



2011 AWARD Fellow
Bolanle Akinwande

Position	Senior lecturer
Institution	Food Science and Engineering Department Faculty of Engineering and Technology Ladoke Akintola University of Technology
Country	Nigeria
PhD	Food Science, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, 2005
Mentor	Professor Ogugua C. Aworh Department of Food Technology, University of Ibadan

Research area: Enhancement of the use of locally produced functional foods of plant and animal origin, such as mushroom, soybean, ginger, turmeric, traditional cheese, and fish.

As one of 15 children in her family, Bolanle Aishat Akinwande appreciated that her father celebrated his children's success in school—even that of his girls. After her father's untimely death, an older brother facilitated her education, encouraging her to pursue the promising path of food science and nutrition.

Akinwande's PhD work, under the supervision of Dr. Robert Asiedu of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, focused on determining the maturation of yam tubers, with a view to advising farmers and breeders about harvesting practices. Her passion for indigenous mushrooms and *Dioscorea dumetorum*, the bitter yam, started after she realized their potential. "Nigerians are often afraid to grow or eat mushrooms, because they think they are poisonous," says Akinwande. "In rural Nigeria, only the poor eat them as a meat substitute." However, she has established that certain mushrooms and bitter yams not only produce high yields with fairly little effort, but they are extremely high in essential phytochemicals, minerals, and vitamins, as well as valuable fibers.

Akinwande has a passion for improving the lot of rural women and would like to develop projects that will improve their health and livelihoods, specifically promoting the consumption of nutraceutical foods. "My goal is to introduce mushrooms as a delicacy and to encourage consumption," she says. "When city people begin to eat them, the local farmers will not only produce them, they will consume them as well. They'll be convinced that they are something good."

Akinwande aims to promote and improve the processing of mushrooms and yams, with people profiting from a much healthier diet. "While yams are ubiquitous in Nigeria and are grown by men and women, the processing into flour and other products is done by women," she says. "Bitter yam has a great potential to improve the lot of rural women and their families."

However, only rural people and low-income earners in urban centers currently eat the boiled bitter yam. Urban people prefer the white yam, which features much lower yields and less nutritious qualities. Processing bitter yam into a shelf-stable form like flour, as well as its value addition into several products, will solve the

problem of postharvest losses. To allow more Nigerians to benefit from the bitter yam's healthy properties, Akinwande plans to help farmers introduce it to urban areas, with the hope of increasing its popularity. She believes in its potential to replace white yam, but knows this will require promotion. As the global food crisis bites, particularly in developing countries, her research topic of adding value to underused crops is not only timely, but also very fitting—and makes her stand out as a woman scientist in Nigeria.

Under the guidance of her mentor, Professor Ogugua C. Aworh, whom she admires as a “fantastic scholar who has been breaking scientific and social barriers,” and with the training in proposal writing she'll get as part of her AWARD Fellowship, Akinwande expects to raise substantial funds for her research into underused crops. Tapping into her mentor's networks, increasing her visibility in food science, and establishing international connections will help her fast-track her career, which stalled somewhat when she took time off after her first child.

Akinwande takes great joy in helping others grow professionally. A young woman scientist who recently graduated with her master's degree in food science, as well as her PhD students, are among the many lives she has already touched. As an AWARD Fellow she feels invigorated—and wants to give even more.

Akinwande is one of a growing number of 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, please visit www.awardfellowships.org
