



Rachel Majekodunmi  
Omodamiro  
**2015 AWARD Fellow**

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Position	Principal Research Officer
Institution	National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), Umudike
Country	Nigeria
MSc	Food Science and Technology (Food Chemistry), Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, 2011
Mentor	Iro Nkama, Professor, Food Science and Technology University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Research Area	New product development and use of edible byproducts from orange-fleshed sweet potato, okara, and maize in southeastern and western Nigeria for improvement of the vitamin A status of consumers.

Rachel Omodamiro grew up in central Nigeria as one of nine children born to a mother who was an only child. Both of her parents worked at the local secondary school and emphasized the value of education. “I always worked very hard at school,” she recalls. “Because of my academic performance, a private individual gave me a full scholarship from secondary school to the early part of my postgraduate education. This kind individual paid the fees for me a few others who were unable to go to school, and I am very grateful for such generosity.”

Omodamiro studied chemistry for her bachelor’s degree, but decided to go into food science for her master’s. She began her current research in 2011. “I’m working on improving people’s nutritional status, focusing on children and adolescents in particular,” she says. “The approach I’m taking is to make use of byproducts and edible waste from the food industry.”

She is working with okara, which is residue from soya milk that can be dried and combined with maize flour to produce a snack. She is also looking at maize and orange-fleshed sweet potato (OFSP), with a view to improving the nutrition of Nigerian consumers. “The maize provides carbohydrates, the OFSP provides vitamin A and carbohydrates, and the okara provides protein and fiber,” she explains. “I have created pro-vitamin-A rich snack (a rod-like snack) using extrusion technology, as well as a drink from the orange-fleshed sweet potato, and my colleagues and food science and technology postgraduates from the neighboring university act as my taste testers.”

Because of limited laboratory facilities, Omodamiro has not yet completed in-depth studies of these products. “I am still working 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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establishing proper storage and packaging techniques," she notes. "I also need to determine the products' shelf-life—there is a lot of follow-up work to be done."

Omodamiro is actively involved with rural smallholders, especially women and youth, teaching them how to add value to their produce. "NRCRI has an extension unit that works directly with women for empowerment," she notes. "The objective is to reduce postharvest losses and to encourage them to adopt farming activities that will result in increased incomes." Other products NRCRI has brought to farmers include cocoyam and cassava flour, among others.

Omodamiro expects to complete her PhD in Food Science and Technology at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, by October 2015. "But I don't want to stop at a doctorate," she exclaims. "I want to get a post-doctoral education, then I hope to get career-development training on my journey to becoming a director in my institute so I can speak for women and be part of policy making."

She sees the AWARD program as an opportunity to expand her networks, and says she has already gained valuable information about different temperaments, leadership, and rural development. She looks forward to visiting research centers so she can see work in action. "I love research and I love looking into things," she says. "I also appreciate the opportunity to be registered with an international body such as the International Foundation for Science."

The mother of three appreciates the support of her husband, who has continually encouraged her to keep going. She is equally grateful to her institution for providing a peaceful environment for her career development. She also acknowledges the guidance she received from her master's and PhD supervisors.

Omodamiro strives to continue to invest in improving the nutrition of smallholder farmers and their families, and she derives great satisfaction from seeing the results of her work, especially when people appreciate what she is doing.