NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STUDENTS FROM SEVEN UNIVERSITIES SERVE AS RESEARCH FELLOWS TO FILL DATA GAPS IN THE WORLD'S OPEN MAP

WASHINGTON, DC — More than ten million changes have been made recently to the world's free, editable public map, OpenStreetMap, by YouthMappers, a network of university students who have united to create and use open spatial data to directly address development challenges in the most impoverished countries on the planet. Seven (7) of those students from 7 universities in 7 countries were selected as Research Fellows, that participated in a workshop and community building event in Washington, DC and Morgantown, West Virginia this June.

Undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in any field at an institution of higher education that has a YouthMappers chapter were invited to apply to become a Research Fellow. The fellows were chosen on the basis of the student's long-term potential to contribute to their research topic, the merit of the research to advance understanding on resilience of vulnerable populations, and the innovative creation and use of OSM data in the study. Students met to address themes of open mapping techniques, data visualization, science communication, inclusive community participation, organizational capacity building, and international partnership.

At the workshop, the YouthMappers program provided capacity training in open mapping techniques and data analysis to help enrich local chapter activities as well as connectivity across the network of chapters. Fellows also received professional development, access to mentoring by international experts and engaged in community building with the other participants.

Michael Montani, along with his mentor Renato Casagrandi from Politecnico di Milano, Italy was selected among 80 applicants to take part. There, Michael was able to further his research on "Cross-continental YouthMapping for fighting schistosomiasis in the Senegal River Valley." By creating an eco-epidemiological model of schistosomiasis, a dangerous epidemic widespread in Sub-Subharian areas of Africa, this research can help improve the resilience of endangered populations in the Senegal River Valley. Carried out with the help of Senegal OpenStreetMap and PoiMappers it will use OpenStreetMap data to obtain a worldwide contribution to this humanitarian problem.

He was joined by others from around the world in a cohort of 8 research fellows:

Student: Airin Akter, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
Mentor: Nahid Rezwana, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Student: Chomba Chishala, University of Zambia, Zambia
Mentor: Benard Chileshe, University of Zambia, Zambia

Student: Dennis Aibuedefe Irorere, Federal University of Technology Akure, Nigeria
Mentor: Adeoluwa Stephen Akande, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Student: Ingrid Martha Kintu, Makerere University, Uganda
Mentor: Anthony Gidudu, Makerere University, Uganda

Student: Maria Fernanda Peña Valencia, University of Antioquia, Colombia
Mentor: Natália da Silveira Arruda, University of Antioquia, Colombia

Student: Michael Montani, Politecnico di Milano, Italy
Mentor: Renato Casagrandi, Politecnico di Milano, Italy

Student: Rubainatu Chalpang Adam, University of Mines and Technology, Ghana
Mentor: Naa Dedei Tagoe, University of Mines and Technology, Ghana

YouthMappers emphasizes the creation and utilization of open data and open source software for geographic information directly related to development objectives in unmapped places of the world where the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) works to end extreme poverty.

All new data created by YouthMappers is open and accessible to the public using the OpenStreetMap platform and tools to ensure it is freely available for the greater public good, particularly local populations planning for the welfare and vitality of their own communities.

The YouthMappers network of chapters organizes a global community of learners and scholars to work locally and exchange collaboratively to help create resilient communities. The program seeks to not just build maps, but to build mappers, supporting universities and colleges to offer meaningful global learning experiences, build a socially engaged citizenry, enhance long-term scientific capacity around the world, and foster youth exchange and leadership.

The Research Fellowship symposium was hosted by The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. and West Virginia University, in Morgantown, West Virginia. Sessions included instructors and experts from Texas Tech University, The George Washington University, West Virginia University, founding partners of YouthMappers, as well as the USAID GeoCenter, The World Bank, the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team and others.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) generously supports this program through a grant from the US Global Development Lab's GeoCenter. To date, 120 universities in 38 countries have formed student-led chapters in the network.

This initiative was formally launched November 2015 on Capitol Hill as part of the US national Geography Awareness Week, and the network was inaugurated in February of 2016. New chapters of students are still being formed and are welcomed to join the network.

For more information about YouthMappers, visit www.youthmappers.org.

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