



Tsedey Beyene
2015 AWARD Fellow

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Position	Youth Livelihood Officer
Institution	Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)
Country	Ethiopia
BSc	Agricultural Economics, Hawassa University, 2009
Mentor	Endalkachew Yaregal, Making Markets for the Poor (M4P) Program Coordinator Economics, DFID Project
Research Area	Assessment of the potential for local rice value chains as an approach for smallholder women farmers to improve their livelihoods.

Tsedey Beyene grew up in Addis Ababa with two siblings, and all have completed university. Education was valued in the family. Their father is a hospital administrator, while their mother is a financial officer in the government. Her family used to live in a rural area, and it was this farming background that prompted her to study agricultural economics. “I decided to do a BSc in Agricultural Economics in order to see the changes in farmers and farms in Ethiopia,” Beyene says. “Ethiopian farmers are so poor—it’s the traders who profit and not the farmers.” She has recently completed a master’s in Sociology at Indira Gandhi University in India, and has been working at MEDA since 2010.

At MEDA, a Canadian-based non-governmental organization that has existed for more than 60 years, Beyene is working with youth aged 14 to 17, most of whom are weavers in Addis Ababa. She is working on a project called Ethiopians Driving Growth, Entrepreneurship and Trade (EDGET). “Edget means progress in Amharic,” she explains. “It’s a five-year, pro-poor value-chain development project, which is aimed at increasing incomes for 10,000 farmers and textile producers in Ethiopia. It facilitates access to markets, enhanced production techniques, appropriate technologies, improved inputs, and affordable support services, including financing.”

Beyene was traumatized when first doing site visits to textile factories. “These young people are being forced to work 14 to 18 hours a day in the textile industry for very low pay—just two dollars per week,” she reveals. “They are hunched over from weaving, and they have no access to education. Kids are being trafficked, and they are being exploited by their employers.”

She and her colleagues are working directly with the young weavers, providing linkages to financial services and other training. “We

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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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developed a program called 100 Hours to Success and I conducted the training,” she notes. “The objective of this program is to enhance life skills and business skills of the trafficked youth in the central part of Ethiopia, where majority are very poor and don’t even know how to read.” She and her colleagues also bring in groups of 15 to 20 weavers and provide coaching and training in financial management. “As well, we are working with youth farmers, training them in business skills, financial management training, and life skills—making them agricultural sales agents by providing agricultural inputs,” she says.

Beyene’s chief goal is to become an agricultural economics researcher who contributes to a research institution by providing impactful information and resources. “I also want to keep working at the policy level with youth, influencing policy regarding the rights of youth,” she states. She plans to get a PhD, and is looking for scholarships. She has been accepted by an Ohio university, and plans to study international development for her second master’s degree.

Beyene is confident that she will benefit greatly as an AWARD Fellow. “I will certainly increase my proposal and scientific-writing skills,” she enthuses. “I’ll also gain from the enhanced networking opportunities, especially as I participate in various workshops to improve my technical competence and liaise with new people.” She feels that the timing is right for her organization too, since she and her colleagues will soon begin Phase 2 of a CIDA farming project. “CIDA wants us to be more woman focused,” she says. “I feel so privileged to be an AWARD Fellow and to be working on this project.”

It has been a busy time for Beyene as she has felt the pressure of balancing two projects at work while pursuing her master’s. “Also, I go to the gym to work out every day, so my schedule is often full—but I enjoy the challenge.”

Beyene appreciates the guidance and wisdom of her manager, who “is not only a manager but a true leader,” she says. Another inspiration is one of her professors from Ethiopia, who inspired Beyene to be a leader and to deliver her best. She loves working directly with communities, and feels a tremendous sense of fulfillment when she sees positive change, thanks in part to her input.