



2011 AWARD Fellow
Olutola Oyedele

Position	Assistant director
Institution	National Horticultural Research Institute (NIHORT)
Country	Nigeria
PhD	Agricultural extension, University of Ibadan, 2006
Mentor	Janice Olawoye, Professor, University of Ibadan

Research area: Facilitating the improved nutrition and health status of rural households by empowering women with improved production methods and promoting increased consumption of fruits and vegetables in Nigeria.

Heading the research on horticultural extension at the National Horticultural Research Institute in Ibadan, Olutola Oyedele is passionate about gender responsiveness. Her steady career path in agricultural extension has seen her teaching ordinary and higher diploma students at the Federal College of Agriculture in Akure before joining her current employer, where she enjoyed five years of practical experience before embarking on her PhD.

Oyedele is involved in a nationwide survey that began in 2009, examining how gender plays out in horticultural production and marketing systems regarding roles, needs, decision-making processes, as well as access to and control over resources. She sends multi-disciplinary teams into the relevant agro-ecological zone for each commodity. "Right now, we are particularly interested in spices," she says. "Pepper, garlic, and ginger are widely grown and also exported. I am focusing on how to promote these lucrative crops to women farmers, pointing out their medicinal value at the same time."

The teams discovered that there are distinct differences between northern, central, and southern Nigeria, while in general, horticultural production is divided into gender-disaggregated roles, with the more difficult tasks carried out by men. "While women predominantly market crops in the south, men do this in the north, where they are also more involved in production. In central Nigeria, women are the drivers of crop cultivation, and in general, men control fruit trees," she summarizes.

These findings call for appropriate extension approaches and tools in each of the five zones, and Oyedele's team is working on developing specific tools, while concentrating on the national priority crops, such as mangoes, citrus, pineapples, tomatoes, and onions, as well as the spices. Realizing that men benefit more from the extension services, Oyedele's capacity-building efforts are geared toward giving women not only technical knowledge and skills in crop production, but also training in leadership, management, and financial skills. "We include how to use new technologies, and access to market information via cell phone is improving; penetration is high," she adds.

Fascinated by the learning from the research, Oyedele wants to intensify her work on gender, attract consultancies, and initially focus on capacity building as a facilitator and trainer at NIHORT. Her aim is to offer improved technologies for farmers in general—and women in particular—as well as for processors, commercial farmers, and retirees who start farming.

Oyedele's goals for her AWARD Fellowship include publishing more in high-impact journals, strengthening her research, leadership, and negotiation skills, as well as enhancing her visibility, in order to better guide her staff and raise funds for her institution.

"I need to improve my work-life balance," she admits. "I am married with three young children, and I can barely juggle my personal life with my work, although my husband is very supportive." As a member of NIHORT's internal management committee, balancing administration and research has been challenging for Oyedele. Her additional tasks as the chair of academic staff of the research institutes' local chapter, and as the national treasurer of the Horticultural Society of Nigeria, add to her workload.

Seeing the need to delegate more, Oyedele wants to use the skills gained during her fellowship to mentor younger women at NIHORT, which has 40 female researchers and recently appointed the first female CEO in its 35-year history. "I love to see the younger generation thrive," she says. "I introduced a special seminar series in our institute for our scientists," she says. "Although we need to look at sound science methodology, we also need to provide training on administration, leadership, and budgeting and financial management—knowledge gaps that need to be addressed with our upcoming scientists."

Oyedele 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
