



Nancy Mugimba
2015 AWARD Fellow

Position	National Coordinator
Institution	Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF Uganda)
Country	Uganda
BSc	Community Forestry, Makerere University, 2004
Mentor	Stella Lutalo, Country Coordinator – Management Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM), Uganda
Research Area	Identification of small-scale farmers' need to provide support to acquire better working policy, social, and economic environments.

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In high school, Nancy Mugimba thought about being a doctor but changed her mind after a visit to the cadaver room at medical school, deciding to study nutrition instead. As she grew up, her veterinarian father and statistician mother combined their work with farming, orienting her to agriculture at a young age. "After retirement, they moved to the village and started working on crop and livestock farming," says Mugimba, the fifth born in a family of seven.

Mugimba was one of 20 students in the pioneer Community Forestry class at Makerere University. "This was forestry combined with community dynamics," she says. "I took it as an opportunity to learn about communities and be hands-on." After graduation, Mugimba interned with a public health organization, working in the HIV department. "Through this exposure, I discovered that you cannot be purely science-oriented—you have to merge all parties and sectors to bring change," she says. Mugimba believes that agricultural research has to be linked to policy, bringing in the social science perspective derived from her training.

Mugimba later worked as a program assistant at ESAFF, which was then a pilot project of PELUM, where her mentor works. "This was a farmer-focused project looking at how to increase farmers' participation in policy," she explains. After two years, the project became an independent organization with Mugimba at the helm, where her responsibilities included fundraising and staffing. "It was a good opportunity for growth—I jumped from being a program assistant to a national coordinator." Since 2010, the team she leads has grown from three to eight staff members. This rapid rise meant she had to learn

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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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quickly, gaining new knowledge through interactions with people in leadership like her mentor and taking short courses such as the training for women heads of organizations offered by the Uganda National NGO Forum.

Currently, Mugimba is pursuing a master's degree in Development Studies at Ugandan Christian University and hopes to graduate by the end of 2015. “This program opened up my mind to the issues surrounding development, not only in Uganda but in Africa at large,” she notes. Mugimba's research is focused on assessing the impact of the National Agricultural Advisory Services program on rural women and youth. “How rural women and youth benefit from government development programs; what are the bottlenecks in acquiring such services and how can they be dealt with?” she asks. Mugimba wants to participate in changing policies that are unfriendly to farmers to improve their livelihoods. “I want to ensure that farmers have money in their pockets,” she resolves.

Through her work at ESAFF, Mugimba interacts with farmer groups comprising men, women, and youth working on different agricultural commodities such as coffee, fisheries, all food crops, and honey among others. “I want to be in a position of influence and be recognized for bringing change to the lives of rural smallholder women farmers,” says Mugimba of her career goal.

Mugimba is inspired by the opportunities presented by the AWARD Fellowship, which she hopes will help make her organization's work more visible. “I feel the potential being drawn out—I am already enriched by finding solutions from within, from African women,” she asserts. She plans to share this knowledge with her colleagues through their in-house capacity-development training sessions. She would also like to create a pool of gender champions in addition to mentoring women at her workplace. “We don't have women at the middle level,” she observes. Her satisfaction is derived from having a positive impact on farmers' lives especially while working in rural settings. “I am happy when I see a changed life, even just one.”