

Merck Foundation honours outstanding African researchers at 2023 MARS Awards

The chief executive officer of Merck Foundation, Rasha Kelej, along with its Scientific Committee, unveiled the distinguished recipients of the 2023 Merck Foundation Africa Research Summit (MARS) Awards.



Source: 123RF.

Six researchers from six different African countries were honoured in two categories: Best African Women Researchers and Best African Young Researchers.

The MARS Awards ceremony garnered the presence of African ministers of health, -technology, -information and technology, -social affairs, -women's rights and gender, -community development, and -social welfare.

This prestigious event was conducted in collaboration with the African Union Scientific Technical Research Commission, International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS), Africa Reproductive Care Society (ARCS), and Manipal University, India.

"Like every year since 2016, I am extremely proud of our six winners of the MARS Awards this year for their valuable contribution in research, especially by African female researchers who are under-represented in this field, as we all know," said Kelej.

"Through these wards, we aim to empower African young researchers and of course to empower and encourage African women researchers through advancing their research capacity and promoting their contribution to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)."

Recognising excellence

The winners of 'Best African women Researchers Awards' and 'Best African Young Researcher Awards' will be enrolled into research training at a premier institute in India.

Merck Foundation has been transforming the patient-care landscape and making history together with its partners in Africa, Asia, and beyond, by providing 1,700 scholarships for doctors from 50 countries in 42 critical- and underserved medical specialties.

"Out of our 1,700 scholarships, we have awarded more than 535 scholarships specifically for clinical and practical training in fertility and embryology.

"These encompass postgraduate diplomas, master's degree programmes in sexual and reproductive medicine, clinical psychiatry, women's health, biotechnology of human-assisted reproduction and embryology, urology, and laparoscopic surgical skills. These scholarships have benefitted doctors from 39 countries across Africa and Asia," Kelej said.

He expressed pride in this significant achievement.

Notable figures in reproductive medicine

The award ceremony was attended by Oladapo Ashiru, renowned Nigerian medical doctor and fertility specialist, recognised for his contributions to reproductive medicine. He is president of the African Reproductive Care Society (ARCS), president of The Academy of Medicine Specialties of Nigeria and secretary general of the International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS) in Nigeria.

The event was also attended by Satish Kumar Adiga, head of the Department of Reproductive Science and co-ordinator at the Fertility Preservation Centre, Kasturba Medical College in Manipal, India.

"I extend my congratulations to all the deserving recipients of the MARS Awards 2023. The received entries demonstrated exceptional quality of research. This platform holds significant value for African women and young researchers dedicated to health research," Ashiru shared.

The ceremony was also attended by the following African ministers:

- Baradahana Lydwine, Minister of Public Health, and Fighting Against Aids, Republic of Burundi.
- Ahmadou Lamin Samateh, Minister of Health, The Gambia.
- Imelde Sabushimike, Minister of National Solidarity, Social Affairs, Human Rights and Gender, Republic of Burundi (represented by Donatienne Girukwishaka, general director for the Promotion of Women and Gender Equality.
- Jean Sendeza, Minister of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare, Republic of Malawi.
- Leocadie Ndacayisaba, Minister of Communication, Information Technologies and Media, Republic of Burundi (Represented by Manirakiza Ferdinand, permanent secretary, Minister of Communication, Information Technologies and Media).

“*"I'm honored to be recognized as one of 100 Most Influential African Women under CSO & Philanthropy category, for fifth consecutive year. Thank you all."*

Senator, Dr. Rasha Kelej

CEO Merck Foundation <https://t.co/ppbbXNRgUJ> pic.twitter.com/JfJ8WizD2N — Merck Foundation (@MerckFoundation)

The MARS 2023 Award winners

Winners of MARS Best Women African Researchers Awards 2023:

- Stella Irungu; Kenya

Topic: *Identifying Biomarkers for the Non-Invasive Diagnosis of Endometriosis*

- Motshedisi Sebitloane; South Africa

Topic: *Women Living with HIV Treatment are at Increased Risk of Premature Menopause*

- Oyeyemi Ifeoluwa; Nigeria

Topic: *Anti-cancer Effect of a Copper(II) Complex with Vanillin 3-Ethyl-Thiosemicarbazone Ligand in Triple Negative Breast Cancer*

Winners of MARS Best Young African Researchers Awards 2023:

- Afework Tadele Mekonnen; Ethiopia

Topic: *Social Determinants of Maternal Health in Developing Countries: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*

- Stephene Shadrack Meena; Tanzania

Topic: *Targeting Tumor-Promoting Inflammation to Control the Growth and Metastasis of Breast Cancer*

- Theogene Wizyimana; Rwanda

Topic: *Prevalence and Risk Factors of Maternal Near-Miss at Kirehe District Hospital in Rwanda: Implications for Improving Women's Health in Africa*

Additionally, Merck Foundation announced the call for applications for the 2024 edition of the MARS Awards, aiming to empower women and youth in STEM in Africa, with a specific emphasis on the critical role of scientific research in women's health and reproductive and fertility care.

MARS 2024 will have scientific support from African Union Scientific-Technical and Research Commission (AU-STRC); African Reproductive Care Society (ARCS), International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS); and Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE), India.

[Applications](#) can be submitted until 30 June 2024.

The winners WILL receive a three-month research training scholarship in India.

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