



Rose Nankya  
**2015 AWARD Fellow**

*"I hope to become a professional agricultural researcher who contributes to solving the real needs of farmers to bring about positive change in communities"*

Position	Program Specialist
Institution	Bioversity International
Country	Uganda
MSc	Environmental Science, Makerere University, 2001
Mentor	Dr. Everline Komutunga, Senior Scientist, Head of Department of Soil Science and Climate Change, National Agricultural Research Organisation, Uganda
Research Area	Improving the productivity and resilience of smallholder farmers through enhanced use of crop varietal diversity.

Rose Nankya was raised in rural Uganda, helping out on the small family farm during school holidays. Growing up, she admired the only graduate in the village—a woman—and wanted to emulate her. There was family opposition to her being educated, as everyone thought she would get pregnant and drop out of school like so many other girls do. "But I was determined to prove them wrong," she says. "I worked hard and qualified to study at Makerere University."

Nankya completed a BSc in Forestry and worked at the Uganda Wildlife Authority after graduation. While there, she was awarded a Harvard University scholarship to pursue a master's in Environmental Science at Makerere under the Kibale National Park Chimpanzee Conservation Project. She has spent all her career working on biodiversity.

In her current research, Nankya is studying how to enhance the use of different varieties of beans and bananas to improve food and nutrition security and smallholder farmer livelihoods. The diversity of bananas and beans is declining because farmers concentrate on more marketable varieties. If the less marketable varieties die off, the gene pool used to improve varieties will also disappear.

"Although some local varieties may not be marketable, they have other important attributes—such as drought resistance, resistance to pests and diseases, better taste, fast maturation and tolerance to excessive water among others—which, if lost, will mean we are losing important diversity that would help farming systems become more resilient to climate change, pests, and diseases," Nankya explains.

The project is therefore focusing on growing diverse varieties to control pests and diseases, enhance resilience to climate change, and improve productivity and marketability. "We set out to establish procedures to ensure that these varieties are used and managed to enhance other

**“We have established trials on farms and at the research stations to determine how farmers can grow the varieties in different ways”**



**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](http://www.awardfellowships.org)**

ecosystem services that can arise from using these varieties, such as reduced chemical spraying for improved ecosystem health,” notes Nankya. “We have established trials on farms and at the research stations to determine how farmers can grow the varieties in different ways.”

In the second component of the project, Nankya is working with farmers to look for ways of improving seed security for better productivity. This involves dealing with the challenges farmers face in accessing good quality seed. Farmers generally get seed from fellow farmers, from markets, or from relatives. There is no quality control in these exchanges and the level of diversity is low.

“We came up with the concept of community seed banking whereby a community seed store is established on land provided by farmers and any other materials possible as a form of in-kind contribution and our project contributes funds for construction,” Nankya says. The project trains farmers on producing good quality seed. The farmers multiply the seed and bring it to the seed bank out of which they borrow the quantity they need at the start of the rainy season, returning double the amount borrowed to the seed bank. In this way, more seed is available for borrowing with every new season. Quality continues to improve because it is monitored by the seed bank management committee, through on-farm inspection. This concept improves the availability of diverse, high-quality varieties of seed. The project has already established two seed banks, and is in the process of establishing another.

Nankya hopes to become a professional agricultural researcher who contributes to solving the real needs of farmers to bring about positive change in communities. She expects the AWARD Fellowship to improve her professional abilities through the range of courses offered.

Nankya aspires to be a leader who does visible, tangible work in biodiversity management, and who other women can emulate. “I don’t want to do research for the sake of doing research,” she asserts. “I want to do research that improves the situation on the ground for smallholders.”