



2014 AWARD Fellow  
**Amleset Haile Abreha**

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Position	Assistant National Coordinator
Institution	Capacity Building for Scaling Up of Evidence-based Best Practices in Agricultural Production in Ethiopia (CASCAPE)
Country	Ethiopia
MSc	Biodiversity Conservation Klagenfurt University, Austria, 2011
Mentor	Dr. Eyasu Elias Fantahun Country Coordinator, CASCAPE
Research Area	Identification and assessment of best practices to increase agricultural production, achieve food security, and promote economic growth to alleviate poverty.

Amleset Haile Abreha was only 11 years old when her father died, leaving her mother to raise and educate seven children. She remembers her mother's admonitions well. "My mother would say, 'The kitchen will trap you! Get an education.' Women's empowerment came early to our family. All of us—five girls and two boys—have graduated from university," she says proudly.

As one of only a few women in the animal science program at Haramaya University, Abreha enjoyed field visits to rural farms. "My grandparents are farmers, so I decided to focus on agriculture," she says. After completing her bachelor's degree, she joined Mekelle University as a teaching assistant, which birthed her interest in teaching and research.

During this same period, Abreha spent four months at Ghent University to study beekeeping for poverty alleviation, on a scholarship from the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation. "The government in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia was trying to motivate landless farmers to raise bees and earn an income by selling honey," she explains. "So much research went into what type of forage to be planted, and the difference is obvious—you can see that the area is much greener."

The project's success prompted Abreha to pursue a more diverse master's program at Klagenfurt University in Austria, where her courses linked environmental protection with improving livelihoods.

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**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.**

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Upon returning to Ethiopia, she began working at CASCAPE, a bilateral project of Wageningen University in the Netherlands and six Ethiopian universities.

In Ethiopia, 80 to 85 percent of the population is involved in farming. In her job at CASCAPE, Abreha works directly with smallholders on a daily basis, teaching about home gardening and timesaving technologies, among other things. “We find that one farmer is doing well, while the fellow next door isn’t,” she notes. “Our objective is to improve agricultural productivity throughout the country. I deal with stakeholder collaboration, innovation, facilitation, monitoring and evaluation of projects. I also train project members, facilitate workshops, and provide feedback on work plans from the regions.”

Abreha is working with collaborators in four regions of Ethiopia. “One region is trying to develop a milk churner,” she explains. “Women spend a lot of time making butter, and this will save them time. We also teach them about nutrition, since agricultural production doesn’t always go hand-in-hand with improved nutrition.”

Abreha has already taken part in several conferences in the United States, Europe, and Africa, using her leave to seize these opportunities. She believes everyone has a purpose—and hers is to help people by generating solutions that will help to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

Abreha sees the AWARD Fellowship as a golden opportunity to improve her research, science, and leadership skills. In particular, she hopes to build her scientific writing skills. “I have two years, and I am keen to set some goals in cooperation with my mentor, a very experienced professional who wants to see me do my best in every way,” she says. Abreha is also eager to share what she learns with her colleagues at CASCAPE, noting that capacity building is a major focus of the project.

Abreha is convinced that improvements to Ethiopian life must begin with agricultural development, and is committed to continuing her work with smallholder farmers. She hopes to begin a PhD program in the near future, which will enable her to continue conducting research that not only directly benefits farmers, but that also empowers women to explore diverse career opportunities. “When you empower a woman, you empower the entire family,” she concludes.