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

Location: Low-income countries

Target group: Women scientists who have received their PhDs within the previous 10 years.

Budget: $60,000 a year (2011, 2013-2018), $80,000 a year (2019-2021).

Related Goals

Goals

- Recognize the achievements of outstanding women scientists in developing countries, increasing their visibility and helping to advance their careers.
- Inspire and support future generations of women scientists, who often struggle in a research environment that is often indifferent and even hostile to their needs and expertise.

Milestones

- Since 2013, 51 talented women scientists from 24 countries have won the awards. In 2022, 6 researchers were awarded as, one reviewer noted: "This year's selection was challenging because there were many outstanding candidates. In the end, the reviewers agreed that there was a tie between two candidates for the fifth award and that it should be shared between both of them."
- In February 2022, the winners presented their experience during a panel event and discussion hosted online at the AAAS meeting, moderated by the Elsevier Foundation Director.
- Since 2019, many winners received an additional travel grant to continue broadening their networks and amplifying the impact of the award by attending conferences and workshops.
- Since 2014, a supplementary cash award of $2,500 per winner has been made by private donors, Dr. Gil Ommen, past AAAS President, and his partner, Martha Darling, to complement the funding from the Elsevier Foundation.
- The Selection Committee meeting for the 2022 Climate Action Awards was held online, which provided an opportunity to form a more diverse committee. Out of a total 26 reviewers, 25 were from developing countries and 16 were closely linked to OWSD including: past OWSD-Elsevier Foundation winners, Early Career alumnae and OWSD Executive Board members. Additionally, 2 Elsevier Climate Advisory Board Members also joined the Selection Committee to help identify the most impressive candidates.

Challenges

- In 2021, the fund for travel grants to awardees could not be used and were reserved to support the awardees in 2022.

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 Aydın University, March 2022) and the EuroScience Open Forum in the Netherlands (July 2022).

Level of evidence

1. Quasi-experimental
2. Pre-post ot 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 Wahidunnessa 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 Ecophysiology. For her research on the responses of native tree species in Rwanda to climate change.

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.

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 (OWSD) 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 and the environment (SDG13, 14, 15) 2023: Food Security, agricultural productivity and sustainable food production (SDG2), 2024: Water, sanitation and hygiene (SDG6), 2025: Inclusive Health (SDG3), 2026: Sustainable, affordable and reliable energy (SDG7).