



# IAU OFFICE OF ASTRONOMY FOR DEVELOPMENT

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## **COVID-19 UPDATE:**

As we adapt to our new reality and new ways of working, the OAD wants to reaffirm commitment to its mission and solidarity with the community. You will find in this newsletter some information on our response to the pandemic. You can also read the [IAU statement](#) on this matter.

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## **1. OAD Calls for Proposals 2020**

Applications are currently being accepted for Stage 1 of the 2020 annual call for proposals. The OAD invites proposals for projects that use astronomy as a tool to address issues related to sustainable development. The call is open to anyone from anywhere in the world (regardless of background in astronomy). Deadline for Stage 1 applications is May 31, 2020.

With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in mind, we are also releasing an extraordinary call for proposals for projects or partnerships that use astronomy in any of its aspects (including skills, methodologies, tools, infrastructure, inspiration or even just networks of astronomers/enthusiasts) to help mitigate some of the negative effects of the pandemic. This is a fast-tracked call that will run in parallel to our regular, annual call. Deadline for applications is May 15 and the results will be announced two weeks later.

Astronomy, by no means, can solve these enormous challenges by itself but it can have a small role to play in the grand scheme of things. As these are complex issues with long term impacts, we recommend proposers consult or work with experts in those domains.

If you want to discuss an idea before submission, write to us at [projects@astro4dev.org](mailto:projects@astro4dev.org).

OAD annual call for proposals: [bit.ly/oad-annual-call](http://bit.ly/oad-annual-call)

OAD extraordinary call for COVID-19 proposals: [bit.ly/oad-covid-call](http://bit.ly/oad-covid-call)

## 2. Call to Action for the Astro Community #COVID-19

While it is hard to see the direct role of astronomy in resolving crises such as the current pandemic, we believe that the astro community possesses skills and experience which might be of benefit in tackling some of the effects of the pandemic. The IAU Offices invite the astro community to apply their skills by contributing to existing efforts (for example, joining one of the COVID-19 hackathons) or applying for a small grant (see #1 above). In doing so, we appeal to the community to collaborate with experts in the field and observe regulations of your local and national governments.

In this time of physical distancing and prolonged stays indoors, we are also gathering astronomy resources and fun activities you can do at home to keep you and any children at home occupied and entertained. If you plan to conduct webinars and other live activities, we welcome you to send us the information for further dissemination (write to us at [info\(at\)astro4dev.org](mailto:info@astro4dev.org)).

More information on the [Call to Action page](#).

## 3. New OAD Fellows

Welcome to our two new OAD Fellows:

Dr. Nikhita Madhanpall joined the team in January 2020, as the OAD-DARA Big Data Fellow. She will be developing and implementing data science and machine learning hackathons/workshops to enable data-intensive research skills development in South Africa and the African AVN-partner countries. She has a PhD in cosmology and extragalactic astronomy from the University of the Western Cape.

Dr. Marie Korsaga, an astronomer from Burkina Faso, is working to highlight the role of the global astronomy community in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and future global emergencies. She has a PhD in astrophysics from the University of Cape Town and Aix-Marseille University.



**Dr. Nikhita Madhanpall**



**Dr. Marie Korsaga**

## 4. Launch of the North American Regional Office

The North American Regional Office of Astronomy for Development was officially established on 29 January 2020 at a signing ceremony in Cape Town, South Africa. The event was attended by the IAU President, OAD team members, and representatives from Regional Offices. It marked the formation of the eleventh Regional Office of Astronomy for Development, to be operated by a consortium comprising the Adler Planetarium, Associated Universities Inc. (AUI), Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy (AURA), and Geneva Lake Astrophysics and STEAM (GLAS).

Prof. Ewine van Dishoeck, IAU President, remarked: "I am delighted that the North American Regional Office, with its wealth of expertise, is joining the IAU family. The IAU vision has always been for developing and developed countries to work jointly towards realising the goals of Astronomy for Development worldwide."

More information in the [IAU Press Announcement](#).



*Image: Members of the OAD Steering Committee, representatives of the North American Regional Office consortium, representatives from other Regional Offices, staff from the IAU Offices.*

## 5. OAD Volunteer Portal

The OAD has launched a new volunteer portal, which will host tasks posted by the OAD, its projects and regional offices, as well as the other IAU Offices. We welcome volunteers from all parts of the world and with differing backgrounds who want to contribute to the vision of "Astronomy for a better world". The portal was developed and is hosted by IUCAA, under the Data Driven Initiatives project funded by the NKN, India.

To access the portal and sign up as a volunteer, visit the [website](#).



## 6. Flagship 3: Knowledge and Skills for Development

The third Flagship project of the OAD has been launched in time for the 2020 call for proposals. This flagship focuses on the use of astronomical knowledge, and skills used in astronomy to tackle development challenges. This includes methods, techniques widely used in the field including data handling, data analysis, machine learning as well as the necessary compute facilities. Projects under the Flagship may be executed in the form of advanced educational programmes, hackathons, competitions or other original interventions that focus on knowledge transfer and/or applying these skills towards development problems.

Flagships are global projects which would be implemented on a much larger scale than those funded through the annual call for proposals. The Flagship themes identified are based on the experience and outcomes from previously funded projects, input from Regional Offices, as well as as partnerships, international trends etc.

More information on the Flagships on the [website](#).

## 7. Updates from the IAU Networks

### Regional Offices:

OAD has 11 Regional Offices which share the vision of the OAD but with a regional focus. "Regions" which they focus on could be geographical (neighbouring countries) or cultural (language or cultural similarities spread over a large geographic region). Normally, these regional offices carry out various activities to disseminate astronomy knowledge, build human capacity, and advance research in order to use astronomy for development. Due to physical distancing rules mandated by COVID-19, the offices have cancelled or postponed events and are busy moving activities online. Further information on the [website](#).

### IAU Office for Astronomy Outreach (OAO):

The OAO is coordinating several programs to support the community during this time.

- [Meet the IAU Astronomers](#): a virtual meetup with an IAU Astronomer for students, parents and the general public to learn/discuss astronomy, the importance of astronomy for society, and choosing astronomy as a career.
- [Online Astronomy@Home Awards](#): the awards will recognize the efforts of event organizers worldwide who conduct online astronomy events between 1 April and 31 July 2020.
- [IAU Outreach Visitor Program 2020 \(2nd Edition\)](#): to support the management of the current programs of the office. It will consist of 2 months of remote work followed by a visit to the OAO in Japan when safety measures permit.
- [IAU Global Outreach Event Calendar](#): IAU Global Outreach Events are international outreach activities supported by the IAU outreach office. Anyone can submit an event related to astronomy that aligns with the IAU Global Outreach initiatives.

For the latest on astronomy outreach, subscribe to the [IAU Astronomy Outreach Newsletter](#) published by the OAO. Further information on the [website](#).

### IAU Office of Astronomy for Education (OAE):

The OAE aims to build a network of National Astronomy Education Coordinators (NAEC) globally. Each NAEC team should consist of up to five experts in astronomy education. If possible, representatives from both primary and secondary education, as well as astronomy education research, should be included. More information is in the [call for applications](#).

### IAU Office for Young Astronomers (OYA):

The International School for Young Astronomers (ISYA) scheduled to be held in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico in June 2020 has been postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis. A second ISYA2020 is scheduled to be held in Cape Town, South Africa in Nov-Dec 2020. The application deadline has been extended to 17 July 2020. Visit the [website](#) for the latest information.

## 8. Events, Visitors, & Other News

- The OAD, in partnership with the Inter-University institute for Data Intensive Astronomy (IDIA), coordinated a hackathon at Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley, South Africa in March 2020. Further hackathons will be developed as part of the OAD-DARA Big Data Fellowship program.
- The OAD partnered with the International Science Council's Regional Office for Africa (ISC ROA) and co-hosted an interdisciplinary workshop on "Science for Development". It was attended by around 100 participants from across Africa and abroad, from a diverse range of fields including biology, astronomy, agriculture, energy, environment, computer science, geology, education, engineering, management, public health, economics, neuroscience, psychology and more. The workshop aimed to stimulate collaborations and lead to the development of science-for-development projects, which apply the tools and methods of science and technology to solve local, regional, and global challenges. Workshop summary
- The annual meeting of the OAD Steering Committee and the face to face meeting of Regional Offices was held in January 2020, right before the Science for Development workshop.
- A short course on 'Introduction to Development Economics for non social scientists' has been launched by the OAD, developed by Dr Chingozha.
- OAD published a booklet highlighting some of its funded projects which can serve as examples of science furthering global development.
- Asma Sahli joined the OAD as a volunteer towards the end of 2019. She worked on developing an astronomy camp project that could be implemented in Qatar, as well as assisting on various other OAD activities.
- Paras Loomba and Sonal Asgotraa from the Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE) visited the OAD in January 2020. OAD has partnered with GHE to implement a global astro-tourism project under Flagship 1 (Sustainable socio-economic development using astronomy facilities).
- OAD continues to engage with its various communities as much as possible: Dr Korsaga gave a talk on "The Necessity of Science Education for African Youth" (in French) at the Schiller Institute's online conference; Venugopal talked about "Community centric Astro-tourism" at the online SpaceUP Live conference.

*Background: Orion nebula by NASA, ESA, M. Robberto (Space Telescope Science Institute/ESA) and the Hubble Space Telescope Orion Treasury Project Team*



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