Recipient of the 2015 Al-Sumait Health Prize Professor Kevin Marsh donates prize winnings to Young African Scholars.

Dr Kevin Marsh, recipient of the award, speaking at the 2016 ceremony.
Professor Kevin Marsh, the recipient of the 2015 Al-Sumait Health Prize for African Development donated the entire one million dollars prize money to boost the prospects of young African researchers.

Professor Marsh of Oxford University and the African Academy of Sciences was awarded the inaugural Al-Sumait Health Prize, at an awards ceremony during the African Arab Summit in Equatorial Guinea in November 2016, for his continued efforts to eradicate malaria, a disease that affects tens of millions of children in Africa each year.

Said Professor Marsh on winning the prize, “Well, it was actually fantastic winning the prize from all sorts of points of view. It is always nice to be recognised but what I think was really great about it was the recognition of the importance of research in Africa and that certainly brought a lot of attention. Then, a very immediate fantastic result for me was it allowed me to use all the prize money to support science in Africa.”

Two initiatives in African research.

Professor Marsh donated the entire prize winnings to two initiatives, The African Academy of Sciences Young Affiliates Program as well as the Africa Oxford Initiative based out of Oxford University, that were both in great need of funding to support young African scholars. The prize has allowed both organisations to expand their programs and in doing so support young African researchers who are driving development on the continent.

The African Academy of Sciences Young Affiliates Program identifies young research leaders across Africa each year to become an affiliate of The Academy. It is directly through funds from the Al-Sumait Prize that The Academy will have the resources to expand the career development opportunities available to the Young Affiliates program. Including hosting an event in 2018 where these young researchers will meet, share knowledge and strengthen research connections.
The Africa Oxford Initiative aims to build stronger research collaborations between the University of Oxford and African institutions however there was a significant need for funding. A direct result of winning the prize was that the Africa Oxford Initiative now has the resources to provide travel fellowships that are awarded to African researchers to travel to Oxford who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to study at the world-class research institute.

“As well as the conference we are looking at linking up all of the Affiliates with better web based linkages and workshops for skills development. On the Oxford side, for the other part of the prize money, we are setting up various schemes for travel fellowships and postdoctoral exchanges working with African students in Oxford. So there is a whole set of initiatives which are moving forward which are really depending almost totally from having this injection of funds from the Prize” said Professor Marsh about the significant impact that the Al-Sumait Prize has had.

An investment in the future.

Professor Marsh said that winning the Al-Sumait Prize has not only provided both initiatives with much needed funds but it has also significantly raised the profiles of both to potential future funding partners. The Al-Sumait Prize will continue to have long lasting impacts on the young African scholars who are directly benefiting from the initiatives funded by prize.

“What we have used the prize money for is for investment in the future so I think it will continue to have an impact. I see both Young Affiliates and the Africa Oxford Initiative as long term enterprises that will grow and we are quite ambitious for both. Now, obviously, we will see be seeking partnerships and funding from elsewhere but by having a kind of major injection of support right at the beginning it will continue to have a very long term impact.”

Professor Marsh says that he is passionately committed to the establishment of a thriving research culture in Africa and is optimistic that with support from initiatives such as the Al-Sumait Prize this vision is attainable.
“Africa’s development, whether it is in health or anything else, needs to be led from within Africa. So my great hopes are for the development of a thriving research culture and from a health point of view that the challenges for health in Africa begin to be solved through solutions generated by African researchers working in African institutions.”

A Prize For Development

The annual Al-Sumait Prize worth one million dollars, honors individuals or institutions who champion research or initiatives to advance the development of education, health and food security in Africa.

The prize was instigated on the initiative of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait.

The prize is administered by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), and celebrates the life and work of the late Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Sumait, a Kuwaiti doctor who dedicated his life to addressing the health challenges confronting Africa and established the Direct Aid humanitarian organization.

Nominations for the 2017 Al-Sumait Education Prize closed in July with the winner of the prestigious prize due to be announced later in 2017.

For more information, please visit www.alsumaitprize.org