

AWARD Fellowship highlights critical role of African women in agricultural research and development

Groundbreaking program announces 2010 fellowship winners

A passion fruit pathologist, a catfish breeder, and a pigeon pea researcher are among the 60 outstanding women agricultural scientists from 10 African countries who received a fellowship on July 27 from African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD). The fellowship will help these top researchers strengthen their research and leadership skills, and enhance their contributions to poverty alleviation and food security across the continent.

“Today we debunked the myth that qualified African women researchers ‘aren’t out there’—an excuse that’s often used to justify why women are not hired or promoted equitably within agricultural research institutions, universities, and corporations,” said Vicki Wilde, AWARD Director. “We’ve proven that top-notch female scientists do exist in significant numbers and, equally important, they are conducting critical food security research that is desperately needed to feed future generations. We are recognizing and supporting these women today with an AWARD Fellowship.”

Dr. Ruth Amata, a senior research officer at the Kenyan Agricultural Research Institute, is one of this year’s 60 fellowship winners. “I am so excited about this great opportunity,” said Amata. “My main goal is to help rural women farmers to improve production of their food crops, including sweet potato and cassava, through disease management. This fellowship will help me link up with and learn from other women scientists who are making an impact, and to develop the leadership skills I need.”

Amata was selected from 784 applicants representing 54 institutions in 10 countries; she joins 120 AWARD Fellows currently in the program. In total, 1,681 female scientists from 450 institutions have applied for the prestigious fellowships since AWARD began in 2008. AWARD Fellows benefit from a two-year program focused on mentoring partnerships, science skills, and leadership development. The fellowships are awarded on the basis of intellectual merit, leadership capacity, and the potential of the scientist’s research to improve the daily lives of smallholder farmers, especially women.

“Agriculture is key to economic growth in Africa,” said Haven Ley, Program Officer at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which supports AWARD through a grant to the CGIAR’s Gender & Diversity Program. “AWARD is changing agricultural research and development to better respond to the needs and challenges of women producers on the continent.”



AWARD is a professional development program that strengthens the research and leadership skills of African women in agricultural science, empowering them to contribute more effectively to poverty alleviation and food security in sub-Saharan Africa. AWARD offers two-year fellowships focused on mentoring partnerships, science skills, and leadership development. African women working in agricultural research and development from Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia who have completed a bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral degree in selected disciplines are eligible.

A project of the CGIAR’s Gender & Diversity Program, AWARD is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and USAID. For more information, please visit www.awardfellowships.org.

In 2008, AWARD partnered with Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI) to conduct a benchmarking survey of 125 agricultural research and higher education agencies in 15 sub-Saharan African countries. Their report, *Female Participation in African Agricultural Research and Higher Education: New Insights*, is available at www.asti.cgiar.org/gender-capacity along with a series of country fact sheets.

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AWARD addresses many of the barriers, including a lack of role models and mentors, which prevent African women from playing a more active role in agricultural research and from considering a career in agricultural science.

Recent research conducted in 15 African countries by AWARD and Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI) shows that between 2000 and 2008, the number of African women professionals employed in the agricultural sciences grew by 8 percent per year, while the number of African men grew by 2 percent per year. However, women still represent less than one quarter of Africa's scientists holding positions in institutions of agricultural research, and less than one in seven (14 percent) leadership positions is held by a woman.

"At the current rate of change, it will take another 20 years before women reach parity with men in African agricultural research institutions," said Wilde. "Africa cannot afford to wait two decades for women scientists' contributions to poverty alleviation and food security."

The critical role of women scientists and female smallholder farmers to Africa's food security is being increasingly recognized by international donors. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) recently announced that it is more than doubling its funding to AWARD.

"We know the people who matter most aren't the financiers or the agriculture ministers or the assistance workers and partners," said USAID Administrator, Dr. Rajiv Shah, in a recent speech. "They are the women farmers who are the untapped solution to this problem. We're working to ensure that women get equal access to services and support, such as financial services that preferentially target women and extension services delivered by female workers. To make this happen, we are investing in women's producer networks and expanding fellowship programs, such as the AWARD program."

Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, Vice President of Policy and Partnerships for the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, challenged the new fellowship winners to be innovative in their research. "Scientists are on the cutting edge of solving Africa's food crisis. But we need to urgently address the gender gap in our scientific community. We need more women pursuing careers in agricultural science because women are the face of African farming," said Adesina, speaking at an announcement event held at the World Agroforestry Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. "For too long we have looked at the problems women farmers face through a predominantly masculine lens. To today's AWARD winners, I ask you to think about strategies and innovations that better transform opportunities for women farmers. We need you to identify and address issues that have not been on men's radar screen."

Dr. Ephraim Mukisira, Director of the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), stated that his organization's goal is to achieve gender balance in its staffing and leadership. Currently at 30 percent, he said KARI is well on its way to reaching this goal, noting that 16 of his research colleagues are AWARD Fellows.

"I believe that AWARD not only gives you the fishing net, but also equips you with the tools that allow you to launch into the deep with some level of confidence and certainty," said Dr. Waceke Wanjohi, professor and chair of Kenyatta University's Department of Agricultural Science and Technology. A 2008 AWARD Fellow, she reinforced the importance of the program on her career as a nematologist and an academic leader.

Stella Williams, AWARD Chair and retired Professor of Agricultural Economics at Obafemi-Awolowo University in Nigeria, thanked the hundreds of senior African male leaders in agricultural research who volunteer their time to serve as mentors to AWARD Fellows across the continent. “We are deeply grateful for your partnership and your vision,” she said.

Fellowship winner Olufunke Olayode says she is honored that AWARD is investing in her career. “I want to help Nigerians, especially poor, illiterate rural women, to understand the important role of forests in climate change mitigation,” said Olayode, a lecturer at the University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, who is researching biodiversity conservation in forest ecosystems. “AWARD will help me sharpen my research and leadership skills so I can carry out my teaching, research, and community service more effectively.”

A list of 2010 AWARD Fellowship Recipients including their research topics is available at:
http://awardfellowships.org/~awfellow/images/stories/award/downloads/2010%20Fellows_research%20areas.pdf

To watch the speech by Vicki Wilde, Director, CGIAR Gender & Diversity Program and AWARD, please visit: <http://www.blip.tv/file/3935740>.

To watch the speech by Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, Vice President (Policy and Partnerships) for the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, please visit: <http://blip.tv/file/3934337>.

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