



2019 AWARD Fellow
Joan Cheron Kimaiyo

Position	Research assistant
Institution	World Agroforestry (ICRAF)
Country	Kenya
BSc	Mathematics (Statistics) and Computer Science, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology (JKUAT), 2011
Mentor	Dr. Judith Oduol, Agricultural Economist, World Agroforestry (ICRAF)
Research Area	Impact evaluation of gender, institutions and markets

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Joan Cheron Kimaiyo grew up in the outskirts of the town of Iten, near the Rift Valley, which is renowned as the capital of distance running, a discipline that Kenya dominates internationally. As the eldest in a family of five, Kimaiyo says her parents encouraged her to pursue a good education. After high school she went directly to JKUAT, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in Mathematics and Computer Science, recently following up with a master’s degree in Research Methods, “so I can better understand the application of statistics to agricultural research,” she says.

“I didn’t have a lot of influence on what to pursue for my undergraduate studies, so I went with what I felt I was good at,” Kimaiyo reveals. She did a professional accountancy program alongside her BSc, and took a job at ICRAF upon graduation. Although she still liked the practicality of pursuing a degree as an accountant, it wasn’t long before she began to appreciate the value of research, learning about the issues that farmers face, and developing their solutions. “I began to appreciate the dynamics of research—it’s not as repetitive as accountancy,” she smiles. “And I am able to make a difference in the lives of smallholder farmers.”

Kimaiyo is now working on the implementation of various projects, primarily analyzing data. “I am assisting with scientific research using behavioral science techniques,” she explains. “I have been working with smallholder farmers in Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia.”

Kimaiyo has been leading the implementation of behavioral science interventions to promote good dairy management, focusing on the importance of fodder shrubs. “A specific fodder we are promoting is Calliandra—a versatile tropical legume that increases milk production

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Kimaiyo is one of a growing number of women agricultural scientists who have won an AWARD Fellowship. AWARD works toward inclusive, agriculture-driven prosperity for the African continent by strengthening the production and dissemination of more gender-responsive agricultural research and innovation. We invest in scientists, research institutions, and agribusinesses to deliver sustainable, gender-responsive agricultural research and innovation.

The AWARD Fellowship is a career-development program that invests in top women agricultural scientists to ensure that confident, capable, and influential women are available to lead critical advances and innovations in the agricultural sector.

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in dairy cattle," she notes. "We demonstrate to farmers how Calliandra increases the quality and quantity of milk."

The dairy project involves simply defining the problem and developing solutions. "It's like an experiment, but involves real people," she says. "It's rewarding to help improve people's nutrition simply by increasing the productivity of cows." The aim of the research is to facilitate the adoption of technologies.

When she began her research career, Kimaiyo was working in a range of areas, but she says she feels her current position is allowing her to grow as a scientific researcher. "I'm a specialist in statistics, but now I'm in a place where I'm sure I can influence the lives of women, children, and youth by having a real impact," she asserts. "Although I don't want to be a gender specialist per se, I've had training on gender and I have a genuine interest in gender matters." In fact, she recently benefited by being invited to meetings on gender in Thailand and Viet Nam.

Kimaiyo says as a young woman surrounded by more seasoned colleagues, she sometimes finds it hard to voice her thoughts—but her confidence is growing. A recent project saw her supervising several enumerators and interns who were undertaking data collection and entry. "This project enhanced my communication skills and enabled me to understand diverse groups of people," she says. "It also gave me experience in managing conflict."

Kimaiyo heard about the AWARD Fellowship from colleagues shortly after completing her BSc, but did not apply because she thought it was for master's or PhD students. "But last year, I read the application for the first time and I realized I should apply." Her long-range goal is to be a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) specialist and continue to grow her skills in M&E. And she is convinced that the AWARD Fellowship will help her reach her goals. "AWARD has stressed the fact that we need to know our purpose, and I know the program will help me get to where I want to be," she says. "The training during the mentoring orientation workshop was particularly valuable and is very critical for my current position."

In terms of her position at ICRAF, Kimaiyo is convinced that AWARD will increase her confidence. She is passionate about working to improve the lives of women and youth, but says it is also important that she knows what she wants and where she wants to go. "If I'm given a job, or if we have a project that is gender blind, I make a point of introducing it," she concludes.