



2011 AWARD Fellow  
**Mary Danse Salifu**

<b>Position</b>	Project officer
<b>Institution</b>	Association of Church Development Projects
<b>Country</b>	Ghana
<b>BSc</b>	Natural Resources Management Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and echnology (KNUST), 2007
<b>Mentor</b>	Emmanuel Danquah, Lecturer, KNUST

*Research area: Research for development in sustainable agriculture, climate change, gender, and women's empowerment.*

Mary Danse Salifu grew up in a small village in northeastern Ghana as the daughter of farmers. Salifu's father was so upset when one of her 18 siblings got pregnant in middle school and dropped out to get married, that he vowed not to waste any more money on education for his other daughters.

"I was passionate about my education, and always performed really well in class," Salifu remembers. "Sister Cherry, a Baptist missionary in our village, paid my school fees, including hefty exam fees." When Salifu was accepted into a top secondary school, she was moved to tears when her benefactor again paid for her fees and supplies.

Wanting to become a nurse like her missionary friend, Salifu took biology, but later opted for agriculture and excelled. "Sister Cherry was not so happy, but supported me anyway," she recalls. "By then, my father was willing to pay for my sixth form education that would eventually lead to university, but he could not afford it, and so I went to a teachers' training college that paid a small allowance instead." She later attended the University of Ghana to obtain a diploma in agriculture. Later, she went to KNUST for a BSc in natural resources management, and began teaching agriculture in a secondary school.

Working for a three-year project called Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Northern Ghana (SPRING), Salifu developed an environmental management and gender strategy, along with gender experts from the Canadian Hunger Foundation. "Our goal was to get more women involved, as the majority of projects targeted men," she says. "We carried out capacity building for couples, sensitizing women to own land, and men to allow women to own livestock."

Attention to climate change is very important in northern Ghana, Salifu notes, where many uneducated women deplete the natural resources for firewood and charcoal. Realizing the necessity to provide these women with other sources of income, SPRING trained them in micro-enterprise skills and provided small loans, as well as starter livestock, such as sheep and goats. "This proved to be a very sustainable approach," Salifu concludes. "The men realized that enabling women meant better food for them, and their wives no longer depended on them to pay health insurance and hospital bills."

Salifu reports beekeeping as one of the big success stories stemming from the SPRING approach, as well as compost production and teaching farmers how to bail hay to have year-round feed for their livestock.

Now a gender and environment desk officer with the Association of Church Development Projects/NGOs (ACDEP), Salifu helps provide base funding for agricultural development and capacity-building projects. Her project portfolio includes implementing the N2 Africa Project, a program funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that supports R&D projects in eight African countries, including Ghana. Salifu's organization oversees 60 demonstration sites in their catchment area, demonstrating biological nitrogen fixation with and without fertilizer and/or inoculants.

Working in collaboration with the Savannah Agricultural Research Institute and KNUST, the project research focuses on determining the nodule population and size to establish the amount of fixed and available nitrogen. ACDEP partners in this program with the Evangelical Presbyterian Development and Relief Agency, which works directly with the farmers. Salifu monitors and trains agricultural extension agents, each of whom is in charge of 12 demonstration sites. Some 40 women and about 80 men work on the 60 demonstration sites as master and satellite farmers.

Salifu is passionate about helping those communities where parents are uneducated. She wants to encourage women to invest the little money they can spare in their children's education, thereby breaking the poverty cycle. She takes pride in the success stories she sees and hears during her monitoring visits to the field. "Some of the women who used to sell firewood and charcoal were trained through our micro-enterprise program, and they started small businesses, such as producing groundnut oil and shea butter," says Salifu. "Now they can pay their children's school fees, and one even bought a sewing machine. And the men are proud of being able to feed their families year-round."

Salifu's aspiration is to obtain a master's degree, studying local livestock feed that is available throughout the year, such as moringa and cowpea, which would enable women to keep livestock. As an AWARD Fellow, her goal is to reach her potential, build her confidence, become a better fundraiser, increase her professional networks, and learn from other women scientists in the project. Apart from increasing her leadership skills, she would like to better interpret lab results to farmers. Juggling her career, education, and a family, she also aims for a better work-life balance.

"Sometimes I feel like giving up and staying home with my children," she laughs and adds: "I am the only woman at N2 Africa Project in my catchment area, and occasionally I feel a little intimidated. It really helps that I have profited from gender training myself."

*Salifu 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](http://www.awardfellowships.org)*

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