



# IN MEMORIAM: FARIDA SHAH

*Her work had a deep impact on women and development in Malaysia and beyond. She will be remembered also for distinguished work with OWSD and TWAS.*

Malaysian molecular biologist and TWAS Fellow Farida Habib Shah passed away on 1 November 2014, at the age of 66. Shah was a member of the TWAS Council and a vice president of OWSD, the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World, where she had served with sustained commitment since 1994.

As a scientist, Shah pioneered research on the biology and genetics of the oil palm, Malaysia's main commodity crop, but she was also a key figure in promoting science education and advocating a better role for women in science. She dedicated part of her energies also to help single mothers, the poor, the homeless and the young.

From 1999 to 2010, Shah served two terms at the Asia-Pacific representative on OWSD's Executive Board, and then was elected vice president for the region. In 2011, her vision and perseverance led to the establishment of OWSD Malaysia National Chapter, which is now a robust resource for Malaysian women in science and engineering. Her work with TWAS dates to 2002, when she was elected a Fellow.

In 2012, she started a three-year term as a TWAS Council member.

"As a member of our Academy and a Council member, she was deeply committed to the cause and objectives of TWAS and for many years she actively supported us," TWAS President Bai Chunli wrote in a letter of condolence to Shah's family. "Farida was a wonderful human being. She will be sorely missed by all of us."

OWSD President Fang Xin shared that sentiment: "Farida was a deeply committed and hard-working member of OWSD. We will miss her."

Former TWAS President Jacob Palis of Brazil said Shah was "... a dear friend and a great symbol of the presence of women in science."

Mohamed H.A. Hassan, TWAS treasurer and co-chair of IAP - the global network of science academies, called her "a very dedicated TWAS member".

Farida Shah sat on the S&T Commission under the Malaysia National Council of Women's Organizations, which has a consultative and advisory role to the government on gender issues. She encouraged women's organizations to work together in a project called "Networking Women", aimed at training women in website design and at increasing women's use of the Internet, even in rural areas, as a vehicle for the online promotion of products and activities.

"She always had new ideas and initiatives and went further to implement them," said Mayra de la Torre, OWSD vice president for Latin America and the Caribbean.



"We lost a great woman and wonderful friend."

On the entrepreneurial side, Shah was the founder and managing director of a new biotechnology-based company, "The Natural Story Sdn Bhd" [Sdn Bhd is the Malay equivalent to *incorporated*] which produces herbal and aromatic products.

Important biotechnology initiatives at the state level stemmed from her passion and commitment to scientific research. She established the Melaka Biotechnology Corporation, with two institutes under its umbrella: the Melaka Institute of Biotechnology and Melaka Biotech Holdings Sdn Bhd.

Shah also founded two biotechnology companies: Tropical BioEssence, and the biotech start-up and consultancy company Novel Plant, a start-up created to transfer scientific discoveries to the market. In addition, Shah set up a platform for DNA Marker Technology Bioinformatics, to authenticate and verify medicinal and herbal plant species and varieties.

Her scientific production - she has authored over 200 papers and presented over 250 papers - reflected her enduring passion for research. In addition, she was an adjunct professor at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.

She leaves her husband and life-long travel companion, Peter Anderson. Together they wrote the 1994 guide, *Discover Malaysia*. ■