AWARD
African Women in Agricultural Research and Development

Profile

Ayojesutomi Abiodun-Solanke
2015 AWARD Fellow

Position	Lecturer
Institution	Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology
Country	Nigeria
MSc	Food Technology, University of Ibadan, 2009
Mentor	Dr. Mercy Adeogun, Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology
Research Area	Improving productivity in fisheries and agriculture, bringing safety and health consciousness into fisheries, and increasing awareness among villages and schools.

"I opted to study this flour because I wanted to find an alternative to yam flour, which is used to make amala"

Ayojesutomi Abiodun-Solanke was only 15 years old when she began her university studies, but she knew exactly what she wanted to do and why. "The food we produced on our farm was never enough to feed us," she says. "I wanted to learn how to produce enough food for our family and to provide for others." She therefore chose a career in agriculture, first earning a bachelor's degree in Food Science and Technology at the University of Technology, Akure.

As the eldest daughter and second-born child in a family of five children, much was expected of her and she assumed a leadership role for her younger sisters early. This prepared her to be a lecturer, something she always wanted to be so she could help influence education and health policies in Nigeria. "I think the reason most research stays on the shelf is that policies don't encourage passing the results to communities," Abiodun-Solanke says.

Abiodun-Solanke's MSc research at the University of Ibadan was on the effects of drying methods and maturity on the re-constitutional properties of plantain flour. "I opted to study this flour because I wanted to find an alternative to yam flour, which is used to make amala, a staple food in southwest Nigeria," she says. "Diabetes is on the increase in Nigeria, and sufferers have to reduce their sugar intake." The sugar content in yam flour, which is what most people eat, is very high, whereas in plantain flour it is minimal.

Realizing that she wanted to work on processing and value addition rather than on usage—the focus of her studies—Abiodun-Solanke applied for a lecturing position at the Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology, where she now works. In addition to teaching, her duties involve community outreach to villages and schools to increase

awareness on ways to improve productivity, especially through fisheries production and processing.

Along with these responsibilities, Abiodun-Solanke is conducting research on the quality characteristics of polluted fish. "In Nigeria, as in the rest of the world, people are advised to eat more fish because it is healthier than red meat," she says. "The consumption for fish is high but production cannot meet it." Some of the fish available is polluted. This poses a potential health hazard from accumulation of heavy metals and other contaminants found in the fish. The aim of Abiodun-Solanke's research is to see how processing can reduce pollutants in fish, and to educate people on how to treat wastes before discharging them into the water to reduce pollution. This will guarantee the safety of general population.

"I think the reason most research stays on the shelf is that policies don't encourage passing the results to communities"

Abiodun-Solanke aspires to be a consultant to international agencies so she can influence education and health policies. She believes that she must achieve high visibility for maximum impact, and expects the AWARD Fellowship to help her achieve this by expanding her networks. She is eager to share the knowledge she gains from AWARD courses with colleagues and students, as well as in outreach activities with smallholder farmers.

"I want to make an impact, and what better way to do this than through students," she states. "Even reaching one student can have a great ripple effect. My long-term vision is competitive, well-funded agricultural research and development in Nigeria that is at par with that in the developed world." Abiodun-Solanke is looking forward to being part of this transformation.

AWARD is a career-development program that equips top women agricultural scientists across sub-Saharan Africa to accelerate agricultural gains by strengthening their research and leadership skills through tailored fellowships. AWARD is a catalyst for innovations with high potential to contribute to the prosperity and well-being of African smallholder farmers, most of whom are women.

AWARD is generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. For more information, visit www.awardfellowships.org