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Five women scientists in developing countries win 2019 OWSD-Elsevier Foundation Awards

Early-career researchers living and working in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Gambia, Nepal and Palestine have been recognized for their work in the biological sciences

Washington, D.C., February 13, 2019 – Five researchers have been named winners of the 2019 [OWSD-Elsevier Foundation Awards for Early-Career Women Scientists in the Developing World](#) for their research in the biological sciences. The winning scholars from Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Gambia, Nepal and Palestine are being recognized for their accomplishments in environmental microbiology, ethnobotany, clinical pediatrics and epidemiology. The prize also acknowledges the scientists' commitment to leading and mentoring young scientists, and to improving lives and livelihoods in their communities and regions.

"These scientists are performing ground-breaking international-level science, often in circumstances where the deck has been stacked against them," said Jennifer Thomson, President of the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD). "They deserve to be honored and celebrated for their dedication not only to their research, but to creating a better world for people to live in."

The five researchers are:

- Tabassum Mumtaz of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (Asia Pacific region); in environmental microbiology;
- Uduak Okomo of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in the Gambia (Africa region); in pediatrics and epidemiology;
- Narel Paniagua-Zambrana of the National Herbarium of Bolivia and Universidad Mayor de San Andres (Latin America and the Caribbean region); in ethnobotany;
- Tista Prasai Joshi of the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (Asia Pacific region); in environmental microbiology; and
- Amira Shaheen of An-Najah National University in Palestine (Arab region); in epidemiology.

"Each year, it is inspiring to find out just how much of the research undertaken by our winning scientists focuses on crucial challenges addressed by the UN Sustainable Development Goals: creating sustainable bioplastics in Bangladesh; preserving traditional plant knowledge in Bolivia; reducing disease transmission to newborns in Africa; removing arsenic from water in Nepal; and investigating the health care system response to gender violence in Palestine," said Ylann Schemm, Director of the Elsevier Foundation. "In addition, working with OWSD and the AAAS to celebrate the success of these talented women scientists is both an honor and a joy."

First awarded in 2011, the awards are given in partnership by [OWSD](#) and the [Elsevier Foundation](#). OWSD chairs a panel of distinguished scientists to select the winners, and the Elsevier Foundation supports a cash prize for each winner of USD \$5,000 and an all-expenses-paid trip to attend the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), this year in Washington, D.C., February 13-17, 2019. The five winners will be honored on February 16 at a special breakfast ceremony during the AAAS meeting.

Past OWSD-Elsevier Foundation Award winners have been recognized by their country's presidents and celebrated by local, national and international media. They have received other prestigious awards and fellowships including L'OREAL-UNESCO For Women in Science Fellowships and the British Council Award.

Read more:

About the Awards: <https://owsd.net/awards/awards>

About recent Awardees:

- 2018
 - Press release: <https://bit.ly/2GdSKdy>
 - Interviews with awardees Germaine Djuidje Kenmoe: <https://bit.ly/2Hd8xNF>; and Dawn Iona Fox: <https://bit.ly/2GPW8gd>
- 2017
 - Press release: <https://bit.ly/2M0Khye>
 - Article in Elsevier Connect: <https://bit.ly/2mJKEE1>

Notes for editors

The awards ceremony will take place on February 16, 2019 during the *Minority and Women Scientists and Engineers Networking Breakfast* from 7:00-9:00 AM in Washington, D.C. at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Annual Meeting.

Reporters wishing to attend the ceremony may contact Domiziana Francescon at +31 610215901 or d.francescon@elsevier.com.

The 2019 winners are:

- **Tabassum Mumtaz, Bangladesh** in *Environmental microbiology*. For her work on bioconversion of waste byproducts and biomass into more environmentally-friendly compounds. Dr. Mumtaz cultivates bacteria that can turn wastewater and food waste, such as effluents from palm oil production, into sustainable bioplastics. "Winning the OWSD-Elsevier Foundation Award is like receiving an Oscar to me," said Dr. Mumtaz. "This will be a tremendous inspiration to me and to all women scientists in Bangladesh and in the Asia-Pacific region, to dream big and to do research beneficial to the environment and society."
- **Uduak Okomo, the Gambia** in *Paediatrics and epidemiology*. For her work in defining routes of transmission of infections to neonates. Dr. Okomo's research has pointed to hospital-acquired transmission rather than maternal or community acquisition, which contributes to improved control

of infections and better planning of health systems and resource distribution, thereby reducing maternal, newborn and child mortality. “Receiving the OWSD-Elsevier Foundation Award is an encouragement to continue my work to improve maternal and newborn survival in Sub-Saharan Africa,” said Dr. Okomo. “I hope this award inspires African women scientists in global health to become scientific leaders in their spheres of influence and gives them the courage and confidence to tackle Africa’s challenges in global health and development.”

- **Narel Paniagua-Zambrana, Bolivia** in *Ethnobotany*: For her work documenting and protecting traditional knowledge of plant use by indigenous populations and local communities, especially in Bolivia. Her work provides local populations with tools to conserve their natural resources and associated traditional knowledge. “Receiving this award makes it possible to highlight the value and importance of making efforts to conserve and protect the traditional knowledge held by the indigenous populations,” said Dr. Paniagua-Zambrana. “Local scientific work is not easy, much less in developed countries. This award will allow me to expand my collaboration to make this task easier and more widely shared.”
- **Tista Prasai Joshi, Nepal** in *Environmental microbiology*: For her research in developing novel metal oxide adsorbents to remove harmful organic and inorganic arsenic compounds efficiently from water. Her work to create more economic and environment friendly techniques for water treatment has had a significant impact on public awareness and accountability of drinking water suppliers in Kathmandu. “Receiving this prestigious award has great value in my scientific career,” said Dr. Joshi. “Because of this international recognition, I am more confident, accountable, and motivated to continue my research activities to achieve my goal. It will inspire many younger ladies in this region to achieve more in the advancement of sciences.”
- **Amira Shaheen, Palestine** in *Epidemiology*: For her work investigating health care system responses to gender-based violence in primary and reproductive health services in Palestine. Her research investigates the readiness of health care systems to identify and refer women victims of violence, with the goal of improving identification and referral and bettering the women’s situations. “As an epidemiologist, winning the OWSD-Elsevier Foundation Award is further evidence of the importance of putting results into practice in the field of public health,” said Dr. Shaheen. “It gives me the courage to further research culturally sensitive issues, and it will motivate young health graduates to enter the field of public health.”

Reference sheets for each award winner with a more extensive biography and description of their work are also available upon request.

About OWSD

The [Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World](http://www.owsd.net) (OWSD) provides research training, career development and networking opportunities for women scientists throughout the developing world. Headed by eminent women scientists from the South, OWSD has more than 7,000 members and runs various programmes, including a PhD fellowship programme with over 250 successful graduates from Least Developed Countries and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as an Early Career Women Scientists fellowship programme launched in December 2017. OWSD is the first international forum to unite women scientists from the developing world with the objective of strengthening their role in the development process and promoting their representation in scientific and technological leadership. OWSD is affiliated with The World Academy of Science (TWAS), a programme unit of UNESCO, and is based in Trieste, Italy, with national chapters throughout the developing world. www.owsd.net

About The Elsevier Foundation

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