



2011 AWARD Fellow
Celestina Ibitayo Omohimi

Position	Quality control officer
Institution	Cassava: Adding Value for Africa (C:AVA) Project
Country	Nigeria
BSc	Food Quality Control and Assurance University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, 2005
Mentor	Professor Folake O. Henshaw, Dean College of Food Science and Human Ecology University of Agriculture, Abeokuta

Research area: Value addition to legumes *Mucuna pruriens*

Celestina Ibitayo Omohimi says she chose a career in food science because, as one of 11 children in her family, she learned early on the importance of food—and she longed to study the science behind it. She is the only one of her siblings to attend university, earning a bachelor’s degree in 2005 and recently completing a master’s program in food quality control and assurance at the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta.

“I enjoy working with women farmers in particular,” says Omohimi. “Serving with the C:AVA project enables me to deal with farmers who are processing cassava. I train them on quality and hygienic practices, and they are very happy to get this training.”

During her BSc studies, Omohimi worked with yams, but moved on to legumes for her later research. “*Mucuna* bean (*Mucuna pruriens*) is highly rich in protein, but it is a neglected legume due to a lack of knowledge about its nutritional value,” she explains. It is mainly grown as ground cover to improve soil properties, or as a forage crop. “Farmers think that’s what it’s for. But although it could add variety to people’s diets and be processed into flour, very few ethnic groups consume it. You have to soak it overnight, making it more labor-intensive,” she explains.

At the PhD level, Omohimi intends to study ways to fortify mucuna flour and its protein isolate in different food formulations in order to develop wholesome, nutritious food products for different consumer groups, especially infants.

“Currently, my university has a unit with a retrofitted flash dryer provided by C:AVA, which makes the production of cassava wet cake into ‘fufu flour’ (a popular food in Nigeria) more efficient. We are trying to create a value chain to link women farmers to the university, as they work on processing cassava into wet cake. Adding value for smallholder women farmers and processors, and improving their livelihoods, gives me so much joy,” she concludes.

As part of her work at as a quality-control officer at C:AVA, Omohimi partners with another research fellow who specializes in gender and learning. The team recently translated questionnaires on the impact of the

C:AVA project into the local language for a gender audit of smallholder farmers in several southwestern Nigerian states.

Omohimi expects the AWARD Fellowship to enhance her leadership skills, and she appreciates the opportunity to attend conferences, workshops, and meetings. "I know I will benefit as an AWARD Fellow in so many ways, especially in the area of networking," she says. "I'll be exposed to senior colleagues with vast experience, and I'll meet and interact with other female researchers, thereby increasing my career development and learning more about the state of agricultural development and food security in various African countries."

Omohimi 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
