



**Position**

PhD Student

**Institution**

Makerere University, Uganda

**Country**

Kenya

**Education**

MSc, Plant Breeding and  
Biotechnology, University of  
Nairobi, Kenya

**Mentor**

Dr. Odeny Damaris, International  
Crops Research Institute for the  
Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT),  
South Africa

**Research Area**

Plant breeding and  
biotechnology.

## Molly Akello Okoth

2021 One Planet Laureate Candidate

Molly Akello Okoth grew up in Nairobi in a middle-class family and is now married with a young son.

Currently a full-time doctoral student, she got a scholarship in 2014 for her BSc in agriculture.

She then earned an MSc in plant breeding and biotechnology at the University of Nairobi.

"I started my PhD in plant breeding at Makerere University in Uganda when I was pregnant, so I had to stop for six months," she recalls. "It was a bit of a challenge to try juggling being a new mom with studying full time."

Always interested in improving the lives of smallholder farmers, Molly's career choice was easy.

"I saw that scientists have a definite impact on the world, and I wanted to be one of them," she says.

"It has always been my plan to contribute to improving food security. It is horrible that people are still dying of hunger in Kenya—we are still so far behind."

Molly says there are still few female plant breeders to effect change.

Her current area of research involves increasing the drought tolerance of crops.

"It excites me that what I am working on is contributing to help solve the problems that farmers are dealing with," she continues.

Because of the objective of her research—planting crops in fields and characterizing them for drought resistance—she is not currently working directly with farmers.

However, she certainly plans to do so in the future.

Molly heard about the One Planet Fellowship through social media and was motivated to apply by her supervisor.

"I applied in 2020 but didn't get in, so I'm glad I persevered. Before I got the fellowship, I had lost focus as a new mother, but I am back on track—the program has been a huge factor in helping me to achieve my goals."

She is confident that the program will prepare her to be a better researcher, "especially thanks to being mentored and because of the leadership skills I will gain, which will greatly impact my community as I contribute to plant breeding and technology," she says.

Eventually, Molly hopes to be a director general of a research institute in her career.

Molly's research involves increasing the drought tolerance of crops to improve the lives of smallholder farmers.

**Molly Akello Okoth** 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.

Do you have any further questions? Send an email to : [oneplanet.award@cgiar.org](mailto:oneplanet.award@cgiar.org)

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