



2019 AWARD Fellow  
**Adjoa Kesewaa Agah**

<b>Position</b>	Assistant Research Scientist
<b>Institution</b>	Biotechnology and Nuclear Agriculture Research Institute - Ghana Atomic Energy Commission (BNARI-GAEC)
<b>Country</b>	Ghana
<b>MPhil</b>	Radiation Processing, University of Ghana, 2011
<b>Mentor</b>	Dr. Mavis Owureku-Asare, Senior Research Scientist, BNARI-GAEC
<b>Research Area</b>	Postharvest processing, product development, and radiation processing.

Agah's research work involves introducing products and technologies that can help local processors produce nutritious food from sweet potatoes and soybeans.

Adjoa Kesewaa Agah credits her mother, a caterer, with igniting her creativity. "She would invite me into the kitchen, put a variety of ingredients out and say, 'Make something with it'—and this made me not afraid to try new things," she says. The lastborn in a family of three children whose father is a medical doctor, Agah says she appreciates the inspiration and freedom to experiment. After completing secondary school she did a degree in Chemical Engineering. She followed up with a master's degree in Radiation Processing, and continues to solve problems as a research scientist at BNARI-GAEC.

The drive to figure out how to make things better keeps her going. "After my first degree I did national service at the Ghana Energy Commission for a year," she reveals. "I then had the opportunity to pursue a master's degree at the Commission's school at the University of Ghana." She wasn't interested in "hard-core" nuclear energy. "That didn't appeal to me," she says. "I wanted a place where I could express my desire to create products and new things, and this is what diverted me into agriculture and food processing. At BNARI we develop plenty of food science and postharvest preservation technologies."

When asked if she was always drawn to a career in agricultural science, Agah smiles, "I never imagined—I always hated biology!" When she started her master's studies, she was surprised at the number of biology courses she was required to take. "I didn't expect that, but I took the challenge and I did well," she continues. "I realized if I could succeed in something I didn't like, I can do anything!"

Agah is frustrated by the fact that there are many cases of malnutrition, especially in northern Ghana. "We produce soybeans and sweet potatoes in the north," she laments. "But that's where malnutrition is most prevalent."

**“This is especially valuable for women scientists, as it helps to empower us to be more effective to improve our culture and our communities.”**



**Agah is one of a growing number of women agricultural scientists who have won an AWARD Fellowship. AWARD works toward inclusive, agriculture-driven prosperity for the African continent by strengthening the production and dissemination of more gender-responsive agricultural research and innovation. We invest in scientists, research institutions, and agribusinesses to deliver sustainable, gender-responsive agricultural research and innovation.**

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“Soybeans have been used for years, and sweet potato has great nutritional value,” she continues. “Sweet potato has been targeted as food security crop—it contains beta-carotene, an antioxidant that the human body converts into Vitamin A—and this is a great opportunity to reduce malnutrition.”

Agah is introducing products and technologies that can help local processors produce nutritious food. “I want to break the cycle of poor nutrition by introducing products that are less expensive, so that people can feed their children and better their lives,” she stresses. “I am also interested in improving our local products—Ghana has many diverse, nutritious foods, but we need to package them properly so we can compete.”

She is currently working on a project to make fortified sweet potato and soybean flour, which is then turned into products such as biscuits and porridge. Agah is trying to simplify the processing technology to make it easily transferable to farming communities so they can make the flour. “They can use the flour to improve their nutrition and they can sell it at the local markets” she says. “I want the technology to diffuse into their ways of living—if we can get people to use the flour, then produce it, and then have an outlet to sell the products, that’s a sustainable solution.”

They have worked with cream-fleshed sweet potatoes and are now working with orange-fleshed sweet potatoes. They are planning to pace the testing of the products. “We have already tested the products in-house and we’ve had good reviews,” she says. Agah remarks that a lot of the food sold in Accra, such as soybean, comes from the north. “So, if they can add value, then they’ll make more money.” She is also exploring more convenient packaging methods. “Ghana is becoming more urbanized—we are changing,” she says. “People don’t have time anymore to continue using some of the old ways to prepare our indigenous foods, so I think they will accept new products that are easy to prepare.”

Agah is currently identifying farming communities that can adopt the technology. She is also seeking funding, and intends to work with some universities in the northern region of Ghana.

The AWARD Fellowship has already helped Agah to better define what she wants to do. “The training, especially in the development of a purpose roadmap, really brought clarity,” she enthuses. “It was structured in a way that helps you to focus—it will help me get to where I want to go faster, better equipped to navigate the challenges.” She is grateful that the mentoring orientation workshop has linked her to many people “who can help me achieve so much to solve the problems that exist in Africa.” Her mentor is a 2013 AWARD Fellow who selected her as a fellow’s mentee then, which prompted her to apply for the fellowship so she could profit more from the career-development initiative.

Agah, who is married with two young children, hopes to start PhD soon focusing on food technology. She says balancing family and work life has been a challenge. “But in general, my biggest concern as an African scientist is in getting funding and equipment to conduct top-notch research.”

Agah feels better linked and more able to accomplish her research goals. “This is especially valuable for women scientists, as it helps to empower us to be more effective to improve our culture and our communities,” she concludes.