



2014 AWARD Fellow
Ngozi Margaret Oguguah

Position	Senior Research Officer
Institution	Nigerian Institute for Oceanography and Marine Research (NIOMR)
Country	Nigeria
MSc	Fisheries Biology, University of Nigeria, 2006
Mentor	Dr. Adesola Osibona, Senior Lecturer, Department of Marine Sciences, University of Lagos
Research Area	Exploration of opportunities to promote value-added fish products to improve the livelihoods of coastal communities.



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Ngozi Margaret Oguguah developed an interest in fish as an undergraduate. “I grew up in a village with no rivers, streams, or sea. I picked an aquaculture project on fish anesthetics, because I liked the way the lecturer taught it,” she says. She does not regret her choice, despite difficulties finding a job when she first graduated, and has made a career out of it.

Oguguah also focused on aquaculture for her MSc, looking at different management systems. She wanted to find the least expensive investment option for homesteads, to encourage people to begin farming fish. “Fish is the cheapest animal protein in Nigeria, and I wanted to interest farmers in aquaculture so they can improve the health of their households and increase their incomes by selling the extra fish,” she says.

As a Senior Research Officer at NIOMR, Oguguah trains farmers in new technologies, and teaches new techniques to university students on attachment and to other scientists.

In her current research, she is exploring existing practices and opportunities for fish value addition in fishing communities in Lagos in order to improve their quality of life. Unwilling to impose methods on the communities with which she is working, Oguguah is first determining what they need and want. The project focuses on women and youth.

“After all the effort they put into the fishing enterprise, fisherfolk make very little money because they don’t know how to preserve what they catch,” she says. “They are forced to sell the fish at throwaway prices because it spoils quickly.” Her project is teaching

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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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them to handle fish hygienically—especially at first contact—to reduce spoilage, as well as how to preserve and market their fish through forming cooperatives.

Oguguah is also finding alternative income-generating activities for the fisherfolk during the off season. “They have to find other work, but they have no other skills. I want to teach them craft work so they can survive these times,” she says.

In her little spare time, Oguguah is studying for a PhD as a part-time student. Her research is on pollution monitoring, looking for heavy metals in catfish and croaker fish, which are popular in Nigeria. “I chose this project because of the health issues associated with heavy metals. I also need the degree to progress to the next level at my institution.”

Oguguah is determined to complete her PhD within the next year so she can achieve her long-term career goal of becoming a fisheries consultant at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). “I want to be more knowledgeable so that I will have a commanding presence when I speak, and be a role model because Nigeria does not have many positive women role models,” she shares.

A self-confessed “Internet rat”, Oguguah has taken many online courses on topics such as research writing, marine statistics, critical thinking, and marine fauna to become better at her job, and has formed a Yahoo group where she disseminates information on upcoming conferences, seminars, and advertisements for research grants. A recipient of a Norman E. Borlaug African Women in Science Fellowship in 2010, she also writes a blog about fellow inspiring women professionals.

Oguguah expects to improve her networks through interaction with the pool of AWARD researchers. “AWARD has already provided me with tools to enhance myself and make me more visible professionally. It is awesome—you can’t get this anywhere else,” she says of the fellowship program.

“As an AWARD Fellow, I will share resources with like-minded people at work to help build their capacity. This will have a ripple effect, as they share the same with others.”