

Hildelitha Berthold
Msita
2015 AWARD Fellow

Position	Agricultural Research Officer
Institution	Sugarcane Research Institute, Department of Research and Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives
Country	Tanzania
PhD	Bioscience Engineering, Katholieke, University of Leuven, Belgium, 2013
Mentor	Dr. Janet Kaaya, Principal Agricultural Research Officer and Head of Information and Documentation Services, Department of Research and Development, Ministry of Agriculture Food Security and Cooperatives
Research Area	Development of soil management packages for cassava and sugarcane to improve the livelihoods and food security of smallholder farmers.

Hildelitha Berthold Msita grew up in various regions in Tanzania as her parents moved around for work. Regardless of where they were, the family always had a small farm on which the children worked during school holidays. Her interest in research was fostered by a professor for whom she collected data after she completed a diploma in fisheries.

“We are determining new fertilizer recommendation rates and testing the effect of leaf harvesting on yields.”

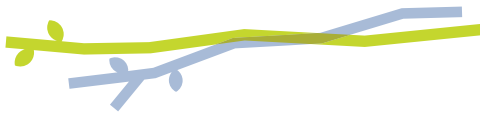
Msita was the first student at Sokoine University of Agriculture to focus on mushrooms during her BSc studies in Agronomy. She was hired as a research assistant immediately after her degree because of this project. This experience encouraged her to continue with her education, enrolling for an MSc with funding from a Norad scholarship for women. While working at Sokoine after her MSc, Msita was awarded a PhD scholarship from the Belgian Development Agency.

Msita’s interest in research prompted her to study agriculture because of the many challenges she observed while she was growing up. “My uncle also encouraged me to take agriculture because the country was beginning to privatize the industry and there would soon be many opportunities in the sector,” she explains.

Msita is currently an agricultural research officer at the Sugar Research Institute. She is working on two projects, both of which will benefit smallholders by increasing productivity through good agronomic practices. The first project is on sugarcane, which is grown as a cash crop in Tanzania. “The country has a blanket agronomic package for growing sugarcane, but we grow more than one variety of the crop, each with its own requirements,” she notes. The project is sponsored by the sugar industry and seeks to determine the agronomic package that provides the maximum productivity for each variety.

The second is a joint project with IITA and is on cassava, which is a root crop. It is sponsored by the African Development Bank and

"I expect that the increased networking opportunities I gain through the AWARD Fellowship will help me form links with scientists for research collaboration."



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.

AWARD is generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. For more information, visit www.awardfellowships.org

focuses on cassava agronomic practices that are not well studied in the country. The work involves establishing trials to study the existing cassava farming systems to improve crop productivity and improve the livelihoods of cassava farmers. "We are determining new fertilizer recommendation rates and testing the effect of leaf harvesting on yields," she states.

Msita expects that the increased networking opportunities she gains through the AWARD Fellowship will help her form links with scientists for research collaboration. She also hopes that as a leader in her department, she will be an ambassador to both her colleagues and institution and share what she learns in the courses to help work on smallholder farmers' problems.

Msita—the firstborn in her family—has risen to the challenge of leading men within her department despite cultural resistance to women as leaders. "I took over the program when it was doing poorly, and I worked hard to convince everyone that the changes I was making could work," she says with a smile. "The program has improved, so my colleagues are beginning to appreciate my input."

Msita's career goal is to become a competent international scientist who can solve the problems of smallholder farmers. She also hopes to be a leader in agriculture research, mentoring other staff to take up the challenge of helping smallholders. "Working with farmers and developing solutions that work for them gives me great joy," she says.