



2011 AWARD Fellow
Ugo Chijioke

Position	Senior research officer
Institution	National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike
Country	Nigeria
MSc	Food processing and preservation Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, 2005
Mentor	Sanni Lateef Oladimeji, Professor University of Agriculture, Abeokuta

Research area: Value-addition and postharvest evaluation of root and tuber crops, e.g. the effect of processing on starch from beta-carotene biofortified cassava roots.

Perhaps it was losing her mother as a young teenager that made Ugo Chijioke a resilient young woman who is keen to soar as a research officer. Her first name means “eagle” in Igbo, one of Nigeria’s official languages. Her father, who she refers to as a “one in a million dad”, retired as chief agricultural superintendant at the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), so she virtually grew up within the institute. “I was looking for a career in which I could be innovative,” Chijioke says. “I know I’m good with things having to do with food, since that’s where my passion lies.”

Chijioke focused on cassava during her master’s program, even making noodles from it. “But I’m now looking at coco yam, because no one is considering what is looked upon as a woman’s crop,” she explains. “I want to reintroduce it to Nigerian homes and find ways to diversify and promote its nutritional value, especially for children.” Chijioke is producing recipes so kids can use it as a breakfast food, and is also exploring its medical properties. “I want to encourage women to make a livelihood from coco yam.” She is working hard to solve a significant problem with the tuber: it makes your mouth itchy. “We are trying to curb the itching properties by such means as blanching,” she says.

Chijioke enjoys the diversity of her job as a research officer at NRCRI. “I also work with corporate groups, training people on value-added products,” she says. “I have taught them to make cassava flour and produce confectioneries from it, which taste good. We also go to villages and train youth, women’s organizations, and church groups, carrying our technologies and research findings to them.”

Chijioke was recently accepted for a PhD program at the University of Nigeria. She aspires to be in a position where she can bring more ideas to women in the agricultural unit where she works and help rural woman to improve their families’ nutrition. Chijioke says she draws great satisfaction from knowing that she has had an impact into a breakthrough in science, such as the work she did on cassava. “I like creativity, and if I can develop something new with a crop, and contribute in some small way to making life better for Nigerians, I feel a real sense of joy.”

As an AWARD Fellow, Chijioke expects to gain skills in scientific writing and proposal writing, which will help her in her research work. She is excited to work with her mentor, who she says has a passion to get people to where they want to go. "Also, I believe I will improve my networks, and pick up skills in how to better deal with human beings," she adds. Moreover, she hopes to enhance her visibility. "AWARD will present opportunities so that when people talk about postharvest, my name will come up," she states confidently.

Chijioke 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
