

Report on the Inauguration of the
Astronomical Society of West Africa
(Nigeria Chapter)

In the bid to foster the promotion and advancement of the study of astronomy across the west coast of Africa, the Astronomical Society of West Africa (ASWA) Nigerian Chapter was inaugurated on the 29th of Nov. 2005 at the Centre for Basic Space Science (CBSS) University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). This event saw the gathering of stakeholders, researchers, Academics and individuals interested in the study of astronomy in the country. The meeting which was well attended attempted to address means of enhancing interest in astronomy. Participants also had an opportunity to speak on their current research interests.

Prof. P. N. Okeke, who serves as the present coordinator of the Astronomical Society of West Africa, (ASWA) gave the Inaugural lecture. He highlighted the history of astronomy in Nigeria, starting from the modest introduction of astronomy by Prof. Gaustard of the Mathematics Dept. (UNN), through the overwhelming contributions of Prof. S.E. Okoye, and the present advances made by him (Prof. P. N. Okeke) in taking the challenges of astronomy development to the government of Nigeria.

According to the coordinator, not less than 10 Universities in Nigeria are offering astronomy programmes at the undergraduate level. He expressed happiness over the Federal Government's initial financial commitment, even though small, to the South

African Large Telescope (SALT) initiative. Two scientists will be going to South Africa to train on the use of the SALT for astronomy research. In addition to this, the Centre for Basic Space Science (CBSS), under the National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA), has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan (NAOJ) and the South African Astronomical Observatory, (SAAO). The CBSS has established a Journal of Space Research (NJSR) and equally acquired a 25cm and a smaller 10cm Meade telescopes for popularization and training programmes in Astronomy. Prof. Okeke charged the astronomers present at the meeting to make themselves available to the various facilities at the Centre, and strive to improve the quality of their research.

Several other notable speakers addressed the participants on their present research interests. They include Prof. Chidi Akujor of the Federal University of Technology Owerri, Prof. A.A. Ubachukwu (UNN), Dr. (Mrs.) Ngwo of Abia State University and Dr. Johnson Urama (UNN).

The symposium closed with a communiqué highlighting the need for Nigeria to intensify its resolve to build a strong Astronomy culture and improve funding for its activities. In addition, the symposium expressed need to mobilize resources and support for the success of the 2006 total solar eclipse. The next meeting was scheduled for February 2006.

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