



2013 AWARD Fellow
Ayodeji Adedire

Position	Assistant Lecturer
Institution	College of Agriculture, Food Science, and Technology Wesley University of Science and Technology, Nigeria
Country	Nigeria
M Agric	Monogastric Nutrition, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, 2005
Mentor	Dr. Mojisola Edema, Associate Professor Federal University of Technology, Akure

Research area: Use of agricultural waste for rabbit feed, and promotion of rabbit production for consumption and marketing among rural women.

Ayodeji Adedire's path to a career in agricultural research could be considered as somewhat of a rabbit trail. She had no interest in agriculture until her first year of university, when an acquaintance in agricultural extension encouraged her to consider it. "I wanted to study biochemistry, but I wound up in animal nutrition," she recalls. "My father, who was a strong proponent of higher education, didn't approve at first, saying, 'Do you really need a degree to be a farmer?'," she laughs.

Adedire persevered, deciding to specialize in rabbits. "They are lovely animals, and easy for rural women to raise," she says. Her current research involves using microbiology to improve the quality of cowpea husks, corn cob, and other industrial byproducts so they can be used as rabbit feed. "This is known as anaerobic fermentation because no oxygen is used—we do solid-state fermentation," she explains. This technique breaks the husks down into cellulose and some other soluble fiber, which are essential components of rabbits' diets. It prevents enteritis, a common disease in rabbits.

Adedire is testing her feed, working with a colleague who is researching rabbit breeding. After she fattens the rabbits up, they are slaughtered, and then Adedire removes their livers to see what, if any, toxins are present. "I look at how they convert the fermented husks to flesh," she explains.

Rabbit is not a common food in Nigeria, even though it is more nutritious than chicken, but Adedire is committed to changing this scenario. "As food, they are low in cholesterol and can improve people's total health," she says. She hopes the high-quality feed she has developed will encourage Nigerian farmers to go into rabbit production. She is training farmers how to raise rabbits, as they have a high mortality rate if not properly handled. "Rabbits cannot do without grass, just like we need our tea break," she laughs.

As an assistant lecturer, Adedire goes out of her way to take her students to the farm so they see things first hand. She has resumed her own PhD studies, which she put on hold after getting married and having a child. She expects this advanced degree to solidly establish her as an academic, and serve as a platform

for growth in her research and teaching career. “My long-term objective is to participate in cutting-edge technology that will improve farming systems in my country and enhance the production of good-quality food,” she asserts.

In 2010, a former AWARD Fellow selected Adedire as her mentee, volunteering to guide her in her career for a year, as part of AWARD’s knowledge-sharing practice. Adedire says this inspired her to apply for an AWARD Fellowship, with the goal of enhancing her career and improving her capabilities. She anticipates that AWARD will help her increase her professional visibility, develop her science writing skills, and facilitate opportunities for collaboration with highly skilled researchers across the globe. “It will also give me the opportunity to be mentored, and in turn to mentor a junior researcher.”

Adedire is one of a growing number of African women agricultural scientists who have won an AWARD Fellowship. 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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