



2011 AWARD Fellow
Sarah Ogochukwu Omeje

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| Position | Scientific officer |
| Institution | National Biotechnology Development Agency |
| Country | Nigeria |
| BSc | Food Science and Technology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2008 |
| Mentor | Rose Gidado, Principal scientific officer National Biotechnology Development Agency |

Research area: Soybean processing and usage to alleviate malnutrition, empower women and improve the health and nutrition of rural households and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Sarah Ogochukwu Omeje knew early on that her interests and talents leaned toward science, and she soon developed a lifelong interest in food science and technology. “I want people to have access to affordable and high-quality nutritious processed food,” she says. “I love innovation, so I intend to simplify advanced technologies to meet rural needs.”

Malnutrition rates among children and women of reproductive age in Nigeria are high, and are very significant in rural locations. Omeje is currently working with soybeans, a low-cost source of protein.

However, she says few Nigerian farmers know about the many benefits of soybeans. “The problem is a lack of awareness—so I want to implement advocacy programs that will demonstrate the health benefits and acceptability of soybean as a major nutritive supplement and food in rural areas.”

Omeje’s job involves the use of biotechnology to improve livelihoods. “I’m trying to encourage the use of soybean-processing technologies with related food products appropriate for rural Nigeria in order to stimulate increased production and to improve the socio-economic and health benefits of rural women,” she says. “Eventually, we hope to biofortify most of our staple foods, thereby eradicating malnutrition in the country.”

Omeje hopes to pursue a master’s degree in food science. “I think the AWARD Fellowship will help me to develop skills that will prepare me for the tasks ahead,” says Omeje, who aspires to be a professor of food science. She is also excited about working with her mentor, a very busy, hard-working woman. Another benefit she sees is the chance to increase her network of contacts. “AWARD has given me an opportunity to meet a lot of people I can connect with for information—people to advise me and work with me, not just for two years but for a lifetime.”

Omeje 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
