



2009 AWARD Fellow
Esther Kimani

Position:	Research assistant
Institution:	Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI)
Country:	Kenya
BSc:	Biochemistry, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya, 2001
Mentored by:	Dr. Santie de Villiers Scientist Biotechnology, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid and Tropics, Nairobi, Kenya

"I will impact the lives of young women in high school/university by teaching biotechnology and using it as a tool for crop improvement."

Esther Kimani, 31, holds a BSc in biochemistry and is currently undertaking her MSc studies in biochemistry and molecular biology at Egerton University, Kenya. Her MSc project covers the characterisation of the Lablab purpureus germplasm in Kenya using AFLP markers and analysis of the flavour compounds in the bean. Lablab purpureus is an orphan crop in Kenya, even though some of the world's oldest varieties such as "Rongai" originated from Kenya. It is a drought-tolerant crop and, when prepared well, is used for forage and food since it has anti-nutritional factors.

Kimani works in the molecular laboratory at KARI-Njoro where she is involved in carrying out marker assisted selection work. She has also been involved in the diagnostics of plant viruses in KARI. She is currently working on projects about the bread-making quality of wheat and other wheat traits using molecular markers. She is also studying how to improve the nutritional quality of wheat using mutation breeding to improve α -tocopherol, resistant starch and mineral levels.

"Molecular biology work is challenging since the technologies are fast-changing. Working in a developing country makes accessing these technologies difficult and also very expensive. But I hope to utilize these technologies in carrying out my research," says Kimani.

Through the AWARD Fellowship, Kimani says she has a better strategy for her career and is benefitting professionally by being formally mentored for two years by a senior scientist. She is also expanding her networks through access to the CGIAR Gender & Diversity Program's global database of women scientists and professionals, as well as her mentor's networks. "I aspire to improve my career by acquiring leadership skills that will enable me to be a team builder," says Kimani. "I want to be a confident leader, impacting the lives of women and men through research that will lead to increase in food quantity and quality."

Kimani 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, visit www.awardfellowships.org