



2013 AWARD Fellow
Esther Gloria Mbabazi

Position	Research Assistant
Institution	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA)
Country	Uganda
BSc	Agriculture, Makerere University, 2010
Mentor	Dr. Florence Kyazze, Senior Lecturer, Makerere University

Research area: Assessing the cost-effectiveness of and farmers' willingness to pay for Newcastle disease vaccination of free-range poultry in eastern Uganda.

Esther Gloria Mbabazi knows the value of being mentored. She credits her older cousin, an agricultural economist, with encouraging her to pursue a degree in agriculture. "I always excelled in school, but my cousin kept an eye on me," she recalls. "He shaped me from the word 'go', sitting me down and telling me to aim for the stars—so that's exactly what I did. I went into agriculture with no second thoughts," she says. "I knew during first year university that I want to be an agricultural economist."

Mbabazi has been pursuing a collaborative MSc in Agriculture and Applied Economics between Makerere University in Kampala and the University of Pretoria in South Africa. She plans to work for a few years after graduating to apply the knowledge she has acquired before beginning a PhD. "Agriculture is about people and making a difference," she asserts. "My passion is working with people, and I am able to do that as a scientist."

The focus of Mbabazi's research has entailed assessing the socio-economic impact of vaccinating poultry against Newcastle disease on free-range poultry farmers in the Iganga district in eastern Uganda. In rural Uganda, almost every household owns chickens, and it is mainly women and children who are involved in rearing them. A boost in local poultry production through proper poultry management and disease control would have a positive impact on household food security, both in increased dietary intake and income generation."

"Village poultry are fairly easy to raise since they require little input in terms of feeds and housing. They can easily be converted to cash for immediate household needs, and they are the major source of animal protein for the rural poor," says Mbabazi. "However, Newcastle disease is the major hindrance to village poultry production."

Mbabazi recently completed a RUFORUM-sponsored research project that involved giving quarterly thermostable Newcastle disease vaccines to all chickens in two selected parishes, at no charge to the farmers. The project studied the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of the rural poultry farmers regarding

Newcastle disease vaccination. “It was a real eye-opener,” she says. “Newcastle disease spreads very quickly and wipes out entire flocks. Farmers tend to think it is witchcraft. Others feared that the vaccine would harm their poultry and have detrimental effects on people who consumed the vaccinated chickens.”

Mbabazi learned the importance of providing a listening ear, respecting rather than judging, and carefully enlightening the farmers through a series of focus-group discussions. At the end of the project’s first year, baseline study results showed that people are more knowledgeable about the disease, and they understand that a vaccine is being developed to help their flocks.

As a young woman from the city working in traditional rural communities, Mbabazi found conducting her research to be a bit of a challenge. “Trying to pass knowledge across was not always easy, especially since the majority of decision makers are men,” she recalls.

Mbabazi believes that advancing her education will put her in a better position to get to the root problems that farmers face, especially the women. “I want them to open up and tell me what constrains them,” she says. “For example, in a group of 200 farmers, close to half are women. But when it comes to marketing produce, there are hardly any women involved, although they do the tilling, planting, weeding, and harvesting. They fetch the water and take the cows out to graze, while men completely dominate the selling. It’s unfair, and I would like to help these women.”

Mbabazi is confident that the best way to make a long-term difference in the lives of smallholder farmers is through research, although she doesn’t want to be purely an academic. She sees the importance of maintaining a balance with real-world experience and exposure.

Mbabazi considers the AWARD Fellowship as a timely opportunity. She is eager to work with her mentor, who was her lecturer during her undergraduate studies, and to eventually mentor a younger scientist herself. “The chance to network with other women scientists will have a huge impact—it’s not just theoretical,” she says. “With AWARD I’ll be able to go out and practice what I’ve learned, have an impact, and leave a legacy.”

Mbabazi 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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