



2011 AWARD Fellow
Ifeoma Chinyere Agbo

Position	Lecturer II
Institution	University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Country	Nigeria
MSc	Veterinary pathology and microbiology University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2008
Mentor	Kennedy F. Chah, Associate professor University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Research area: Phenotypic and molecular characterization of avian pathogenic Escherichia coli strains in poultry in southeastern Nigeria.

Education was a strong influence for Ifeoma Chinyere Agbo and her four siblings, whose parents both were teachers. Her father's confidence in Agbo prompted him to enroll her in a science secondary school, which in turn led her to a career in veterinary medicine with a passion for molecular biology.

Agbo's position as a university lecturer does not leave her as much time for research as she would like. "Despite substantial teaching and administrative responsibilities, I am really interested in developing solutions for villagers," she says, "particularly women farmers, whose chickens die in flocks from a serious bacterial disease caused by multi-resistant strains of *Escherichia coli*."

Looking for the genes responsible for resistance to certain antibiotics, Agbo is keen to develop a vaccine to prevent the disease from spreading in the first place. "Antibiotics are abused in Nigeria; they are too cheap, and farmers apply them without asking for advice—which causes multi-resistance," laments Agbo.

Working closely with her university supervisor, she is still in the early stages of molecular characterization of the specific bacteria strains. Eventually, they want to collaborate with a drug company to develop an affordable and easily administered vaccine. Agbo is also trying to help farmers learn to better diagnose the disease as soon as respiratory symptoms become visible in the flocks, before the chickens begin to die. Currently, even if the birds do recover, they have lost considerable weight, so the economic importance of Agbo's work is significant.

Agbo regards securing an AWARD Fellowship on her second attempt as a tremendous achievement, especially since she has four other AWARD Fellows at her university as role models. "These women have advanced their careers and are well regarded," she notes. Agbo is particularly looking forward to increasing her professional network, improving her communication skills, and being mentored by a senior scientist. She also expects AWARD's Women's Leadership and Management Course to help her reach her goal faster, which is to become a professor in veterinary microbiology and molecular biology at a renowned university, preferably internationally.

"I love being a lecturer," says Agbo. "I am passionate about imparting knowledge and seeing the impact and results of my work in my students."

Agbo is one of a growing number of African women agricultural scientists who have won an AWARD Fellowship. 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 is generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the United States Agency for International Development. For more information, visit www.awardfellowships.org
