



2018 AWARD Fellow
Mary Damian Ndomba

Position	Agricultural Research Officer
Institution	Ministry of Agriculture
Country	Tanzania
MSc	Crop Science (Agronomy), Sokoine University of Agriculture, 2013
Mentor	Dr. Deusdedith R. Mbanzibwa, Head, Disease Control Unit, Mikocheni Agricultural Research Institute
Research Area	Increasing grain yields by introducing different management practices and helping farmers improve their crop production.

At the Ministry of Agriculture, Ndomba is working with root and tuber seed systems, and on quality seedling multiplication from the lab, in an effort to improve the seeds available to smallholder farmers.

Mary Damian Ndomba grew up in the Ruvuma region, near Dar es Salaam, as the youngest in a family of three children. After completing high school, she earned a diploma in an agricultural program. "At first my father discouraged me from pursuing agriculture as a line of work, because it was not considered professional," she recalls. "But now my parents are very supportive, especially when I am able to advise them on the correct fertilizers to use on their crops." After completing a BSc in Agricultural Education and Extension at Sokoine University of Agriculture, she went on to earn a master's in Agronomy.

At the Ministry of Agriculture, Ndomba is working with root and tuber seed systems. "I'm working on quality seedling multiplication from the lab, in an effort to improve the seeds available to smallholder farmers," she reveals. "We receive tissue cultures then put them in a growth chamber, then they go into a screen house to prevent contamination. We control how much light comes in." The objective is to increase farmers' productivity, their food security, and their income generation.

Ndomba is working with both women and men focusing on orange-fleshed sweet potato seed systems. "We are promoting this tuber because it contains lots of beta carotene, which is good for brain development of babies in the womb," she says. "It is also an excellent source of vitamin A, especially for children under five years of age." Ndomba is teaching people how to grow sweet potatoes. Late in 2017, she attended a sub-Saharan root and tuber exhibition held by the International Potato Center (CIP) in Dar es Salaam.

Ndomba 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 Tanzania, most farmers are women, but Ndomba says cultural practices need to change. "As in many African countries, women own the small animals—goats or chickens, for example—but they are not allowed to own land," she says. "We are working for change to enable women to have rights." Her supervisor at the Ministry of Agriculture is a woman, and she is learning a lot from her.

Another challenge is the high cost of technology and materials. "The work requires a lot of water and labor," she says. "Although CIP helped us to set our prices, the farmers find them high all the same."

Ndomba is happy her institution has a gender policy unit whose objective is to incorporate gender mainstreaming into all fields of programming and governance, including project planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of research activities.

Ndomba plans to further her career by pursuing a PhD. Her goal is to be a competent researcher who can develop cost-effective technologies that will help farmers have a reliable source of disease-free seeds.

Ndomba first heard about the AWARD Fellowship when she was completing her first diploma. "Both my director and my immediate supervisor at the Ministry of Agriculture are AWARD Fellows," she says.

As an AWARD Fellow, she has already gained confidence and is sure her research skills will grow. "There is so much I want to accomplish," she asserts. "AWARD has already helped me by offering training in leadership and communications. These skills will help me climb to where I want to go." She also looks forward to advancing her scientific skills by competing for an advanced science training position.

"I want to thank AWARD for supporting African women without bias," she concludes. "I want to be an ambassador that will help our institution, region, and nation."