



Ibilola Oluyemisi Ikotun
2015 AWARD Fellow

Position	Research Officer I
Institution	Nigerian Stored Product Research Institute (NSPRI)
Country	Nigeria
MSc	Agricultural Economics, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), 2014
Mentor	Dr. Lucia Omobolanle Ogunsumi, Associate Professor Southwest Farming System Research and Extension Institute of Agricultural Research and Training, Obafemi Awolowo University
Research Area	Improvement of women agro-processors' incomes through proper processing of root tubers to produce better quality products with proper packaging and value addition.



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Ibilola Oluyemisi Ikotun's interest in agriculture was manifested early. "At age eight, I would plant groundnuts in our backyard," she says. This was further nurtured in secondary school where the students would work on farm plots. Working to improve food security, especially among smallholder farmers, is what led Ikotun to pursue a career in agriculture. "There is a lot of wastage of agricultural products due to a lack of storage space—we need to improve agriculture to help secure our children's future," says the married mother of two.

Ikotun is currently doing research on cassava agroprocessors who are involved in value addition of produce, which she believes would contribute to improving women's household earnings. This would add value to their products, resulting in boosted sales. The researcher recently completed her MSc in Agriculture at FUNAAB. "From my field work, I saw the need for training," she explains. "I observed women using unhygienic methods to dry their cassava." These methods include drying cassava on bitumen roads. "They put it on the roadside and do not even put nylon paper on the ground," Ikotun explains, highlighting health concerns as the food can be eaten by animals and is exposed to soot from vehicles.

"I want to go into farming communities to train them on how they can process hygienically," says Ikotun. She notes that financial constraints deter women from investing in locally made produce dryers. "These dryers will ensure that they have safe moisture content before packing their products," she explains. Together with colleagues at

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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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NSPRI, Ikotun plans to write grant proposals to get funding to do more outreach work. "I would like to see women owning NSPRI multi-purpose dryers to enable them to dry their produce in a safe and hygienic manner," she says.

AWARD has helped Ikotun to expand her networks by linking her to her mentor. "She is the bridge that I have been looking for," Ikotun enthuses. "With her influence and direction, I will be able to move my department forward. AWARD has awakened me to my responsibilities, that I can be so much more." Prior to becoming an AWARD Fellow, Ikotun felt that she was doing skeletal research and is challenged to do more. "I want to be at the center of things and reach out to communities that are in need of our technologies," she adds. She wants to pursue a PhD on knowledge management of postharvest practices among key stakeholders who include farmers, extension workers and processors. She is currently gathering information to enable her to develop a research proposal. "I am anxious to gain more knowledge on statistical analysis tools that can help me go deeper into data processing," says Ikotun.

While doing her MSc, Ikotun was inspired by her lecturer who is versatile in statistics and econometrics. "We were not very exposed to research methods, but he explained the relationship between data and people," says Ikotun. She also looks up to a friend who is a lecturer. "She has inspired me to see that as a woman, I can accomplish so many things."

Time is a key constraint for the researcher as she balances her work responsibilities with taking care of her two young children. She highlights this as a key setback she experienced while carrying out her master's research. "Finishing what I have started and getting recognition is the fuel that keeps me going," says Ikotun.