



Idayat Oyetoro
2015 AWARD Fellow

Position	MSc Student
Institution	University of Ibadan
Country	Nigeria
MSc	Forestry and Wildlife Management, University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, 2009
Mentor	Adegoke Emmanuel Adegbite, Head, Biological Science Department, Ondo State, University of Science and Technology
Research Area	Assessment of the efficacy of medicinal plants in wound healing for natural product research and development of alternate drug sources.



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Idayat Oyetoro grew up in Ibadan in a family of five children, all of whom have completed university. She credits her parents, both now retired—her father as a forestry professional and her mother as a secondary-school principal—for encouraging their children to pursue higher education. “I decided to focus on forest resource utilization during the final year of my BSc,” she says. “This pertains to the way forest plants are used for medicinal purposes.”

During the course of her undergraduate studies, she decided to pursue an area of research that had not yet been undertaken. “We discovered plants indigenous to Nigeria that help in the extraction of bullets from the body, as well as helping to heal other physical injuries,” she declares. “Before we conducted this work, we carried out an ethno-botanical survey to gather information about who is using these plants.” She has since begun a master’s degree in Pharmacognosy—a branch of pharmacy that deals with making drugs from natural sources—at the University of Ibadan, and she has already defended her thesis.

“My MSc research focus is on medicinal plants namely *Erythrophleum suaveolens* (sassafras) and *Vitellaria paradoxa* (shea butter tree),” Oyetoro notes. “I’m working on the wound-healing activities of these plants, exploring the active constituents that are responsible for the healing process.” There are many such plants in Nigeria, according to Oyetoro. She is also working with local smallholder herb sellers, 95 percent of whom are women, and traditional medicine practitioners. “We must work hand-in-hand with these people to get the plants,” she says.

Oyetoro says some people use these plants by squeezing and applying directly to burns or wounds, while others first boil, and use to wash the wounds, or drink the concoction. “Because there is such a diversity in the way these plants are used, we are trying to standardize the production

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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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and use of these plants,” she says. “Of course, we tested them on animals before testing on humans, and the results give us hope that we will be able to create a standard product from medicinal plants.”

As her career progresses, Oyetoro hopes to secure a good job and plans to focus more on women’s health, particularly in the areas of such common diseases as fibroids and cancer. “Some medicinal plants have been discovered to be effective in those areas, but further research is required to test the efficacy of these plants and contribute to knowledge.” She plans to get a doctorate once she has finished her master’s, and aspires to eventually become a professor of Pharmacognosy in a reputable University. One of the skills she hopes to gain as an AWARD Fellow is the ability to write winning grant proposals, since so much funding is required for her research.

Oyetoro wants to have an impact in her immediate environment, as well as in Nigeria as a whole. She counts on her role as an AWARD Fellow to help her achieve these goals, especially as she expects her confidence to grow, thanks to both the influence of her mentor and the training she will receive. She is grateful for the support of her parents and her husband, who have helped to drive her toward a place where she can make a difference in the lives of people in sub-Saharan Africa. “I will also enlighten the local people on forest resource conservation and its importance, including preventing soil erosion and degradation, helping them to realize that the trees around them are meant for their protection, and should not be exploited,” she resolves. “I will continue to create awareness on the medicinal uses of some common plants in rural areas, of which some people are already aware.”

She also appreciates the support of her university supervisor, who provides encouragement and has helped her to continue to move forward.