



FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

SEERJANA MAHARJAN RECOGNIZED AS THE 2021 AWARDEE FOR THE BIFAD AWARD FOR SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE IN A FEED THE FUTURE INNOVATION LAB

May 11, 2022



Ms. Seerjana Maharjan, 2021 BIFAD Award for Scientific Excellence Student Researcher Award Recipient

The Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (**BIFAD**) is honored to recognize Ms. Seerjana Maharjan as the recipient of the 2021 Student Researcher Award for Scientific Excellence in a Feed the Future Innovation Lab.

With this award, BIFAD recognizes research efforts that contribute to the interrelated and interdependent objectives of the U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy: inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth, strengthened resilience among people and systems, and a well-nourished population. Ms. Maharjan is a Ph.D. student at Tribhuvan University in Nepal and an Assistant Scientific Officer at the Department of Plant Resources under the Ministry of Forests and Environment, Government of Nepal. Her research is funded in collaboration with the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Integrated Pest Management.

The BIFAD awards panel highlighted the exemplary scientific rigor and relevance of Ms. Maharjan's research, which focuses on the ecology and management of the highly invasive weed *Parthenium hysterophorus* through biological methods. Her research addresses major gaps in the understanding of this destructive weed's distribution patterns and projected spread, which is known to leave agricultural land unsuitable for crop production or animal grazing. Ms. Maharjan's research modeled the likely spread of this weed under different climate change scenarios. Her results, which point to wider spread of the weed in coming years, urge the scientific community and decision makers to take prompt action around quarantine decision-making to prevent invasion of this weed in new areas and to develop early detection and eradication strategies. Ms. Maharjan is also exploring two biological control options, rust fungus and leaf



Ms. Seerjana Maharjan conducting field observations in Central Nepal



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feeding beetles, which show promise for the effective and successful management of the weed.

Professor Dr. Pramod K. Jhaat Tribhuvan University who works closely with Ms. Maharjan commended Ms. Maharjan's "extreme passion and dedication to research," which motivated her to expand her field work, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. In describing her research and collaboration with the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Integrated Pest Management, Ms. Maharjan shared that the Lab's support allowed her to learn new research approaches such as species distribution modeling and remote sensing imagery. The IPM Innovation Lab also supported her participation in international conferences to share her research findings.

BIFAD will recognize Ms. Maharjan at an awards presentation and lecture in fall 2022.

ABOUT BIFAD: The Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (**BIFAD**) is a seven-member, presidentially appointed advisory board to USAID established in 1975 under Title XII of the Foreign Assistance Act, as amended, to ensure that USAID brings the assets of U.S. universities to bear on development challenges in agriculture and food security and supports their representation in USAID programming.

ABOUT THE FEED THE FUTURE INNOVATION LABS: The Feed the Future **Innovation Labs** draw on the expertise of top U.S. universities and developing country research institutions to tackle some of the world's greatest challenges in agriculture and food security. Led by U.S. universities, these Innovation Labs are central to advancing novel solutions that support our goals to reduce global hunger, poverty, and undernutrition. The BIFAD Awards for Scientific Excellence recognize student and senior researchers for significant achievements originating from work performed under the Feed the Future Innovation Labs. Award selection criteria include scientific merit; relevance to country priorities; potential for broader impact at scale; and evidence of commitment to inclusive development and local capacity development.