



**2013 AWARD Fellow**  
**Meaza Bahiru Heterat**

<b>Position</b>	Program Associate
<b>Institution</b>	Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA)
<b>Country</b>	Ethiopia
<b>BA</b>	Economics, Addis Ababa University, 2008
<b>Mentor</b>	Dr. Nigist Haile Abreha Monitoring, Learning, and Evaluation Directorate, ATA

*Research area: Creating well-functioning agricultural cooperatives that sustainably improve the quality of life of smallholder farmers by enabling increases in yields and incomes in Ethiopia.*

Meaza Bahiru Heterat grew up in Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa, where her business-owner parents were committed to ensuring that their nine children got a good education—and all have attended university. On her way to elementary school one day, Heterat remembers passing by an open market area, where she first saw crowds of rural people who had migrated to the city in search for work. “I recall asking why people were there—why were they lying around on the ground? I wondered if they had families.” This early experience galvanized her resolve to do something in development to alleviate poverty in her country.

As a student, Heterat’s first academic interests were in biology and chemistry, and she was selected from among the top three students in her grade to attend a special class. “It was there that you chose between natural and physical sciences,” she explains. “I scored A in biology so that’s what I had in mind.” But instead, she began focusing on the social sciences. She ultimately earned a BA in Economics from Addis Ababa University, with a concentration in business. “Biology is about nature, but economics is about human beings,” she explains. “My program was all about development and supporting people. I wanted to use my advantages not just for my own benefit, but to help disadvantaged people. I had one chance in a million, so I want to serve thousands.”

Heterat’s is convinced that there are business solutions to development problems. “At the end of the day, we need to increase farmers’ incomes and make markets accessible to them,” says Heterat. “I believe in investing in agri-business in the long term.”

After graduation, Heterat began volunteering at MAEDOTE, an Addis Ababa-based development and exercise center focused on women and children. After supporting the NGO’s project manager for four months, she was offered a full-time job and given skills training. “That’s how I first began engaging with farmers. I was really surprised at their passion and eagerness to change. Externalities were forcing them to come to the city to look for work, and my heart remains fixed on discovering what I can do to be of service.”

Today, serving at ATA, whose primary aim is to promote transformation in the agricultural sector to achieve food security in Ethiopia, Heterat is part of a team working on an agricultural cooperatives program aimed at building the capacity of farmer groups to increase their yields and incomes.

“Farmers face a big challenge with marketing their produce, particularly as they are dealing with cooperatives and contract farming. We’ve established a number of interventions to help, including looking at best practices internationally.” Heterat says the structure in which Ethiopian cooperatives operate limits their effectiveness and efficiency in serving members. “The marketing chain is lengthy, with farmers receiving less revenue from their production than ideally possible,” she explains. “Women farmers are underrepresented, and there is strong competition from other traders.”

Potential solutions, she says, include designing a marketing structure and infrastructures that cooperative members can access, shortening the marketing chain, and recreating strong and competitive cooperatives at all levels. “We also hope to introduce a stringent quality-control process, and encourage participation by women farmers.”

Heterat has begun a training course in entrepreneurship in Addis Ababa, with a long-term goal of being a social entrepreneur. Not satisfied with simply churning out reports, she wants to do meaningful activities that will have impact on the ground.

Heterat hopes to become a more confident and more visible leader as she takes advantage of the various opportunities afforded by the AWARD Fellowship. “I am delighted to be an AWARD Fellow. I will learn new perspectives from the wide network of fellows and mentors. I will also benefit from various local and international experiences, and I’ll be exposed to different ways of thinking and bodies of knowledge,” she says. She feels a close bond with her AWARD Mentor, also an economics specialist.

“I think I’m on the right track with my vision, and I’m confident that the AWARD Fellowship will further my career by building my leadership capacity and increasing my exposure. It is so valuable,” she concludes.

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*Heterat 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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