



Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New partnership with Canada to broaden support for early-career women scientists in the developing world

Trieste, Italy (8 November 2017) – The Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) and Canada have begun a new partnership aiming to empower women researchers based throughout the developing world to become leaders and role models in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has pledged approximately USD6 million to OWSD over the next five years., matching the contribution renewed by long-term donor Sweden. The agreement was signed by UNESCO and IDRC in August 2017.

The two donors, IDRC and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) agreed to pool resources in order to provide a comprehensive career development programme for women scientists from 66 of the world's least developed and scientifically lagging countries (STLCs). OWSD now has two major fellowship strands: an existing PhD training programme funded since 1998 by Sida, and the new Early Career Women Scientist (ECWS) programme, funded by IDRC. The aim of the Sida-funded programme is to enable women from STLCs to leave their home countries and travel to better equipped laboratories and departments in other developing countries in order to complete their PhD training to internationally competitive standards. The aim of the IDRC-funded programme is to enable women with PhDs to stay in their home countries and continue their research to international standards, while training new PhDs and building a research team and centre of excellence in their field.

"PhD graduates often return to their home institutions only to find themselves in a scientific vacuum," explains OWSD President Jennifer Thomson, emeritus professor of Biotechnology based at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. "This new funding from IDRC aims to fill that vacuum and assist young women scientists to gain a foothold on the ladder to scientific development and future excellence. It aims to help these women not only to become leaders in their field of research, but also to become influential voices in their country for women in science."

Naser Faruqi, Director of Technology and Innovation at IDRC, commented that "IDRC is most pleased to join Sida in enabling the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World to extend its longstanding graduate fellowships program now to early-career women scientists. OWSD's expanded program should encourage more young women to pursue and advance in their research career, through leading research teams at home, participating in international networks and collaborating with industry for their results to help build more inclusive societies."



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OWSD can now offer a full suite of mechanisms to support women scientists throughout their careers, increase their influence as scientific leaders in their field or institution, and engage them in innovations through partnership with industry. With IDRC funding, OWSD will target early career women employed at their home institutes in the South and provide the individual and institutional support they need to make sustainable links with industry and the private sector. A total of 60 women are expected to start and complete their fellowships by 2021, receiving support and training to set up laboratories and head research teams as well as transform their research ideas into marketable products. The first call for applications will go online in March 2018 and the first cohort of 20 fellows announced by October 2018.

Tonya Blowers, OWSD Coordinator, will be working with members of the OWSD Secretariat from their offices in Trieste, Italy to put the plan into action. She echoed the enthusiasm about the collaboration: “This new funding from IDRC takes the support OWSD can give to women scientists from developing countries to another level. We can now offer opportunities to women to enable them to stay in or return to academic institutes in their home countries and build up research laboratories or departments with international reputations for scientific excellence. These centres will become places that scientists from all over the world will want to visit and in this way more women from developing countries will become leaders and influential voices in science: choosing not just the kind of research that is done, but how, why and where it is done.”

For the past 20 years, with Sida funding, OWSD has awarded over 400 PhD fellowships in least developed countries and sub-Saharan Africa, and over 210 of these awarded fellows have graduated; there are currently over 160 women completing their fellowships. With renewed Sida funding, OWSD will support an additional 140 women from STLCs to obtain PhDs over the next five years. OWSD alumnae have often overcome great challenges to achieve research excellence and many are now lecturers and principle investigators in their home institutions. However, they still face many challenges.

With the new ECWS award at postdoctoral level, awardees (who may have received an OWSD PhD fellowships in the past although this is not a prerequisite) will be able to invest their energy and scholarship in building a research environment both at regional and international level.

The award will have an important impact on local research cultures as well as on the awardees themselves, enhancing the visibility of their past work and creating new opportunities for the future.

Other donors may wish to expand existing strands or create new ones (mentoring, national chapter support, regional networking, professorial chairs, industry-to-academia fellowships, discipline-based groups). The Elsevier Foundation already funds a highly successful awards scheme run by OWSD to annually reward 5 Early Career Women Scientists from 5 world regions.



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About the Partners

The Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD)

OWSD was founded in 1987 and is the first international forum to unite eminent women scientists from the developing and developed worlds with the objective of strengthening their role in the development process and promoting their representation in scientific and technological leadership. OWSD provides research training, career development and networking opportunities for women scientists throughout the developing world at different stages in their careers. OWSD is hosted by The World Academy of Sciences for the advancement of science in developing countries (TWAS), a UNESCO Programme based in Trieste, Italy.

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Part of Canada's foreign affairs and development efforts, IDRC invests in knowledge, innovation, and solutions to improve the lives of people in the

developing world. IDRC supports leading thinkers who advance knowledge and solve practical development problems. It provides the resources, advice, and training they need to implement and share their solutions with those who need them most. Working with its development partners, it multiplies the impact of its investments and brings innovations to more people in more countries around the world. IDRC also offers fellowships and awards to nurture a new generation of development leaders. Established by an act of Canada's parliament in 1970, its head office is located in Ottawa, Canada, with four regional offices in Cairo, Egypt; Montevideo, Uruguay; Nairobi, Kenya; and New Delhi, India.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

Sida has supported OWSD financially since 1998. Sida is a government agency working on behalf of the Swedish parliament and government, with the mission to reduce poverty in the world. Through its work, and its cooperation with a total of 36 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, it contributes to implementing Sweden's Policy for Global Development (PGU) by allocating aid and other funding to enable poor people to improve their lives. Sida assists the government with assessments and information gathering, in order to decide and implement development assistance according to priorities identified by the Swedish government. Sida is tax-funded and administers approximately half of Sweden's total development aid budget. Its work is performed in a cost-effective way with a strong focus on results. Sida has more than 700 employees, located in three offices in Sweden as well as abroad in its cooperation countries.



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More Details about the ECWS Fellowships Programme

This is an entirely new strand of the OWSD suite of activities, designed to build on and add value to the solid foundation of OWSD PhD fellowships and its increasingly important and supportive network of members and national chapters.

As well as fulfilling the overall objective of increasing the participation of women in developing countries in scientific and technological research, teaching and leadership, the ECWS fellowships will have a further specific goal: to collaborate with industry to convert advanced knowledge in STEM into innovations that make local economies and societies more inclusive.

The long-term impacts of this goal will be:

1. Increased relevance and implementation of scientific research projects developed by women in STLCs for the economic, social, health and research needs of their countries.
2. Increased numbers of women scientists from STLCs staying in their home countries in order to continue their scientific/industrial careers, thereby contributing to research training and development.
3. Strengthened research, resources and expertise of institutes in STLCs.

The fellowship is for women who are already employed at their institutes and receive a salary and is in this sense entirely different conceptually from the PhD fellowship scheme.

There are three main elements to the ECWS Fellowships:

1. A **research resources grant** (up to USD10,000 over two years) to be spent by the individual awardee on laboratory equipment and/or the resources needed to build up a research group. In addition, the awardee will receive specific training in procurement and management skills.
2. A substantial **research activities grant** (up to USD40,000 over two years) to be spent by the awardee on activities that will enable her to maintain an international level of research as well as initiating collaborations and partnerships with industry and the private sector (for example, undertaking a placement in industry, hiring a lab technician, contributing to childcare expenses, alleviating teaching responsibilities, travelling to international conferences, inviting speakers and researchers to visit the home institute, establishing a patent). A list of recommended and eligible activities will be prepared in conjunction with the Programme Technical Committee (PTC) at the start of the programme.
3. Two annual tailor-made **training workshops**. The first workshop (to be held in Trieste each November) will introduce all the elements of the grant (including setting up a lab, managing a research group, linking with industry) as well as establishing communication and networking between fellows, the wider OWSD community and industry. In this workshop Fellows will present and revise their proposals. The workshop will be a networking opportunity for the fellows to meet each other and establish an ECWS group, which will be built on each year as more fellows are selected. Fellows will be interviewed and a short film made each year and posted on the website and social media. In the second (and final) year of their fellowship each cohort of 20 fellows will be invited to a second workshop (held in May) in one of the four OWSD regions, to follow up on the workplan presented in November and receive further training on collaborating with industry through



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a Dragons Den-style scenario where fellows can develop and defend the commercial aspects of transforming their research into marketable products. Key note speakers and facilitators from industry, academia and government will be invited. It is expected that these workshops will be hosted by an appropriate OWSD national chapter - and that OWSD members in the region will meet with the ECWS fellows for exchange and collaboration.

More information

[OWSD Early Career Women Scientists Fellowship Programme](#)

[OWSD PhD Fellowship Programme](#)

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