



11th meeting of the BRICS Astronomy Working Group

13 to 17 October 2025

Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais (INPE)
São José dos Campos, São Paulo, Brasil

BRICS Astronomy and the IAU Office of Astronomy for Development: collaborations to optimise societal impact

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Abstract

The International Astronomical Union established the Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD) in South Africa in partnership with the South African National Research Foundation and the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation. The OAD coordinates 11 regional and language offices around the world with some overlapping with BRICS countries. To date the OAD has funded and coordinated 236 projects in 5 continents, including in BRICS countries. These projects all use astronomy to positively impact society, and have together reached more than 2 million people across 112 countries. Three flagship projects that have emerged from these are (i) astronomy for socioeconomic development through tourism; (ii) astronomy for mental health; and (iii) astronomy data skills for development through hackathons. There is natural synergy between the work of the OAD and that of the BRICS Astronomy societal impact team, and there have already been close collaborations around the third flagship mentioned above regarding hackathons. The teams are also physically located in the same building in Cape Town and the OAD provides management and administrative support to the BRICS Astronomy team. This presentation will reflect on current and potential collaborations that will enhance the output of both the OAD and BRICS Astronomy in terms of societal impact arising from astronomy.