



**2010 AWARD Fellow**  
**Mildred Ochwo-Ssemakula**

<b>Position</b>	Lecturer
<b>Institution</b>	College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Makerere University
<b>Country</b>	Uganda
<b>PhD</b>	Molecular virology, Makerere University, 2009
<b>Mentor</b>	Dr. Richard Edema, Senior lecturer, Makerere University

*Research area: Developing management tools for viral diseases in horticultural crops.*

Mildred Ochwo-Ssemakula considers agricultural science to be a noble profession, and has dedicated her career to plant virology, with a special focus on horticultural crops such as passion fruit.

“During my final year of secondary school, my uncle challenged me with this quote: ‘He who serves agriculture serves all mankind,’” says Ochwo-Ssemakula. “The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to make a difference in this world by ensuring that people have food to eat and money to take care of their families generated from agriculture.”

Ochwo-Ssemakula obtained her three agricultural degrees from Makerere University, where she now lectures and leads the passion fruit research team, part of a USAID-sponsored Integrated Pest Management Collaborative Research Support Program. She has served as a guest scientist at Washington State University, participating in research on the detection and identification of Tospoviruses in tomato and pepper, and was a visiting scientist at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Centre, where she developed molecular diagnostic tools for Potyvirus identification in passion fruit. Ochwo-Ssemakula was also a guest scientist at the Federal Research Centre for Agriculture and Forestry in Braunschweig where she worked with a team to identify a novel and prominent *potyvirus* infecting passion fruit in Uganda.

She is currently working on developing an integrated management package for viral disease on passion fruit in Uganda, based on cultural practices and host resistance. “This research is particularly exciting because viral diseases cause yield losses of up to 100 percent, yet there are no resistant crop varieties available for commercial production and the breeding program for passion fruit collapsed more than 20 years ago,” explains Ochwo-Ssemakula. “However, farmers are really interested in growing the crop because there is a ready market for it and the market price, both local and international, is good.”

Based on her winning project proposal, Ochwo-Ssemakula recently received funding from RUFORUM to work with small-scale farmers to develop technologies appropriate for use on-farm in managing viral diseases in passion fruit. “AWARD’s proposal-writing workshop helped me to improve my submission. I developed the

proposal specifically to target women farmers after AWARD highlighted to me how women's unique needs are not adequately met with current research," she says. "My other various research interests on hot pepper, common bean, tomato, and coffee also target small-scale farmers' productivity enhancement."

Career-wise, Ochwo-Ssemakula enjoys her university's academic setting where she lectures, conducts research, and supervises 11 graduate students. "I would like to eventually impact decision making at a national level by joining the National Planning Authority in Uganda," she says. "My AWARD Mentor has helped me to enhance my visibility, which has expanded my research scope beyond the horticultural crops that I previously worked with. The fellowship has equipped me with invaluable skills for managing research projects and teams. I am no longer a passive follower; I seek opportunities to participate and contribute to the development of my unit at Makerere University."

Ochwo-Ssemakula finds her work challenging and satisfying. "Knowing that my work is shaping the future of agriculture through training agricultural professionals and that my research will make a difference in the lives of farmers gives me joy," she concludes.

*Ochwo-Ssemakula 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](http://www.awardfellowships.org)*

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