



2011 AWARD Fellow
Beatrice Olubukola Ogunba

Position	Senior lecturer
Institution	Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU)
Country	Nigeria
PhD	Public Health Nutrition, University of Ibadan, 2007
Mentor	Kehinde Taiwo, Professor, OAU, Ile Ife

Research area: Appropriate feeding approaches for children under age five in rural Nigeria.

As a nutritionist and a mother of three, Beatrice Olubukola Ogunba is passionate about helping mothers feed their young children properly. "My firstborn just would not grow, and I thought he had health problems," she remembers. "I spent so much money on tests he didn't need until finally a pediatrician told me how to better breast-feed my boy. He then grew without any problems." This experience triggered Ogunba's zeal to train breast-feeding mothers and to teach them about appropriate complementary feeding practices.

Ogunba has witnessed heartbreaking scenes during her MSc and PhD research, such as a 23-month-old child weighing only four kilograms. She did all she could to help this baby, but the mother refused to take her to the hospital, so the baby died. "Babies really need breast milk for six months exclusively and two years of breast-feeding, slowly introducing local foods and cereals, as well as soft fermented fruit and juices," she explains.

Ogunba's immediate research addresses food safety and the microbial level, and how food should be served to babies. Rural mothers tend to put food in a bottle or a bowl, and feed the baby throughout the day without refrigerating or heating the food, so microbes flourish. In urban areas, babies now eat more biscuits than nutritious food, and consequently suffer from a lack of essential micronutrients. Fruits and vegetables are rarely fed to children (nor do adults in her region consume significant amounts). The main foods eaten consist of cereals, rice, roots, and tubers.

The outreach and extension program of Ogunba's agricultural faculty plans to work with rural and peri-urban women to teach them about feeding practices, with funding from the Education Trust Fund and the National University Commission. In collaboration with the university's drama group, Ogunba aims to use theater to help change attitudes and behavior regarding feeding practices.

Ogunba plans to establish an NGO to promote better nutritional practices among women and mothers and increase household food security, so building her leadership skills is important, as is balancing work and family. With an ultimate goal of becoming an international consultant on nutrition, Ogunba anticipates that AWARD will help her to write better proposals. She already feels more focused on her career goal, and is

confident that presenting her research results at an international conference—with AWARD’s support—will help her network and increase her visibility.

Ogunba enjoys research and says she has more questions in her head than she can tackle at any given time, and no shortage of ideas. As the head of her department, she is also involved in curriculum development, which follows a review every five years to ensure responsiveness to current needs. The OAU research council decides what additional research will be funded on top of lecturers’ and professors’ teaching loads. “I also love talking to women and students about their lives and serving as a life coach,” she concludes.

Ogunba 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
