



2010 AWARD Fellow Agnes Alajo

Position:	Research assistant
Institution:	National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRI), Namulonge
Country:	Uganda
BAEE:	Agricultural Education Extension, Makerere University, 2004
Mentored by:	Dr. Sophy Musaana, Plant geneticist NaCRRI

Research area: Breeding of orange-fleshed sweet potato varieties suited to agro-ecological conditions and preferences of resource-poor women; breeding of weevil-resistant sweet potatoes; development of more sustainable seed systems.

Agnes Alajo works in a NaCRRI research program that recently released the world's first participatory breeding sweet potato variety, called Naspot 11. Ugandan farmers are optimistic about its potential for higher yields and increased incomes.

"We are also developing weevil-resistant sweet potato varieties for sub-Saharan Africa," Alajo explains. "Weevils are responsible for crop losses ranging from 60 percent to 100 percent during pronounced drought, when sweet potato is sometimes the only food available."

Alajo grew up in a large family in northern Uganda. She earned a diploma from an agricultural college, and then got a job to help with her younger siblings' schooling. Her friend Dr. Beatrice Akello—who is currently an AWARD Mentor—encouraged her to further her education. "At first I said no, since I had my own children by then and couldn't afford it," she says. But she decided to apply as a mature student and was the first of her family to go to university. She will soon complete a master's degree in Crop Science.

Alajo is working with women's groups in Uganda, focusing on enhancing production, addressing food security, and improving farmers' income. She intends to pursue a PhD, and plans to publish her work. As an AWARD Fellow, she wants to increase her visibility and further her research.

Alajo is one of 180 African woman 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. For more information, visit www.awardfellowships.org