



**2013 AWARD Fellow**  
**Edna Nduku Mutua**

<b>Position</b>	Research Technician, Gender and Agriculture
<b>Institution</b>	International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)
<b>Country</b>	Kenya
<b>MA</b>	Gender and Development, University of Nairobi, 2008
<b>Mentor</b>	Dr. Salome Bukachi, Research Fellow, University of Nairobi

*Research area: Evaluating the impacts of livestock value chains and microcredit programs on women's empowerment using the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) methodology.*

Edna Mutua grew up in Athi-River, a town located just south of Nairobi, where her mother raised broiler chickens, and she and her three younger siblings helped raise, slaughter, and package the birds for the market.

Her university studies initially took Mutua in a seemingly very different direction, as she earned a BA in Literature and Philosophy. But ultimately, these disciplines brought her back to agriculture, and she decided to pursue an MA in Gender and Development Studies.

"I realized that I liked studying how people interact in communities. From philosophy, I learned to critically analyze issues, and from literature to look at the patterns of peoples' lives and why they behave the way they do or make certain decisions," says Mutua.

Today, she is closer to her roots, investigating gender and agriculture at ILRI. Her current research is applying qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the impacts of livestock value chains and micro-credit programs on women's empowerment. The data have been collected at the intra-household level, from beneficiaries of dairy and indigenous chicken value chain programs, and a livestock micro-credit program.

The evaluation is based on the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), which measures five dimensions of empowerment: decision making regarding agricultural production, access to and decision making regarding productive resources, control over income, leadership in the community, and time use. It also includes a gender parity index that measures the percentage of women who are as empowered as their husbands, or the empowerment gap between men and women where parity has not been achieved.

Mutua and her colleagues adapted the methodology and survey tool to suit the Kenyan context, including the addition of questions about decision making around reproductive health and attitudes towards gender-based violence.

Women's rights and economic opportunities are central aspects of the research, and Mutua argues that

bringing them together could lead to broader empowerment for women and changes in gender relations.

“Each of these areas has strengths to share with the other, but they are rarely combined in development programs,” she explains. “Providing women with economic opportunities is necessary but not sufficient for women’s empowerment. And making women aware of their rights, without providing the necessary financial resources to facilitate the enjoyment of these rights, also may not result in empowerment”.

Mutua and her colleagues have presented the evaluation findings to stakeholders specializing in livelihoods and in human rights, hoping to convince the two groups to work together.

She is fascinated by the study’s findings so far, some of which are challenging her own understanding of empowerment. In some cases, the respondents’ definitions or perceptions of their own level of empowerment were very different from what might be expected, leading to some rich ongoing discussions among the researchers.

Mutua emphasizes the importance of looking at both sides of the gender equation, and presents the results for men and women, side by side. “Gender has been perceived to be a strategy that empowers women while disempowering men. This has led to a lot of resistance, especially from men,” she says.

Mutua’s study compares which dimensions or indicators are most disempowering for women or men, and which are cross-cutting. She also argues that male involvement is a critical catalyst for women’s empowerment and essential for the success of development initiatives targeting women.

In the long term, Mutua hopes to see the day when professionals in agriculture integrate gender into their work, not to please donors, but as a strategy for making it more effective. “The moment agricultural research and development institutions adopt gender-transformative approaches as the norm, I will have achieved my life purpose,” she says.

In the meantime, Mutua considers the AWARD Fellowship as a way to build her leadership, scientific writing, and presentation skills so that she can advance her own career and empowerment.

---

*Mutua 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.*

*AWARD is generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, and Agropolis Fondation. For more information, visit [www.awardfellowships.org](http://www.awardfellowships.org)*