



**2010 AWARD Fellow**  
**Shelmith Munyiri**

<b>Position:</b>	PhD research fellow
<b>Institution:</b>	Makerere University/International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
<b>Country:</b>	Kenya
<b>MSc:</b>	Agronomy, Egerton University, 2008
<b>Mentored by:</b>	Dr. Jane Ininda, Program officer Crop Improvement and Farmer Variety Adoption Fund for the Improvement and Adoption of African Crops Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa

*Research area: Genetic studies of resistance in maize to stem borers.*

Shelmith Munyiri has a heart for female farmers in Kenya, many of whom are widows struggling to hang on to their small plots of land—women just like her mother.

Munyiri lost her father in a road accident when she was five years old, leaving her mother to raise five young children. “My mother’s only resource was her farm. She did everything she could to get us an education by selling produce,” recalls Munyiri. “Today, I work with so many women farmers like her. They have no one to advise them on how to improve their crops or their livelihoods. I want to be a bridge for those women.”

Female farmers grow most of the country’s home-consumed maize—a crop that is vulnerable to insects. “The maize stem borer accounts for about 13 percent of grain yield loss, and depending on the variety of maize, losses can be higher,” says Munyiri, who is studying genetic resistance in maize to stem borers as part of her PhD research at Makerere University. “Most farmers, and especially women, can’t afford chemical control, and it is environmentally unsafe.”

Munyiri derives her greatest professional satisfaction from helping women farmers directly. “When I was working in extension, women would often tell me what a difference I’d made to them. They’d say, ‘If you hadn’t taught me to raise papaya, maize, or mangoes, I couldn’t have paid my children’s school fees,’” recalls Munyiri. “My 20-year experience in extension helps me focus my breeding work on the needs of women farmers. I see this as a real advantage,” she adds.

Munyiri has clear career aspirations. As an AWARD Fellow, she hopes to develop her technical skills and her leadership abilities to prepare her to become the head of a regional plant-breeding program. “In about 10 years, I want to have released new varieties specifically responding to women’s needs. I want to be on my way to becoming a professor in plant breeding, influencing seed policies in the East Africa region—if not Africa-wide.”

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

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