



2011 AWARD Fellow
Shirley Isibhakhomen Ejoh

Position	Assistant lecturer
Institution	Department of Human Nutrition, University of Ibadan
Country	Nigeria
MSc	Human Nutrition, University of Ibadan, 2005
Mentor	Veronica Obatolu, Professor of Human Nutrition Institute of Agricultural Research and Training, Ibadan

Research area: Exploring the use of underused traditional plant foods to expand dietary diversity and contribute to nutritional status of vulnerable groups in rural areas.

Shirley Isibhakhomen Ejoh came from a family that valued education, so it was expected that she would attend university. She chose to study human nutrition, and is currently in a doctoral program in the same discipline at the University of Ibadan.

Ejoh is studying leafy green vegetables, many of which grow wild in and around the village where she is conducting her research. “The food basket in Nigeria is shrinking because of an over-dependence on a few promoted crops,” she says. “I want to assess how indigenous plant foods can contribute to the protein and micronutrient intake of women of reproductive age and children, who are the most vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies.”

As part of her research, Ejoh is looking at food frequency patterns of both wild and normal foods among the villagers. She is also working on the processing of flour from cocoyam, an underused tuber in Nigeria. She aims to address some of the constraints in cocoyam consumption and usage by processing the tuber into flour, determining its nutritional qualities, and exploring its potential as a meal or snack item. “My job is more public health rather than agriculture specifically,” she says. “The field of human nutrition is vast, and there needs to be a balance between nutrition and agriculture.”

Ejoh says her goal is to become a leading researcher and promoter of underused foods and biodiversity for improving food and nutrition security in Nigeria through the development of food-based dietary guidelines, recipe books, and nutrition and health information materials. She hopes to organize a fair on World Food Day, where the women farmers can demonstrate the diversity of the traditional foods in their locality, inviting the university community to attend. She says most of the young people have left the tiny remote village where she works. “We need to document the foods our ancestors ate—and record them on paper, through pictures, and on the web.”

Ejoh says she draws the greatest satisfaction from seeing the fruit of her labor. “When I achieve a milestone and the results are positive, it is exciting—it gives you the courage to go on.”

As an AWARD Fellow, Ejoh looks forward to working with her mentor and honing her writing skills by attending the AWARD science writing workshop. "I hope to gain leadership skills and I'll apply for an AWARD-sponsored research attachment. I know this fellowship will help me become a better teacher."

Ejoh 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
