OWSD-Elsevier Foundation Awards for Early-Career Women Scientists in the Developing World

Primary outcome
Increase the number and influence of women in science in the developing world. The premise is simple: the more diverse the pool of scientists, the more robust the science. Women scientists often make life-changing contributions to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), identifying problems and finding solutions that others have not considered.

Overview
Women scientists in developing countries often experience isolation, lack of role models and visibility. For the past ten years, the Organization for Women in Science for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) has collaborated with the Elsevier Foundation to address these issues through an awards and recognition program for talented early career women scientists from Africa, the Arab region, Asia and the Pacific region and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Each winner receives a cash prize of USD 5,000, and is sponsored to attend the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), held each year in February. The winners are presented with their awards at a special AAAS networking ceremony, and have the opportunity to attend workshops and sessions, meet experts in their fields, visit local laboratories and institutions, and attend a celebratory networking dinner organized by the Elsevier Foundation.

In 2021, the awards were re-focused to align more closely with the United Nations SDGs. The awards’ annual focus was shifted from specific scientific disciplines to broader SDG topics and research areas. The 2022-2026 awards cycle is focused on: 2022: Climate action; 2023: Water, sanitation and hygiene; 2024: Food Security, agricultural productivity and sustainable food production; 2025: Inclusive Health; 2026: Sustainable, affordable and reliable energy.

Future plans
- Integrate the winners into the broader OWSD network of 6000+ members as mentors and advisors to support OWSD national chapter members, PhD and Early Career Fellows.
- Host two Award ceremonies during the virtual International Conference on Gender Action and Climate Change (hosted by OWSD and the Istanbul Aydin University, March 2022) and the EuroScience Open Forum in the Netherlands (July 2022).

Level of evidence
1. Quasi-experimental
2. Pre-post or cross-sectional
3. Point-in-time study
4. Performance metrics/stats
5. Anecdotal evidence

Spotlight on: 2022 winners — Climate Action
- Abeer Ahmed Qaed Ahmed, Yemen, in Microbiology and Environmental Science. For her work on solutions to pressing problems such as carbon emissions, drug-resistant pathogens and fossil fuel dependence.
- Ashani Savinda Ranathunga, Sri Lanka, in Geotechnical Engineering. For her work turning industrial & agricultural waste into soil for ground improvement & mine rehabilitation.
- Gawsia Wahidunnnessa Chowdhury, Bangladesh, in Aquatic Ecology. For her work on conservation of aquatic ecosystems and threatened species.
- Heyddy Calderon, Nicaragua, in Hydrology. For her work to provide secure and sustainable water sources for vulnerable populations.
- Flor de Mayo Gonzáles Miranda, Guatemala, in Environmental Engineering. For her work engineering better landslide prevention for vulnerable areas.
- Myriam Mujawamariya, Rwanda, in Tropical forest ecology and Ecosystem Health. For her research on the responses of native tree species in Rwanda to climate change.

Winners
- Ashani Savinda Ranathunga
- Gawsia Wahidunnnessa Chowdhury
- Heyddy Calderon
- Gawsia Wahidunnnessa Chowdhury
- Myriam Mujawamariya
- Abeer Ahmed Qaed Ahmed

Main photo: Dr. Myriam Mujawamariya explaining photosynthesis measurements to students. Below: Ashani Ranathunga in her lab. Both are part of the 2022 Award winners cohort.