



# African Open Science Platform to boost the impact of open data for science and society

## Media Release

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An initiative to establish an African Open Science Platform to promote the value and exploit the potential of Open Data for science was announced by the Minister of Science and Technology, Mrs. Naledi Pandor, at the Science Forum South Africa 2016 (SFSA).

The Africa-wide initiative will promote the development and coordination of data policies, data training and data infrastructure. The pilot phase, launched today, is supported by the South African Department of Science and Technology (DST), funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF), directed by CODATA, the Committee on Data of the International Council for Science (ICSU) and implemented by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf).

The initiative originates from the Science International Accord on Open Data in a Big Data World, which was launched at the SFSA in 2015. The Accord presents an inclusive vision of the need for and the benefits of science Open Data internationally, and in particular for lower and middle-income countries. The International Council of Science and the other partners to the Science International Accord welcome the initiative and have helped build the partnerships for the pilot.

***Minister Pandor commented “The creation of the African Open Science Platform is an excellent example of the tangible impact our Science Forum has already achieved in harnessing international partnerships to advance African science. The Platform will play a critical role to assist African countries in developing the necessary capacities to manage and exploit scientific data for the benefit of society. I am proud that our Department, and its entities the NRF and ASSAf, are contributing to this crucial mission.”***

The onset of the digital revolution has created an unprecedented explosion in the data available for analysis as a basis for greater understanding and efficient policies by scientists, policymakers, businesses citizens and other actors in civil society. Extremely large data sets, or ‘big data’, drive this revolution and researchers are able to recognise subtle but powerful patterns in areas ranging across the sciences, from security to genetic research and human behaviour.

Several open science activities are underway across Africa, but a great deal is to be gained if these activities were to be coordinated and developed through a coordinating initiative.

It is envisaged that the African Platform will be a basis for shared investment in infrastructure. It will harvest and circulate good ideas, spread and support good practice and develop the capacities of individuals and institutions. It will promote key applications of relevance to African economies and societies. It will also act as a conduit for links with the international open data and open science programmes and standards that will be vital if it is to flourish.



An open science platform is conceived as an integrated set of arrangements that provides a policy, capacity-building and infrastructural framework for enhanced accessibility and impact. The initiative also focuses on the creation of national Open Science fora through which policies and coordination can be discussed and established.

The high-level trajectory of development of the Platform will be determined by an Advisory Council, and its technical development by a Technical Advisory Board. Both bodies will have membership drawn from the whole region.

During a one-day workshop and a parallel session – both as part of SFSA – experts from across the region convened to discuss and co-design the platform’s further development and its themes including coordinated policy development, incentives and benefits, capacity-building and training, and roadmaps for coordinating data infrastructure.

**Ends...**

## **CODATA**

CODATA (<http://www.codata.org/>) is the Committee on Data of the International Council for Science. CODATA was created to promote global collaboration for Open Data and to support ICSU’s mission of strengthening international science for the benefit of society, by promoting the policy, technological and cultural changes that are essential to make research data more widely available.

The CODATA Strategic Plan <http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.50343> identifies three priority areas: 1) promoting principles, policies and practices for Open Data and Open Science; 2) advancing the frontiers of data science; 3) building capacity for Open Science by improving data skills and the functions of national science systems needed to support open data. CODATA achieves these objectives through a number of standing committees, Task Groups and Working Groups as well as executive-led activities. CODATA supports the Data Science Journal <http://datascience.codata.org/> and collaborates on major data conferences like SciDataCon <http://www.scidatacon.org/2016/> and International Data Week <http://internationaldataweek.org/>.

CODATA provides expert direction for the African Open Data Platform initiative which is being implemented by ASSAf.

## **Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf)**

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) celebrates its 20th year as official academy of South Africa this year.

ASSAf was inaugurated in May 1996. It was formed in response to the need for an Academy of Science consonant with the dawn of democracy in South Africa: activist in its mission of using science and scholarship for the benefit of society, with a mandate encompassing all scholarly disciplines that use an open-minded and evidence-based approach to build knowledge.

ASSAf thus adopted in its name the term 'science' in the singular as reflecting a common way of enquiring rather than an aggregation of different disciplines. Its Members are elected on the basis of a combination of two principal criteria, academic excellence and significant contributions to society.

The Parliament of South Africa passed the Academy of Science of South Africa Act (Act 67 of 2001), which came into force on 15 May 2002. This made ASSAf the only academy of science in South Africa officially recognised by government and representing the country in the international community of science academies and elsewhere.

For more on the [history of ASSAf](#)