OnePlanet FELLOWSHIP

Building a robust pipeline of scientists leading climate change research in Africa

Candidate Profile

Igbari Aramide Dolapo

2020 One Planet Laureate Candidate

Position

Lecturer

Institution

University of Lagos, Nigeria

Country

Nigeria

Education

PhD, Molecular Systematics, University of Lagos, Nigeria

Mentor

Dr. Adebayo Liasu Ogunkanmi, Associate Professor, University of Lagos, Nigeria

Area of research

Molecular plant systematics, DNA barcoding, bioinformatics, and biodiversity conservation.

Igbari Aramide Dolapo grew up in Lagos, Nigeria. Her parents instilled diligence and academic excellence in her and her siblings. Her interest in the characteristics of living things from an early age informed her decision to pursue a bachelor's degree in microbiology. She realized that she enjoyed her specialization, mainly working on legumes, so she chose to study botany for her master's degree.

Looking back, Igbari associates her affinity to food plants as an area of study with her childhood experiences where she saw her mother and grandmother growing small gardens from which they fed their families with vegetables. She found crop growth and propagation science intriguing and realized that an extensive investigation of food plants' nature could help mitigate food security challenges. This became the driving force of her postgraduate academic and research work.

Igbari is a passionate scientist conscious of the high level of intelligence required to improve humanity through science. She currently holds an academic position at the Botany Department, University of Lagos, where she develops high-yielding, drought-tolerant groundnut varieties through molecular breeding.

Nigeria was once among the top groundnut exporting countries in Africa, but a combination of drought and other diseases has diminished groundnut production since the 1970s. It has become challenging to provide adequate volumes to meet the vast demand cost-effectively. The high levels of aflatoxin infestation in groundnuts during pre and post-harvest affect their quality and farmers' earnings.

Igbari intends to work on other drought-tolerant crops towards increasing food security in Nigeria. She says, "My goal is to impact this generation by developing homegrown solutions capable of bringing Nigeria back when it exported large quantities of groundnuts. I always want to see my work being practical, relatable, and understandable to the layperson."

The perceived impact of her research keeps Igbari going. The scientific solutions that will be developed will significantly address the challenges of groundnut production.

There is no doubt that creating a condition that can allow farmers to plant their crops without the concerns of drought and toxins will be an immeasurable achievement.

Igbari is also a collaborator on research focusing on the ethnobotanical survey and phytochemical screening of medicinal plants used to manage asthma. She is asthmatic herself, so this work has a personal touch for her.

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Igbari aims to reach the top of the academic career ladder and be an authority in her field at national, continental, and global levels. She looks forward to regularly participating in policy forums where her solutions would be adopted and applied: "I want to establish myself as a household name in conversations about food security in Africa."

Igbari considers the One Planet Fellowship as a roadmap to the future she wants for her career. The mentoring and advanced science training will develop her research skills. Additionally, the leadership training will provide her with the confidence and visibility required to assert herself, stand out and ascend the career ladder. She sees the networking opportunities, proposal, and technical writing skills as assets beneficial to the actualization of her goals.

Igbari intends to pass on the skills and knowledge acquired from the One Planet Fellowship to colleagues at her institution through research collaboration and training. She will be involved in mentoring students and ensure the creation of working mentoring structures.

Igbari is convinced that the need to manage family life effectively and a science career and their accompanying challenges accentuates the importance of mentoring women scientists. She knows from experience that being pregnant and subsequently a nursing mother can significantly limit a female scientist's progress and productivity. Fortunately, she has people whose help she can rely on to deal with the stresses associated with her various roles. Among them is her husband, who also is in academia.

Igbari Aramide Dolapo is one of the growing number of candidates selected to participate in the One Planet Fellowship. The One Planet Fellowship is a career development initiative that is building a robust pipeline of highly connected, inter-generational scientists equipped to use a gender lens to help Africa's smallholder farmers cope with climate change. The One Planet Fellowship is funded by the Bill &Melinda Gates Foundation, the BNP Paribas Foundation, the European Union and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) and Agropolis Fondation are jointly implementing the Fellowship.