

1 Observatory Road
Observatory
Cape Town



MINUTES OF AfAS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

MEETING NUMBER: AfAS 2025 Executive Committee Meeting 01

VENUE: Zoom

DATE: 14 April 2025

TIME : 14h00 – 17h00

CHAIRPERSON: Amare Abebe

SCRIBE: Nombali Qodi

ATTENDEES

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Amare Abebe (AA) | amare.abebe@afasociety.org | AfAS President/Chairperson |
| Benedicta Woode (BW) | benedicta.woode@afasociety.org | AfAS Executive Committee Member |
| Charles Takalana (CT) | Charles.takalana@afasociety.org | AfAS Director |
| Joyful Elma Mdhuli (JEM) | joyful.mdhuli@afasociety.org | AfAS Executive Committee Member |
| Kenda Knowles (KK) | kenda.knowles@afasociety.org | AfAS Executive Committee Member |
| Kevin Govender (KG) | kg@astro4dev.org | AfAS Director |
| Moloko Makwetja (MM) | moloko.makwetja@afasociety.org | AfAS Education and Outreach Officer |
| Nombali Qodi (NQ) | nombali.qodi@afasociety.org | AfAS Acting Executive Officer |
| Patricia Ann Whitelock (PAW) | p.whitelock@afasociety.org | AfAS Executive Committee Member |
| Sally MacFarlane (SMF) | sally.macfarlane@afasociety.org | AfAS Ex Officio Member |
| Sinenhlanhla Precious Skhosana (SPS) | sneprec@gmail.com | AfAS Director |
| Takalani Nemaungani (TN) | Takalani.Nemaungani@dst.gov.za | AfAS Ex Officio Member (DSTI Representative) |

| | | |
|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Yin-Zhe Ma (YZM) | yin-zhe.ma@afasociety.org | AfAS Vice President |
| Youssef Moulane (YM) | youssef.moulane@afasociety.org | AfAS Executive Committee Member |
| Yunus Manjoo (YEM) | yunus.manjoo@afasociety.org | AfAS Project Manager |
| Zodwa Tiki (ZT) | zodwa.tiki@afasociety.org | AfAS Media and Outreach Coordinator |
| Moleboge Lekoloane (ML) | moleboge.lekoloane@afasociety.org | AfAS/BRICS |

ABSENT

| | | |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Thebe Rodney Medupe (TRM) | rodney.medupe@nwu.ac.za | AfAS Immediate Past President |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------|

| ITEM NO. | DESCRIPTION | ACTION | DATE |
|----------|---|--------|------|
| 1. | Opening & Welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chair welcomed all present. The agenda was approved as presented, with additional items under miscellaneous | | |
| 2. | Adoption of previous minutes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The committee members noted the minutes of the previous meeting, and the updates on action items were provided and are included below where appropriate. | | |
| 3. | Executive Committee Administration Inclusion of Additional Members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern was raised on the Executive Committee's current composition being overly dominated by South African based members, there are only two members from outside South Africa: one from Morocco and the other from Ghana. The Chair highlighted the lack of representation from Francophone Africa, which has a large presence across the continent. Some members of the committee noted that the issue stems from low engagement from the AfAS membership during the nomination process. Despite extending the nomination deadline and highlighting diversity concerns (geographic and gender), few additional nominations were | | |

| | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| | <p>received; only 18 of 300 members submitted nominations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lack of response was also seen in consultations with members on the Constitution and membership fee policy. • It was proposed setting limitations during future elections on how many members from a single country can be on the Executive Committee • AfAS should emphasize the need for better engagement and responsiveness of the AfAS community in future processes. • PAW suggested to co-opt a representative focused on engaging French-speaking countries and strengthening their inclusion in AfAS, and Maram Kaire was proposed as a potential candidate for this role. CT and KG supported the suggestion. • It was noted that the IAU processes may not be appropriate for AfAS election processes, but such and other mechanisms will be explored for the future. • Suggestions were made to consider a regional nominations model, where Executive Committee seats are allocated by African regions (North, South, East, West, Central). • Some members supported mandatory regional quotas to eliminate the need for ad-hoc corrections post-election. <p>Proposed Individuals for Co-opting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maram Kaire (Senegal) – Francophone and West Africa; noted for strong public engagement in astronomy. Some concern was expressed about his scope of interest being limited to Senegal; the proposal is to give him a clear mandate to represent and mobilize the broader Francophone African community. • Yaser Abdel-Hamid (Egypt) – North Africa; involved with the National Research Institute of Astronomy and Geophysics. • Edward Jurua (Uganda) – East Africa; endorsed for his involvement and leadership in regional astronomy. • The current list lacks female representation, however, it was noted that currently, women are in the majority. • It was agreed that the next step in the process is to formally invite the three proposed individuals (Maram Kaire, Yaser Abdel-Hamid, and Edward Jurua) to join the Executive Committee. • The Secretariat will take the lead in drafting formal letters of invitation and gather and verify | <p>Secretariat</p> | <p>July 2027</p> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Secretariat will take the lead in drafting formal letters of invitation and gather and verify | <p>YEM/AA</p> | <p>End April</p> |

| | | | |
|--|---|----|-----------|
| | <p>email contact details for the three proposed candidates.</p> <p>Meeting Schedule for the year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This was the first meeting of the new Executive Committee and served partly as an induction programme.• Historically, two meetings per quarter have been held over the past 5–6 years, despite the Constitution requiring at least four meetings annually. <p>Meeting 1 (First Month of Quarter):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Quarterly Report Back, where committee chairs were invited to present highlights, challenges, and upcoming plans (based on written quarterly reports).• Intended format: 5–10 minutes updates followed by EXCO business.• In practice, Presentations often exceeded time limits, contents of reports were repeated, and full EXCO agendas were not completed.• Chairs were expected to exit after their reports to allow EXCO to discuss internal matters, but this was not always effectively implemented. <p>Meeting 2 (Mid-Quarter):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A regular Executive Committee meeting to address standard agenda items. <p>The new EXCO is invited to review and decide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Whether to maintain this schedule or propose a new one.◦ Preferred day of the week, week of the month, and time for regular meetings. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Once confirmed, a calendar for the financial year will be issued (typically finalized by mid-May).• Standard practice is to send reminders two weeks in advance of each meeting.• General agreement that four mandatory meetings per year (one per quarter) are sufficient.• In addition, it was suggested to schedule a second “optional” meeting per quarter, to be confirmed as needed by the Chair.• This allows flexibility for additional discussions if required, thus avoiding outstanding agenda items.• Members agreed that discussing the scheduling during this meeting is inefficient.• It was proposed that the Secretariat coordinate future meeting dates using a Doodle poll:• The Poll should ideally cover a narrower window (e.g., first or last two weeks of a month) to improve responses. | | |
| | | NQ | End April |

| | | | |
|----|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They also stated a willingness to step down if the new Executive Committee prefers to nominate directors from its current South African-based members. • Three members, PAW, KK, and JM expressed their willingness to be appointed as Directors. • A formal resolution was passed by the Executive Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Approving appointments ◦ Accepting resignations of current directors • The Secretariat will arrange for the formal documentation to be signed off by the Chair and the processing of the change of Directors with the CIPC. • YEM will advise the 3 incoming Directors of the documents required. | <p>YEM</p> <p>YEM</p> | <p>End April</p> <p>End April</p> |
| 4. | <p>African Science Journal (YZM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the AfAS conference, a representative from Elsevier presented a proposal regarding the creation of an African Science Journal. • Opinion in establishing a dedicated African journal for astronomy is divided within the community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Some see value in highlighting African research advancements and utilizing large facilities (e.g., MeerKAT, SALT) to boost scientific visibility. ◦ Others point out that existing international journals (e.g., Astrophysical Journal, MNRAS) already offer free publication options for researchers from low- and middle-income countries, making a new journal potentially redundant. • There has been informal consultation with several individuals at the AfAS General Assembly. • The Elsevier presentation was shared with PAW, who has engaged in further discussions with South African scientists, especially in Cape Town. • Within South Africa, there's growing interest in a locally relevant publication model that supports free publication and aligns with government subsidy frameworks (e.g., from DSTI or Department of Education). • PAW highlighted a potential misalignment between the goals of AFAS (pan-African) and the specific needs of South African institutions. • A separate South African-focused consultation is being considered, especially involving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Researchers from MeerKAT, SALT, and various universities. ◦ Broader discussion on how this might align with or differ from AfAS's goals. • Strong caution was raised about partnering with Elsevier, due to its underlying status as a profit-seeking company. | <p>PAW/YZM</p> | <p>July-Sept.</p> |

| | | | |
|----|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns were raised about commercializing African science and losing control over the journal's mission and access policies. South African institutions are incentivized to publish in journals that qualify for government subsidies, particularly from DHET. There's concern that if a new African journal does not qualify for these subsidies, it may not be widely supported within South Africa. The Open Journal of Astrophysics was mentioned as a potential alternative. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is open access and gaining credibility. They are reportedly open to including African editors, which could increase relevance and buy-in from African researchers. There's a strong consensus that decisions should not be made solely by South Africa. Any decision for a new journal must be Continent-led and informed by the full AfAS membership. The conversation remains open and unresolved. There is general support for continuing the conversation and gathering input via a survey before any formal decision is made. It's important that this process be inclusive, transparent, and data-driven. | | |
| 5. | <p>C Takalana Key Projects Handover (including website)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AfAS website needs urgent updating. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A web developer has already been identified to help revamp it. NQ will now take over project management, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination with the developer. Reference to a document from the Science Committee, outlining desired functionality to support the scientific community. Hosting an internal meeting (this or next week) to align both science and outreach needs. AfAS is an observer member of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UN COPUOS). AfAS can continue submitting statements at upcoming UN COPUOS meetings (next in July). The Executive Committee should support ML in drafting such statements. The South African DIRCO played a major role in securing observer status for AfAS; South African representation on the relevant committee should therefore be discussed with DIRCO. EXCO should also consider collaborating with the South African Space Management Authority (under TN) on UN COPUOS matters. | <p>NQ</p> <p>EXCO</p> | <p>September</p> <p>End June</p> |

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hackathons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Hackathons are managed by a partnership which consists of OAD, IDIA, BRICS Astronomy, AfAS and SAAO. - Includes Hackathons and Train-the-Trainer events. - Needs a designated AfAS liaison to maintain momentum. ● TART Telescope Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low-cost radio telescope initiative has been under discussion for years. - Requires EXCO prioritization to help upscale radio astronomy efforts continent-wide. ● ARAN (African Radio Astronomy Network) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing installations in Nigeria and NWU (South Africa). - Supported through travel grants and DARA. - Science Committee to explore continued support. ● ROTSE Telescope (Namibia) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AfAS (D Buckley) was instrumental in resurrecting this project. - Partially funded by DARA, with David Buckley as lead. - Follow-up needed from EXCO and the Science Committee to coordinate next steps. ● SSERVI Partnership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - US-based Solar System Exploration Research Virtual Institute. - Collaborative effort to establish a Lunar Node in Africa. - First Lunar Symposium held at AfAS Conference; plans to meet annually. - Currently supported by ML; will be handed to the Science Committee for further development. ● SKAO (Square Kilometer Array Observatory) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submitted a value proposition document to SKAO. - SKAO committed €5,000 annually for 3 years, towards AfAS Conference sponsorship. - EXCO to maintain and strengthen this relationship. ● PANOPTES Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low-cost camera-based telescopes for exoplanet detection and transient science. - Goal: deployment across Africa. - AfAS collected expressions of interest at the last conference to support funding proposals (via Breakthrough Initiative). - Requires follow-up with interested institutions and funders. ● Breakthrough Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-standing support for AfAS. | <p>Secretariat</p> <p>EXCO</p> <p>Science Committee</p> <p>Science Committee</p> <p>Science Committee</p> <p>EXCO</p> <p>Science Committee</p> | <p>End July</p> <p>End June</p> <p>July-Sept.</p> <p>End June</p> <p>On-Going</p> <p>July</p> <p>On-Going</p> |
|--|---|---|--|

| | | | |
|-----------|--|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AfAS co-organizes the annual Life in the Universe Conference with Breakthrough Listen. - Need to ensure ongoing coordination and future involvement. • OHB Partnership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OHB (contractor for MeerKAT expansion) interested in supporting African radio astronomy infrastructure. - AfAS to respond to their request for input on a new community-driven instrument. - The Science Committee was tasked to lead this response. - Further coordination with YEM is needed for EXCO involvement and support. - Initial contact made; more formal engagement is pending. • Upcoming African Space Conference in late April (Egypt). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The incoming Executive Officer requested to attend, given proximity (based in Morocco). | <p>EXCO</p> <p>Science Committee</p> <p>MG</p> | <p>On-Going</p> <p>On-Going</p> <p>April</p> |
| 6. | <p>Annual Operating Plan 2025/26 (YEM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most committee AOPs submitted; only African Network for Women in Astronomy AOP outstanding. • Deadline to finalize AOP is end of May. • Draft AOP will be sent to EXCO within 2–3 weeks for review and approval at next meeting. <p>Funding Overview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year-end unspent balance: ~R1,2m(R200K is for APA ; R1m AfAS); R0,5m savings in hotel costs for conference as lower Government rates secured, OAD and SAAO thanked for their efforts in negotiating the lower rate. • Total Conference cost: R2,5m including some R1m in accommodation and flights. • 2025/26 grant from DSTI to be paid in April. • Cash flow projection for the next 3 months was issued with the financials. | YEM | End May |
| 7. | <p>AfAS Year-End Audit (YEM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Audit processes have been initiated by YEM, all initial documentation sent to the Auditors. | YEM | End July |
| 8. | <p>Update on Executive Officer & Accountant Recruitment (YEM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Officer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meryem Guennoun (MG), from Morocco, has accepted the offer for the Executive Officer position subject to obtaining a work visa. | | |

| | | | |
|-----------|---|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The visa application is a complex and lengthy process (estimated 3–6 months). - An immigration agency has been contracted for assistance (at a minimal cost of ~R10,000). - MGs' academic qualifications (Master's and PhD) have been translated into English and submitted to SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) for accreditation. - SAQA accreditation is expected within 4–6 weeks due to a new system. - Once accreditation is granted, MG will apply for a critical skills work visa at the South African Embassy in Rabat, Morocco. - All supporting documentation (police clearance, medicals, application forms) is being prepared in advance. - Embassy is non-responsive to communication, but MG obtained an application form and a working email during a recent visit. - The immigration agency will review her completed application form to ensure alignment with visa requirements. - Target Start Date: 1 July 2025, though dependent on visa timing. - Regular follow-ups are being made with SAQA by the immigration agent. • Junior Accountant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To be employed with a view to longer-term succession planning for the finance function (incl. payroll, financials). - Applications Received: Over 220 - Many were unsuitable (e.g., unrelated degrees, no accounting experience). - Reduced to ~22 and now narrowed down to a shortlist of 6 candidates. - Candidate quality overall is not very strong, but interviews will help determine suitability. Awaiting availability of the incoming Executive Officer prior to confirming interview dates. | <p>YEM</p> <p>YEM</p> <p>YEM</p> | <p>End May</p> <p>End June</p> <p>End June</p> |
| 9. | <p>Annual Conferences 2026-2029 formal letters to Hosts & 2026 Date. (YEM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the next conference host (BIUST) was announced at the AfAS conference, they have not yet received a formal letter of confirmation. • Botswana University proposed the following dates for the next conference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Sunday, 22 March to Saturday, 28 March 2026 • These dates to be confirmed early to allow the university to begin engagements with stakeholders and venue preparations. | | |

| | | | |
|------------|--|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern was raised about possible overlap with Ramadan or Eid but Ramadan in 2026 is expected to end on 19 March 2026, with Eid celebrations immediately following. The proposed dates fall just after these religious holidays. The university's Executive Management team has requested a meeting with the AfAS Executive Committee. EXCO agreed to the conference dates as well as to meet with BIUST Executive Management. YEM to confirm a meeting date between EXCO and BIUST Management. Formal letters to all 4 hosts to be issued by the Chair in consultation with YEM. | <p>YEM</p> <p>AA/YEM</p> | <p>End April</p> <p>End April</p> |
| 10. | <p>2025 Annual Conference Report-Back (CT/YEM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CT compiled a detailed report on the proceedings of the Annual Conference and General Assembly. This was issued to EXCO. Limited feedback from the committee, members to review the report and share any comments or suggestions. | <p>EXCO</p> | <p>Next Meeting</p> |
| 11. | <p>Key International Meetings 2025/26 (CT/YEM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AfAS has had both Outreach and Science Committee sessions accepted for the Africa-Europe collaboration session at EAS. Talks submitted by James Chibueze and Duduzile Kubheka have been accepted. AfAS ExCo to consider sending representation to the EAS meeting, as has been done in the past. Middle East-Africa IAU Meeting (organized by MEARM) was mentioned, but dates not yet confirmed. AfAS ExCo to follow up on this meeting and consider involvement once dates are announced. AfAS previously attended the January AAS meeting, largely in connection with the IAU General Assembly. AfAS used that opportunity to thank AAS for support for the African Astronomy Community. It was recommended that new AfAS President contact the following people to strengthen links: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dara Norman (AAS) Sara Lucatello (EAS) AA to send introductory emails to key international partners. | <p>EXCO</p> <p>EXCO</p> <p>AA</p> | <p>Next Meeting</p> <p>Next Meeting</p> <p>End June</p> |

| | | | |
|-----|--|----|------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern raised over the lack of clear acknowledgment of AfAS's leadership in the Africa Programme during SKAO presentations. SKAO provided funding and exhibition support for this year's AfAS conference. Importance of maintaining strong ties with SKAO emphasized. AfAS to consider formal representation (virtual or in-person) at the upcoming SKAO meeting. | AA | July |
| 12. | <p>DSTI Expectations for the coming 3 years (TN)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TN confirmed ongoing DSTI support for AfAS and expressed appreciation for the new Executive Committee's commitment. Expectations Outlined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on the existing foundations of AfAS. Strengthen AfAS's visibility, profile, and activities. Prioritize the interests of AfAS members and serve the community effectively. Encourage professional, respectful dialogue, even amidst differences of opinion. Maintain a committed and communicative Executive Team, especially in informing the Secretariat when unavailable. Continue to grow the African astronomy community despite limited resources. | | |
| 13. | <p>Miscellaneous: (CT/YEM)</p> <p>Change to the AfAS bank account details</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently, AfAS has previous Directors and CT as bank account Authorizers. CT, however, processes all banking transactions which are reviewed by YEM. The bank (FNB) needs to be advised of the new Directors once formally appointed. ZT, based at the AfAS Secretariat, will now manage the banking transactions until the Executive Officer officially joins AfAS. NQ will approve all payments prior to ZT processing through the bank account and YEM will continue to review these. Glenda Snowball (SAAO), a GA 2024 Finance Committee member, requested to be removed as a signatory for the GA account which is also in the name of AfAS. Currently, Glenda Snowball and CT are the only signatories for the GA account with YEM again, reviewing all transactions. | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--------------------|------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Executive Committee approved the appointment of ZT as the sole bank account Authorizer as stated above. This resolution will be formally communicated to the bank and YEM to draft the resolution for signature by the Chair. A new certificate of Directors must be issued by CIPC before the bank can process any changes in Directors. | YEM/AA | End April |
| | NEXT MEETING | 22 May 2025 | |

ACTION ITEMS

| ACTION ITEMS | DATE | PERSON RESPONSIBLE |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Begin consultations on the constitution of the AfAS Committees | Mid-May 2025 | ExCo |
| The Secretariat and Nominations Committee to consider adopting a more dynamic nominations process which includes regional diversity and gender, for EXCO members prior to the next General Assembly. | July 2027 | ExCo/Secretariat |
| Confirm appointment of Co-opted members | End April 2025 | YEM/AA |
| Appoint additional members to Constitution Review/By-Laws Working Group | June 2025 | Secretariat/PAW |
| Confirm date of next EXCO meeting via Doodle Poll | End April 2025 | NQ |
| Arrange EXCO/Committee Chairs Meeting | End April 2025 | NQ/YEM |
| Recruitment of Members/Chairs for Committees | End May 2025 | Secretariat/EXCO |
| Establish Shared Drive to facilitate access to documents by EXCO members. | 28 April 2025 | NQ |
| Committee ToRs to be issued to EXCO members | 28 April 2025 | NQ |
| EXCO members to confirm their Committee selection | Next EXCO Meeting | EXCO |
| Update Bank Account Authorizer and advise bank of new Directors | May 2025 | YEM/ZT/CT |
| Draft Terms of Reference for Executive Committee to be reviewed and feedback provided. | Next EXCO Meeting | EXCO |
| Confirm the appointment of the 3 Directors and initiate the change process with CIPC | End April 2025 | YEM |

| | | |
|---|---|--------------------|
| Formally advise the hosts of the AfAS Annual Conference for the coming 4 years. | 21 April 2025 | YEM/AA |
| Arrange Meeting with South African Astronomers on African Science Journal | July-Sept. 2025 | PAW |
| AfAS Website Upgrade | Sept 2025 | NQ |
| Secretariat Projects Handover | June 2025 | EXCO to Committees |
| Annual Operating Plan Year-end Audit Executive Officer Work Visa Junior Accountant | End May 2025 July 2025 July 2025 June 2025 | YEM |
| Letters to Annual Conference Hosts | End April 2025 | YEM/AA |
| Meeting with BIUST Management/Confirmation of Conference Dates 2026 | May 2025 | YEM/AA |
| President Formal Introduction to EAS/AAS | June 2025 | AA |
| SKAO Meeting | July 2025 | AA |