



2018 AWARD Fellow
Lemlem Abebe Azage

Position	Gender Research Deputy Director
Institution	Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR)
Country	Ethiopia
MSc	Rural Development and Agricultural Extension, Haramaya University, 2016
Mentor	Dr. Kristie Druzca, Gender and Social Development Research Manager, International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT)
Research Area	Developing gender-sensitive monitoring indicators for gender mainstreaming in agricultural research.

Azage's work revolves around gender-responsive research in all disciplines—crops, food science, livestock, and natural resources.

Lemlem Abebe Azage is one of the few women working in agricultural research and development in Ethiopia. "My father's dream was to have me study medicine," she recalls. "Now, he says if people have nutritious food, there will be no need for them to go to hospital," she adds, noting that her father recognizes value of her work. Prior to working in research, she coordinated extension services at the district level. Azage enjoys her work in research, especially because she has adequate resources to conduct her studies. "At the district, we had limited resources to travel to different areas to carry out extension work," she says.

"In Ethiopia, the perception is that farmers are men," says Azage. She believes that through evidence-based research, she can challenge this perception. Azage explains that prior to the adoption of gender-responsive research, when agricultural technologies were developed, the scientists focused on characteristics that were important for men, in particular, yield. "When technologies are released from research, they are not adopted sustainably. If women do not know about the technology, you lose 50 percent of its potential," she asserts. "Technologies should benefit men, women, and youth."

Azage's work revolves around gender-responsive research in all disciplines—crops, food science, livestock, and natural resources. She is actively involved in developing gender-sensitive monitoring indicators for gender mainstreaming in the EIAR's work to ensure that technologies developed address not only the needs of male farmers but also take into consideration the preferences of their female counterparts.

“If we want to eradicate poverty and malnutrition for the long term, we need both substantial improvements in agricultural productivity and sound management of natural resources.”



Azage 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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EIAR is taking a deliberate approach to address this gender disparity and has an action plan in place. “In our human resources policy, there is affirmative action to bring more women into the workforce,” explains Azage. “For research positions, if there is a tie in the selection process, the policy is to choose the woman.” In addition, EIAR gives women priority in selecting the research centers they work in, taking into consideration their proximity to their family members. Azage acknowledges that effecting change is a gradual process. We are looking to create attitudinal change, create awareness, and build gender-responsiveness in research and support staff,” she says.

As the gender focal point at Ambo Plant Protection Research Center, Azage was involved in conducting participatory on-farm demonstrations. “When I go to the field, if there is less than 30 percent of women participating, I ask where the women farmers are.” In her quest to ensure that women are not left out, she is constantly challenging the misperception that women cannot prepare land or handle certain technologies.

“There is progress in research, and women are participating in variety selection,” says Azage. In maize participatory variety selection, Azage observed that sometimes there was a perception that women only need the stalk and leaves for fuel. On the contrary, she has observed that researchers gain different types of information from men and women farmers. “Women would say, when you give children maize for breakfast, they do not come back until dinner,” says Azage, explaining that such a response speaks to the grain’s nutritional value. “The women also know about food preservation and postharvest handling—it is not about productivity alone.”

The pan-African AWARD Fellowship provides a good opportunity for networking with scientists across the continent. “I have realized that Africa has a lot of women scientists working in different disciplines,” notes Azage. Interacting with senior women scientists has reinforced her drive to be a catalyst for change. “I can do what I need and want,” she declares. Despite this resolve, Azage identifies a lack of time as a major constraint. “As a scientist, you must balance family and professional responsibilities—you must read more, participate in conferences, and fulfill obligations in the domestic sphere.”

Azage plans to organize a workshop to enhance the capacity of her team of 17 gender focal persons and to share what she learns from AWARD. “AWARD will help me to complete the realization of my institution’s gender strategy,” she asserts. “My aim is to grow in my career and become a lead researcher.” She is confident that her participation in AWARD will help her to achieve this goal through exposure to short-term training opportunities and linkages to professional networks. “The pinnacle is to work in the Ethiopian Youth and Gender Ministry, organize women scientists in local areas to work together, and feed toward a continental organization like AWARD,” Azage concludes.