



2014 AWARD Fellow
Deborah Nabuuma

Position	Research Fellow
Institution	Bioversity International
Country	Uganda
MSc	Applied Human Nutrition, Makerere University, 2009
Mentor	Robert Mwadime, Chief of Party, USAID/Uganda Community Connector Project
Research Area	Promotion of identified local varieties and tested exotic varieties of bananas and plantain in order to address micronutrient deficiencies in sub-Saharan Africa through <i>Musa</i> -based foods.

“It was very uplifting to watch the children progress thanks to better nourishment.”

Deborah Nabuuma grew up on the outskirts of Kampala, Uganda’s capital city. Today, she is more focused on the remote, rural regions of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As a nutritionist, Nabuuma is working with a team trying to introduce healthier banana and plantain varieties within existing farming systems in those two countries, in order to complement local diets and combat nutrient deficiencies.

Nabuuma discovered her fascination with nutrition as an undergraduate student in food science and technology. After completing her BSc at Makerere University, she acquired hands-on experience working in a hospital malnutrition unit that cared for mothers and undernourished children.

“It was very uplifting to watch the children progress thanks to better nourishment,” says Nabuuma, noting that at least a third of all Ugandan children under age five do not receive adequate nutrition for their healthy growth and development.

Nabuuma continued to address childhood malnutrition during her MSc studies in Applied Human Nutrition at Makerere University. She worked as part of a USAID collaborative research support program to develop therapeutic food for malnourished children. With researchers from Makerere, the University of Ghana, and the University of Georgia, she formulated and developed a processing protocol for a peanut-based drink that is highly nourishing, easy to digest, good tasting, and more affordable than milk-based formulas.

“AWARD is pushing me to dream big and to determine what I really want. It is helping me to make my goals more realistic, steering me in the right direction, and giving me the confidence to believe I will succeed. I am honored to be an AWARD Fellow.”



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

Currently, Nabuuma is collaborating with colleagues at Bioversity International, who have identified and done trials with more than 400 exotic and local *Musa* (banana and plantain) varieties to see which provide the highest nutritional benefit, while growing well in East African soils. They have chosen six of these, which are rich in vitamin A and well adapted to local conditions. She is working with communities in Burundi and the DRC to build awareness and capacity around nutrition and diet diversification, and to test local acceptance of the more nutrient-rich cultivars.

“The agronomists look at the *Musa* plants, analyzing factors such as how quickly they mature, their disease resistance, and the size of the bunch and fruit,” she explains. “I work on establishing how well they retain their nutrients after cooking, and whether they pass the test of taste, texture, and other sensory aspects with the producers and consumers.”

Because bananas and plantains are a primary staple food in Burundi, the DRC, and Uganda, the work has the potential to enhance nutrition and reduce the impact of vitamin A deficiency. The condition is widespread in the region, and can lead to blindness, compromised immune systems, and premature death.

“We are not trying to replace or displace other foods or banana varieties,” says Nabuuma. “We want to offer an additional source of nutrition that fits within agronomic and cultural practices, and that will still be there long after the program has ended.”

Nabuuma’s future plans include embarking on a PhD in nutrition, further developing her research and leadership skills, and ultimately, becoming a technical director of an international research organization. She finds that being an AWARD Fellow has helped her to focus with greater direction and conviction on her objectives. It also offers access to a mentor, wider networks, and enhanced skill sets to help her achieve them.

“AWARD is pushing me to dream big and to determine what I really want. It is helping me to make my goals more realistic, steering me in the right direction, and giving me the confidence to believe I will succeed. I am honored to be an AWARD Fellow,” she concludes.