

1 Observatory Road
Observatory
Cape Town
2193



MEETING NUMBER: AfAS 2025 Executive Committee Meeting 04 Minutes

VENUE: Zoom

DATE: 21 January 2026

TIME : 14h00 – 16h30

CHAIRPERSON: Amare Abebe

SCRIBE: Thembela Mantungwa

ATTENDANCE RECORDS

Amare Abebe (AA)	amare.abebe@afasociety.org	President
Benedicta Woode (BW)	benedicta.woode@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
Charles Takalana (CT)	Charles.takalana@afasociety.org	Advisor (Ex-Officio)
Joyful Elma Mdhuli (JEM)	joyful.mdhuli@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
Kenda Knowles (KK)	kenda.knowles@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
Thembela Mantungwa (TM)	thembela.mantungwa@afasociety.org	Acting Executive Officer (Ex-Officio)
Patricia Ann Whitelock (PAW)	p.whitelock@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
Kevin Govender (KG)	kg@astro4dev.org	Advisor (Ex-Officio)
Yunus Manjoo (YEM)	yunus.manjoo@afasociety.org	Project Manager (Ex-Officio)
Takalani Nemaungani (TN)	Takalani.Nemaungani@dst.gov.za	Ex Officio Member

Edward Jurua (EJ)	ejurua@must.ac.ug	Co-Opted Executive Member
Yasser Abdel-Hadi (YAH)	yasser.hadi@nriag.sci.eg	Co-Opted Executive Member (Joined the meeting late)
Léon Snyman (LS)	SnymanLD@ufs.ac.za	APA Committee Chair (Ex Officio Member)
Meryem Guenoun	guennounmeryem27@gmail.com	AfAS Executive Officer (Ex Officio Member, joined late)
Youssef Moulane (YM)	youssef.moulane@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member (Joined the meeting late)

APOLOGIES

Yin-Zhe Ma (YZM)	yin-zhe.ma@afasociety.org	Vice President
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ABSENT

Maram Kaire (MK)	maramkaire@gmail.com	Co-Opted Executive Member
Thebe Rodney Medupe (TRM)	rodney.medupe@nwu.ac.za	Immediate Past President (Ex Officio)

DESCRIPTION	ACTION	DATE
<p>1. Welcome & Introduction</p> <p>1.1 AA opened the meeting and welcomed all. There was an apology only from YZM.</p> <p>1.2 AA emphasised the importance of active participation from all Executive Committee members, as well as attendance of the meeting. He also expressed concern about some ex-officio members not attending meetings. It was agreed that before the process for absence at meetings is invoked, AA will request the affected members to commit fully to future meeting attendance; otherwise, their membership will be revoked.</p> <p>1.3 YAH joined the meeting late, stating that he cannot accommodate the 14h00-start time for</p>	AA	FEB

<p>meetings and a later time of a 1- or 2-hour delay should be considered. This suggestion had no support from the rest of the Committee and YAH needs to advise the Committee of his future attendance.</p> <p>1.4 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved by email on a round robin basis to ensure timeous upload to the AfAS website for members. The Secretariat is to ensure that all minutes of the meetings are available on the website.</p> <p>1.5 Updates on action items not on the agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) There has been no response from the African Space Agency on the request to engage; there appears to be internal administrative issues within the Agency. b) The AfAS Newsletter was published electronically in December 2025 through all media channels. 	<p>YAH</p> <p>TM</p>	<p>FEB</p> <p>FEB</p>
<p>2. Simons Foundation Call for Institutional Grants</p> <p>2.1 The AfAS proposal was unsuccessful; in future, such calls require a more proactive approach from the Science Committee.</p> <p>2.2 Responses to funding Calls should consider the broader requirements of the African Community and not the interests of individual members of the Committee.</p>		
<p>3. Committees Report back</p> <p>3.1 Science (BW)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The commissioning of the ROTSE telescope has been hampered by technical problems; hence, the call for proposals has been delayed. b) The Committee has eventually elected a chair and co-chair for the Early-Career sub-committee, and the Executive Committee was advised. It was agreed that the appointment of members and chair/co-chair of Committees should be detailed in the Terms of Reference of each Committee. c) The SALT proposal from Mirjana Povic (MP) was allocated time as an African initiative, but no feedback has been received on who the collaborators are or on progress to date. MP has been requested to advise the Science Committee at its meeting next Friday. d) There was consensus that the transition to the new committee members had not gone well. e) A continental-wide Working Group is to be established to determine the key tasks for the coming year. 	<p>BW</p> <p>BW</p> <p>BW</p>	<p>JAN</p> <p>MAR</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> f) PAW suggested that AfAS should have a science strategy. This should be led by the Science Committee. g) The Executive Committee is seeking a senior scientist to co-chair the committee. h) Committee Chairs are to be reminded that all appointments to Committees must be approved by the Executive Committee. 	PAW	FEB
	ALL	FEB
<p>3.2 Outreach & Education (KK)</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Nikita Ramkilowan and Bramuel Naakholi have been elected as Chair and Co-Chair of the Committee. Sally Macfarlane and Duduzile Kubheka will continue to support the Committee. b) The Committee now has representatives across the continent, and they hope to have a wider reach as a result. However, the Executive Committee suggested that, due to the large membership of the Committee, regional groups should be established. c) Committee members will be involved in the selection of the Hackathon participants, whilst the Chair will be part of the organising team at the conference. d) The call issued by AfNWA for outreach in rural areas for girls was done without the knowledge or the involvement of the Outreach Committee. The Committee now needs to be actively involved in the selection of the projects and awarding of the grants. YEM emphasised the importance of obtaining approval from the Executive Committee before issuing calls, especially if AfAS funding is required. e) It was noted that the majority of the Committee's activities are focused within South Africa, and future activities planned should be aimed at the rest of the continent. f) No formal Committee meetings were held during the current year, although one is planned for this week. 	KK	FEB
<p>3.3 Communications (JEM)</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Shirley Aoko has been appointed as the co-Chair of the Committee. b) Ten new committee members have been recruited, and the committee had its first meeting in January with the full cohort of representatives. The plan is to meet every 2 weeks. c) At the next meeting, the draft communications strategy will be discussed, and it will be presented to the Executive Committee thereafter for review. d) The next newsletter will be issued post the annual conference and will include regional news with 	JEM	MAR

<p>d) AERAP will host its annual EU/Africa meeting in Brussels in March. Access to EU funds will be a key topic.</p> <p>e) The latest African Science Stars magazine was published in December; the BRICS magazine is ready for publishing.</p> <p>f) AA commented that fundraising is also a key responsibility of the Executive Committee, and external funding should be actively sought. Also, prominent people from across the continent should be approached for assistance. Given that Khotso Mokhele has been mentioned several times at meetings, it was agreed that PAW should engage with him on assisting AfAS with fundraising. TN stated that whilst such persons can be approached, they should not be members of the Fundraising Committee.</p> <p>g) AA stated that the DSTI should also approach other Governments in Africa for funding contributions.</p> <p>3.7 APA (LS)</p> <p>a) The APA website remains a key priority, and the Committee will focus on resolving access and functionality issues as well as the database.</p> <p>b) APA will not host a workshop at the annual conference due to a lack of presenters and suitable material. The new Committee is still deliberating on the key objectives/activities.</p> <p>c) The WITS dome festival in August is a possible option for APA to have a presence, and LS has commenced discussions with the organisers.</p> <p>d) Nico vd Merwe (NvdM), an ex-APA Executive Committee member, has developed a mobile planetarium, and he is willing to run a one-day workshop at the conference. YEM mentioned that he could also be involved in outreach activities during the week by having shows for learners. LS/YEM to engage further with NvdM.</p>	<p>PAW</p> <p>TN</p> <p>LS</p> <p>LS</p> <p>LS/YEM</p>	<p>JAN</p>
<p>4. Science Forum South Africa (SASF) 2025 (JEM)</p> <p>4.1 The AfAS session at the SASF was well received, and the Executive Committee thanked JEM for organising the event.</p> <p>4.2 TM stated that the South African National Space Agency (SANSA) has agreed to a MoU with AfAS, which is currently being drafted.</p>	<p>TM</p>	<p>MAR</p>
<p>5. Annual Conference Update including Workshops (YEM)</p> <p>a) Some 400 abstracts (300 science) have been reviewed, and presenters have been notified of the outcomes.</p>	<p>ALL</p>	<p>FEB</p>

<p>b) PAW and YEM met with the Chairs of the LOC and SOC last week to finalise the special sessions requested by AfAS stakeholders.</p>	<p>YEM</p>	<p>FEB</p>
<p>c) The key concern now is that the program is still being finalised. The Ministry in Botswana has committed some additional funds for the travel grants, but the amount has not been confirmed yet.</p>	<p>AA/YEM</p>	<p>FEB</p>
<p>d) There are limited flights to Kasane; the LOC has been requested to advise delegates of alternative routes.</p>	<p>PAW/YEM</p>	<p>FEB</p>
<p>e) All core Executive Committee members have confirmed in-person attendance at the conference. AA encouraged members to seek external funds for their flights. It is noted that currently, most of these members are seeking external funds, and the others are to do likewise. Once flights are booked, members should inform YEM of their itinerary for ground transport arrangements by the LOC.</p>		
<p>f) Breakthrough Listen have indicated their willingness to host the reception on the Sunday evening before the conference; their session topic has not been confirmed.</p>	<p>YEM</p>	<p>FEB</p>
<p>g) EAS session is confirmed, the contents to be discussed between EAS/AfAS.</p>		
<p>h) PAW expressed concerns about the organisation of the conference and delays in the issue of the programme and the announcement of the change in the conference venue. YEM has advised the LOC that the programme must be finalised by the end of January, given the 6-week lead-time for visa applications. The LOC will try to expedite the visa applications.</p>	<p>YEM</p>	<p>FEB</p>
<p>i) AA suggested the conference proceedings should be published; PAW mentioned that astronomers are not eager to have their talks in conference proceedings. In addition, previous enquiries by AfAS revealed that it was costly to publish proceedings.</p>		
<p>j) The Business Meeting is tentatively scheduled for Friday afternoon. KK stated that flights leaving Botswana are few and she can only get a return flight on Friday afternoon. YEM to note the flight details of the Committee members before finalising the time slot.</p>	<p>YEM</p>	<p>FEB</p>
<p>k) The planned Executive Committee meeting at the conference is scheduled for Tuesday evening, to be confirmed once the programme is finalised.</p>		
<p>l) YEM to confirm with the LOC whether ground transportation can be arranged for delegates flying to other airports, such as Victoria Falls.</p>		

<p>9. African Science Journal Results The initial results of the survey have not been completed, and a special Executive Committee meeting to be arranged in February to discuss the Committee's response to the survey.</p>	<p>YZM</p> <p>TM</p>	<p>FEB</p> <p>JAN</p>
<p>9. Constitution Working Group Feedback</p> <p>a) The Constitution Working Group has filled the vacancy by the appointment of Alshaimaa Hassanin from Egypt.</p> <p>b) The Committee intends to simplify the Constitution and have the details in the By-Laws.</p>	<p>PAW</p>	
<p>10. Secretariat Report-back (YEM)</p> <p>10.1 The new AfAS Website is in the final stages of testing. The Executive will have the opportunity to access the new website and provide feedback to the Secretariat within a week of being given access</p> <p>10.2 The incoming Executive Officer, Meryem Guennoun (MG), partially attended the meeting and introduced herself. She will be arriving in South Africa on the 09th February on a 3-year contract and will be temporarily housed onsite at SAAO. TM will work jointly with MG until the end of March. YEM will be involved in her induction.</p> <p>10.3 YEM will be engaging with the Chairs of the Committees on the 2026/27 AOP, which is due in April.</p> <p>10.4 The current quarterly meeting schedule will continue for 2026/27, and a preliminary timetable will be issued; this will be similar to the current year.</p> <p>10.5 TN mentioned that the DSTI will renew the AfAS contract for the 3 years commencing 1st April 2027. YEM to compile a report highlighting the activities for the past 3 years to facilitate the renewal. A summary presentation of the report to be included.</p>	<p>TM</p> <p>TM/YEM/MG</p> <p>YEM</p> <p>TM</p> <p>YEM/TN</p>	<p>FEB</p> <p>MAR</p> <p>MAR</p> <p>FEB</p> <p>SEP</p>
<p>NEXT MEETING (Special Meeting)</p>	<p>19 February 2026</p>	

SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS

ACTION ITEMS	DATE	ACTION BY
AA will request the affected members to commit fully to future meeting attendance	FEB	AA
YAH needs to advise the Committee of his future attendance.	FEB	YAH
The Secretariat to ensure that all minutes of the meetings are available on the website.	FEB	TM
ROTSE Call for proposals		BW
Progress on SALT Observations		BW
Science Strategy		BW
Science Committee Co-Chair	FEB	PAW
Outreach Call for projects involving girls in rural areas (with AfNWA)	FEB	KK
Communications Strategy	MAR	JEM
Membership List	FEB	YEM/TM
AERAP Contract	MAR	TN/YEM
Khotso Mokhele Discussion to assist with fundraising		PAW
Funding from African Governments	DEC	TN
MoU with SANSA	MAR	TM
Dark & Quiet Skies Recommendations follow-up	MAR	JEM
ASTRO-ACCEL Outcomes Follow-up	MAR	NQ/TM
MM Telescope in Morocco		CT