



2011 AWARD Fellow
Motunrayo Funke Olumakaiye

Position	Senior lecturer
Institution	Department of Family, Nutrition and Consumer Sciences Faculty of Agriculture, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile Ife
Country	Nigeria
PhD	Public Health Nutrition, University of Ibadan, 2007
Mentor	Professor Simisola Mercy Odeyinka Department of Animal Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture, OAU

Research area: Evaluation of the nutritional content of indigenous foods to provide dietary diversity for women in rural Nigeria.

With her late father having been the chief examiner in agricultural science for the West Africa Examination Council in Nigeria until the late '90s and the author of an agricultural science textbook, Motunrayo Funke Olumakaiye's career path was somewhat predetermined.

Today, Olumakaiye is a nutritionist who is passionate about the nutritional and economic empowerment of teenage and young mothers, especially those in rural Nigeria. "I know that rural women use indigenous vegetables that are rich in vitamin A and iron, but the traditional way they process food destroys almost all of the nutrients," she says. Young mothers often lack awareness about basic nutrition, so Olumakaiye offers them training.

"I find it extremely rewarding to see malnourished children flourish after I've taught their young mothers how to prepare nutritious foods using locally available food items," says Olumakaiye.

"Healthy women are more productive on their farms and in their households." She is also interested in the nutritional assessment and food consumption patterns of rural school-aged children, adolescents, and young mothers.

As the wife of an Anglican bishop in Osun state, Olumakaiye speaks to large groups of women and girls about nutrition. She promotes the consumption of indigenous foods that are rich in protein and essential micronutrients, such as milk from vegetable sources (soybeans, peanuts, tiger nuts) and their by-products, as healthy alternatives to expensive animal milk. She also develops nutritious new recipes, such as soy cookies.

Olumakaiye is particularly concerned about the very high rate of teenage pregnancy in her area. She tries to reintegrate teenage and young mothers, who drop out of school in large numbers, by offering encouragement and practical tools for skills acquisition, helping to empower them so they can avoid being trapped in the cycle of poverty. She also assists village grandmothers, with whom girls often leave their babies when they move to towns.

Olumakaiye would like to do more research on the nutritional potential of what she calls “novel foods,” such as local wild plants—particularly mushrooms—which are extremely nutritious, although often widely ignored. She is equally fascinated by some species of termites, edible larvae, and giant snails as sources of protein, which, she says, “have fallen victim to civilization. I encourage women and girls to use all locally available sources of nutritious food without any bias.” She is also interested in advancing her work on purple-fleshed sweet potatoes, local breadfruit, cocoyam, and other local yam species for possible cultivation and processing by women to improve their livelihoods.

As an AWARD Fellow, Olumakaiye looks forward to fast-tracking her career as a scientist and in academia, increasing her visibility, and becoming an authority on adolescents’ and young mothers’ nutrition. She believes that AWARD will provide her with the confidence and leadership skills she needs to better equip and advise teenage girls and women. Even though her article on “Food Consumption Patterns of Adolescents and Effect on Body Weight” in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* was rated first among the top 10 articles published worldwide in 2010 in the domain of adolescent nutrition, food consumption, and body weight—Olumakaiye still expects to profit from AWARD’s science-writing course.

Olumakaiye 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
