UNESCO–MARS 2016 has brought together more than 200 researchers from more than 35 African countries to discuss the generation, sharing and dissemination of research data and to prepare for the road ahead in developing Africa as an international hub for research excellence and scientific innovation

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia, November 29, 2016/ --

- **Nine researchers from across Africa receive 'Best Young Researchers Award' and 'Best Women Researchers Award.'**
- **MARS 2016 contributes to Building Research Capacity in Africa to improve Women Health.**
- **MARS 2016 addresses Research in Francophone Africa for the first time.**
- **Merck On-line research community (www.Merck-CAP.com) launched to enable young researchers to share experience with their peers in Africa and beyond.**

Merck (www.MerckGroup.com), a leading science and technology company in partnership with UNESCO, African Union, Ethiopia Ministry of Health, University of Cambridge and Institute Pasteur International today announced the 2016 UNESCO – Merck Research Award winners. The nine winners under two categories, **'Best Young African Researchers Award'**
and
'Best African Women Researchers Award'
, were announced during the 2nd UNESCO-MARS Summit 2016 being held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

"We are very happy to partner with UNESCO, African Union and Ethiopia Ministry of Health to achieve the important goals of improving women health and empowering women in research, as they are still under-represented in Africa," Frank Stangenberg-Haverkamp, Chairman of the Executive Board and Family Board of E. Merck KG emphasized at the inauguration of the UNESCO-MARS 2016 Summit.

Yifru Berhane, Minister for Health, Ethiopia, said: "We are very happy to partner with Merck, UNESCO and Africa Union to build research capacity in Africa with the focus on young researchers and women researchers and to define policies to enable high quality research in the continent".

“This is the first time the UNESCO-MARS is launching the ‘Best African Woman Research Awards’ with the aim of promoting women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) that has seen five women researchers from across Africa being recognised for the quality of their research. The awards are in line with this year’s UNESCO-MARS 2016 theme that supports empowering women in research and building research capacity in Francophone and Anglophone Africa to ultimately improve women health in the continent,” emphasized Rasha Kelej, Chief Social Officer, Merck Healthcare.

Beatrice Nyagol from Kenya Medical Research Institute was awarded the 1st Woman Researcher Award while Rogomenoma Ouedraogo from Laboratory of Biology and Molecular Genetics University, Burkina Faso received the 2nd Woman Researcher Award. The 3rd, 4th and 5th Woman Researcher Awards were granted to Sandrine Liabagui ep Assangaboua from Gabon; Maria Nabaggala from Infectious Diseases Institute, Uganda and Martha Zewdie of Armauer Hansen Research Institute, Ethiopia respectively.

The three categories of the ‘Best Young Researchers Award’ were given to two female and two male researchers with the 1st Award going to Patricia Rantshabeng from University of Botswana and the 2nd Award to Constantine Asahngwa from Cameroon. The 3rd Award were given to both; Tinashe Nyazika of University of Zimbabwe and Lamin Cham from the National Aids Control Program, Gambia.

“The awardees who are final PhD students and young investigators based at African research institutes and universities were selected based on the abstracts they submitted which were very impressive and related to **Infectious Diseases with the aim to improve Women Health,** which is the focus of UNESCO-MARS 2016,” emphasized Rasha Kelej.

Summit addressing both Francophone and Anglophone Africa

UNESCO–MARS 2016 has brought together more than 200 researchers from more than 35 African countries to discuss the generation, sharing and dissemination of research data and to prepare for the road ahead in developing Africa as an international hub for research excellence and scientific innovation.

Of the 200 researchers attending the Summit, 60% are women. This is contributing to one of the main objectives of UNESCO-MARS, which is empowering women in research.

The Summit for the first time, is also addressing both Francophone and Anglophone Africa and has attracted researchers from 11 French speaking countries of Senegal, Rwanda, Gabon, Benin, Congo, Cameroon, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Niger, Burundi. Researchers from

English speaking countries are drawn from Namibia, South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Liberia, Botswana and Ethiopia. In addition, researchers from Arab speaking and Portuguese speaking countries such as Egypt, Angola and Mozambique are in attendance.

Researchers benefit from diverse scientific sessions

The 2nd UNESCO MARS Summit is providing a unique opportunity for Africa’s young and talented scientists to share their research output and findings with the top echelon of scientists from Africa and abroad. It is also an opportunity for networking and career development. The Summit is presenting a platform where young scientists are able to discuss the enabling environment for better research among others.

“The researchers attending the two-day Summit are benefiting from diverse and rich scientific sessions that are focusing on the relation between infectious diseases and cancer in women; untreated infectious diseases and the high prevalence of infertility in Africa; and participating in discussions to identify scientific research priorities for evolving health needs to address infectious diseases such as Malaria, Schistosomiasis and Zika in relation to women health,” Rasha Kelej emphasized.

The Summit theme of “**Infectious Diseases and Women Health”** is informed by the fact that for many infectious diseases, women are at higher risk and have a more severe course of illness than men for many reasons including biological differences, social inequities, and restrictive cultural norms. Therefore, efforts to recognize and reduce health disparities among women have particular relevance for global health,” Uganda Minister of State of Health, Sarah Opendi emphasized.

Key African Ministers support building research capacity and policy development in the continent

Up to 15 African ministers of Health; Education; Science and Technology and Gender & Social Development participated in two ministerial high level panels at the UNESCO-MARS 2016. The ministers in discussions committed to support the building of research capacity at country and regional level, and the development and enforcement of policies to guide and promote scientific research for the benefit of Africa. They also pledged to enhance efforts to empower women in research.

The first ministerial high level panel on “Defining interventions to advance research capacity and empower women in research to improve women health in Africa,” involved: Sarah Opendi, Minister of State of Health, Uganda; Idi Illiassou Mainassara, Minister of Public Health, Niger; Julia Cassell, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Development, Liberia; Jesús Engonga Ndong, Minister of Education & Science, Equatorial Guinea and Prof. Frank Stangenberg-Haverkamp, Chairman of Executive Board and Family Board of E.Merck KG.

The second ministerial panel on “Research and policy making gap in Africa – challenges and opportunities – Africa as a new international hub for research excellence and scientific

innovation," included: Prof. Yifru Berhane, Minister of Health, Ethiopia; Prof. Afework Kassu Gizaw, Minister of Science and Technology, Ethiopia; Dr. João Sebastião Teta, Secretary of State, Angola; Zuliatu Cooper, Deputy Minister of Health and Sanitation, Sierra Leone and Rashid Aman, Chairman, Kenya National Commission for UNESCO.

Knowledge exchange platform to boost research capacity launched

During the UNESCO-MARS 2016, the Merck on-line research community blog (www.Merck-CAP.com) was launched to enable young researchers to exchange experience and knowledge with their peers and with established researchers in Africa and beyond.

The first UNESCO-Merck Africa Research Summit 2015 was successfully organized and held in Geneva, Switzerland in October 2015 with the focus on Emergent Infectious Diseases such as Ebola. The third UNESCO- MARS is scheduled to be held in 2017 in Africa.

About 2016 MARS award winners
"Best African Woman Researcher Award"

- **1st Place**: Beatrice Nyagol, Kenya Medical Research Institute, Kenya
- **2nd Place**: Rogomenoma Ouedraogo, Laboratory of Biology and Molecular Genetics University, Burkina Faso
- **3rd Place:** Sandrine Liabagui ep Assangaboua, Ecole Doctorale Regionale d'Afrique Centrale, Franceville, Gabon
- **4th Place:** Maria Nabaggala, Infectious Diseases Institute, Uganda
- **5th Place:** Martha Zewdie, Armauer Hansen Research Institute, Ethiopia

"Best Young African Researcher Award"

- **1st Place:** Patricia Rantshabeng, University of Botswana, Botswana
- **2nd Place:** Constantine Asahngwa, **Cameroon** Centre for Evidence Based Health Care, Cameroon
- **3rd Place:** Tinashe Nyazika, University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe and Lamin Cham, National Aids Control Program, Gambia

Social Media:
Join the conversation on building research capacity in Africa through UNESCO-MARS on Youtube (http://APO.af/MhEGkq), on Twitter using the handle @Merck_MARS (http://APO.af/5vSJZJ) and on Facebook (

http://APO.af/gOh0Rc
).

About UNESCO Merck Africa Research Summit:
The program aims to bring together researchers from across Africa to discuss the generation, sharing and dissemination of research data and to prepare for the road ahead in Africa’s development as an international hub for research excellence and scientific innovation. Please go to www.UNESCO-MARS.com and www.Merck-CAP.com for more information.

More pictures are available here: www.APO-mail.org/161129Merck .

About Merck:
Merck (www.MerckGroup.com) is a leading science and technology company in healthcare, life science and performance materials. Around 50,000 employees work to further develop technologies that improve and enhance life – from biopharmaceutical therapies to treat cancer or multiple sclerosis, cutting-edge systems for scientific research and production, to liquid crystals for smartphones and LCD televisions. In 2015, Merck generated sales of € 12.85 billion in 66 countries.
Founded in 1668, Merck is the world's oldest pharmaceutical and chemical company. The founding family remains the majority owner of the publicly listed corporate group. Merck, Darmstadt, Germany holds the global rights to the Merck name and brand. The only exceptions are the United States and Canada, where the company operates as EMD Serono, MilliporeSigma and EMD Performance Materials.