

The OAD Flagships Ecosystem: Harnessing Astronomy for Inclusive Development in Africa and beyond

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IAU-Office of Astronomy for Development
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Over 100 years of scientific excellence

IAU

International
Astronomical Union

To promote and safeguard the science of astronomy in all its aspects including research, communication, education and development through international cooperation



IAU Strategic Plan 2020-2030

GOAL 1 The IAU leads the worldwide **coordination of astronomy and the fostering of communication and dissemination** of astronomical knowledge among professional astronomers

GOAL 2 The IAU promotes the **inclusive advancement** of the field of astronomy in every country

GOAL 3 The IAU promotes the use of **astronomy as a tool for development** in every country

GOAL 4 The IAU **engages the public** in astronomy through access to astronomical information and communication of the science of astronomy

GOAL 5 The IAU stimulates the use of **astronomy for teaching** and education at school level





International Astronomical Union (IAU)
est. 1919, Paris



Office for Young Astronomers (OYA)
est. 1967, Oslo



Centre for the Protection of the Dark and Quiet Sky from Satellite Constellation Interferences (CPS)
est. 2022, Paris



Office of Astronomy for Education (OAE)
est. 2019, Heidelberg



Office for Astronomy Outreach (OAO)
est. 2012, Tokyo



Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD)
est. 2011, Cape Town



Vision and Mission

Vision:

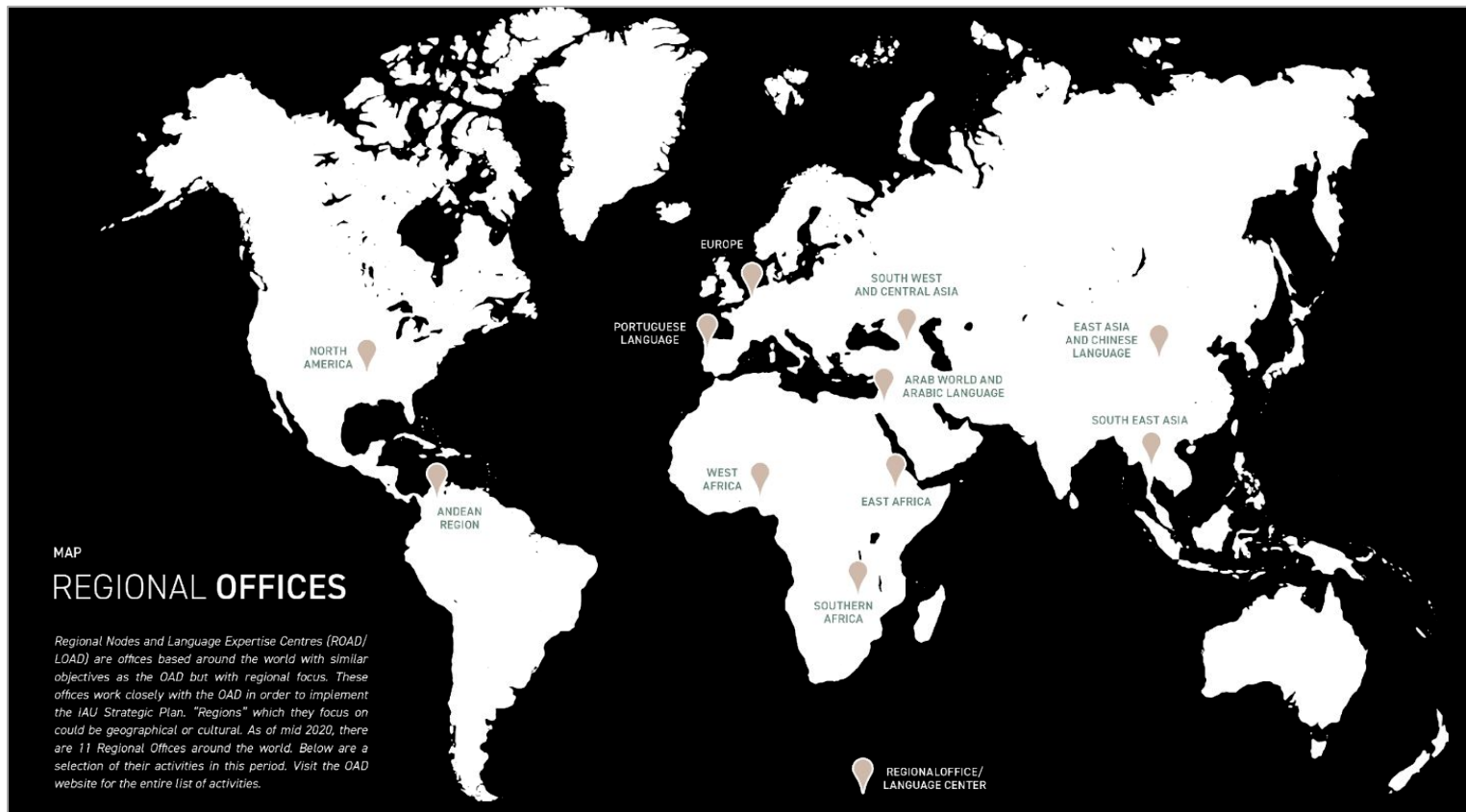
Astronomy for a better world!

Mission:

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.



Global Reach



IAU-OAD Focus

**Annual Call for
Proposals**

**Theme 1:
Socio-economic
Development
through
Astronomy**

**Theme 2:
Science
Diplomacy
through
Astronomy**

**Theme 3:
Astronomy Skills
for Development**

**Flagship
Projects**



Astrotourism

**Astronomy for
Mental Health**

**Astroskills for
Development**

Flagship Projects

Flagship 1: Astrotourism



Stimulating local economies
through astronomy

Flagship 2: Astronomy 4 Mental Health



Using Astronomy for Mental
Well-being

Flagship 3: Astronomy 4 Skills

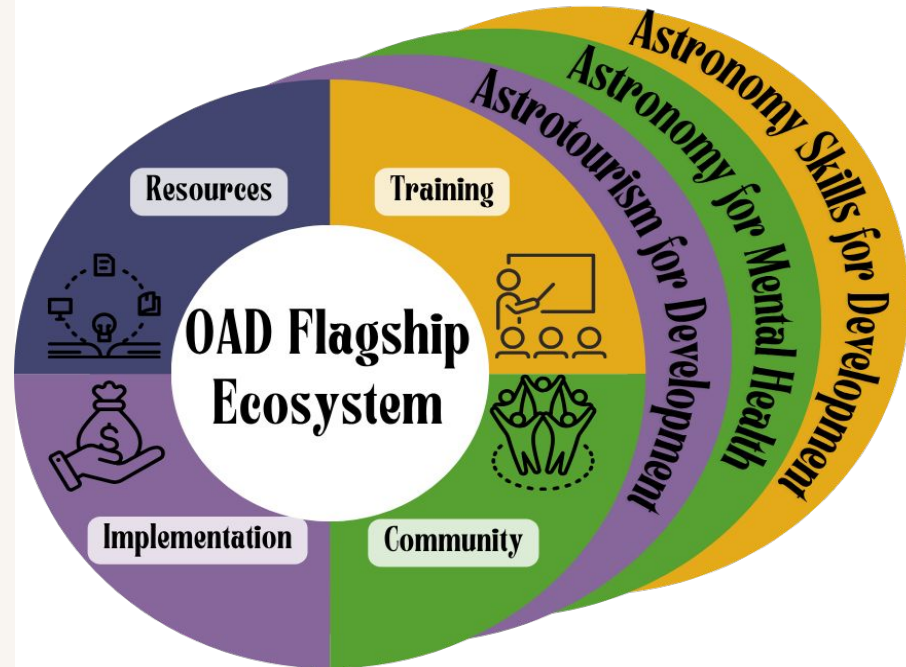


Skills development / leveraging
astronomy-related expertise to
address global development
challenges

Flagship Ecosystem

The OAD's flagship work is organised around four key areas: Resources, Training, Implementation, and Community.

Together, these pillars form part of a dynamic ecosystem that provides the tools, knowledge, and networks necessary to transform astronomy into a driver of positive change for individuals and communities across the globe



Flagship Ecosystem - Resources


Resources: Open-access toolkits, guidelines, case studies, and research.

- Open access to these resources ensures that communities, practitioners, and decision-makers worldwide have the necessary tools to build impactful, inclusive, and sustainable initiatives.




Flagship Ecosystem - Training

- Capacity building is central to the flagship projects, recognising that sustainable growth requires equipping individuals, communities, and institutions with the necessary knowledge and skills.
- Our primary training tool is a free online course introducing flagship fundamentals and providing practical guidance for initiative design and implementation. This is supplemented by in-person training, often co-developed and tailored to specific needs, delivered in collaboration with partners and regional offices. These sessions combine theoretical instruction with experiential learning.
- Training is further complemented by mentorship and peer-learning within the Community of Practice, allowing participants to continually develop expertise and access ongoing support.

Course
Astrotourism for Development 

You're on this course ✓




Course description | Course content | Course reviews

Welcome to the IAU Office of Astronomy for Development online course on Astrotourism. This course is designed for individuals/business who wish to expand their knowledge of the night sky. The course provides a balance of foundational astronomy, cultural storytelling, sustainable practices, and hands-on guiding skills. No prior scientific background is needed. By the end of this course, guides/individuals will be able to interpret celestial phenomena, explain astronomical concepts in simple terms, and organise/facilitate engaging stargazing experiences.

Course
Astronomy Skills for Development

You're on this course ✓




Course description | Course content | Course reviews

Welcome to the IAU Office of Astronomy for Development (IAU OAD) online course on Astronomy Skills for Development. The guidelines and resources in this course are created to aid the planning of a data science skills exposure hackathon. These guidelines are the result of the experience gained and lessons learned from running hackathon events since 2020 as part of the hackathon programme initiative of the IAU OAD under the 'Knowledge and Skills from Astronomy' theme in collaboration with the inter-university Institute for Data Intensive Astronomy (IDIA) and Development in Africa with Radio Astronomy - DATA's Big Data, who are all partners of the Hack4dev project. Other hackathon events may take different formats, this course aims to simply provide guidelines when you do adapted astronomy.

Course
**IAU Office of Astronomy for Development
Astronomy for Mental Health**

You're on this course ✓



Course description | Course content | Course reviews

This course equips facilitators, educators, and outreach professionals to use astronomy as a tool for personal exploration, reflection, and well-being in non-clinical settings. Over five modules, participants will explore how astronomy fosters awe, perspective, mindfulness, and connectedness; gain a grounding in mental health concepts; apply safeguarding strategies; and design, implement, and evaluate inclusive activities. The course offers evidence-informed methods, ACT micro skills, and practical resources such as templates, blueprints, and evaluation guides to support the safe and confident delivery of astronomy for well-being programs.

Flagship Ecosystem - Implementation

Implementation: Proposal planning and support, seed grants, and Monitoring and Evaluation support.



Projects

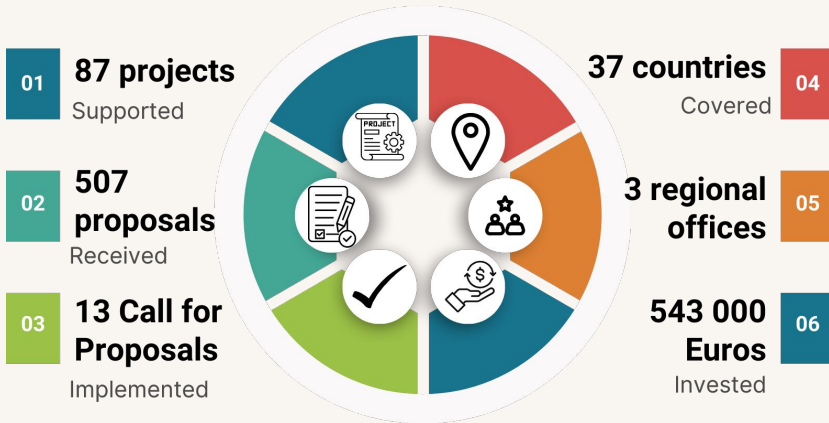
Annual Call for Proposals

Every year, the OAD conducts a Call for Proposals, in which individuals and organisations anywhere in the world are invited to propose projects that use astronomy to address a problem or challenge related to development.



Projects

African Footprint



Flagship Ecosystem - Community

Community: Community of Practice hosted on Discord

- Knowledge Sharing
- Cross-sector Collaboration
- Professional Growth
- Community Building
- Peer learning



How does AfAS fit in?

7. Encouraging the use of astronomy for socio-economic development

8. Strengthening the teaching of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in schools and with the public through the use of astronomy and related fields

17. Identifying and preserving indigenous astronomical knowledge

19. Inspiring and retaining underrepresented groups, including women, to study astronomy.



Astrotourism

Travel segment that focuses on celestial events, dark sky destinations, and sky-related activities.

Mission:

Leverage astronomy and tourism to drive economic growth, social inclusion, and cultural preservation.



Photo credit: Dr Matipon Tangmatitham

Astrotourism

Resources

English



Spanish



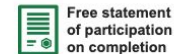
Persian



Training

Course

Astrotourism for Development



You're on this course ✓

Astrotourism for a Better World



Course description

Course content

Course reviews

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Astrotourism

2026 OAD Funded Astrotourism Projects

- Starlight Bridges: Community Astrotourism through the ARTEMIS Space Observatory - **Greece**
- Astro Tourism for Development: Storytelling, Science, and Socio-Economic Growth in **South Africa**
- Starry Safaris: Astrotourism for Development Project in **Tanzania**

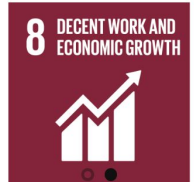
OAD PROJECTS

Astro Tourism for Development: Storytelling, Science, and Socio-Economic Growth in South Africa

South Africa is internationally recognised for its cutting-edge astronomical facilities – including the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), the MeerKAT array, and the Southern African Large Telescope (SALT). Yet the communities nearest these sites, particularly in the Karoo and Northern Cape, remain largely excluded from the opportunities such infrastructure could enable. These regions face high youth unemployment, limited access to STEM education, and minimal participation in tourism-driven economic activity.

The challenge is twofold: to bridge the gap between world-class astronomy and under-resourced rural communities, and to ensure the benefits of astronomy – educational, economic, and cultural – are more equitably distributed. Additionally, there is an urgent need to connect indigenous sky knowledge, such as San star lore, with modern astronomy to create more inclusive narratives that resonate with diverse South African audiences.

AstroDevSA proposes a development-focused solution: to harness the potential of astro-tourism by blending science, storytelling, and socioeconomic upliftment. Using creative media, community partnerships, and tourism planning, the project will deliver tangible outcomes in education, local enterprise, and public



Location

South Africa

Year

2026

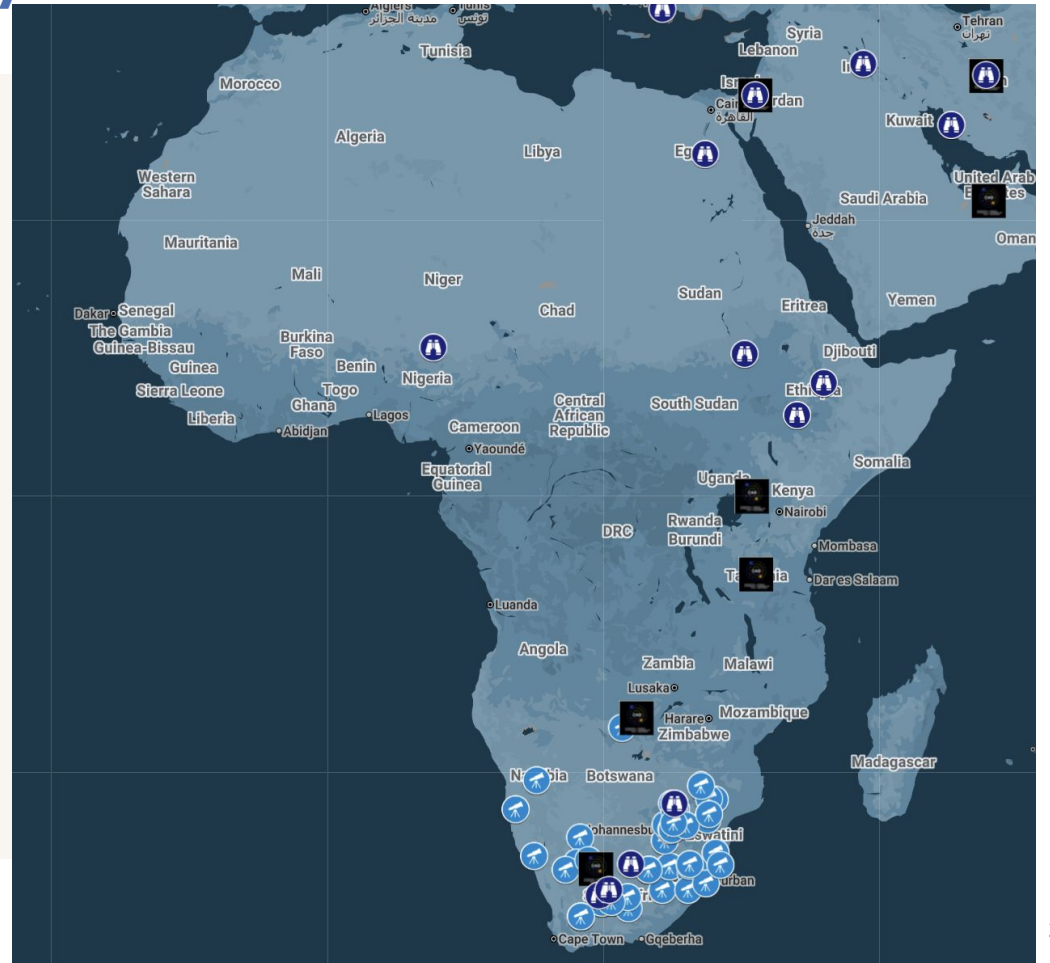
Tags

astrotourism

How does the AfAS community fit in?

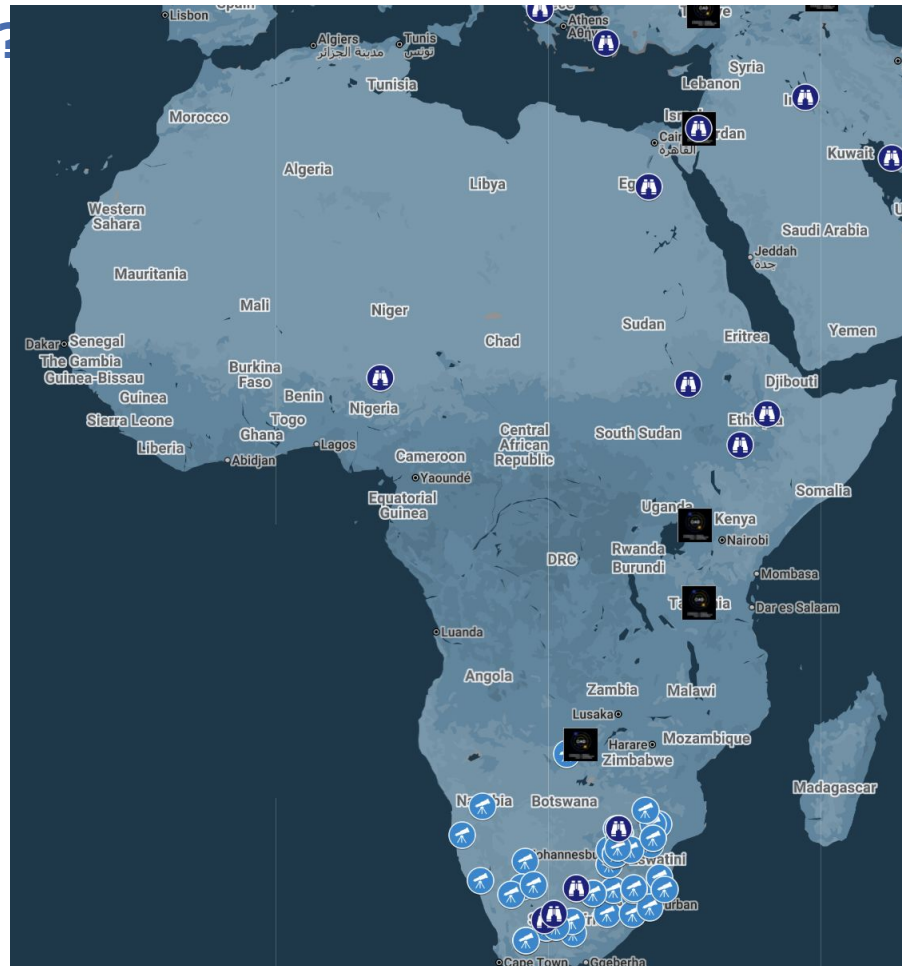
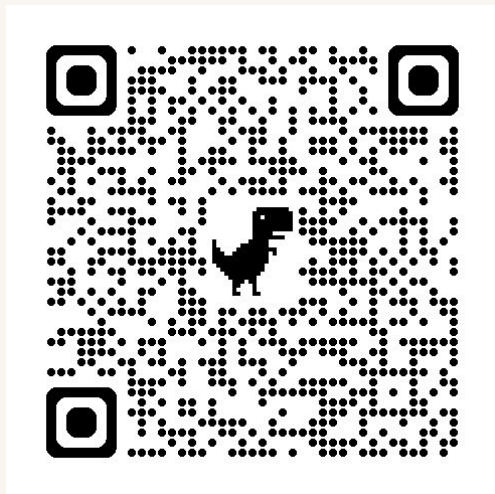
Astrotourism Initiatives Around the World

- We are working to collect data about astrotourism projects and initiatives around the world.



How does the AfAS community fit in?

Include your project to the Astrotourism Initiatives Around the World



Astronomy for Mental Health

Problem:

- Access to mental healthcare is severely limited
- Stigma is prevalent
- Resources are scarce



Astronomy for Mental Health

- By leveraging the inspirational power of astronomy and its ability to foster awe, perspective, and connection, we develop novel approaches that complement traditional mental health interventions and expand access to support worldwide.
- Using cost-effective and culturally relevant astronomy activities, the project seeks to create settings for self-exploration and reflection.
- Partnership with Stellenbosch University



Astronomy for Mental Health

Weekend Camps



How Stargazing is Shaping Mental Health Research

Overnight Camps

2025, ASTRONOMY FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Looking Up, Slowing Down: Astronomy for Mental Well-being

POSTED ON MAY 7, 2025 BY RAM VENUGOPAL



Looking Up, Slowing Down: How Stargazing and Nature Support Mental Well-being by IAU Office of Astronomy for Development IAU OAD

CONTINUE READING →

Astronomy for Mental Health

Resources

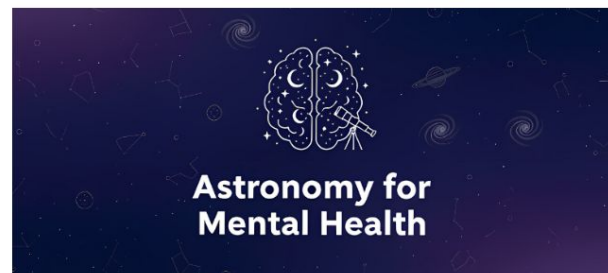


Training

Course

IAU Office of Astronomy for Development Astronomy for Mental Health

You're on this course ✓



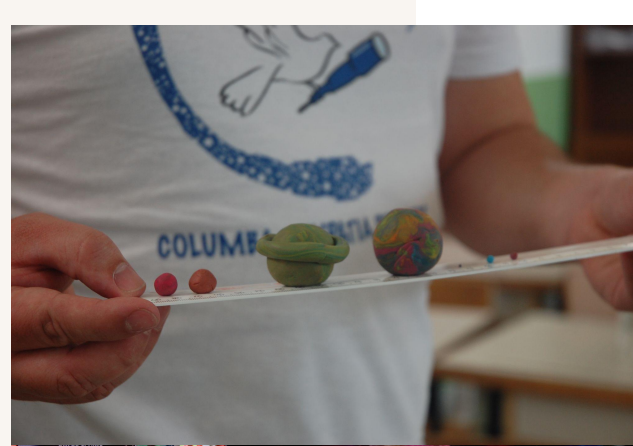
Course description

Course content

Course reviews

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Astronomy for Mental Health/Celebrating our common humanity



Astronomy for Mental Health

2026 OAD Funded Astronomy for Mental Health Projects

- Stars Offering HOpe (SOHO): Using Astronomy to Support Mental Well-being in Uganda's Refugee Camps



In Summary

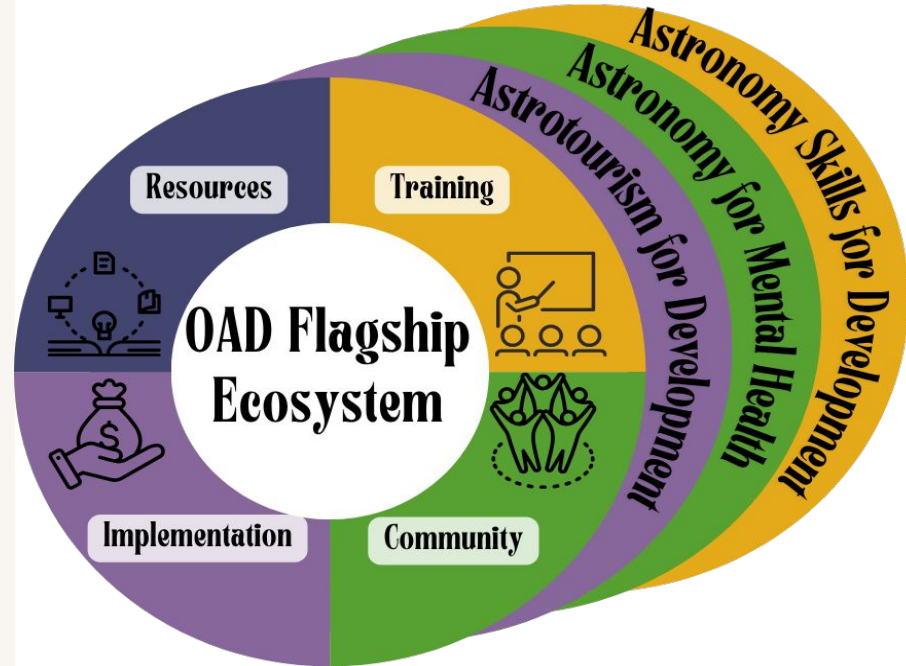
The OAD has a flagship ecosystem with 4 key pillars.

Resources: Open-access toolkits, guidelines, case studies, and research.

Training: Free online courses and tailored in-person sessions.

Implementation: Proposal planning and support, seed grants, and Monitoring and Evaluation support.

Community: Community of Practice hosted on Discord: cross-sector collaboration and peer learning.



Conclusion



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Join our community:

<https://discord.gg/QTeSbEteCM>



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