



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

Location: Low- and middle-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), \$100,000 a year (2022-2024).



Primary outcome

The more diverse the pool of scientists, the more robust the science. Women scientists from the global South 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 a unique awards and recognition program for early career women scientists from the global South. Since 2013, more than **60** researchers from over **35** countries have won the awards. Each winner receives a cash prize and is sponsored to attend a prominent scientific conference in their field where they receive their awards at a special ceremony, attend workshops and sessions, meet experts, visit local laboratories and institutions, and attend a celebratory networking event.

In 2021, OWSD and the Elsevier Foundation decided to re-focus the awards 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 welcoming a range of interdisciplinary approaches. The 2022 awards focused on Climate Action, the 2023 awards on Food Security, and the 2024 ones on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene.

Goals

- Recognize the achievements of outstanding women scientists in the global South, 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.

Activities and milestones

- Due to a lack of relevant conferences related to food security in 2023, the 2023 award winners were invited to participate in Elsevier's April 2024 Global Food Security Conference in Leuven, Belgium. The Elsevier Foundation team has worked closely with the conference organizers to ensure the winners' active participation in the event as speakers, moderators, presenters, and more.
- Many winners received additional travel grants through the Elsevier Foundation partnership to continue broadening their networks at conferences and workshops. For example, 2019 winner Uduak Okomo was sponsored to attend the Africa Health Agenda International Conference in March 2023 in Kigali, Rwanda. The 2023 Latin American winners Carla Fabiana Crespo Melgar and Gabriela Montenegro-Bethancourt, and 2016 winner Dr. Magaly Blas, participated in a panel on media, gender and SDG research during the World Conference of Science Journalists in March 2023, co-organized by Elsevier and SciDev. In May 2023, the 2023 Asian winners, Dr Munkhjarga Tserendorj from Mongolia and Professor Renuka Attanayake from Sri Lanka together with 2022 winner, Gawsia Wahidunnessa Chowdhury from Bangladesh, were featured as speakers in the EcoSystem Summit for Leadership in STEM in Singapore.
- The majority of the awards' Selection Committee are from the global South. The Committee includes past OWSD-Elsevier Foundation winners, experts in the SDG field, early career alumnae and OWSD Executive Board members.

Sustainability and future plans

- The 2024 winners will attend the International Water Week conference in Singapore in June 2024 as well as the Elsevier Foundation-COACH Water First! Workshop, which will take place immediately after the conference focusing on success strategies for women in water research and policy. Additionally, the winners from the Asian Region have been invited to join the Asian Scientist-Elsevier Foundation Summit for Leadership in STEM as speakers following the Water First! Workshop.

Spotlight on the [2024 winners](#) — Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

The research conducted by the 2024 award winners explores pioneering ways of tackling the water quality challenge, from using hydrological modelling to plant virology and ranging from socioecological systems to microbiology. The prize also acknowledges the scientists' commitment to leadership, mentoring and engagement within their communities, including the use of innovative technologies in their research.

- **Augustina Clara Alexander**, University of Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania: water supply and treatment, hydrological modelling, climate change. (*collage, third from left*)
- **Tasrina Rabia Choudhury**, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, Bangladesh: environmental restoration, water quality improvement. (*collage, second from left*)
- **Shirani Manel Kumari Widana Gamage**, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka: applied microbiology, plant virology, bioinformatics. (*collage, fourth from left*)
- **Lidia Antonella Rivera Peñalva**, Coral Reef Alliance, Honduras: marine biology, fisheries, socioecological systems. (*main photo*)
- **Zubeda Ukundimana**, Kampala University, Uganda: wastewater treatment, sanitation and hygiene. (*collage, first from left*)