



2010 AWARD Fellow
Sarah Lubega Mayanja

Position:	Program officer
Institution:	Pan Africa 2000 Network
Country:	Uganda
BSc:	Agriculture, Makerere University, 1986
Mentored by:	Dr. Dan Kisauzi, Director Nkoola Institutional Development Associates

Research area: Building rural agricultural networks for improved market information-sharing between value-chain actors to facilitate more equitable trade.

Sarah Lubega Mayanja believes that effective agricultural marketing is one of the keys to economic success in Uganda. She is involved in agricultural commodity marketing, specifically on value-chain development.

In her work with Pan Africa 2000 Network, Mayanja links large-scale buyers with sellers—farmers producing maize, soybeans, and groundnuts—and helps to ensure a fair deal for all. “We are trying to assure both parties that the product will be the right quality and quantity, that it will be delivered on time, and that everyone is paid as agreed,” explains Mayanja. “Big buyers don’t want to go around finding one bag here, another there. We work with NGOs who connect us with farmers’ networks. The farmers are happy because they get a good price and the buyers are happy because they get quality produce,” says Mayanja.

Women farmers are now getting 80,000 Ugandan shillings (US\$38) for a 40-kg bag of groundnuts —20,000 shillings (US\$9) more than they earned before participating in the group, which is comprised of at least 25 fellow farmers, says Mayanja, who is impressed by their initiative. “Ten to 12 groups are joining together to form associations, usually at sub-county level.”

One of 28 children who was raised on a large farm in Uganda, Mayanja has learned much about trading and about people during more than five years as a program officer. “Farmers aren’t all angels,” she laughs. “They add stones and sticks to the bags of produce to make up the weight. I admit I prefer working with women farmers who are more trustworthy with the funds they receive and more patient when payment from the buyer is delayed.”

An innovative thinker, Mayanja and her colleagues are helping rural entrepreneurs to collect and share daily market information via mobile phone text messages. The information is sent to a central database, and is then synthesized and distributed to a network of entrepreneurs and subscribers via SMS.

“The local entrepreneur can display this information, and if farmers have produce to sell, they can be linked to markets and buyers,” explains Manyanja. “An ‘offer to sell’ alert can be broadcast to network members by SMS. On the other hand, a big buyer can also send an ‘offer to buy’ alert to network members for any commodity he needs. Deals are being made this way.”

Manyanja is eager to increase her knowledge about agricultural economics and take on more responsibility at work. “People tell me I have potential to advance, but I don’t get promotions because I only have my BSc,” she says. In 2006, she was admitted to a master’s program in Agricultural Economics at Makerere University, but her husband was tragically killed in a road accident, leaving this young widow with two young daughters to educate.

Despite the challenges she has faced, Manyanja remains positive and perseverant, and says winning an AWARD Fellowship has encouraged her to set new goals. She is keen to research information about other agricultural marketing projects and publish her findings in a journal. “I would like to learn not just from those who have been successful, but also from those who have had their fingers burned,” says Manyanja, who anticipates support in developing her writing skills from her AWARD Mentor. “My mentor is a very resourceful person and I am sure he is going to help me move forward.”

Having raised her daughters—the eldest is completing a degree in agricultural business management—Manyanja says the timing is right to further her education and develop the marketing consulting business that she and her colleagues recently launched. “Although I haven’t advanced as I’d anticipated in my education, I’m proud of my achievements. My children are doing well, and I’ve built a career despite the hurdles I’ve faced. Now it’s time to think about the future.”

Lubega Manyanja 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, please visit www.awardfellowships.org
