



2010 AWARD Fellow  
**Victoria Mwenda**

<b>Position:</b>	Nutritionist (Coordinator)
<b>Institution:</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
<b>Country:</b>	Kenya
<b>BSc:</b>	Nutrition (Honors), Kenyatta University, 2005
<b>Mentored by:</b>	Dr. Sophie Ochola Senior Lecturer Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Kenyatta University

*Research area: Studying the association between a set of maternal characteristics and nutritional outcomes of children under five years of age.*

It is the children who inspire Victoria Mwenda in her work in one of the world's oldest and largest refugee camps.

"Children are so genuine and responsive," says Mwenda, a nutritionist with the UNHCR at the Kakuma Refugee Camp in northwestern Kenya. Established in 1992 to accommodate Sudanese refugees, today the camp is home to some 75,000 refugees from at least nine African countries.

Mwenda has served in Kakuma for three years—a long stint for a young relief worker. Turnover tends to be high among humanitarian workers who deal daily with the needs of thousands of people, often with dwindling resources. Such stress is compounded by the area's searing heat and harsh semi-desert terrain—but to Mwenda, it's a second home.

"Working in Kakuma is very rewarding. It's really satisfying to see a malnourished child, who has been identified and referred to the facilities for treatment and rehabilitation, improve and be restored to good health," says Mwenda. "This strengthens my resolve to seek sustainable solutions to prevent malnutrition."

In the camp, Mwenda works with partners and the refugee community to implement and monitor food security and nutrition programs. "Working with the community is essential in promoting nutrition practices," explains Mwenda. "We need good health and nutrition for mothers and entire families in order to improve and maintain children's adequate nutritional status."

Mwenda is working on her master's degree from the University of Liverpool online. Her research is focused on the association between selected maternal characteristics (age, education, family size, birth spacing practices, etc.) and the nutritional outcomes of children under five years of age. "Mothers and women are children's primary care takers/givers in the camp. I am interested in establishing what personal factors interact to determine the kind of care they give their children."

Mwenda's concern for child nutrition extends to her fellow Kenyans. According to a recent government health survey, 35 percent of Kenyan children are stunted (low height-for-age), 7 percent are wasted (low weight-for-height), and 16 percent are underweight. "This is very worrying. A productive nation stems from a populace that is well nourished," notes Mwenda. "Good nutrition is a crucial factor in any country's economic development."

Career-wise, Mwenda hopes eventually to have a position through which she can work closely with government, international organizations, and others to guide and influence policy making, strategic planning, and decision making about nutrition across all sectors and government ministries. Toward that goal, she plans to expand her professional networks, gain international work experience, and serve on advisory boards to spearhead the integration of nutrition within public and private sectors in Kenya.

Mwenda says AWARD is helping her to think more broadly about how to achieve her goals. "AWARD is giving me an edge and it is a huge motivation for me. I feel lucky to meet people who believe in me and are investing their time, skills, and experience to nurture my career and personal development."

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

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