AWARD
African Women in Agricultural Research and Development

Profile

2011 AWARD Fellow

Bridget Obhagiagie Bobadoye

Position	Lecturer
Institution	Federal College of Forestry Department of Horticulture and Landscape Technology
Country	Nigeria
MSc	Entomology, University of Ibadan, 2011
Mentor	Dr. Elizabeth Ekpo, Director Forestry Institute of Nigeria

Research area: Studying the impact of honeybee colony losses, managed colony population decline, varroa destructor infestation, and colony collapse disorder in rural communities in southwest Nigeria.

Killing an annoying bug in her office one day sparked Bridget Obhagiagie Bobadoye's interest in studying honeybees. The more she learned about the social order and organization of these amazing insects, and the nutritious and medicinal qualities of honey, the more she wanted to continue her research.

Today, Bobadoye has her own beehives, which she is developing as an alternative source of income for the rural poor. Supported by her like-minded husband, she also raises African giant snails and rears catfish commercially.

"My heart is in the bees, though," Bobadoye stresses. "I am deeply concerned about women farmers engaged in beekeeping who lose their additional source of income from one day to the next due to the increasingly common colony collapse disorder."

Bobadoye is trying to establish why bees abandon their hives, leaving behind eggs, stored food, and emerging young ones that are too weak to fly, while many bees die in and around the hive. She aims to develop a diagnostic tool to help hive owners, especially rural women engaged in beekeeping, to notice the early signs and prevent the collapse of the entire colony. One of her approaches is to rear queens that have better qualities and less of the African bee characteristic of suddenly absconding. She is also currently trying to work on artificial insemination to develop African hybrid bees suitable for the tropics that could be resistant to foul brood and other common bee diseases and also produce higher yields of honey. Her role models are Ghanaian Dr. Peter Kwapong, Canadian Dr. Lawrence Packer, and American Dr. Susan Cobey and Dr. Marla Spivak, all of whom are internationally recognized bee researchers.

As an alternative to African honeybees, Bobadoye is exploring the potential of introducing stingless bees into rural Nigerian communities. Their lives are similar to honeybees, and although they produce less, their honey is of higher medicinal value and can be used to treat cataracts and partial blindness. In future collaboration with Dr. Kwapong, an expert on stingless bees, Bobadoye is trying to establish how more Nigerian women could profit from rearing them.

Having completed her master's degree in 2011, Bobadoye now wants to continue with her PhD studies. Her longer-term goal is to establish a non-governmental organization for rural women and girls involved in beekeeping, providing them with hives and beekeeping suits through a cooperative society that will be formed solely for this purpose, while offering a secure market for the honey and other processed products, selling it on the women's behalf. Her intention is to give the proceeds back to the women in the form of new hives, processing tools, and more.

"The demand for honey is very high in Nigeria as it is part of a traditional bride price, naming ceremonies, and graduation for local artisans," says Bobadoye. "Demand cannot be met currently, and adulteration of honey is unfortunately common." Nigerians will not mind paying more for genuine honey if it is unadulterated, she adds. Since university funding is so scarce, she uses her own money to go to villages monthly to work with women involved in beekeeping.

Bobadoye's greatest joy is achieving her goals. When she joined the honey processing team at her college and saw the poor state of the apiary, she worked with three male colleagues—using their own money—to replace the hives and to buy equipment and beekeeping suits, changing everything gradually over about six months.

Bobadoye has a heart for young girls, who she sees "as a vital force for change and development in rural communities. Teen girls, especially in rural communities in Nigeria, are very vulnerable due to certain traditions and beliefs, which make them succumb to early marriages or even teenage pregnancies," she says. "Empowering young girls is the only solution."

Bobadoye anticipates that the AWARD Fellowship will enable her to join the International Bee Research Association—an opportunity to increase her visibility, potential collaboration, and to find more funding for her stingless bee research. She also looks forward to participating in the AWARD Women's Leadership and Management Course to improve her confidence, negotiation, and communication skills. Bobadoye says that she has adopted a new life motto from her first AWARD training course: "Feel the fear and do it anyway!"

Bobadoye 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, visit www.awardfellowships.org