



## 2008 AWARD Fellow Sheila Ommeh

<b>Position:</b>	PhD fellow
<b>Institution:</b>	International Livestock Research Institute
<b>Country:</b>	Kenya
<b>MSc:</b>	Biotechnology, Kenyatta University, Kenya 2007
<b>Mentored by:</b>	Dr. Johnson Ouma Senior Scientist/Deputy Centre Director Trypanosomiasis Research Centre Kenya Agricultural Research Institute

*Research area: Introduction of a disease-resistant chicken using indigenous African breeds preferred by women farmers.*

Sheila Ommeh is a PhD fellow at the International Livestock Research Institute, based in Nairobi, Kenya. This young animal geneticist is passionate about poultry. Sheila hopes to introduce a disease-resistant chicken using indigenous breeds that can be easily produced by women farmers.

Sheila understands the importance of poultry farming in the livelihoods of the rural poor. Seventy-six percent of all Kenyan rural households are engaged in some kind of poultry rearing. Her mother and grandmother raised chickens to support the family's children. But disease prevalence was high and the flock was wiped out on occasion. When the chickens died, money for food and school fees was in short supply. Sheila grew up determined to help find a solution.

Sheila's doctoral research will contribute toward a genetic control of bird flu and Newcastle disease. Currently, there is no effective cure or vaccine for these viruses.

In 2008, Sheila won a fellowship from the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD). This career-development program helps female researchers to build their technical and leadership skills. The 180 women in AWARD come from 10 different countries, but they share one passion: to change the face of agriculture in Africa. As emerging leaders, they want to see women have more influence over research priorities, policies, and programs so they can make sure that rural smallholders—most of whom are women—are included.

Sheila also has a heart for youth. In 2009, she herself received a Promising Young Scientist award from Lions Club International. That same year, Sheila met U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack during their visit to Nairobi. "Science is crucial to building a pathway out of poverty," said Sheila, during the meeting. "Yet few young Africans are pursuing careers in agricultural research and science. We need your help in expanding that number."

*Sheila shows off prize poultry to Secretary Clinton during an event hosted by AWARD.*

