



Esther Leah Achandi  
**2015 AWARD Fellow**

<b>Position</b>	Research Assistant
<b>Institution</b>	Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice)
<b>Country</b>	Tanzania
<b>MA</b>	Economic Policy and Planning, Makerere University, 2010
<b>Mentor</b>	Dr. Beatrice Kalinda Mkenda, Senior Lecturer, Economics University of Dar es Salaam
<b>Research Area</b>	Enhancement of women's participation and recognition of their contribution through agricultural research for development

**"I am writing my thesis on women's empowerment, technical efficiency, and market participation within smallholder rice-based farming systems."**

Esther Leah Achandi loved reading as a child. "I would pick up pieces of paper as I walked to experience the miracle of reading," she says. Her parents were committed to education but at times faced challenges raising school fees for their six children. In spite of this, Achandi excelled—representing her high school in a national mathematics contest and qualifying for university. "I had a dream to enroll for my master's immediately," recalls Achandi. Even with the uncertainty of fees, she immersed herself in her studies. "I would say I am studying for fun—to occupy my mind." It was only when one of her classmates paid her first semester fees that she was able to take her exams. At the beginning of the second semester, she was employed at a bank where she worked for two years. She later served as a part-time lecturer at Makerere and was able to pay for her educational expenses.

Achandi recalls a high school field visit to the Doho Rice Scheme in eastern Uganda, even though she had no clue that she would become a rice researcher. After completing her master's, she cut her teeth in research by helping scientists collect field data, but longed for a permanent job. "I knew I wanted a research job," says Achandi. She took a chance on an opening for a research assistant position at AfricaRice in Dar es Salaam, where she now works in the value chain section. "They've given me a lot of opportunities for career development," notes Achandi who has attended several training sessions including a women's leadership course at the International Rice Research Institute.

With encouragement from her supervisor and former AWARD Fellow Gaudiose Mujawamariya, Achandi presented a paper at the International Rice Congress in Bangkok, Thailand and won the 2014 Young Rice Scientist Award. Her paper examined the market participation of

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

Tanzanian smallholder rice farmers using double hurdle analysis. This entailed studying the farmers’ decision-making processes—whether the farmer decides to participate in the market, and how much produce they take to sell.

Achandi, who serves as the AfricaRice gender focal point for Tanzania, has had direct interaction with smallholder farmers as she conducted research in Kahama and Kilombero districts to assess women’s empowerment and their response to extension services, especially through adoption of new technologies. The work examines whether women care about the gender of the extension workers and looks at their views on the training to determine what influences their decisions to adopt proposed technologies. “At AfricaRice, we plan to conduct a similar study in Ethiopia and Madagascar,” says Achandi, who plans to publish the findings with permission from AfricaRice.

Achandi is juggling work and PhD studies in Economics at the University of Dar es Salaam. “I am writing my thesis on women’s empowerment, technical efficiency, and market participation within smallholder rice-based farming systems,” she states. Her goal is to contribute to agricultural research and development to enhance the productivity of rural smallholder female farmers. Noting that women provide most of the farm labor in Africa, Achandi is keen to see them reap the benefits of their work. “We want them to be able to bargain for a fair share of the farm income,” says Achandi. “Money in the hands of a woman means better nutrition, education, and health outcomes for the children—the whole household will be uplifted,” she asserts. “As AWARD improves me, I also want to improve the bargaining skills of women farmers.” Through a bargaining process, Achandi believes that men can be change agents in women’s empowerment efforts.

Achandi is looking forward to doing a role-modeling event at her rural primary school in Tororo. “I need to give back to rural agricultural households,” affirms Achandi. Through AWARD, she is hoping to improve her research skills and share the information with colleagues, especially the early stage researchers. For the mother of one, inspiration comes from the family—she cites her parents’ determination and her husband’s dedication to his work. She derives immense joy from completing myriad tasks successfully.