant to be a detailed summary report of the meeting, but an effort to provide the reader with an overview of themes that were emphasized throughout the two day conference.

A Trusted Voice for Effective Policy Advising

Government officials must make wise policy choices if they are to improve living standards in Africa. To write effective policies, decision makers need access to evidence-based scientific and technological information. They also need trusted advisors to translate the often complicated information into terms that can be incorporated into policies.

Even with this assistance, some decision makers lack the tradition or culture of making judgments based on impartial information and therefore eschew such advice. Conversely, some managers in resource-restricted countries recognize the value of evidence-based advice but feel pressed to make decisions that strike a balance to keep systems functioning, albeit poorly.

The result of either of these situations is a lack of demand for information. Without the demand for information, an academy’s capacity to advise goes under-utilized by governments. That being said, academy members must be proactive in educating policy makers on how academies might be used as a resource to assist governments in responding to challenges they may face. For example, African academies can assist by helping governments set national priorities and advising on coordination mechanisms. Often, agendas are set by international practice and aid agencies with directed funding for target areas. These may or may not be of maximum benefit to a



“Evidence based advice can also help to entrench policy-decisions, both enriching the process and, probably legitimising the decisions taken. Owing to this, it would be ideally reasonable for policymakers to insist that no policy decision is justified without a strong evidence base to substantiate it.”

Hon. Patrick Amuriat Oboi, MP
Parliament of Uganda

country particularly if there is overlap in the target funding areas. Such overlap leads to inefficiencies of scarce resources. Improving coordination and minimizing resource wastage benefits all actors involved, from the Ministry of Health

government programs like the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. African academies could similarly assess national and international programs and provide recommendations for improvements. It is important to note

that African academies are part of a larger network of academies on the continent and beyond. Their ability to access leading experts around the world through international networks of academies can provide local policy makers with a valuable perspective on how best to apply global solutions to local contexts using a more systemic approach.

Governments and academies are both responsible for creating a demand for

leadership to users of the services, researchers and funding partners.

Another role for academies may be to function as program evaluators. In the past, the US National Academies have functioned as external evaluators of large

balanced, evidence-based policy advice. When African governments seek such advice, academies in Africa must stand ready to respond. By working together, academies and governments help ensure that effective policies are written and wise policy decisions are made.



Investing in Africa

The Role of African Academies

Information and knowledge are essential raw materials for progress in science and technology (S&T) that promote economic and social development. As stated by Hon. Dr. Ham-Mukasa Mulira in his keynote address at the 2008 ASADI Annual Meeting, efforts are underway to fully engage the African continent in the new era of an “Information/Knowledge Economy” by harnessing the benefits of S&T to remove poverty, disease and ignorance.”

Countries are being urged to explore ways of securing closer collaboration between the public and private sectors in applying science to development goals. African academies can and do play a vital role in that process. By offering a platform where open dialogue is encouraged among various “actors”—including representatives from governmental and non-governmental agencies, academic institutions, private sector organizations, civil society and research establishments—academies take the first step in linking policy makers with the wider audience and most importantly, with the scientific community.

According to Brenda Killen from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—an international organization helping governments tackle economic, social and governance challenges of a globalized economy—making development aid effective requires evidence based on local knowledge. She added that building local capacity to produce evidence, leads to more effective, sustainable and accountable use of resources. In addition, accountability and transparency are important issues to

funders and without these, funding for any project is likely to be short-lived.

Academies provide advice in the form of recommendations using consensus-building and a rigorous peer-review process and other procedures that follow high standards. With access to the best local, regional, and global scientists, a balanced committee of independent subject matter experts is formed to evaluate available evidence and provide recommendations to governments. This process is transparent and often includes workshops that can



be attended by the public. However, this service does not just benefit governments. International organizations interested in a survey of the local issues may also ask academies for advice. Carol Medlin from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation suggested framing such advisory needs in the form of a question. Two examples might be: “Are we doing enough of the right things?” and “What tools are needed to help bridge the gap between scientific discovery and policy and practice?”

Academies can be asked to respond to questions using their rigorous, transparent processes. These values, the ability to tap into national, regional and, if needed, global expertise on health and science, and the willingness to take on controversial and complex issues in service to society, create the potential to offer government and other private or non-profit groups a unique, homegrown voice among many voices offering advice at the country level. In this way, African academies can help promote economic and social development within the Information/Knowledge Economy.



Effective Partnerships for Future Development

Considerable effort has gone into forging international partnerships that promote development and support the work of African academies. Three main focuses of these efforts have been on building the public service role of academies; investing in the development and maintenance of excellence in science; and networking among academies.

Through partnerships with the African Science Academy Development Initiative (ASADI), academies in South Africa, Uganda and Nigeria are testing mechanisms on how best to advise governments and how best to inform the general public on issues of great national concern. The Uganda National Academy of Sciences conducts radio call-in programs hosted by an expert from the academy. It also offers workshops through its *Forum on Health and Nutrition*. The most recent workshop—funded by the US Department of State—addressed laboratory biosafety. The three-day meeting brought together national and international representatives from government, industry, research and academia to share relevant information from differing perspectives. One outcome of the meeting was networking. Another outcome was a request to the Uganda National Academy of Sciences to conduct

a consensus study to gain greater clarity on definitions of biosafety and biosecurity in the Ugandan context. The Academy of Sciences of South Africa and the Nigerian Academy of Science have similarly conducted noteworthy workshops and consensus studies on such topics as blood safety; HIV/AIDS, TB and nutrition; health systems; and science for poverty alleviation.

Like the US National Academies, UK's Royal Society is committed to partnerships with African academies. The Pfizer-Royal Society African Academy program focuses on work with academies in Tanzania and Ghana and with developing academies in Ethiopia and Zambia. The Leverhulme-Royal Society Africa Awards provide funding for UK-Ghana or UK-Tanzania research collaborations and The Royal Society-Pfizer Award promotes science capacity building in the developing world through a funding scheme that recognizes young innovative scientists based in Africa. In 2008, the Pfizer award went to Dr. Enock Matovu of Uganda for his work on molecular mechanisms of drug resistance in trypanosomes—parasites found in tsetse flies—that cause sleeping sickness.

Awards such as this strengthen the local scientific community. However, scientists need to express their technical research in a language that can be understood by policy makers. Without this, government officials are not able to utilize scientific research for a greater public good. The Member of Parliament-Scientist Pairing Scheme is one attempt to promote greater dialogue between these groups. With help from the Royal Society and the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, the scheme is being piloted in Uganda through the Ugandan academy.

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC)—Canadian government's foreign aid agency—and the Royal Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs are also part of the international promotion of academies in Africa. Both are particularly interested in encouraging partnerships throughout Africa and the world. IDRC is providing core support to The National Academy of Sciences and Technologies of Senegal to implement its strategic plan and to engage in cooperation and partnership with similar

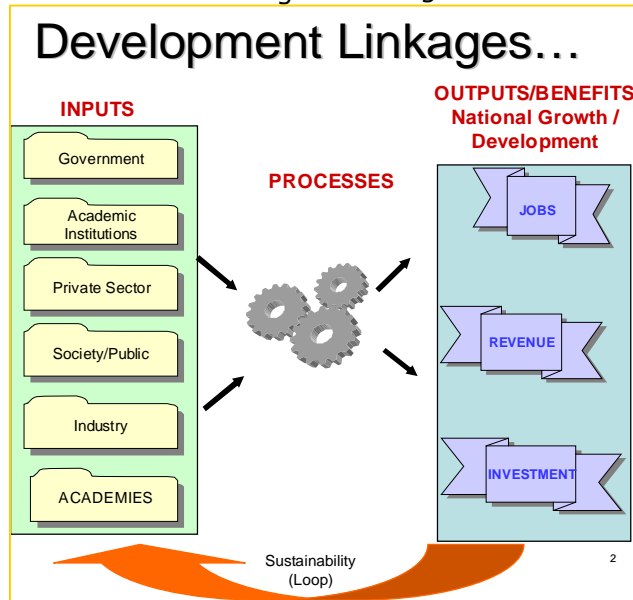
organizations—especially those in French-speaking countries of West and of Central Africa. The Royal Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs pledged 1.5 million Euros over three years to the Nairobi-based Network of African Science Academies whose aim is to promote and strengthen efforts that create, share and

use knowledge for poverty reduction through information circulation and networking.

In November 2009, ASADI will again bring together African academy representatives and policy makers from their respective governments to discuss an area of great importance to Africa. The meeting will take place in Ghana and

will address maternal, newborn, and child health in sub-Saharan Africa. The meeting presents a great opportunity for the scientific experts in academies to come together with one voice and be heard by the policy makers. Through these and other partnership efforts African academies are shifting from an honorific focus to a greater emphasis on service to influence policies that improve the lives of citizens in Africa.

NETWORKING





To view the 2008 ASADI Annual Meeting agenda and presentations; biographies of the eight ASADI Board members; and information on the 2009 ASADI Annual Meeting taking place in Ghana, follow the corresponding links from: <http://www.nationalacademies.org/asadi/>.

Acknowledgements

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