



Oluyemisi Fawole  
**2015 AWARD Fellow**

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Position	Senior Lecturer
Institution	University of Ilorin
Country	Nigeria
PhD	Microbiology, University of Ibadan, 1990
Mentor	Abayomi Omotesho, Professor, Agricultural Economics and Farm Management University of Ilorin
Research Area	Development of fungal inoculants from native soil micro flora to improve nutrient status and aid composting of agro-wastes for improved soil productivity.

Fawole Oluyemisi is the second in her family to win a prestigious AWARD Fellowship, as her youngest sister was an AWARD Fellow in 2014. As the second born in a family of five children raised in southwestern Nigeria, she values the guidance her parents provided. All of her siblings have completed university, and two of them have doctorates.

Oluyemisi heard about AWARD at the university where she works but says it was her sister who strengthened her resolve to apply. A visit to her university by former AWARD Steering Committee Chair Dr. Stella Williams, on the platform of NiWARD, an association of AWARD Fellows and Mentors in Nigeria also helped.

Oluyemisi loved biology even in secondary school, and credits her late uncle-in law, a professor of botany, as watering this seed. “I would go to my aunt’s for holidays, and her husband would take me along to the lab,” she recalls. “I loved it, and knew I wanted to work in this area. I applied to university of Ilorin to study biology, first focusing on plants and zoology, and then moving into microbiology in second year.” She moved to the University of Ibadan for a master’s and PhD in Microbiology, and is now a senior lecturer at the University of Ilorin.

Oluyemisi’s research focuses on developing soil inputs from microorganisms. “When I started, I looked at the impact of chemical fertilizers, and quickly found a number of negative effects on soil,” she says. “Now, I am looking specifically at bio-fertilizers, bio-fungicides, and bio-herbicides. My hope is to develop products that are eco-friendly and affordable to smallholder farmers.” Her goal is to use microorganisms that are indigenous to Nigerian soils, since it is logical to use what is already available.

Soil-management practices in Nigeria have not been good, with fertilizers being used without testing what the soil needs. “Most smallholders can’t afford to buy chemical fertilizer, and those who are using it have damaged the soil and therefore the soil productivity is poor,” Oluyemisi says. “The microorganisms I plan to use are

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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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phosphorous solubilizing. These organisms act on the insoluble phosphorous to make it soluble and usable for plant use. If we can mass produce these and find carriers such as peat and soil, then we can market them for farmers' use in soil to improve productivity and increase yields."

Oluyemisi says the first step is to identify which microorganisms have potential, and isolate them in the lab. Once this stage is complete, she will develop proper fertilizers and apply them first to greenhouse crops and then to crops in the field. "We have already isolated some, and are in the process of screening them," she notes.

This well-published woman with more than 30 papers to her credit hopes to obtain a professorship at her institution, and is confident that her role as an AWARD Fellow will help to increase her visibility. "I believe AWARD will develop my proposal-writing skills that will help me get funding to carry out quality research," she says. "One major problem I deal with on a regular basis is underdeveloped labs, but I hope the AWARD Fellowship will give me a push to write a proposal that will help me to better equip my lab. I think it will also help me develop interpersonal, leadership, and communications skills, along with increased science skills." She intends to tap into all of the opportunities available in order to increase her visibility.

Oluyemisi says her main challenge is that men tend to see through a cultural lens, thinking that certain roles are unsuitable for females. "But others believe you can go anywhere, and I appreciate the individuals who have this view," she smiles. "When I was appointed sub-dean in my faculty there was some disgruntlement, but after four years they accepted me."

She is currently involved with facilitation of memorandums of understanding between the University of Ilorin and other centers, with the goal of broadening international collaboration. "I am also interested in building the capacity of younger women scientists through workshops and the like, which will be a plus for my institution," she says.

The mother of three is delighted when her work succeeds in positively affecting her community. "At the end of the day, all of this research work must have an impact on smallholder farmers," she asserts. "Currently, I am fulfilled by teaching my students, but I know that my goal is to have a more direct impact on my community in the long term."