

ACADEMY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE | SESSION 3

Meeting Report

Enhancing the Capacity of Newly Established and Young Academies in Africa



Date	24 September 2026
Format	Virtual
Participants	Representatives from Senior Academies, National Young Academies and regional partner organisations.
Keynote speaker	Dr Justine Nzweundji-Khumbah, former President, Cameroon Academy of Young Scientists (CAYS)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Africa has approximately 20 active National Young Academies.** Sustainability, credibility and influence depend on four priorities: membership, reach, policy relevance and funding.
- **Merit-based selection, clear governance and documented processes** protect an academy's vision and continuity.
- **A phased 12-month pathway** favours steady institutional growth over rapid expansion.
- **Participants called for early dialogue between Senior and Young Academies**, with NASAC continuing its advisory and facilitative role.

Overview

On 24 September 2026, the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) hosted its third Academy Development Initiative (ADI) session of the year, under the theme “Enhancing the Capacity of Newly Established and Young Academies in Africa.” The meeting brought together representatives from Senior Academies, National Young Academies (NYAs) and regional partner organisations.

The keynote speaker, Dr Justine Nzweundji-Khumbah, former President of the Cameroon Academy of Young Scientists (CAYS), shared insights and lessons from leading an NYA. She set out four priorities for institutional enhancement: constructing inclusive membership models, expanding organisational reach, maximising policy relevance, and establishing sustainable funding structures.

The Current Landscape of African Young Academies

Dr Nzweundji-Khumbah opened with an overview of the continent's approximately 20 active NYAs, emphasising the importance of building entities that are sustainable, credible and influential. Drawing on consultations with leaders from 10 African NYAs, she outlined key structural and operational hurdles,

including governance constraints, resource limitations, career demands on early-career researchers, and leadership transitions.

To address these challenges, she highlighted four priorities:

1. **Effective membership models:** grounded in scientific excellence, diversity and active contribution.
2. **Expanded institutional reach:** built on strategic partnerships and cross-border collaboration.
3. **Policy relevance:** translating research into actionable evidence for decisionmakers.
4. **Sustainable funding:** diversifying revenue through grants, partnerships and institutional support.

She also noted the value of strengthening structured mentorship and coordination between Young and Senior Academies, particularly given administrative capacity constraints on both sides.

Institutional Framework for Credible Academies

Dr Nzweundji-Khumbah then detailed four interconnected pillars essential for building a merit-based and resilient academy:

- **Governance and leadership:** clear mandates, constitutional frameworks and transparent decision-making procedures.
- **Operations and institutional capacity:** stronger administrative systems, documentation and institutional memory.
- **Programmes and impact:** relevant policy advice, evidence synthesis and public engagement.
- **Resources and sustainability:** multi-year funding, diversified revenue streams and leveraged member networks.

Using CAYS as a case study, she illustrated how merit-based selection, transparent review processes and structured candidate interviews safeguard an academy's vision and long-term continuity. In response to a question on candidate selection, she clarified that CAYS interviews a shortlist of 18-20 qualified applicants each year [from a pool of approximately X applications] to keep the process manageable and noted that evaluation methods should adapt as applicant pools grow.

A 12-Month Development Pathway

To guide emerging academies, Dr Nzweundji-Khumbah proposed a practical, phased pathway that favours steady institutional growth over rapid expansion:

1. Foundation	Months 1-3	Review governance mandates, constitutions and key policies.
2. Standardization	Months 4-6	Standardise merit rubrics; establish administrative and financial frameworks.
3. Delivery	Months 7-9	Execute key policy programmes and track engagement outcomes.
4. Accountability	Months 10-12	Publish annual performance reports and conduct institutional reviews.

Strategic Insights and Member Engagement

During the interactive session, participants and discussants contributed complementary strategies for strengthening young academies:

- **Institutional memory and alignment:** developing five-year strategic plans and establishing formal mentorship and induction mechanisms with Senior Academies.
- **Refined selection and commitments:** broadening selection criteria to account for community service and leadership potential, aligning member preferences with specific committees, and using annual feedback assessments to monitor active participation.
- **Member contributions:** participants reaffirmed that both financial commitment and active participation are necessary to sustain an academy's independence and impact.

Conclusion and Proposed Next Steps

Participants emphasised the need for early dialogue between Senior and Young Academies, with NASAC continuing its advisory and facilitative role to strengthen these institutional partnerships across Africa.

Proposed next steps: early dialogue between Senior and Young Academies; NASAC facilitation; next ADI session owners and dates to be confirmed.

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