

Letters of Interest Submission



Contribution ID: 65

Type: **not specified**

Using Astronomy for Development in Africa

Using Astronomy for Development in Africa

Background:

In 2011 the International Astronomical Union (IAU), through a joint partnership with the South African National Research Foundation, and with strong support from the South African Department of Science and Innovation, established the global Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD), hosted at the South African Astronomical Observatory in Cape Town, South Africa. The OAD's vision is simply "Astronomy for a better world!" and its mission is: "To help further the use of astronomy as a tool for development by mobilizing the human and financial resources necessary in order to realise the field's scientific, technological and cultural benefits to society." During its first decade (2011 to 2021) the OAD granted € 961,903 to 181 projects around the world through its annual call for proposals, targeting audiences in more than 100 countries. It established 11 regional offices around the world, with 3 located in Africa (in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Zambia) and two with target countries in Africa (the Portuguese language office and the Arab World). The OAD also registered over 700 volunteers and formed 17 partnerships with organisations sharing in the OAD vision. In 2020, with the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the OAD issued an extraordinary call for proposals in addition to the annual call, and awarded € 40,000 to 43 projects using some aspect of astronomy to address the negative effects of the pandemic. More can be found on the OAD website: www.astro4dev.org. The purpose of this LOI is to ensure that as we grow the field of astronomy on the continent, we build on the experience of the OAD to ensure that developmental impacts are fully realised.

Potential areas of focus:

a. Flagship projects: The OAD coordinates global "Flagship projects" identified from its funded projects, regional offices and development trends globally. The African continent could benefit from carrying out some of the flagships. Such flagships in Africa should respond to a significant number of SDG indicators and there should be evidence of their impact through relevant monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment studies. The three global astronomy-for-development flagships identified by the OAD are currently (i) Astronomy for economic development (largely through astrotourism); (ii) Astronomy for Mental Health (and bringing global perspectives); and (iii) Astronomy knowledge and skills for development (applying data skills to development challenges).

b. Regions: A structure of regional offices across the continent is beneficial for rolling out flagship projects, as these offices help localise and implement specific activities. The already existing three OAD regional offices in Africa, as well as potential new regional coordinating centres, could be called upon to support these flagships and other initiatives.

c. Call for proposals: The OAD's annual call for proposals is a core activity which both supports activities on the ground and stimulates new ideas in using astronomy for development. Thus far, Africa has been the region where the most OAD projects have been funded through this call. New funding sources specifically for Africa could be secured for an expanded targeted call around "Physics/Science for Development". The OAD's resources can be used and adapted accordingly for this. These tools should also enable all projects to incorporate monitoring and evaluation principles, while taking into account lessons and resources from past projects, thus ensuring a strong positive feedback loop. Projects supported through this call could demonstrate significant contributions to SDG indicators.

d. Partnerships: In order to realise the impact of astronomy (or Physics) on development, it is essential to establish strong, functional partnerships with organisations across disciplines, especially those that have expertise in development. Establishing these interdisciplinary partnerships will be important both to successfully implement flagship projects and enhance the call for proposals. The OAD's Collaboration Gateway can be used for this purpose and the OAD can serve as a facilitator for interdisciplinary conversations. A specific goal can be to establish new partnerships with development-related organisations and development specialists at regional universities.

e. Fundraising: It will be essential to secure sufficient funding to realise the developmental benefits in Africa

from astronomy (and Physics). The OAD uses the skills from the IAU fundraiser and could contribute to possible fundraising activities for this strategy. The fundraising should include a suite of approaches to funders, from submitting specific proposals to international funding calls to lobbying specific governments on the African continent (both local and regional) to support the investment in science for development.

f. The 2024 IAU General Assembly and related vision for Astronomy in Africa: Following a bid led by South Africa, on behalf of the continent, the 2024 IAU General Assembly will be held on African soil for the first time in the IAU's 100-year history. The support for the bid was overwhelming, and the pro-Africa spirit that prevailed was significant and memorable. A shared document has been put together which attempts to capture that spirit and consolidate that support into a vision for 2024 that we can strive towards as a united astronomical community. This document and other information can be found on www.astronomy2024.org. The following is an extract from the Prologue of that vision document: *When the world descends onto African soil in 2024, what do we want them to experience? This is not simply an opportunity for astronomy, this is an opportunity to change the way the world sees Africa. When a continent so often looked down upon can lead the world in a field as technical as astronomy, then we change perceptions, we challenge preconceptions, we shake unconscious biases –we make the world think differently about the potential of all people in the world to contribute to the human endeavour. Africa also has a rich culture to share with the world and many stories to tell (both Astronomy and otherwise). 2024 is an opportunity like no other –it is up to us to maximise on that opportunity for the benefit of Africa and the world. We need to be “audacious” in our thinking and carry the continent forward to 2024 and beyond.*

Primary Category

Astrophysics & Cosmology

Secondary Category

Community Engagement

Subgroup categories

Astro&Cosmo—Astronomy for development

Did you / will you submit this LOI to another category?

NO

Additional Information

This could potentially be related to others

Primary author: GOVENDER, Kevin (IAU Office of Astronomy for Development)