

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Annual Young Scientists' Conference 2026

Jointly hosted by the:

Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf)
iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu
South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS)
and
Partners

Date:

13-15 September 2026

Theme:

**Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems
to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063**

Venue:

iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu, Mthatha Campus



science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



1. Introduction

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu, South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS), and partners will host the Annual Young Scientists' Conference (AYSC) from 13-15 September 2026.

ASSAf and its partners invite applications from young scientists based at South African institutions to participate in the 2026 AYSC. This transdisciplinary conference will foster scientific exchange, collaboration, networking, and knowledge sharing among young African researchers from diverse fields.

2. Background and Theme

At its 39th Ordinary Session held on 14 February 2026 in Addis Ababa, the African Union (AU) adopted the annual theme "Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063." This marks a historic milestone, elevating water and sanitation to a central continental priority and recognising their critical role in economic transformation, climate resilience, public health, food security, and regional stability. Despite Africa holding 9% of the world's freshwater resources, significant gaps remain, with 418 million people lacking basic drinking water services and 779 million without basic sanitation (2022). The launch of the Africa Water Vision 2063 provides a strategic framework to drive inclusive, climate-resilient development.

Aligned with this continental priority, the 2026 AYSC adopts the 2026 AU theme, emphasising inclusive, trans-sectoral solutions to build resilience and sustainability, as well as the role of early-career researchers in advancing scientific advice and science diplomacy. The scientific contributions of emerging researchers are crucial in shaping the future by providing science-based solutions to societal challenges.

The AYSC serves as a dynamic forum for emerging researchers and innovators to exchange ideas, forge collaborations, and advance the scientific mission in Africa. Characterised by curiosity, rigour, and inclusivity, the gathering represents a critical opportunity to harness the collective intellect and creativity of Africa's brightest minds. At the heart of the conference lies a recognition of the multifaceted challenges facing African communities and the indispensable role of science in addressing them. Moreover, the AYSC promotes mentorship by connecting established experts with emerging researchers, encouraging peer-to-peer learning, and cultivating a culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing that transcends borders and disciplines.

3. Conference Sub-Themes

3.1. Water Resources and Infrastructure

Focusing on water quantity and quality, investment in infrastructure, and innovative technologies. This includes equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation systems, as well as the role of fit-for-purpose water in sustaining the well-being of ecosystems, humans, and economies.

3.2. Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability

Focusing on adaptive strategies, nature-based solutions, and building resilient communities and water systems in the face of climate variability.

3.3. Inclusive Development, Innovation, and Cooperation

Promoting the custodianship of water and sanitation systems by local communities through the integration of indigenous and local knowledge systems, practices, and values into decision-making. Advancing gender-responsive water and sanitation planning and management.

4. Eligibility

The AYSC is open to early career researchers based in South Africa. Applicants should meet the following criteria to participate:

- Be based at a South African institution
- Be under the age of forty (40) years by the application deadline
- Hold at least a Master's degree, or be a PhD candidate, PhD graduate, or Postdoctoral Researcher.
- Have research interests aligned with one or more of the conference sub-themes
- Commit to attending the full duration of the conference
- Submit an abstract relevant to the conference theme, which will form the basis for either an oral or poster presentation at the conference

All applications must be submitted via the following link on or before the closing date: [AYSC 2026 Application Form](#).

The online application form must be completed in full and submitted by **21 June 2026**. For any enquiries, please contact: Kholani Mbhiza at kholani@assaf.org.za. There is no registration fee to attend the conference. Successful applicants will receive further information about the conference via email.

5. Call for Abstract

5.1. Abstract Format and Submission

Applicants must submit an abstract relevant to the conference theme and sub-themes. The abstract will form the basis for an oral, poster, or alternative/creative presentation at the conference.

Abstracts must:

- be written in English;
- not exceed 300 words;
- include a clear title;
- include the presenting author and affiliation details;
- include 3–5 keywords;

- where appropriate, the abstract may be structured using the following headings:
 - Introduction/Objectives
 - Methods
 - Results
 - Conclusions

5.2. Oral Presentations

All oral presentations will be conducted in English. Detailed instructions for oral presentations will be included in the abstract acceptance letter.

5.3. Poster Presentations

Accepted posters will be displayed at the conference venue. Detailed poster specifications and presentation requirements will be included in the abstract acceptance letter.

6. Alternative Presentation formats

Alternative presentation formats that stimulate dialogue and explore key issues through innovative and creative approaches are highly encouraged. These may include literary works (e.g. drama, poetry, storytelling and prose), performing arts (e.g. dance and music), and visual arts (e.g. film and photography). Interested applicants should clearly describe their proposed format in the online application form for consideration.

Note: All proposals must remain relevant to the conference themes while demonstrating innovative approaches to engagement.

7. General Conference Information

For any further information regarding the conference please contact:

Mr Kholani Mbhiza

Email: kholani@assaf.org.za

Closing date: 21 June 2026

Click here
to
apply