

# **Visit of the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) to the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW)**

## **Report**

### **Introduction**

From 29 January to 6 February 2006 the thirteen academies that comprise the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) paid a working visit to the KNAW. A list of these academies, as well as the individuals who represented them during the visit, is attached (see Appendix 1).

The NASAC working visit was organised by the KNAW in the context of the Academy's decision, made in 2005, to develop an African science and technology (S&T) capacity building drive <sup>1</sup>. This new policy initiative is to focus on the building of academies of science in Africa and is regarded as the KNAW's contribution to the capacity building programme of the InterAcademy Panel on International Issues (IAP), a global network of the world's science academies. The IAP co-sponsored the visit by subsidising the travel expenses of two of the invited African academies.

The purpose of the NASAC visit was twofold: It was intended, in the first place, to contribute to a strengthening of African academies. This entailed in-depth discussions about KNAW activities and related modes of operation, an exchange of information about African and Dutch science and science policy systems, as well as the facilitation of networking opportunities. The visit served, in the second place, as a chance for the KNAW to learn about the capacity building needs of African academies and to discuss ideas for future KNAW capacity building activities with colleagues from Africa.

### **The programme**

The programme for the working visit – a copy of which is attached (see Appendix 2) – was jointly designed by the KNAW and the participating African academies. In developing the programme, advice was sought from KNAW Board members and several members of the academy.

One of the specific goals of the programme was to enable African academies to meet and interact with a broad spectrum of Dutch scientists and science (or related) policymakers. Taken as a whole, Dutch participation in the programme included 65 individuals from 40 organisations (see Appendix 3).

The programme was structured around a number of themes, covering five scientific fields (water, energy, agriculture, social sciences and health sciences) and five areas of policy, most of which represent the main activities of the KNAW. These policy areas include foresighting, S&T education and training, science expertise and advice in public policy making and

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<sup>1</sup> This decision was taken on the basis of a recommendation made by an ad hoc International Policy Advisory Group (IPAG), which was established in 2004 in order to undertake a review of the KNAW's internationalisation policy and associated portfolio of activities.

evaluation, as well as an introduction to the systemic context academies operate in. Alongside the thematic sessions, a number of working sessions were held. These sessions gave all participating academies – including the KNAW – the opportunity to reflect on information received and to work towards the concrete application thereof. The final working session was also used to identify concrete follow-up activities to the visit.

Over and above the thematic and working sessions, the programme included the following special events/meetings:

- A meeting with scientists of the African Studies Centre (ASC)  
This meeting was organised to introduce the African academy representatives to the work of the ASC and to exchange ideas about the content of the ASC's new Research Master's Programme in African Studies
- A public debate on the role S&T in Africa's development  
Sir David King, Chief Scientific Adviser and Head of the UK's Office of Science and Technology, opened the debate with a lecture on the role of S&T in the latest G8 report on Africa (the so-called Gleneagles Communiqué) and the work of the UK's Commission for Africa in this area. Panellists included Dr Abdullahi Aliyu (Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, Nigeria), Dr John Mugabe (Director, Office of Science and Technology, New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)) and Professor Mohamed Hassan (President, African Academy of Sciences and NASAC). The audience, members of which participated actively in the debate, consisted of approximately 120 individuals and included Board members (presidents of academies) of the InterAcademy Council (IAC).
- A working meeting with Board members of the IAC  
This meeting afforded African academies a chance to give input to the IAC's future plans and follow-up to its current activities.
- A meeting with Professor Pieter Drenth, President of the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA)  
The purpose of this meeting was to exchange information about regional networks of academies, and to discuss possible future cooperation between NASAC and ALLEA.
- A meeting with Dr John Mugabe, Director of NEPAD's Office of Science and Technology  
The focus of this introductory meeting between NASAC and NEPAD fell on the important advisory role that African science academies can and should play in the work of NEPAD.
- A meeting with Dr Philip Campbell, Editor-in-Chief of the journal Nature  
During this meeting, Dr Campbell asked African academy representatives for initial input and ideas for a possible series of articles in Nature on excellent science in Africa
- A one day programme organised by the Department of International Cooperation (INCO), Directorate General (DG) for Research of the European Commission (EC)  
The programme provided an introduction to the S&T policy of the European Union, and presented the various funding opportunities (including Framework Programmes) offered by the European Commission to African researchers. Representatives of DG Research, DG Development, DG Information Society and Media, the EuropeAid Cooperation

Office, as well as the Europe-South Africa S&T Advancement Programme participated in the programme (see Appendix 2).

### **Outcomes and follow-up**

- **Development of an action agenda for NASAC**  
The working visit to the KNAW was the first time that NASAC met as a full group. The African academies used this opportunity to debate the direction NASAC is to take and the role of the individual academies in the network. During the final working session, discussions held over the previous days served as the basis of a brainstorm about concrete actions to be undertaken as an outcome of the working visit. The items to come out of the brainstorm are to be developed into an action agenda.
- **Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between NASAC and ALLEA**  
The presidents of NASAC and ALLEA will sign a Memorandum of Understanding that is to form the basis for closer cooperation between the two organisations.
- **Further input for a possible series of articles in Nature on excellent science in Africa**  
Building on contacts established during the working visit, Dr Campbell has circulated a short questionnaire among the representatives of African academies to collect further input for the possible article series in Nature.
- **Providing input to agenda setting processes of Dutch science and related policy organisations**  
Several Dutch organisations have expressed an interest in pursuing a dialogue with representatives of the African academies as input for their activities.

Laura van Veenendaal  
Department of International Relations and Quality Assessment  
Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences