



## 2010 AWARD Fellow Christine Mukantwali

*Research area: Fruit processing, focused on pineapple processing and preservation.*

A focused researcher, Christine Mukantwali knows exactly what she wants to accomplish in her career: to develop improved processing methods for locally grown fruits and vegetables to help Rwandese improve their nutritional levels and their livelihoods.

Mukantwali is determined to make a contribution to her country, even if it means studying for her PhD in Tanzania, where she is currently based, far from her husband and three daughters at home in Rwanda. She understands how precious time can be. In 1994, Mukantwali's parents and five of her siblings died in the genocide that claimed more than a million lives. Only she and her younger brother survived.

"I walked the streets, looking for food and clothing. I'd never looked after myself and now I had to look after my brother and my two cousins," says Mukantwali. Despair was not an option. "We survived. As long as I am living, I have to live well."

To support her family and to save money for her university studies, Mukantwali worked as a lab technician at the National University of Rwanda's medical laboratory for several months. She was convinced that education was the way out of poverty. "One day a woman walked by me, carrying water on her head, a baby strapped to her back, with a goat tied to a rope beside her," she recalls. "I realized I'd have to study hard if I wanted a different life myself."

In 2001, Mukantwali won a government scholarship to study nutrition at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, where she completed her bachelor's and later her master's degrees in Nutrition. She joined the *Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Rwanda* full time in 2005, and worked her way up to be Head of the Postharvest Research Unit and the Food Conservation and Nutrition program. While there, she coordinated a project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on the assessment of postharvest losses of fruits and vegetables in Africa and South Asia, in collaboration with the National University of Rwanda and KIST.

**Position:** PhD student

**Institution:** Sokoine University of Agriculture, Tanzania

**Country:** Rwanda

**MSc:** Human Nutrition, University of KwaZulu-Natal  
South Africa, 2005

**Mentored by:** Dr. Hilda Vasanthakalaam, Head  
Food Science and Technology Department, Faculty of Science  
Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST)

Mukantwali obtained a European Union grant to help small banana wine companies in Rwanda to improve their production. "Hygiene was a problem. The workers were using their feet to mash the bananas," she says. "We taught them good manufacturing processes—pasteurization and juice extraction—and their sales doubled."

Currently, Mukantwali is particularly interested in micronutrients and how they affect the whole life cycle. "Traditionally, Rwandans don't eat a lot of fruits and vegetables, and I want to find ways to encourage people to add these items to their diet." She says postharvest handling needs to be improved, and she is researching this as part of her PhD studies.

To obtain future funding for her research, Mukantwali would like to strengthen her writing skills through training offered by AWARD. "When I've written a successful proposal that will directly benefit people, I feel like I'm flying. Often, I write proposals with a team, and if I can improve my skills, it will help my colleagues as well."

Mukantwali also looks forward to feedback and encouragement from her mentor. "I expect that AWARD will help me to focus and not be deterred when someone says, 'Is that really feasible?'"

Confident and industrious, Mukantwali credits her "can do" attitude to her late parents. "My parents were not educated, but they worked hard and taught their children to do the same," she says. "This is the legacy they left us."

*Mukantwali 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, please visit [www.awardfellowships.org](http://www.awardfellowships.org)*

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