



2014 AWARD Fellow  
**Phoebe Anyango Sikuku**

Position	Lecturer
Institution	Maseno University
Country	Kenya
PhD	Botany (Plant Physiology and Biochemistry), Maseno University, 2012
Mentor	Dr. David Musyimi, Senior Lecturer, Maseno University
Research Area	Identification of low nitrogen, adaptable, improved rice varieties to reduce the use of expensive inorganic fertilizers and decrease malnutrition in women and children.

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Phoebe Anyango Sikuku was raised by her mother, a smallholder farmer and trader, in Western Kenya. Her mother could not afford to send her to high school, but fortunately her working brothers paid her fees. Throughout school, Sikuku was determined to do well so she could make a difference in the lives of women farmers like her mother.

As she embarked on her MSc studies, once again supported by her brothers, Sikuku wanted to link her botany background to agriculture. “I wanted my MSc research to take me back to agriculture so I could achieve my goal of helping women farmers,” she says. Her supervisor advised her to take up plant physiology and biochemistry, and Sikuku chose to work on identifying rain-fed rice varieties tolerant to water deficit. “The aim was to recommend these rice varieties to farmers who live in dry areas,” she explains.

Sikuku’s current research is also on rain-fed rice varieties; this time she is focusing on identifying those that can grow in poor soil and that require limited amounts of fertilizer. “Poor soils are a common problem on smallholder farms and these farmers cannot afford fertilizer,” she notes. “With this research, I hope to put more food on farmers’ tables and more money in their pockets.”

Sikuku has concentrated on investigating rice because more people are eating it—rice is now the second-highest food consumed in the country after maize. To improve nutrition among smallholder farmers, she is intercropping rice with soybeans to develop nutrition-sensitive rice farming. The beans improve soil fertility, and are also a source of protein for the family.

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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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Sikuku’s vision is to disseminate the results of her research to farmers, rather than storing them on the shelf. “I want to see agricultural research translated into action that will involve disseminating research findings to smallholder farmers so they can achieve the maximum returns from their inputs,” she says.

A lecturer at Maseno University in Kisumu, Kenya, Sikuku is responsible for advising students on their choice of courses. She enjoys the responsibility and is proud when students follow her advice and succeed.

Sikuku hopes to improve her leadership and communication skills through AWARD. “I hope it will help me achieve my career goal of empowering women,” she says. “I prefer to work quietly and write my thoughts rather than speak them.” She is looking forward to gaining skills that will help make her more assertive and proactive at work—abilities she will share with her students.

Sikuku expects to learn how to sharpen her proposal-writing skills to help her win grants for projects related to helping women. She also wants to gain the confidence to hold seminars so she can share with colleagues the experiences and skills she acquires through AWARD.

Sikuku has set her sights on increasing her professional visibility by emulating her college supervisors. “They were highly visible because of their networks, which enabled them to win many grants,” she says. She wants to become a professor and eventually to head an organization that works directly with rural women.