



2013 AWARD Fellow
Omolabake Esther Okunade

Position	Associate Professor
Institution	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Nigeria
Country	Nigeria
PhD	Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria, 2002
Mentor	Professor Janice Olawoye, Dean

Research area: Empowerment of rural women through agricultural information to enhance sustainable farming activities.

Omolabake Esther Okunade's parents are both farmers, who inspired her early passion for agriculture as she grew up in a small village outside Ibadan, Nigeria. Today, as a mother of five children who lives and works in the city, she still loves to go to the farm. "I have no illusions about the harsh a life my parents lived, especially my mother, who did most of her work unrecognized. However, I love the greenness of our farm. I am just as inspired today by nature's lushness after the onset of the rains as I was when I decided to go into agriculture years ago."

Okunade is driven by her desire to have a positive impact on women and their lives by helping them expand their farming activities from the micro to the macro level, especially in the area of postharvest loss management. Her first job was in agriculture extension, and she still feels at her best when in the field.

"Women are the key to agricultural development because about 60 to 70 percent of farm activities are done by them," she says. "Good access to extension education services would harness the hidden potential of women, resulting in high food productivity and thereby ensuring household food security and sustainable development."

After serving as an extension officer for eight years, Okunade transferred to the university to pursue her PhD, but is still actively involved in knowledge dissemination. She enjoys the personal interaction with women farmers, helping to increase their knowledge and skills. "I was involved in soybean popularization and processing for four years," she recounts. "This project helped women as they kept the income from the sale of the processed soybeans."

Since research and extension funds are scarce in her country, Okunade uses personal resources to work with women smallholders. She has organized trainings and seminars on improved crop husbandry and conducts practical demonstrations, sometimes including sessions on small entrepreneurship. She recently registered her own NGO, with a focus on empowering rural women by availing useful agricultural and business information on the management of postharvest losses, and providing relevant training in modern postharvest technology.

Okunade has delivered consultancy services on the empowerment of women for the Agricultural Research and Management Training Institute, as well as for the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Bank, and others. She was involved two World Bank-funded projects in Osun state related to small-scale community-owned infrastructure and asset acquisition, both of which focus on the United Nations Millennium Development Goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women.

At her workplace, Okunade provides career counseling to younger women, promoting agriculture with a focus on extension. "It is one thing to develop appropriate technologies, but using the right language with farmers, especially women, is very important if we are to make a difference in people's lives," she emphasizes.

Okunade expects to enhance her knowledge and skills in leadership, and in science and proposal writing through training provided by AWARD. She admires her mentor's experience in fundraising and extensive networking, and would like to learn to emulate it. She plans to become a member of the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education to help her network internationally and increase her visibility.

Okunade 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.

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