



2018 AWARD Fellow
Silvia Alonso Alvarez

Position	Scientist - Epidemiologist
Institution	International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)
Country	Spain
PhD	Veterinary Public Health, University of Bologna, Italy, 2005
Mentor	Dr. Namukolo Covic, Research Coordinator, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
Research Area	Improving human health through better understanding of zoonotic disease transmission, enhanced livestock production systems, and safer, high-quality animal food products that are more nutritious and less risky.

Alonso Alvarez has been involved in research work and teaching in a range of epidemiology methods in various countries in Asia and Africa, including Vietnam, China, Cambodia, Tanzania, and Kenya.

Silvia Alonso Alvarez grew up in a small rural village in northern Spain as the youngest in a family of five siblings. The only one in her family to go to university, she took her BSc at the University of Leon in Spain, and then followed up with an MSc in Epidemiology in the U.K. After completing her PhD in Veterinary Public Health in Italy, the multilingual scientist moved to Kenya with her Italian-born husband. "We both have a passion for living abroad," she says. "To date, I have been involved in research work and teaching in a range of epidemiology methods in various countries in Asia and Africa, including Vietnam, China, Cambodia, Tanzania, and Kenya." Their two children—a six-year-old boy and a three-year-old girl—were born in France and Kenya.

Alonso Alvarez has always loved learning. "I like doing research that exposes me to new challenges," she says. Trained as a veterinarian, she soon realized she wasn't motivated by working with small animals. "I wanted my work to have more of an impact. I decided to do something at the community level instead."

Her current area of research involves public health at the interface of livestock production and human health, primarily in East Africa. "This includes looking into the dynamics and management of infectious diseases as they move between livestock and humans," she explains. "I got into public health because I am interested in the multiple impacts that livestock has on human health and social well-being," she states. "These can include the economics of production

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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.

Alonso Alvarez 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.

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and sustaining livelihoods, as well as specific health concerns like preventing salmonella. Public health is also about people's well-being and mental health—there is a very specific connection." Her firm goal is to contribute to improving livelihoods, health, and nutritional security.

Alonso Alvarez is eager to move into finding solutions as opposed to just finding problems. "Three of my current projects involve testing field interventions through randomized control trials to improve livestock production, food safety, and human health outcomes," she says. She has also begun to engage with stakeholders and people in government to facilitate knowledge dissemination and maximize the impact of her work. "If our proposed strategies prove successful, they will have the capacity to self-sustain as they are adopted by the countries themselves," she says.

Some of the projects Alonso Alvarez is working on include looking at the broader impacts of livestock production on human health and nutrition. "I am coordinating a research project, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), which is aimed at leveraging informal dairy markets to improve the health and nutrition outcomes of children living in Nairobi," she says. "We are trying to scientifically prove the capacity of a specific intervention to improve the nutrition and health of children in poor households in Nairobi. The intervention is a training and certification scheme for dairy traders in the informal/raw milk sector, which encompasses street market vendors."

The BMGF project, in its second year, is exploring the linkages between dairy production, commercialization, marketing, and consumer health. "It aims to improve and promote the informal dairy sector to protect the livelihoods of its actors, looking also at the benefits for women traders, which are often neglected," Alonso Alvarez says. Apart from developing and coordinating the research idea, her technical input will involve designing a field experiment, developing research tools, and analyzing data.

A smaller project in the Borana region of Ethiopia will see Alonso Alvarez working with pastoralist women to improve milk fermentation practices and processes to obtain safer and higher-quality dairy products, while ensuring the maximization of production and thereby increasing the women's incomes.

Alonso Alvarez heard about the AWARD Fellowship from a number of colleagues who have taken part in the program. "I've been trying to participate for three years," she says. "I am so happy that I was successful."

As her career progresses, she hopes to lead a team in an international research organization. She is confident that AWARD will increase her visibility. "I need some help to figure out a strategy to ensure that my work gets out there," she states.

Alonso Alvarez wants to share the skills she develops with her colleagues at ILRI. "There are ways to empower women informally that will increase the visibility of female staff," she says. "I think women sometimes need a bit of a push, and we need to help each other."