

How TDR has helped me to grow as a person and as a professional?

I obtained PhD training in malaria through a grant award of the TDR, WHO (Principal Investigator: Kamini Mendis). The excellent quality of training received with foreign training components provided a firm foundation for my early academic/research career. After the successful completion of the PhD I was confirmed as a Senior Lecturer in the university. TDR awarded financial support to obtain post-doctoral training at the University of Edinburgh. The excellent quality training received as a young academic and researcher from 1989 to 1995 enabled me to grow as an independent researcher with confidence to build my own research program and the team in my home institution. TDR continued to support this work through successive funding (collaborative research awards) that enabled further strengthening of this program. This enabled training of young scientists (including a PhD trainee from Myanmar), infra-structure development of the laboratory and inculcation of a research culture within the team members. Appointment as a consultant /advisor to Pathogenesis and Functional Genomics committee during this period, further enhanced my confidence as a senior-level researcher. This exposure enabled very effective interactions with other established researchers across the world and enhanced networking/strong linkages to be forged with overseas scientists. The career developments and growth as a person was enabled through such interactions (e.g. Fellowship awards from the Fulbright Commission and Harvard University, USA).

With the track record built up as a researcher over many years, enabled me to attract funding from both local and other international bodies such as the Wellcome Trust and NIH, USA. Changing trends in vector-borne diseases in Sri Lanka over the past 2 decades necessitated me to move on to new and more challenging areas of research in the field of leishmaniasis, a program that is now very-well established with ongoing support from the National Institute of Health, USA. Currently I am a mother of 2 girls holding the post of Senior Professor and Chair of Parasitology, University of Colombo, leading a well-established research program with training of several young scientists under my supervision (Over 15 trainees have successfully completed their post-graduate training and almost equal number currently under supervision).

Highlights of Achievements

- Honorary Visiting Fellow, Harvard University, USA
- Elected Fellow, National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka
- Elected Member, American Academy of Arts and Sciences (*First Sri Lankan to be elected*)
- Founder President, National Chapter of the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD)
- Member, Steering Committee of Women in Science and Engineering in Asia-Pacific (WISE), Association of Academies in South Asia
- Consultant/Advisor Strategic Research Steering Committee, World Health Organization
- Board Member of the Governance Council of Genomic Epidemiology of Malaria Network, University of Oxford, UK
- Board Member, Inter-Academy Partnership for Policy in Research, Third World Academy of Sciences, Trieste, Italy
- Research Grant Awardee of National Institute of Health, USA; Wellcome Trust, UK; World Health Organization, Switzerland; University of Oxford, UK
- Fellowship Awardee of Harvard university; Fulbright Commission; European Union; World Health Organization
- Recipient of Presidential Awards for Research; Zonta Woman of the Year Award