

VinFuture's Grand Prize Winner: The prize is bigger than the Nobel, but it's not the most valuable thing

Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim, who was the first season VinFuture Award winner, thinks there is something more valuable than the prize money.

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At the first season of the VinFuture Awards, Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim and her husband Professor Salim Abdool Karim were awarded the Special Prize for "Scientist from Developing Countries", for their work on developing a gel containing Tenofovir drug helps fight HIV virus and prevent the risk of infection.

As one of the winners of the first season of the VinFuture Award, and also a female judge on the Preliminary Council of the 2022 award, Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim recently shared impressively about the award, as well as the achievements challenges and opportunities of scientists from developing countries.



Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim and her husband Professor Salim Abdool Karim received the Special Prize for "Scientist from Developing Countries" in the first season of VinFuture.

VinFuture – The award that makes a lot of difference

Reporter: In 2021, GS came to Vietnam as a candidate for the VinFuture award. In 2022, GS is a new member of the Preliminary Committee of the award. With this role, how does GS feel?

Prof. Quarraisha Abdool Karim: I am very excited about this new role, because I have the opportunity to read and see many nominations that are scientific works from many parts of

the world. I also have the opportunity to know in advance what will happen. This is my first year participating as a member of the preliminary panel that I can see the quantity and quality, as well as variety of the nominations.

The difference of VinFuture is not just an award to honor scientific research. Because these scientific studies create changes and impact on people's lives. This is also the purpose of life that I always seek. So that's why I didn't hesitate to accept the invitation to join VinFuture immediately.

In 2021, this is my first time going to Vietnam, really excited. A lot of my friends have asked what Vietnam is like? After this trip, scientists and I have had collaborations, such as a project to bring Vietnamese students in the medical field to South Africa. We also have lectures, joint research projects on health issues between Vietnam and South Africa.



Prof. Quarraisha Abdool Karim shared about the challenges and opportunities of scientists from developing countries. Photo: VFP

Reporter: Last year, GS and her husband went to Vietnam and won an impressive VinFuture award. This year, GS comes here with a new role, is her husband the one who motivates GS?

Prof. Quarraisha Abdool Karim: I have been with my husband for over 30 years. We worked on many different projects before working on HIV together. My views and my husband's are complementary, like yin and yang. Therefore, my participation in the VinFuture 2022 Preliminary Council does not affect my husband. After hearing that I was invited to the Preliminary Committee, my husband was very excited. Because this is an opportunity for me to participate in many activities of the VinFuture Prize, and at the same time strengthen the cooperation relationship between scientists in Vietnam and South Africa.

Reporter: Before joining the VinFuture Award Preliminary Council, have you ever participated in any award committee and is there any difference?

Prof. Quarraisha Abdool Karim: I have participated in different award committees, such as the science award committee in Canada, South Africa... However, I see the biggest difference between the VinFuture and Other places are discoveries and awards aimed at making big impressions, having a great impact on all of humanity. This is also what impressed me the most with the VinFuture award.

Reporter: The theme of the VinFuture 2022 award is "Revival and Reconstruction", so do this year's nominations meet this criterion, sir?

Prof. Quarraisha Abdool Karim: Of course there is. "Revival and Reconstruction" is a poignant theme and is well reflected in this year's nominations. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us the role of technology to look to the future. Therefore, the theme of "Revival and Reconstruction" is also a reminder to the world, that we still have many challenges and cannot be left unfinished about what we are doing.

Among this year's nominees, we've seen plenty of high-quality scientific research. There are actually a lot of new projects in the early stages of research. But what matters is the impact and potential of the studies. It doesn't matter what stage the research is at.



Prof. Quarraisha Abdool Karim took on the role of a member of the VinFuture Award Preliminary Committee for the first time. Photo: VH

Reporter: Many people think that the attraction of the VinFuture award comes from the prize money. As someone who has served as both a candidate and a member of the Preliminary Committee, what do you think?

GS Quarraisha Abdool Karim: Of course, the attractive bonus is one of the reasons people choose VinFuture. Because the value of VinFuture's prize is even greater than the Nobel Prize, everyone is surprised by this. But the values that VinFuture brings will help this award reach the world. There will be a Nobel Prize in Switzerland, in Japan there will be a Kyoto Prize from the Inamori Foundation... and in Vietnam it will be VinFuture later. This award will put Vietnam on the world map in terms of scientific stature.

However, above all, for me, I choose VinFuture because it is not only a place to honor innovative science but also create an impact to change the lives of millions of people around the world. In addition, different from other awards, VinFuture has up to 4 awards, including a

special prize for female scientists. Therefore, this is a level playing field for many initiatives and scientific research in many different fields.

Strengthen cooperation in scientific and technological research

Reporter: How to improve the situation of science and technology research and development in developing countries?

Prof. Quarraisha Abdool Karim: In the field of science and technology, there is no difference between developed and developing countries. Therefore, it is important to strengthen connectivity everywhere. First, to establish a partnership understand that we can do more by doing it ourselves.

In developing countries, we need to find people who can add value. To make this happen, we need cooperation. For example, reading the research of colleagues in the same field. In order to choose a partner, we also need a certain "chemistry" in us to have mutual respect even at different levels of development.

When we work together, we can bring together an entire community to find solutions to common human problems. Especially, when we work together, we will solve that problem faster.

Reporter: Regarding scientific innovation in developing countries, it is not simple, what is the way to promote it, Professor?

Prof. Quarraisha Abdool Karim: Barriers always come with opportunities. For me, my favorite motivation from a professor has formed my mind. That's when the opportunity comes to make sure you're ready. The challenge for developing countries is to limit the number of qualified scientists and to limit technology that is not up-to-date. We need to see who has what skills, what to contribute and how to be part of the team. Then they will have a comprehensive scientific team.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, barriers were broken down for the first time. This is the first time that access to vaccines is fair and equitable globally.

In the time of Covid-19, when we were still looking for a product to treat the disease, WHO offered a solidarity platform to review all regimens. Through solidarity we can share clinical medical discoveries. Normally it takes us 10 - 20 years to verify but the unified platform allows us to react more quickly. That is, innovation can accelerate humanity's problem solving.

Therefore, we need to join hands to attract the participation of countries and talents, in order to create such a solidarity mechanism for action.

Reporter: Many young people choose to pursue many other professions that are not science. For this problem, what will GS say to young scientists?

Prof. Quarraisha Abdool Karim: In developing countries, including Vietnam, not many people choose to pursue scientific research.

But if we look at the clothes, the phones, the tall buildings, we can all see that they are all the results of science from different fields.

Therefore, if we work together, we can build a better world in the future. It's not just buildings, but also many other basic amenities. The purpose of science is to give life meaning not only to us but also to those around us.

I hope when young people can see how science will lead the world and lead to a better life, they will have the inspiration and passion to pursue it, not follow TikTok, Instagram or follow Kim Kardashian.

Thank you GS!



The VinFuture 2022 award ceremony will take place on the evening of December 20. Photo: VFP

VinFuture Science and Technology Week 2022 with academic activities for the scientific research community, business leaders, innovators and the public, will take place from December 17 to 21, 2022. In particular, at 8 pm on December 20, the VinFuture award ceremony - one of the largest Science and Technology awards on the planet - will be broadcast live on VTV1 and CNN, Discovery, Euronews, Technode Global websites.