



2009 AWARD Fellow
Sarah Ayeri Ogalleh

Position:	Associate researcher
Institution:	Centre for Training and Integrated Research in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands Development (CETRAD)
Country:	Kenya
MSc:	Environmental Science, Egerton University 2008
Mentored by:	Professor Mathews Chemelil Department of Agricultural Engineering Egerton University, Kenya

Research area: Agricultural innovation and climate change: Study of farmers' localized adaptations to climate change.

Climate change affects us all, but its impact is already being borne by the most vulnerable: women, children and the disabled in poor rural communities who are already struggling to make a living from the land, says Sarah Ayeri Ogalleh.

This environmental scientist focused her research for her MSc degree on helping communities along the River Njoro to manage and preserve the delicate watershed while reaping benefits from it. "Some 500,000 people depend on the river, as well as wildlife, including the famous Lake Nakuru flamingos. Lake Nakuru is an important touristic attraction that provides many jobs directly or indirectly," explains Ogalleh. But local farmers who clear cut the land have damaged this fragile ecosystem. "Our research found that people perceived trees to have natural regeneration potential and they saw no need to plant them on their farms, resulting in the current state of the watershed."

Ogalleh's work is helping to change traditional beliefs by equipping farmers—both men and women—with the knowledge and means to manage their environment, using scientific facts and participatory methodologies that the local people could understand.

She organized training sessions to raise awareness about the importance of trees and taught farmers how to produce and sell seedlings that were soon in demand. She also helped residents establish a water users' association to manage the river and protect it from further degradation.

From 2007-2009 Ogalleh replicated similar methodologies done earlier in River Njoro, an arid and semi-arid region, where farmer groups are trained in community environmental management, community empowerment and leadership skills. These groups are supplied with seeds, training and water tanks so they can grow seedlings to plant and sell. Ogalleh has also taught school children basic environmental conservation through tree planting and nurturing.

Ogalleh, 32, is already gaining recognition for her work. In 2006, she and a co-author presented a paper at an international conference in Laos entitled *"Integrating gender perspectives in water policies and institutions: realizing new options for effective water management in Kenya."* In 2005, she attended a conference in Russia where she presented a paper on *"Human settlement around the Mau Forest and its implication on forest succession."* She has also published findings in the renowned Discovery and Innovations Journal of the African Academy of Sciences, as well as proceedings of SUMAWA conferences.

The Mau forest has since become an even more critical issue in Kenya, attracting international attention. During the past 15 years, more than 100,000 hectares—one quarter of the forest reserve—have been settled and cleared. Some 20,000 families accused of squatting in the forest are facing eviction by the Kenyan government.

Ogalleh is as ambitious as she is determined to be a catalyst for change in her society. After graduating with her master's degree in environmental studies in 2008, she was awarded a scholarship from the North South Dialogue Programme of Austria to pursue her PhD studies at the Universität für Bodenkultur in Vienna, Austria. She plans to conduct her research study on climate, agriculture, natural resources and livelihoods.

Ogalleh is the Kenyan representative on the Gender Water Alliance, an East African regional body including scientists from Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda who are experts in water and sanitation and environmental sustainability.

Ogalleh says her participation in AWARD has helped her strategically plan her career and develop international networks.

Ogalleh is one of 180 African woman 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. For more information, visit www.awardfellowships.org
