



2011 AWARD Fellow
Njeri Njau

Position	Master's student (Agronomy)
Institution	Kenyatta University
Country	Kenya
BEd	Botany, zoology, and chemistry, Kenyatta University, 2008
Mentor	Waceke Wanjohi, Associate professor and dean School of Agriculture and Enterprise Development Kenyatta University

Research area: Assessment of macropropagation technology to produce affordable pest- and disease-free banana seedlings.

Njeri Njau is fascinated by bananas, and is working on a technology to produce affordable seedlings, which will enable Kenyan smallholder farmers—more than 60 percent of whom are women—to improve their livelihoods.

Njau recalls always loving science. “In high school I was in the science club, and I chose to study biology and chemistry at university.” She began a master’s program in agronomy in 2010, and aspires to eventually do a PhD in crop protection, preferably abroad. One of her long-range goals is to write and publish a book that will give insights into food production and how to gain maximum yields through reducing crop diseases.

Njau’s current research involves working with farmers to set up banana-seedling nurseries, similar to ones already established in eastern and central Kenya. “We recently held two demonstrations of the technology for farmers,” she says. “The turnout was good but it was mostly women—the men think it’s too much work.”

She says she chose to work on bananas because a majority of farmers generally produce only enough to eat, and not enough to sell. She wants to increase their productivity so their livelihoods will improve—those who accept the technology can actually sell the seedlings, and some are open to this idea. “Knowing that every effort I make—however small—will contribute to food security gives me great satisfaction,” she says.

Every month, Njau visits the farms, and it has taken some time to earn the farmers’ confidence and trust. “Sometimes it’s hard to be a woman working in rural areas—people don’t always understand why you are still studying and what you are doing. But they are impressed when they see me pick up a saw to construct the nurseries.”

Njau learned about the AWARD Fellowship from her university dean and current mentor, who is a former AWARD Fellow herself. “The best things about being an AWARD Fellow are having my goals clearly defined, enhancing my networking skills, and increasing my confidence. Joining a professional organization is a big advantage too, and I look forward to improving my leadership skills.”

Njau 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
