



2019 AWARD Fellow
Rebecca Owusu Coffie

Position	Lecturer
Institution	University of Cape Coast
Country	Ghana
PhD	Agricultural Economics, University of Western Australia, 2017
Mentor	Dr. Wilhemina Quaye, Director, Science & Technology Policy, Research Institute, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)
Research Area	Agriculture productivity, food security, market analysis and gender studies.

Coffie is researching best farming practices and collecting quality data to create informed policies for the benefit of smallholders. Her ultimate goal is to increase food security in Ghana.

Rebecca Owusu Coffie is determined to help people escape poverty. Having been raised in a rural environment in Eastern Ghana, she recalls seeing young people working on farms on her way home from school, and she always asked herself what she could do to help. "Most people go to work on farms after school," she says. "In addition, many young people with children have no education, no skills, and no training. When I finished secondary school, I did my best to motivate them, and I'm happy to say that my encouragement has had an impact on several people."

This drive to improve people's lives by helping them escape poverty is what prompted her to study agricultural economics after completing her BSc in Agriculture at the University of Cape Coast. "The farmer is the decision maker in the production process," Coffie says. "But farmers usually look at subsistence only, and need to be encouraged to look farther afield."

A component of her work as a lecturer at the University of Cape Coast has her liaising with extension agents and interviewing farmers to ascertain their farming practices. "I'm trying to determine what issues need addressing," she continues. "Most farmers don't record their production, so when I ask them how many bags of fertilizer they've used, they just go by their memory. I'm trying to teach them basic record-keeping techniques." Coffie says Ghana has recently introduced drone technology, "which will enable us to collect quality data to create informed policy for the benefit of smallholders."

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Coffie is one of a growing number of women agricultural scientists who have won an AWARD Fellowship. AWARD works toward inclusive, agriculture-driven prosperity for the African continent by strengthening the production and dissemination of more gender-responsive agricultural research and innovation. We invest in scientists, research institutions, and agribusinesses to deliver sustainable, gender-responsive agricultural research and innovation.

The AWARD Fellowship is a career-development program that invests in top women agricultural scientists to ensure that confident, capable, and influential women are available to lead critical advances and innovations in the agricultural sector.

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Her ultimate goal is to increase food security in Ghana. "But we can't ignore the farmers, as they are the decision makers—we can help them with input choices in production processes, and teach them how to market farm outputs and improve their livelihoods," she stresses.

"Hunger is a product of poverty," Coffie asserts. She longs to see the continued development of the agricultural sector in Ghana, because she is convinced that this will improve productivity, and in so doing reduce poverty and hunger.

One issue she raises is the need to consider farmers' preferences for production technologies. "Usually we package and present technologies to farmers without getting their input," she continues. "But we need to consider their perspective—often there's a component that they don't like or would like included." She wants to see technologies that improve indigenous processes incorporating farmer participation. "We need more farmer participation in conception and planning of new technologies if we want farmers to adopt them," she emphasizes.

Coffie aspires to be a highly professional researcher working toward addressing the many problems that plague the African continent. "It's easy for me to do because of my background in research," she notes. "I can look at the problems—malnutrition, inequality in access to education—and introduce policies that improve the lives of farmers. I aspire to reach the topmost rank at the university to ensure that we introduce a quota in terms of admissions to the poor." She acknowledges that she needs to start where she lives, encouraging young people that they can make a difference. "I intend to visit rural communities and liaise with men and women, especially young people."

As an AWARD Fellow, Coffie looks forward to sharpening her skills in scientific writing and writing for publication. "I think the AWARD Fellowship will help to increase my visibility, expand my networks, and will also give me the opportunity to interact with great scientists," she states. Coffie expects to learn a lot from her mentor, especially in the area of networking and winning grants. She also hopes to gain the opportunity to better relate to her male counterparts at her workplace. "I ask myself how I can better work in a male-dominated environment."

Coffie hopes to publish in top-profile scientific journals, honing her leadership skills along the way as she interacts with her students. No matter what challenges face this young woman as she continues her research career and strives to create a cohesive working environment with her students—some 400 each year—she draws strength from within. "But it's the drive to help the poor that keeps me going," she concludes.