



Ade Oluwafolakemi
Oyewole
2015 AWARD Fellow

“I am delighted that AWARD bought into my vision and saw that I want to improve the value chain of the unknown and underused agricultural resources”

Position	Senior Research Officer
Institution	Federal Institute of Industrial Research, Oshodi, Lagos
Country	Nigeria
MSc	Chemical Process Engineering, University College, London, 2009
Mentor	Dr. Yemisi Asagbra, Deputy Director Biotechnology/ Gender Desk Officer, Federal Institute of Industrial Research, Oshodi, Lagos
Research Area	Upgrading indigenous technologies to develop herbal soaps and cosmetics, and the substitution of conventional raw materials with locally available underused/unknown options to empower communities with entrepreneurial skills.

Ade Oluwafolakemi Oyewole has always had an interest in the cosmetics industry. “I always dreamed of becoming a chemical engineer but unfortunately we have very few ‘made in Nigeria’ products,” she observes. Her goal is to become an entrepreneur, contributing to manufacturing cosmetics in Nigeria using locally obtained raw materials. She and her sister had an academic background, growing up with a mother who was a teacher and a father who works in agricultural research. In fact, it was her father who encouraged Oyewole to apply for the AWARD Fellowship.

In pursuit of skills to help her realize her dream, Oyewole obtained a BSc in Chemical Engineering from Obafemi Awolowo University, followed by an MSc in Chemical Processing from University College London. For her research-based postgraduate studies, she ventured into the private sector to investigate the impact of industrialization in her country. “I discovered that we were importing the raw materials,” she says. Noting that these were mainly agricultural products, Oyewole was interested in finding out how local resources could be used in manufacturing.

In collaboration with a group of scientists at the Federal Institute of Industrial Research, Oyewole is working on a range of products that contain extracts of the neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*), commonly known as Dongoyaro in Nigeria. The plant was introduced in the country to address desertification. “It is just lying there in the north,” says Oyewole. As one of the principal neem researchers in her institute, she has developed the experimental design for laboratory-scale production of herbal toothpaste. The institute also has other shampoos, creams, and lotions in the laboratory development phase, while their soap is ready for pilot-scale 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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The tree can also be used to generate economic growth by producing biopesticides and biofuel. Oyewole cites the example of India, a country that has exploited the tree’s healing properties to generate wealth, as something that can be replicated in her country because there is arable land where it can be cultivated. “When you go to the villages you see the women with lovely skin—they are using locally available plants,” observes Oyewole. “The world is going organic, and we want to use products that agree with our skin.” Oyewole’s interest in using indigenous plants for manufacturing is driven by the fact that it provides a market for agricultural products. “Using agricultural resources is sustainable as they will grow again,” she says. “I would like to create job opportunities using indigenous raw materials and have ‘made in Nigeria’ products,” she remarks.

Oyewole would like to have an impact on peoples’ lives particularly by contributing to improving the skills of small-scale entrepreneurs to tap into the boom in the global cosmetics industry. Her institute holds workshops to train participants—most of whom are women—on how to make black soap, supporting their cottage industries. She enjoys this work because it provides an opportunity to share knowledge. “You find that people are soaking in what you are saying,” she notes.

“I am delighted that AWARD bought into my vision and saw that I want to improve the value chain of the unknown and underused agricultural resources,” says Oyewole. She believes the fellowship will help expand her networks and increase her scientific knowledge base through interactions with peers and senior colleagues. She also hopes it will also give visibility to her institute’s research outputs.

Oyewole regrets that at times, brilliant discoveries do not go beyond the laboratory, but she believes that her passion will ensure that the knowledge will benefit local entrepreneurs. “If you are not passionate about what you are doing on the bench, it will lie on the bench,” she says.