

1 Observatory Road Observatory Cape Town	
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Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting

VENUE: Conference Hall Breakthrough Room (AfAS2026, Wildview Resort, Kasane, Botswana)
+ Zoom

DATE: 24 March 2026

TIME: 16h00 – 18h30

CHAIRPERSON: Amare Abebe (AA)

SCRIBE: Meryem Guennoun (MG)

ATTENDANCE RECORDS

<u>Amare Abebe (AA)</u>	amare.abebe@afasociety.org	<u>President</u>
<u>Benedicta Woode (BW)</u>	benedicta.woode@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
<u>Charles Takalana (CT)</u>	Charles.takalana@afasociety.org	Advisor (Ex-Officio)
<u>Edward Jurua (EJ)</u>	ejurua@must.ac.ug	Co-Opted Executive Member
<u>Joyful Elma Mdhuli (JEM)</u>	joyful.mdhuli@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
<u>Kenda Knowles (KK)</u>	kenda.knowles@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
<u>Léon Snyman (LS)</u>	SnymanLD@ufs.ac.za	APA Committee Chair
<u>Meryem Guennoun (MG)</u>	meryem.guennoun@afasociety.org	Executive Officer
<u>Patricia Ann Whitelock (PAW)</u>	kenda.knowles@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member

<u>Takalani Nemaungani (TN)</u>	Takalani.Nemaungani@dst.gov.za	Ex-Officio Member
<u>Thebe Rodney Medupe (TRM)</u>	rodney.medupe@nwu.ac.za	Immediate Past President (Ex-Officio)
<u>Thembela Mantungwa (TM)</u>	thembela.mantungwa@afasociety.org	Acting Executive Officer (Ex-Officio)
<u>Yunus Manjoo (YEM)</u>	yunus.manjoo@afasociety.org	Project Manager

Online attendance

Kevin Govender (KG)	kg@astro4dev.org	Advisor (Ex-Officio)
Youssef Moulane (YM)	youssef.moulane@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member

Science strategy discussion attendance

Eli Kasai (EK)	ekasai@unam.na	Science Committee chair
Patrick woudt (PW)	patrick.woudt@uct.ac.za	Science Committee co-chair

ABSENT

Yasser Abdel-Hadi (YAH)	yasser.hadi@nriag.sci.eg	Co-Opted Executive Member
Yin-Zhe Ma (YZM)	yin-zhe.ma@afasociety.org	Vice President

DESCRIPTION	ACTION	DATE
1. Welcome & Opening 1.1 AA opened the meeting and welcomed all members. 1.2 AA reiterated the importance of attendance and stated that any member who does not submit an apology in advance will be considered absent.	ALL	

2. Progress on action items not on Agenda 2.1 Website a) PAW raised concerns regarding the timeous availability of Executive Committee minutes online and noted that AfAS Members have requested more transparency regarding the Committee's activities. b) YEM confirmed that the new AfAS website will go live on 1 April 2026, and will include approved uploaded meeting minutes. 2.2 ROTSE Call for Proposals a) BW reported that the ROTSE call for proposals is delayed due to ongoing technical issues. The Call will therefore be issued once the telescope is fully operational. b) YEM confirmed his engagement with David Buckley regarding a forward plan and noted that approximately R180K remains unutilised. A plan for the coming year has been presented. CT commented that the DARA funding deadline is March 2027 and the unspent funds must be spent accordingly otherwise funds will be returned to DARA. A progress report is required for the 2025/26 year and must be included in the 4th quarter Science Report, BW to advise Eli Kasai. 2.3 SALT Observations a) It was noted that Mirjana Pović's proposal was an individual submission but did include African Co-PIs. Further details are required on African astronomer participation, the Science Committee to obtain information on all participating astronomers. b) AfAS should continue with its efforts through the Science Committee, in encouraging African astronomers to submit proposals for time allocation on SALT.	TM/MG BW BW BW	
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2.4 Communications Strategy

a) **JEM** reported challenges in obtaining responses from Shirley Aoko, the current Chair of the Communications Committee. Thus no update has been received on the status of the Communications Strategy. It was agreed that the draft Strategy be tabled at the next Executive Committee Meeting.

JEM/TM

b) **TM** informed the Executive that the Chair had unilaterally appointed a Co-Chair. The Executive Committee noted that the current Chair's appointment should have been on an acting basis during the period when **TM** was serving as Acting Executive Officer. It was agreed that **TM** will assume the role of Chair from 1 April 2026, and Shirley Aoko should be informed accordingly.

PAW emphasised that the process must align with the Constitution. **YEM** further noted that the Constitution does not provide detailed guidance on committee activities, and that, in practice, reference is currently made to the Terms of Reference (ToR).

c) **YEM** confirmed that the a generic Terms of Reference for all Committees will be included in the By-Laws, this will include:

PAW/YEM

- Appointment procedures
- Performance expectations
- Consequences for non-performance

d) **AA** stressed the need to resolve this matter and proposed that a dedicated meeting be convened urgently by the Secretariat.

MG/TM/JEM

e) **CT** highlighted the importance of strong communications expertise within the Committee, this is currently lacking given recent experiences and that ExCo's decision for **TM** to resume as the Chair should be implemented soonest.

2.5 Fundraising and AERAP

a) **YEM** is progressing the approval of the AERAP contract with the bank who will submit the grant funding application to the South African Reserve Bank for approval. This will take between 4 to 6 weeks.

YEM

b) **PAW** has engaged with Khotso Mokhele who has expressed willingness to assist with fundraising efforts.

PAW

c) **TN** is engaging with the Government Departments responsible for Science in other African countries. This will be an on-going process during the year.

TN

2.6 MoU with SANSA TM reported that no response has yet been received from SANSA, to be speedily progressed by the Secretariat. 2.7 Action Items from attendance of Conferences by AfAS members a) MG to engage with Nombali Qodi/JEM regarding the recommendations arising from the Astro-Accel workshop (October 2025) and the Dark Skies Workshop (December 2025). b) CT mentioned that YM is leading the Millimetre Telescope project which will be relocated from the USA to Morocco. Funding is being sought for the relocation costs.	TM/MG MG YM	
3. African Astronomy Journal Due to the absence of YZM, the discussion on the African Astronomy Journal was postponed. It was agreed that AA will request YZM to share with ExCo, the talk to be presented at the Annual Conference.	AA/YZM	
4. Co-opted Members (Francophone Representation) 4.1 AA updated the ExCo on the interviews that were conducted for potential co-opted members from Francophone regions, the others at the interview were YEM, PAW and MG. Two candidates were interviewed, one from Burkina Faso (Marie Korsaga) and the other from the Ivory Coast (Marc Yao Fortune). 4.2 TRM stated that there is a request from representatives in Francophone regions to have all communications and documents in French as well. It was mentioned by both PAW and TN that all the major astronomy agencies and organizations across the world use English for all communicating with members and others. Also, the translation costs are high. 4.3 The Executive Committee agreed that AfAS will continue to use only English. 4.4 The Committee supported the inclusion of the two proposed candidates as co-opted ExCo members, and they will be formally invited to join the Executive Committee.	YEM/AA	

5. Meeting Schedule-2026/27 5.1 YAH's request to re-schedule the meeting start time cannot be accommodated, he will be advised. 5.2 YEM circulated the proposed meeting dates for 2026/27 prior to the meeting, these are similar to the current year including a meeting at the 2027 annual conference. Members to confirm their availability and the next meeting will be held on 22 April 2026. Meeting invites for the coming year to be issued.	AA/MG MG	
6. AfAS 2027 Conference (Rhodes University) 6.1 The conference will be held early April due to Ramadaan and Easter, the dates will be confirmed in the near future. 6.2 The preliminary timeline has all the major activities being concluded by mid-December. 6.3 Nikhita Ramkilowan will lead the Outreach Organising Committee and Patrick Woudt will lead the SOC portfolio. 6.4 KK is also exploring a partnership with the University of Fort Hare for the Outreach activities. 6.5 YEM stated that the 2026 Conference has spent R1m in travel grants and Rhodes University will need to fund a similar amount. The Fundraising Committee will be tasked to find sponsors for these grants. 6.6 Registration fees will be levied for the first time, the fee to be approved by ExCO. 6.8 TN mentioned that the DSTI will again sponsor the gala dinner in South Africa.	KK KK TN KK TN	

7. AfSA Engagement 7.1 AA provided feedback on a strategic meeting with the African Space Agency (AfSA) leadership, YEM was also invited to attend. The AfSA delegation included its President, Deputy President and Hamdi Kacem. While AfSA initially mistook AfAS for a South African national entity, they now recognize its Pan-African mandate and identified AfAS as a key partner to lead the continent in the Astronomy Portfolio within the Agency. MG to send the File Note on the meeting to Committee Members. 7.2 Within the framework of the Africa–Europe Space Partnership Programme (AESPP), a Joint Taskforce (JTF) on Astronomy is being established. AfAS to submit the names of 2 Senior Astronomers per region (Northern, central, Southern, Eastern, and Western Africa ensuring geographical and linguistic balance. The selection to focus on competency, gender equity, and youth inclusion. AA encouraged ExCo to submit potential candidate nominations for the JTF by the end of the current conference. 7.3 TN proposed that AA should be the AfAS lead for all engagements with the AfSA. 7.4 A formal Working Group led by Hamdi Kacem, will be formed with AfAS to explore collaborative opportunities and to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between AfAS and AfSA. In the short term, AfAS is tasked with inviting five astronomy-related companies to the AfSA Business Summit at the African Space Expo in the Ivory Coast this September. Additionally, AfAS has been invited to participate in the development of a roadmap for African astronomy as part of AfSA's upcoming Strategy Review. 7.5 Regarding upcoming events, MG noted an invitation to a conference in Gabon (April 22–23) but raised concerns over the high registration fees, which AA suggested discussing offline. 7.6 AA presented a funding request for an Egyptology project, the request was high and unaffordable but AfAS could consider partial funding.	MG ALL AA/YEM/MG AA/TN AA AA/YEM/MG AA/YEM	
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8. Science Strategy Discussion (EK/PW present) 8.1 PAW led a discussion on the need to draft an AfAS Science Strategy. She emphasized that a clear strategy is the foundation for a strong value proposition, which is essential for successful fundraising. This document should define a clear vision and highlight AfAS's core strengths, specifically in training and fostering collaboration across the continent. 8.2 KK stated that feedback she received indicated that there are no defined science groups within the Science Committee. It was agreed that this should be considered by the Committee. To ensure these groups are representative, TN suggested conducting a survey to identify key science priority areas. KK added that the survey results should also inform the development of more targeted workshops. The Committee agreed that the survey should be launched soonest. PAW suggested weekly reminders to ensure a high response rate. 8.3 AA called for a clear timeline for the drafting of the strategy document. 8.4 It was agreed that EK and PW will establish a Task Team to develop the Science Strategy.	EK/PW/BW EK/PW/BW EK/PW	
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9. Conference Proceedings 9.1 AA opened the discussion on the publication of the conference proceedings, with EK and PW remaining in the session to provide input. 9.2 PAW raised significant concerns regarding the feasibility of formal proceedings, citing a lack of dedicated funding and the high administrative burden of finding qualified editors. She emphasized that for AfAS to maintain its international reputation, publications must be of a high quality. 9.3 EK suggested that using conference participants as peer reviewers has worked effectively at other conferences and this could be a viable solution. 9.4 PW and PAW commented that it may be too late to publish the 2026 conference proceedings given the long lead time required to assess the talks and eventually publish. AA responded by stating that the publication can be achieved with a strong review and editorial team. 9.5 TN supported the publication of the proceedings and proposed that a start should be made rather than having any further postponement for another year. 9.6 AA will present the findings of the survey at the Business Meeting on Friday while preliminary responses indicate strong support from the presenters for publishing. Post Meeting Note: There was overwhelming support for publishing the proceedings and AfAS will proceed with this initiative.	AA YEM/MG	
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10. Recognition Awards & Fellowships 10.1 AA introduced the topic of AfAS Recognition Awards and Fellowships, citing that of the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) as a successful model. He noted that since AfAS has recently completed its 7th year since the relaunch, it is an appropriate time to launch such a program. It was agreed that the criteria for the awards be clearly defined together with the process for nominations and selection. 10.2 TN offered to assist with the fundraising initiative for these awards. 11. Membership 11.1 YEM confirmed that a formal communication was issued stating that the membership portal will go live on April 1st and membership fees are also due from full members. The new system is designed to automatically generate membership certificates on the payment of fees. The system can also generate invoices on request and will send out annual payment reminders will be sent to members from next year. 11.2 PAW/YM raised concerns about county restrictions regarding the difficulty some members face with international payments, such as Algeria. YEM assured the Committee that the AfAS system is capable of managing payments in multiple currencies. 11.3 It was agreed that Institutional Membership fees and benefits need to be finalized during 2026.	AA TN YM	
NEXT MEETING	22 April 2026	

SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS

ACTION ITEMS	DATE	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
New AfAS's website live on 1 April 2026 together with Membership Module and payment of fees by full members.	1 st April	TM/YEM
Progress Report for 2025/26 for DARA on the ROTSE Telescope Project.	April	BW/YEM
Further details on African Astronomers participation in the SALT project led by Mirjana Povic.	April	BW

Communications Strategy to EXCO for discussion at April Meeting.	April	JEM
Meeting with Chair of Communications Committee to resolve Leadership.	April	MG/JEM
Approval of the AERAP contract by the South African Reserve Bank	May	YEM
Further engagement with Khotso Mokhele on fund-raising initiatives	On-going	PAW
SANSA MoU.	April	TM/MG
Engage with Nombali Qodi on AstroAccel project and JEM on the Dark Skies Workshop	April	MG
African Science Journal Presentation at Conference and follow-up actions	On-going	YZM
Invitation to the 2 Frankphone candidates to join ExCo as co-opted , non-voting members.	April	YEM/AA
ExCo Meeting Dates for 2026/27	April	MG
File Note on AfSA meeting to Committee Members. Identify and nominate candidates for AfSA Joint Task Force (2 per region) on AESPP Working Group and MoU for AfSA/AfAS future engagements.	April April May	MG ALL AA/YEM/MG
MG attendance of New Space Agency Conference In Gabon.	April	AA/YEM/MG
Funding request for an Egyptology project	April	AA/YEM
Fund-raising campaign for 2027 Annual Conference Travel Grants	December	TN
2027 Annual Conference Planning	December	KK
Survey to identify key scientific priorities for AfAS. Establish Science Strategy task team and draft initial framework and timelines	April/May April	EK/BW EK/BW
Criteria and Process for AfAS Recognition Awards	July for ExCo approval	AA
Fund raising initiatives for awards	On-going	TN
Publication of conference proceedings	December	MG/BW/JEM
Institutional Membership fees and benefits	December	YM

