



2008 AWARD Fellow
Sarah Mubiru



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Sweets for Success

Sarah Mubiru is a pioneer. A member of the first cohort of AWARD fellows in 2008, she has carved a unique path for herself in the world of agriculture using the skills she gained during her time as an AWARD fellow to refine her vision and take on innovative projects in agriculture. She started her career as a livestock scientist specialising in capacity development for crops and livestock using ICT tools and has now moved to the agribusiness and food production sector after launching a sweets manufacturing company.

She became a fellow after completing her PhD studies. She recalls, “What prompted me to apply for the fellowship was an advertisement. The training, leadership, negotiation skills, science writing, proposal writing, and mentoring appealed to me, I thought it was an exciting opportunity.”

Despite her accomplishments in the field of agriculture, Mubiru did not choose to study agriculture. She says that she was funneled into the Makerere University’s Agricultural Studies program based on her secondary school exam results. Her father, however, was excited. “My dad was okay with it because he had a dairy farm. He said agriculture was the backbone of the economy,” she explains.

Mubiru has continued to engage with AWARD in her role as a mentor and speaks highly of the transformative process that took place within her. “By the end of the fellowship, I was a completely different person. I knew where I wanted to be in ten years’ time, twenty years’ time, and what I had to do to get there,” she says. Mubiru also speaks favourably of the mentoring she received and how it encouraged her to go after opportunities she would have otherwise talked herself out of.

After her fellowship, her newfound leadership skills and more targeted vision inspired her to start the Sow and Grow Foundation, a capacity building organisation for youth in agriculture. “It came from my background studying in an urban area and looking at the other kids and that they never knew what things looked like in gardens—sweet potato, cassava—they only saw it in the market.” She continues, “Knowing they were the future policy makers, ministers, prime ministers, and bank managers, I wondered, ‘how are they going to make policies on agriculture when they do not know what’s happening in the field or understand the challenges farmers go through to produce the food?’”

Mubiru, along with Esther Lugwana, her Sow and Grow co-director and one-time AWARD mentee, formed partnerships with other institutions to ensure that urban African youth have a solid understanding of the farming processes. "I wanted to reward and acknowledge excellence. I thought it was a good and attractive way to engage young people in agriculture."

Having established the organisation, Mubiru was ready for her next endeavor—food production. The inspiration for the project sprung out of her desire to see healthier sweets on the market. She explains, "I have a sweet tooth and I wondered how does one continue eating sweets without worrying?" To achieve her goal of good nutrition and a sweet taste, she used honey. Mubiru experimented with various recipes until she finally came up with a delicious product called Aroma Honey Toffee.

Looking back at all her experiences and accomplishments over the years, Mubiru reminisces about a young Sarah and the advice she would have given her, "Knowing what I now know, I would get two or three people to talk to her and get her out of the little box she is sitting in with her research and writing and ask her to explore her innate potential," she reveals.



Mubiru at AWARD's GAIA bootcamp.

Mubiru has constantly broken out of the mould and taken on projects outside her initial field of livestock science. She wants other women scientists to also remove themselves from the comfort zone society ushers them into. "You have to be a bit of a rebel to get out of stereotypical roles and paths and do something unique including looking for research and grant opportunities out of one's original field," she advises.

Perhaps the biggest take away from Mubiru's long and illustrious career is the advice on seeking counsel from mentors and that one should not fear taking on projects one is not unfamiliar with. "There is nothing impossible. Things are only impossible because we haven't yet found a solution," Mubiru explains.

AWARD is a catalyst for innovations with high potential to contribute to the prosperity and well-being of African smallholder farmers. We equip top women agricultural scientists across sub-Saharan Africa to accelerate agricultural gains by strengthening their research and leadership skills.

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