



FIVE WOMEN NAMED ELSEVIER WINNERS

Early-career life scientists from Indonesia, Nepal, Peru, Uganda and Yemen were honoured with the 2016 Elsevier Foundation awards – supported by OWSD and TWAS – for work in health and nutrition.

 by Sean Treacy

Five researchers have been named winners of the 2016 Elsevier Foundation Awards for Early Career Women Scientists in the Developing World, in recognition of research that has strong potential health and economic benefits.

The winning scholars from Indonesia, Nepal, Peru, Uganda and Yemen were honoured for their accomplishments in nutrition, psychiatry, biotechnology, women's health, bioenvironmental sciences and epidemiology. They were also celebrated for mentoring young women scientists who are pursuing careers in agriculture, biology and medicine in their respective countries.

The Elsevier Foundation awards are given in partnership with the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) and TWAS. The women received their awards on 13 February at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

The 2016 winners are:

- **Etheldreda Nakimuli-Mpungu**, of Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, for her work using psychotherapy to treat depression and alcoholism in Ugandans with HIV. Depression is a serious problem for HIV patients throughout Sub-Saharan Africa,

making it more likely that those patients will stop taking their HIV-antiretroviral medications. Nakimuli-Mpungu is working with service providers to integrate depression screening with HIV-treatment, as well as to include local communities in discussions of depression to help destigmatize the illness.

- **Sri Fatmawati**, of Kampus ITS in Sukolilo, Indonesia, for her work analysing the medical and pharmaceutical potential of plant and fungi extracts normally used in herbal medicine. Fatmawati has also received the prestigious International L'Oréal-UNESCO for Women in Science Fellowship for research analysing substances from sponges that may lead to treatments for malaria, cancer and Alzheimer's disease.
- **Sushila Maharjan**, of the Research Institute for Bioscience and Biotechnology (RIBB) in Nepal, for her work using soil microbes to develop medically useful chemicals. Microbes create a great number of the materials used in medicine, including antibiotics. Maharjan is currently researching bacterial strains from the high-altitude regions of Nepal to identify substances useful for development of new antibiotics, as well as other medically useful compounds.



▲ The winners of the 2016 Elsevier Award, from left: Sri Fatmawati of Indonesia, Etheldreda Nakimuli-Mpungu of Uganda, Ghanya Al-Naqeb of Yemen, Magaly Blas of Peru, and Sushila Maharjan of Nepal. [Photo: Elsevier Foundation]



- **Magaly Blas**, of Cayetano Heredia Peruvian University in Peru, for her work using information and communication technology to solve health problems, particularly sexually transmitted diseases in urban and rural Peru. Blas also leads the Mama River Programme, training community members to use smartphones to collect basic information from pregnant women and forward this information to a medical ship to schedule visits.
- **Ghanya Al-Naqeb** of the Faculty of Agriculture, Sana'a University in Yemen, for research using chemicals isolated from Yemeni herbal plants for disease prevention. For example, a major focus of Al-Naqeb's work has been black cumin seeds, which are commonly used as a spice in Yemen, other Middle Eastern countries and India. Her research on these seeds has focused on their effects in protecting the heart from cardiovascular diseases.

The 2016 Elsevier Foundation awards competition focused on biological sciences (agriculture, biology and medicine) and a panel of eminent scientists selected each winner based on her achievements. The prize includes USD5,000 and all-expenses-paid attendance at the 2016 AAAS Annual Meeting.

For more information:
www.twas.org/node/11560/

To find a video about the winners: www.bit.do/Els2016

This recognition gives the winners improved visibility and helps them to build extended international professional networks. The winners, in turn, serve as an inspiration for women and girls at home and in other countries.

"The determination, commitment and enthusiasm of these five women is an inspiration to us all, but especially to other women undertaking scientific research in developing countries," said Fang Xin, president of OWSD. "This award celebrates their excellent science and demonstrates that their hard work has had an impact both regionally and internationally, despite the difficult local conditions."

"These are exemplary researchers, and their work has enormous potential to improve people's health and support stronger communities," said TWAS Executive Director Romain Murenzi. "Their work will be widely appreciated for the benefits it can bring to developing countries. Just as important, they will serve as models and as inspiration for young scientists – women and men – of a new generation."

“We hope that our awards help shine a light on these emerging women leaders and the important work they are doing in their fields.”

David Ruth, executive director, Elsevier Foundation

David Ruth, executive director of the Elsevier Foundation, said, "Over the past five years, we've evolved these awards together with OWSD and TWAS and each year we learn more about the incredible challenges faced by women researchers doing science in low-resource settings. We hope that our awards help shine a light on these emerging women leaders and the important work they are doing in their fields — and what better place to do this than at the AAAS conference where the latest science, issues and leaders come together each year." ■