



## Mevoyon Pamela Karrel Afokpe

2019 One Planet Laureate Candidate

### Position

Manager, Market gardening  
for West Africa

### Institution

East-West Seed International

### Country

Benin

### Education

Master II, plant selection,  
improvement of plants and  
varietal creation

### Mentor

Professor Achigan Dako  
Gbenato Enoch, Assistant  
Professor, Faculty of  
Agronomic Sciences,  
University of Abomey-Calavi

### Research Area

Varietal improvement of  
indigenous vegetables

“For souls nobly born, valour does not await the passing of years.” This quote from the French writer Pierre Corneille is entirely in line with Pamela Afokpe’s professional career. Just 27 years old, Pamela Afokpe works for East-West Seed International in Ghana, Nigeria and since 2017 has opened and manages the East-West Seed International (EWS) research station in Benin. East-West Seed International is a seed company with its headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand, which invests in the research, development and commercialisation of horticultural varieties with an approach centred on small producers around the world.

EWS was born 35 years ago, with the aim of combining the European technology used in the seed sector with the production of tropical vegetables in Asia. Today, EWS has revolutionized the tropical vegetable seed market in Asia and Africa, introducing hybrids and varieties that allow small producers to have more productive harvests, thereby obtaining higher incomes.

Its founder, Simon N. Groot, received the worldfoodprize in 2019. This international distinction is the most prestigious prize awarded to people whose efforts have led to progress in human development through a considerable improvement in the quality, quantity and availability of food products worldwide. This is a first in the horticultural field, which gives even greater visibility to the organization of which Afokpe is very proud to be a part.

At East-West Seed International, she is in charge of implementing the varietal improvement program for traditional leafy vegetables and fruits for West Africa. She is actively working to improve different indigenous crops to meet the growing needs of small African farmers. Her objective is to select varieties that respond better to environmental changes and pest pressures that can allow small producers to increase their yield and therefore their income.

The ultimate goal, she specifies, is to develop better strategies to support African farmers by promoting their access to quality seeds, to varieties of traditional/local crops, selected for their resistance to growing abiotic and biotic stresses, and on the other hand to improve their farming practices to reduce their vulnerability to climate change.

The improvement of living conditions of small producers has always been at the heart of Pamela Afokpe’s research objectives. Indeed, before joining East-West Seed, she spent a year working for the rice selection department at the Africa Rice Centre (AfricaRice, Benin) as an intern. She participated in conducting yield trials for rice lines obtained from intra and interspecific crosses to obtain varieties resistant to certain diseases, also conducting seed production trials, establishing technical and descriptive sheets of the varieties of rice developed by AfricaRice.

She also conducted a study on the response to colonization by mycorrhizal fungi Arbuscular Mycorrhizae (AMF) of a collection of wheat varieties (local breeds, pure lines, hybrids) in France. She also analysed the seed production system of *Phaseolus vulgaris* and evaluated the agronomic performance of several varieties produced on a large scale by small Tanzanian producers.

This young Agronomist, born in Porto Novo in Benin, who is very proud and very committed and likes to say "Happy farmer, happy me!" dreamed of being a doctor. She had all the prerequisites to get there given her interest but especially her very good performance in science at primary and secondary school. Her highly educated father, a former director of infrastructure and planning in the telecommunications sector, directed her towards agricultural sciences.

In 2008, after obtaining her Baccalaureate D (science), the young Pamela Afokpe trusted her father and enrolled at the University of Abomey-Calavi at the Faculty of Agronomic Sciences for a professional bachelor's degree in agronomy, production, specialising in plant production. She finished her degree in 2012. In 2014, she obtained a scholarship from the Institut Polytechnique Lasalle Beauvais in France to do a master's in plant improvement. She completed this master's in 2015.

Still a recipient of the grant from the Institut Polytechnique Lasalle Beauvais in France, she went to Belgium, to Ghent, as part of the ERASMUS programme, to do a second master's in plant improvement. Her research focuses on a specific variety of dry beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) cultivated in Tanzania. The work consists in collecting all the genetic resources of this species followed by evaluation based on an agro-morphological characterization to then select a high-yielding variety meeting the needs of small producers. She stayed in Tanzania for six months and obtained her second master's in 2016.

"The One Planet Fellowship is an excellent opportunity for me to strengthen my personal and scientific capacities, and also a window for me to pass on my achievements as a laureate to future generations of researchers through mentoring," says Sarr.

Pamela Afokpe would like to continue to develop her research talents and do a PhD. She projects herself as one of the most confident and influential women scientists in agricultural research and development in Africa, who through her research will help many small African farmers to improve their living conditions. The goal that she gives her professional career is above all to help and have a positive and significant impact on the lives of small African producers. The "One Planet Fellowship" programme, which she found out about on the internet and of which she is now a laureate, came just in time for her career.

She plans to make good use of the mentorship, leadership training and other interpersonal skills offered by the programme. Her young age (27) has not always been an advantage. She is very often underestimated and has learnt to accept this. She wants to continue training to be able to assert herself better professionally.

**Mevoyon Pamela Karrel Afokpe** is one of the growing number of candidates selected to participate in the One Planet Fellowship. The One Planet Fellowship is a career development initiative that is building a robust pipeline of highly connected, inter-generational scientists equipped to use a gender lens to help Africa's smallholder farmers cope with climate change. The One Planet Fellowship is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the BNP Paribas Foundation, the European Union and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) and Agropolis Fondation are jointly implementing the Fellowship.

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