

# The IAU Office of Astronomy for Development

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**Abstract.** The IAU Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD) †, established in March 2011 as part of the implementation of the IAU Strategic Plan, is currently located in South Africa and serves as a global coordinating centre for astronomy-for-development activities. In terms of structure the OAD is required to establish regional nodes (similar offices in different parts of the world which focus on a particular geographic or cultural region) and three task forces: (i) Astronomy for Universities and Research, (ii) Astronomy for Children and Schools, and (iii) Astronomy for the Public. This paper will describe the progress of the OAD towards the realisation of the vision ‘Astronomy for a better world’.

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## 1. Introduction

The OAD is hosted at the South African Astronomical Observatory in Cape Town. The activities of the OAD got underway in March 2011 with an official launch by the South African Minister of Science and Technology and the President of the IAU in April 2011. The first year of operation of the OAD was mainly occupied by appointing staff, setting up the office and online infrastructure, building the necessary networks, recruiting volunteers and promoting the existence of the OAD in various forums around the world. During this time the OAD also coordinated the establishment of its three Task Forces and began the process of setting up regional nodes globally.

The role of the OAD is fundamentally that of a strategic coordinating centre. In order to carry out its mission the OAD must fulfil several roles relating to this. Primarily the OAD was set up to implement the IAU Strategic Plan which provides the broad guidelines in terms of realizing developmental benefits from astronomy. The OAD, guided by this plan and a global view of development activities, should provide strategic advice where needed to individuals and organizations involved in similar activities. As such the OAD should be the first port of call for development activities using astronomy. It should also coordinate and facilitate global activities in line with its mission. Such efforts do not imply carrying out activities on the ground but rather sourcing partners or volunteers and providing them with the contacts, assistance and guidance necessary for them to implement a project. In terms of specific projects, the OAD should provide or assist in the acquiring of funding and infrastructure as required by its partners. There may also be specific developmental projects which will be managed and administered by the OAD.

## 2. Regional Nodes and Task Forces

In accordance with the ‘bottom-up’ strategy outlined in the strategic plan, an Announcement of Opportunity was issued in January 2012 for the establishment of Regional Nodes of the OAD (ROADs) and Language Expertise Centres for the OAD (LOADs). ROADs would be offices similar to the OAD established within host institutions and

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employing a full time coordinator, with a focus on activities in a specific geographic region. LOADs would have a similar structure but with a focus on a particular language or cultural region, which could sometimes stretch across the entire world. There was an excellent response with 31 Expressions of Interest and 14 full proposals received until July 2012. Evaluation of this first round of proposals was conducted by the EDOC. Currently two regional nodes have been established: one in China for the East Asia region and mainly Chinese language and culture (this would serve as both a ROAD and LOAD); and one (ROAD) in Thailand for the South East Asian region. Numerous negotiations are ongoing regarding the establishment of other nodes across the world.

Following the OAD Stakeholders Workshop in December 2011 (attended by 56 participants from 28 countries), three Task Forces have been established to lead the OAD's activities. These are TF1 (Universities and Research), TF2 (Children and Schools) and TF3 (Public Outreach). Task Forces are groups of international 'experts' in their fields who advise and assist the OAD in the implementation of the strategic plan. These are not necessarily IAU members but individuals who have been nominated and selected from a global science community. The Chairs, Vice Chairs and Management Teams of the TFs have been appointed by the EDOC and chosen to include a combination of veterans from the Commission 46 and 55 Organising Committees and 'new blood' from the many volunteers who have stepped forward thus far, as well as names received from an open call for nominations. In August 2012 the first open call for proposals was released with the IAU allocating funds towards projects relating to each of the Task Forces. The principle of the call was that each Task Force would evaluate proposals received and decide which were to be funded and which were to be put onto a wish list - the OAD would then continue to fundraise for those wish list projects.

### 3. Collaborations

The OAD has established several collaborations with partners sharing similar objectives. The Royal Astronomical Society in the UK provides a travel grant for UK-based experts to travel abroad on OAD activities. A similar agreement for Netherlands-based experts exists with the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. The International Science Programme of Uppsala University in Sweden has supported a pilot project on using astronomy tools to enhance university Physics teaching. The International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Italy launched a very close partnership with the OAD on a range of activities including associate positions, academic schools, building of networks, and individual grants. The Inter-university Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics in India has agreed to host young astronomers at their facility as well as evaluate new educational materials. The University of Central Lancashire has offered 12 astronomy distance learning scholarships for African countries. The OAD is grateful to its existing partners and welcomes more collaborations such as these.

### 4. Future Outlook

As the Task Forces, ROADs and LOADs become fully operational, the OAD will embark on a major fundraising campaign. The proposals received through the Task Force calls, together with the needs of the ROADs and LOADs, will inform this campaign. By the end of 2015, the OAD aims to have active regional nodes on all populated continents; active Task Forces with an annual call for proposals; secured funding for the OAD in the 2016 to 2020 period; a sustainable volunteer programme; and funds raised exceeding those put in by the IAU and South African government.