



Nora B. Ndege
2015 AWARD Fellow

Position	Research Fellow
Institution	World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)
Country	Kenya
BSc	Food Science and Technology, University of Nairobi, 2011
Mentor	Hellen Ochieng, Program Officer, Partnerships and Impact, ICRAF
Research Area	Access and use of training on processing technologies by smallholder farmers in Mwala, Machakos county.



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Nora Ndege credits her mother for sparking her interest in agriculture. “I learned farming skills from my mother, but then, I didn’t really like agriculture,” says the young scientist who spent part of her childhood in Kenya’s Kisii and Nakuru counties. “Whenever I wanted to speak to my mother, I would have to look for her in the fields, where she grows finger millet and maize.” Her mother, who would work on other people’s farms to get additional income to pay school fees, is still farming and earning a living from her produce. She sends food from her farm to all five of her children whose families live in Nairobi. “In a small way, she ensures household food security for all of us,” says Ndege. “And this can be transferred to a nation.”

After high school, Ndege attended the University of Nairobi, where she studied Food Science and Technology. “This was a good opportunity and an eye opener,” she says. “I now have a healthy appreciation of what my mother was doing.” Ndege worked as the lead food technologist in a food processing firm South Sudan for two years after completing her BSc in 2011. “There is plenty of food that goes to waste,” she says. This work experience got her thinking about how she could contribute to national food security. “How can a country achieve food sufficiency and security when most of its food is imported from neighboring countries?” asks Ndege. For her, the solution lies in food processing to ensure that the surplus produce does not go to waste.

Ndege would like to see her research have an impact on food security in Africa as a whole. “I want to ensure that the continent can feed itself, process food without importing, and ensure that each and every household is food secure,” she says with conviction. She believes that household food security is the route to ensuring that all the nations on

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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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the continent are food and nutritionally secure. To improve her skills in disseminating agricultural information, Ndege has begun an MSc in Agricultural Information and Communication Management at the University of Nairobi and expects to graduate in August 2015.

Ndege’s career goal is to inform policy, provide information and training, and conduct research on issues related to food and nutrition security. “I see myself transforming Africa through the provision of information and appropriate technologies so that we can have nutritious food on the table,” she resolves. She wants to help eradicate nutritional diseases like kwashiorkor and marasmus, both severe forms of malnutrition. “I want to influence and change behavior, especially when it comes to diets, so people can improve their health.”

Ndege’s work at ICRAF involves sharing her knowledge on fruit processing through training smallholder farmers in Mwala in Machakos counties. Through ICRAF’s Fruiting Africa Project, she teaches farmer groups how to extract jam from an indigenous fruit, *Syzygium cuminii*, commonly known as msambarau. This fruit, along with mabuyu (baobab seeds) and mkwaju (tamarind), are rich in vitamin C, but farmers do not fully exploit their commercial value. “Instead of having the surplus go to waste, you can do value addition,” she explains. She has taught women’s groups how to make jam and juice, from fruits, since women are the main food processors, and she is delighted when her research and training have a positive impact on communities. “When I went back to the farmers to collect data, I saw their joy,” she enthuses. “What we are doing is changing people’s lives!”

Ndege believes that people need to become more aware about their diets. She emphasizes that it is not only rural smallholders who need to eradicate diet-related diseases. “We need behavior change for both rural and urban communities to ensure that they incorporate dietary diversity in meals,” she observes. Through AWARD, Ndege hopes to publish and enhance her leadership, research, and scientific skills, while working to expand ICRAF’s networks with public and private partners.