



Brenda Boonabaana
2015 AWARD Fellow



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Position	Lecturer
Institution	Makerere University
Country	Uganda
PhD	Gender/Tourism Development, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2012
Mentor	Professor Mnason Tweheyo, Dean, School of Forestry, Environmental and Geographical Science, Makerere University
Research Area	Assessment of how women participate in, and benefit from, biodiversity conservation and related activities, and the constraints they face.

Brenda Boonabaana grew up on a farm in rural southwestern Uganda, where her parents produced their own food. The last born of three girls, her name means “whether boys or girls, they are all children,” which is what her mother said after the community sympathized with her for producing yet another girl.

Boonabaana’s mother encouraged her daughters to work hard in high school, despite opposition from relatives who thought that educating girls was a waste of time. All three finished high school and have done post-secondary courses.

Boonabaana followed her mother’s advice and won a government scholarship to study geography at Makerere University. She pursued an MA in Land Use and Regional Development through private sponsorship, again at Makerere, and performed the best in her class, prompting the university to offer her a teaching position. She won another scholarship to pursue her PhD in New Zealand.

Issues affecting women are close to Boonabaana’s heart because of her experience growing up with a single mother and depending on the maternal side of the family. She therefore opted to study the effects of tourism on gender for her PhD. The project focused on how women in conservation areas are engaged in tourism activities and how this affects gender relations and roles in the community.

“Gender roles—especially child care, household activities and farming—were a constraint to women actively participating in tourism activities,” says Boonabaana. “However, the few women engaged in tourism were empowered and were slowly influencing attitudes at the household and community levels, especially since the activities increased household incomes.”

Boonabaana is currently writing journal articles and conference papers from her PhD work. She is also working on a research project proposal on conservation, agriculture, and gender, focusing on women who live around Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, home of the mountain

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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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gorilla. "These women have always depended on the forest for survival—gathering herbs, collecting firewood, and farming—but the forest is now conserved for tourism," she explains. The project aims to determine how women can position themselves to benefit from tourism and still do small-scale farming, especially of vegetables and fruits that are lacking in the area and that the hotels in and around the park import from inside and outside the country.

"Men and women know a lot about the environment and how to conserve it, and I am sure the government can benefit from this knowledge," Boonabaana states. "I am interested in studying the relationship between indigenous knowledge, conservation, and gender, and am seeking funding for this project to determine how conservation authorities can draw on this knowledge to come up with gender fair policies in conservation."

Boonabaana expects the AWARD Fellowship to help her acquire the skills she needs to achieve her goal of becoming a professor and eventually a gender and development advisor to the government. "I welcome the opportunity to learn from my mentor, an opportunity I have not had before," she says.

She is eager to contribute to the university's goals of increasing publications and outreach activities, as she gains related skills from the AWARD courses. "Currently, the few professional networks we have in the country are dominated by men who feel that women cannot achieve much and therefore isolate them," she says. "I believe the AWARD experience will equip me and other women to prove our worth to the men so that they welcome us into these networks."