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PROF. P.N. OKEKE, FAS AND NASRDA CENTRE FOR BASIC SPACE SCIENCE, NIGERIA

The National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA), Abuja Nigeria, was established in 2001 and one of its activity centres is Centre for Basic Space Science (CBSS). This name was coined after the UN initiatives of 1991. Prof. P.N. Okeke is the first and still the current Director of the Centre.

The mandate of the Centre includes: conducting research to expand the frontiers of knowledge in Astronomy and Atmospheric Sciences, with the primary objectives of development of skills and knowledge of researchers. This assignment has to be done in collaboration with both national and advanced international organization.

The Centre is located temporarily in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, but is currently developing its permanent site about 10 kilometers outside Nsukka town in a beautiful valley free from noise and interferences.

Today, CBSS is collaborating with relevant Nigerian universities, research institutes, National Astronomical Observatory, Japan, National institute for optics and Astronomical Science China, Urunqi Observatory China, South African Astronomical Observatory, Cape Town, HartRAO Observatory South Africa, and University of Delaware, USA, etc. CBSS participated actively in the 2005 – 2009 IHY projects including the hosting of the International School IHY for all African countries. The Centre has also been billed to host the UN/NASA/JAXA/ESA/NSRDA/ISWI workshop in October, 2011.

Other achievements recorded by the Centre include:

- (i) The construction of one of the largest Radio Telescopes in Africa – a 25 metre dish which is currently being constructed in collaboration with China and will be installed in Nigeria by 2012.
- (ii) The installation of a wireless network of 20 automatic weather stations spanning the entire country for monitoring Real Time Climatic and Environmental Hazards. It is known as NECOP, Nigerian Environmental and Climatic Observing Programme.
- (iii) The installation of systems for studying radio propagation in the troposphere with the aim of producing an accurate characterization curves for Nigeria.

- (iv) Participating in all the IHY projects through installation and use of magnetometers SID, GPS, Aerosols and Pollution research, study of near earth objects.
- (v) CBSS received prize award for her outstanding performance in IYA 2009 100 days of Astronomy.
- (vi) CBSS is responsible in Nigeria for publishing primarily all the original results findings by researchers in Space Science and Technology in the country through the Journal known as Nigerian Journal of Space Research. Staff members of the Centre have published extensively both in other international Journals of Space Science as well as Nigerian Journal of Space Research.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR OF CBSS: PROF. P.N. OKEKE, FAS, FRAS

Prof. P.N. Okeke has two major visions/missions which he pursued relentlessly over the past 40 years: the first of this mission is to participate actively in the development of Basic Space Science not only in Nigeria but Africa in general. The following appointments buttress this fact. He served as an external board member of NFR, South Africa for Astronomy from 1996 – 2000; during this period he encouraged the blacks to participate in Astronomy programmes.

Prof. Okeke and late Bob Stobie were instrumental for the planning and sitting of SALT in Southland, and trained a number of PhDs using facilities in South Africa. He is currently serving as the Director of NASRDA Centre for Basic Space Science (Astronomy and Atmospheric Sciences) as well as a member of technical Advisory Board of NASRDA. Prof. Okeke was given a letter of commendation by United Nations during one of UN's meetings in Tokyo 2007, for his tremendous role in the development of Astronomy in Africa and he is still a single point contact for Astronomy in Nigeria.

Apart from the above, Prof. Okeke works extremely hard to make the study of Physics and Astronomy easy and interesting in West Africa. He has written over fifteen textbooks in Physics and Astronomy at both tertiary and higher schools. These books are today, the most popular books in Nigeria and some parts of West Africa.

Professor Okeke has published extensively in various areas of Space Science and his final ambition is to complete the construction of a 25m Radio Telescope which he intends to operate with over twenty former PhD students whom he produced in collaboration with various research groups in the world.