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IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Hands-on Space Education and Outreach (8)

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SPACE SCIENCE AND ASTRONOMY EDUCATION OUTREACH EFFORT IN AFRICA: THE AFRICAN ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY (AFAS) PERSPECTIVE USING THE HANDS ON APPROACH

Abstract

The paper highlights the journey of the African Astronomical Society (AfAS) in propagating Space Science and Astronomy across Africa. As the Public Relations and Education Officer of the newly constituted African Astronomical Society (AfAS), I have been involved in the renewed efforts of taking Astronomy to the grassroots, to reach the millions of un-reached and under-served communities across Africa in the past one year. With the widespread unawareness of Space Science among millions of African population, it has become imperative for AfAS to take a proactive approach towards a radical campaign to create awareness, harnessing the efforts of the many Amateur Astronomy groups across the continent. Africa with under 20 population making up about 25 percent of the entire population, and with millions of kids out of the conventional school system, Astronomy is being used as a tool to engage these categories of young people, using hands on activities to serve as a means of arousing their interests and in the process also encouraging a return back to school for those interested in going back to school. With telescopes for star gazing at outreach events, young people are easily excited and this is helping AfAS shape the career paths of the young ones in her effort in raising the next generation of Astronomers and Space Scientists in Africa. There has been an urgent need for a rigorous and deliberate effort to "catch them young". Popularizing Space Science and using Astronomy as a tool to promote Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) is one way to create awareness and also increase participation of young people in STEAM. Most of the target population for these outreach activities are school children, out of school children and most recently children who have been displaced by insurgency activities living in Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, especially in Nigeria. The need to see that STEAM becomes a popular concept among young African kids is the reason behind this renewed drive for achieving a widespread reach by the African Astronomical Society (AfAS). Many locally sourced materials are being used to carry out the various hands on activities during these Space Education outreaches. These are mostly fabricated materials used especially in rural and poor communities. This paper also highlights the challenges of carrying out Astronomy and Space Science outreaches across Africa and especially to the rural and remote parts of Africa.