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Five researchers named winners of 2016 Elsevier Foundation Awards

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Early-career researchers from Indonesia, Nepal, Peru, Uganda and Yemen honored for their life-enhancing work in health and nutrition

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 are being honored for their accomplishments in nutrition, psychiatry, biotechnology, women's health, bioenvironmental sciences and epidemiology. They are 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 The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) for the advancement of science in developing countries. The five winners will receive their awards on February 13th during a ceremony at the Gender & Minorities Networking Breakfast at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Annual Meeting in Washington D.C.

The 2016 winners are:

- **Dr. Etheldreda Nakimuli-Mpungu, Makerere University Kampala, Uganda (Sub-Saharan Africa Region)**

Psychiatric epidemiology: For her work using psychotherapy as treatment of 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. Dr. 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.

"A country needs human capital; individuals who are productive members of society," said Dr. Nakimuli-Mpungu. "This innovative model helps people coping with HIV/AIDS to regain their dignity, self-esteem and desire to fully participate and contribute to their communities."

- **Dr. Sri Fatmawati, Kampus ITS Sukolilo, Indonesia (East and South-East Asia & the Pacific Region)**

Bioenvironmental sciences: For her work analyzing the medical and pharmaceutical potential of plant and fungi extracts normally used in herbal medicine. Dr. Fatmawati has also received the prestigious Pemenang Fellowship International L'Oréal-UNESCO for Women in Science for research analyzing substances from sponges that may lead to treatments for malaria, cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

"I don't know what the future brings, but I know science is part of my soul," said Dr. Fatmawati. "I hope more young generations will share their life with science for a better world."

- **Dr. Sushila Maharjan, Research Institute for Bioscience and Biotechnology RIBB, Nepal (Central & South Asia Region)**

Biochemistry and biotechnology: For her work using soil microbes to develop medically useful chemicals. Microbes create a great number of the materials used in medicine, including antibiotics. Dr. 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 most rewarding part of my research is to find novel drugs and antibiotics from Streptomyces bacteria of Nepal that have great potential to combat the emerging drug and antibiotic resistant diseases worldwide," said Dr. Maharjan.

- **Dr. Magaly Blas, Urb Ingenieria, Peru (Latin America and the Caribbean Region)**

Epidemiology: For her work using information and communication technology to solve health problems, particularly sexually transmitted diseases in urban and rural Peru. Dr. 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.

"Female leadership in Latin America is growing," said Dr. Blas. "I feel proud to be part of this new generation of women scientists who are trying to make a difference in their country and in the world."

- **Dr. Ghanya Al-Naqeb, Faculty of Agriculture, Sana'a University, Yemen (Arab Region)**

Nutritional Sciences: For her research using chemicals isolated from Yemeni herbal plants for disease prevention. For example, a major focus of her 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.

"Despite all the difficulties we face in our country, Yemeni women have always worked hard to raise the name of Yemen," Al-Naqeb said. "I am very pleased to represent my country with my scientific research."

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 USD \$5,000 and all-expenses-paid attendance at the 2016 AAAS Annual Meeting.

This important recognition helps invigorate the winners' careers by providing them with new visibility and extended professional networks, allowing them to engage with colleagues and the public while their careers are still at an early stage. The winners also serve as a source of inspiration for other women in countries where more scientific expertise is a critical need.

"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. 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" said Fang Xin, president of OWSD.

"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."

David Ruth, executive director of the Elsevier Foundation, said, "Over the past 5 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."

The Elsevier Foundation Award winners will be giving a talk about their work at the Global Women's Institute, George Washington University, February 11th in a session moderated by Dr. Rachelle S. Heller, Professor in the Department of Computer Science.

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