



2010 AWARD Fellow
Vettes Kalema

Position:	Lecturer
Institution:	Makerere University, Uganda
Country:	Tanzania
PhD:	Plant Ecology, Witwatersrand University, South Africa, 2010
Mentored by:	Dr. Gerald Eilu, Professor Department of Forest Biology and Ecosystems Management Makerere University

Research area: Assessing the economic contributions of woodlands to rural livelihoods in Uganda.

Vettes Kalema is fascinated by forests, and is dedicated to helping rural women who live off this natural resource. She is equally committed to preserving Uganda’s fragile woodlands, which are rapidly being depleted at a rate of up to 600 square kilometers per year.

“Women depend on woodlands for everything: food, firewood, and medicine. I want to find new ways to support households while relieving the pressure on the forests, giving them time to regenerate,” says Kalema. Woodlands and savanna forests provide up to 90 percent of Uganda’s energy requirements, but this is not sustainable if they are not managed properly.

Kalema believes women can develop alternative income-generating activities, such as baking and knitting, and learn to plant fast-growing trees to harvest for firewood while the woodlands are recovering. “If our woodlands survive, people will survive,” she says. “We can’t separate the two.”

Kalema is a self-described nature lover who began her career working with livestock. After high school, she applied to Tanzania’s Livestock Training Institute for a two-year range management course. She’s grateful that her first name is rather ambiguous, or she might not be where she is today; the registrar thought she was a male and admitted her.

“The teacher was confused when I showed up for the first class—which was all men,” laughs Kalema. “I didn’t realize it was a male-dominated area. I just loved being out in the field, so I applied.”

Kalema learned about cattle breeding and feed preparation, as well as how to dehorn and milk cows. “In my community, women don’t milk cows, but I’ve always been a tradition-breaker—in a good way. My father taught me to ride a bike and drive a motorcycle. I’m daring.”

After graduating from the institute, Kalema changed her focus, taking a job as a junior scientist at the National Herbarium of Tanzania. She served there for 10 years while studying for a BSc in Zoology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Dar es Salaam. She graduated in 1997, and in 2001 obtained a scholarship to complete a master’s in Environmental Science at her alma mater.

In 2002, Kalema became a lecturer at Makerere University and taught for four years before being awarded a scholarship from the Third World Organization for Women in Science to conduct PhD research in Plant Ecology at Witwatersrand University in South Africa. Upon graduation in 2010, she returned to Makerere University as a lecturer.

Kalema thoroughly enjoys working with the students in her faculty. "It's very satisfying to know that I have contributed to a person's development. When a student achieves something, I feel I've achieved something, too."

While Kalema has already achieved much in her own career, she welcomes the guidance and support she is receiving as an AWARD Fellow. "I wasn't sure where to go after completing my PhD, but now I've developed a career roadmap. If I'd had this before, I might not have meandered quite as much; the road forward would have been shorter."

Accessing research funds is a challenge for many scientists, and Kalema expects that connections gained through AWARD will help broaden her network and knowledge about grant opportunities. AWARD Fellows receive a two-year membership to a professional association of their choice, as well as the monthly *Funding News*, a publication of the CGIAR Gender & Diversity Program. "I realize now that I was surrounded by opportunities that I didn't know existed," she notes. "AWARD is putting me on the right path."

Kalema 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
