



2019 AWARD Fellow
Veneranda Mugaya Ngazi

Position	Research assistant
Institution	Mikocheni Agricultural Research Institute (MARI)
Country	Tanzania
MSc	Crop Sciences, Makerere University, 2018
Mentor	Mwanaisha Mkangara, PhD Student, Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST), Lecturer, Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology (DIT)
Research Area	Molecular biology and virology.

Using her training in virology and molecular biology, Ngazi educate farmers on how to identify infected plant, how to avoid the spread of cassava disease, and educating them on how to recognize the symptoms of cassava brown streak disease and cassava mosaic disease.

Veneranda Mugaya Ngazi says her interest in science started when she was very young, as she admired her mother, a principal agricultural research officer who was a soil scientist/agronomist. "I was inspired to follow a career in research," she says. "My dad worked with animals but I decided to work with plants." As the last born in a family of five, she followed in the footsteps of her mother and two of her sisters, both of whom also attended SUA. "I went to SUA for my undergraduate degree in Biotechnology and Laboratory Science," she says. She then followed up with a master's degree in Crop Sciences at Makerere University, which she just completed in January 2018.

"During my undergraduate program, I took part in field practical training, which is an integrative, hands-on learning experience in a supervised setting," she explains. "Once that was completed, I went back to MARI, where I decided to ask the principle investigator if I could volunteer in the field of molecular and genetic engineering." Her timing was right, as a woman from AfricaRice was looking for a research assistant. Ngazi interviewed and got the position. "AfricaRice didn't have labs, so I did the research back at MARI," she says.

Later on, Ngazi got an MSc scholarship from MARI under a cassava diagnostic project. "This involved having access to materials that would be used for breeding against cassava mosaic disease (CMD) and cassava brown streak disease (CBSD)," she explains. She has participated in numerous field surveys, attending to farmers' fields to access their cassava plants. Ngazi says if cassava is infected, it cannot be consumed.

Along with her work on cassava, Ngazi has been diagnosing diseases in maize, sweet potatoes, and beans. She is driven to find solutions.



Ngazi 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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"Farmers need to be educated to not move infected plants to new fields," she stresses. She is working with farmers to help them recognize the symptoms, to be able to tell whether or not their plants are infected. It is especially important to avoid cross-contamination by taking plants from other people.

"I was able to educate farmers on how to avoid the spread of cassava disease by using clean planting materials, educating them on how to recognize the symptoms of CMD and CBSD and how to identify infected plants," she says. "I also provided farmers with clean planting materials. In my community, the planting is done by both men and women, but it's mostly the women who sell the products."

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Ngazi was a fellow's mentee of Mwanasha Mkangara, a 2015 AWARD Fellow. When applying for the 2019 AWARD Fellowship, she asked Mkangara to be her mentor to continue the relationship. Ngazi was instrumental in starting an AWARD country chapter in Tanzania, known as TanzAWARD. "I'm an active member," she says. When she first applied for the fellowship, Ngazi shared with her colleagues and some were interested. "I told them about the value of the AWARD Fellowship, that it can help us improve in our careers, especially in the area of making presentations and collaborating with other fellows and mentors." She is also keenly interested in gender-responsive research.

Ngazi is currently looking for scholarships to pursue a PhD. "A PhD will prepare me to engage in activities that will benefit my community," she concludes. "It's not just about publishing—it's also about helping the community."