



OnePlanet
FELLOWSHIP



Transforming Climate Research Leadership in Africa





A vertical graphic on the left side of the page. It features a close-up of a microscope's eyepiece and objective lens area. A white, stylized plant-like shape with three rounded leaves is superimposed over the microscope, extending from the top to the bottom of the page.

Transforming Climate Research Leadership in Africa



One Planet Fellowship: Transforming Climate Research Leadership in Africa

October 2024

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We also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the AWARD team for their dedication and commitment to empowering African researchers.

Special thanks go to the Laureate Candidates, Mentors, and Learning Partners who participated in the Fellowship. Your enthusiasm, resilience, and collaborative spirit have enriched this initiative, fostering a vibrant community of climate research leaders dedicated to addressing the challenges of climate change in Africa.

We are grateful to the European institutions that hosted our Laureate Candidates, providing them with access to advanced scientific resources and enriching their research experience. Your partnership has played a crucial role in fostering cross-continental collaboration.

We are also thankful to the African institutions that endorsed and supported their researchers to participate in the Fellowship. They played an invaluable role in ensuring the Fellowship achieves its objectives.

We would also like to extend our appreciation to the WRENmedia team for their expertise carrying out the participant interviews, and in writing this report and articulating the Fellowship's achievements and impact.

Finally, we thank all the institutions and stakeholders involved for their continued support and engagement. Together, we are making significant strides toward developing sustainable solutions for smallholder men and women farmers in Africa and advancing climate resilience.



Foreword

In the face of unprecedented global shocks that continue to plague our planet – including pandemics, climate change, and conflict – the One Planet Fellowship, an initiative of African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD), stands as a beacon of hope. Since the inaugural Cohort launched in September 2019, this transformative initiative has mobilized numerous outstanding African experts working in climate change to lead the development of solutions for the continent's smallholders to cope with environmental crises.



The One Planet Fellowship has created a robust network of women and men leaders dedicated to addressing the multi-dimensional impacts of climate change on agrifood systems, for improved livelihoods across Africa. To achieve this goal, building an intergenerational network of African researchers co-creating solutions has been a key focus, anchored by intentional efforts to foster intra-Africa and north-south collaborations.

Recognizing that these researchers operate within institutions, institutional engagement has also been a key focus – with the Fellowship encouraging African institutions to support their researchers' participation in the Fellowship. With more than 160 institutions actively involved, the Fellowship has fostered institutional responsiveness to advancing climate change solutions in Africa.

This report, on the outcomes and lessons from the One Planet Fellowship, offers a comprehensive look at the remarkable progress made over the past years. It highlights how the Fellowship has not only fostered scientific excellence and leadership but also bridged continents and generations, creating a vibrant community of experts with a shared vision of working for the planet. Despite being severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit as soon as the initiative was launched, the Fellowship has demonstrated true resilience and embraced new ways of delivering on its promise amid an extraordinary occurrence.

As you delve into this report, you will discover inspiring examples of innovation and collaboration, underpinned by exemplary personal and professional growth among the researchers. The Laureate Candidates have enhanced their visibility and communication skills and mastered the art of storytelling, empowering them to share compelling narratives with global audiences about the importance of their research. The Fellowship has also set a new standard for capacity building in climate science, comprising mentorship models that span three generations of scientists to international research placements that broaden horizons and deepen expertise. Together, the elevated skills and knowledge of Laureate Candidates, Mentors, and Learning Partners have paved the way for sustainable climate adaptation solutions tailored to the unique challenges faced by African smallholder men and women farmers.

The outcomes documented here are a testament to the power of strategic partnerships and the unwavering dedication of the scientific community. As the Laureate Candidates are set to graduate from the Fellowship to become leading Climate Laureates, I am immensely proud of what we have achieved together with our partners and look forward to continuing this vital work. Together, we are not just responding to climate change, we are proactively shaping a sustainable future.

Susan Kaaria, PhD

Director, AWARD



Introdu

While climate change affects agriculture worldwide, Africa is particularly vulnerable. The World Meteorological Organization states that African nations are disproportionately impacted by climate change, with farmers under increasing strain from reduced pastures, productive land, and water resources.



ction



Women farmers are particularly vulnerable. Within the next 80 years, the continent's agriculture sector is expected to see losses totaling up to 7% of its gross domestic product as a result of environmental outcomes ([IPCC, 2023](#)).

Inspired by the successful model of the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) Fellowship, the One Planet Fellowship launched its first Cohort in September 2019, following its announcement at the inaugural One Planet Summit in 2017. Targeting mid-career researchers from 14 African countries⁴, the initiative aimed to contribute to global efforts in combating climate change by strengthening the research and leadership skills of African women – and men – in agricultural science, and creating a vibrant, highly-connected, pool of scientist leaders across the continent.

The Fellowship was structured to enhance the leadership capabilities of African women and men researchers working on climate change, equipping them to not only become exceptional leaders, but also researchers of uncompromising quality capable of fostering significant collaborations and visible in global Climate Change platforms.

For the Fellowship to achieve its goals, support from institutions across Africa was crucial.

All applicants were required to secure an endorsement from their institution, confirming their commitment to supporting the Laureate Candidate's full participation in Fellowship activities. Several institutions had more than five Laureate Candidates, demonstrating widespread support for the Fellowship's vision.

The Fellowship further targeted early career and seasoned African and European researchers and to create an intergenerational network of experts working toward a common goal of developing climate solutions. Together, these scientists are working on innovative research projects and gender-responsive interventions for climate change adaptation and sustainable agriculture in Africa, while promoting intercontinental collaborations.

European institutions played a significant role in the Fellowship's success by hosting Laureate Candidates for research placements – providing them with access to advanced scientific resources and fostering cross-continental collaboration. These partnerships expanded the Fellows' networks and strengthened global climate science research.

To date, the One Planet Fellowship has created a community of experts from 28 countries across the globe, championing solutions to address some of the pressing needs of our agri-food systems.

⁴ Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, and Zambia



Storytelling was another critical element of the Fellowship, and the program adopted the public narrative methodology⁵ to accomplish this – combining scientific expertise with compelling narratives. By equipping Laureate Candidates with the confidence and skills required to craft compelling stories about their research, they can connect with diverse audiences and communicate the importance of their work. The Laureate Candidates participated in storytelling training, helping them overcome public speaking fears and articulate the significance of their contributions to climate solutions.

The Fellowship also partnered with science communication leaders, including The Conversation Africa, to train female Laureate Candidates in writing for popular media, enhancing their position as thought leaders.

While external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, posed unforeseen challenges that forced the Fellowship to pivot its activities, they also helped us to embrace new opportunities. The Fellowship leveraged digital tools and platforms, such as a virtual learning hub, to facilitate ongoing communication and collaboration via virtual engagements for Laureate Candidates, Mentors, and Research Supervisors.



7%



Percentage of gross domestic product losses the Africa's agriculture sector is expected to see within the next 80 years, as a result of environmental outcomes

2017

the One Planet Fellowship inaugural summit



2019

the One Planet Fellowship launched its first Cohort



28

Number of countries across the globe the One Planet Fellowship has created a community of experts from

⁵ The public narrative methodology, developed by Professor Marshall Ganz at Harvard University, helps individuals connect personal stories to collective action through the "Story of Self," "Story of Us," and "Story of Now."



Implementation structure



Non-residential Fellowship

The One Planet Fellowship was a non-residential program which required the selected Fellows to remain at their home institutions during the Fellowship. This arrangement allowed them to participate in the in-person and virtual training activities, whilst also enabling them to continue their work and apply newly acquired skills and knowledge to influence institutional practices. This close collaboration ensured that institutions across Africa could actively participate in developing climate change solutions and enhance their own capacities to deliver on their mandates. As such, institutional support, from where Fellows were drawn,

was crucial to the success of the One Planet Fellowship from the start.

These institutions played an essential role by endorsing and supporting their Laureate Candidates, ensuring they had the time and resources to fully engage in Fellowship activities. A total of 89 institutions gave their endorsement for their researchers to participate in the Fellowship, reflecting a deep commitment from some of the leading African institutions working to advance Climate Change research-for-development across the continent.



Continuous learning and improvement

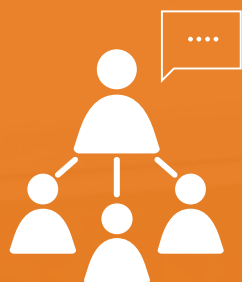
Monitoring and evaluation was critical to the Fellowship's development and the success of its participants. For instance, mid-term and end-line evaluations were conducted, along with longitudinal surveys, progress monitoring meetings, and quarterly mentoring diaries. The findings were used to expand and refine the program's approach across the three cohorts. As a result, the third cohort placed greater emphasis on integrating gender perspectives into research projects and training sessions in response to insights gained from the earlier cohorts.

Feedback from institutions involved in the Fellowship was also gathered to assess the impact of the Laureate Candidates' work within their organizations. This feedback helped shape the way institutional engagement was encouraged throughout the program, ensuring that institutions across Africa continued to support the professional growth of their researchers and were responsive to climate change solutions being developed.

A photograph of two women in white lab coats working in a laboratory. The woman in the foreground is looking down at something in her hands, while the woman in the background is looking towards the camera. The lab coats are white and have a small logo on the left chest. The background shows laboratory equipment and shelves.

Fellowship activities

The One Planet Fellowship had three primary objectives: to enhance leadership skills, strengthen scientific research capabilities, foster robust research partnerships and networks, all while equipping the researchers with knowledge and skills to use a gender lens in their work. To achieve these, the program took a holistic approach, involving several interconnected activities:



1. Mentorship:

The One Planet Fellowship's three-tiered mentorship model was central to its success. Fellows, known as One Planet Laureate Candidates, were paired with established African researchers for a year-long, structured mentorship. This relationship not only supported the Laureate Candidate's career development but also fostered intergenerational knowledge transfer and collaboration. Meanwhile, Mentors mutually benefited through enhanced interpersonal, managerial, and relationship skills; opportunities to engage in collaborative research; and improved networks and networking abilities.

The mentoring program also involved supporting every Laureate Candidate to select and mentor two younger, emerging scientists, one each from Africa and Europe (known as Learning Partners), creating a mentorship chain that spanned three generations of researchers.

European Learning Partners were initially hosted at their Laureate Candidate's institution for a two- to four-week internship, before returning home and resuming virtual mentoring sessions. The African Learning Partners received in-person guidance from their assigned Laureate Candidates and attended a Fellowship-hosted training course on leadership.



2. Training and skills development:

The Fellowship offered its participants—Laureate Candidates, Mentors, and Learning Partners – access to various courses on leadership and scientific research skills throughout the program. Ranging from one-on-one sessions to virtual and in-person courses involving field and hands-on activities, all the training activities incorporated a focus on integrating gender perspectives into agricultural research-for-development. The leadership training served to develop skills such as risk-taking, negotiation, and team management. The Laureate Candidates testified to how timely the leadership training was, noting that their enhanced awareness on their strengths and areas of improvement enabled them to navigate some of the challenges they face in their leadership roles.

The Fellowship involved tailored training in science communication and proposal writing. These modules focused on enhancing

participants' skills in effectively communicating research findings, creating research proposals, enhancing grant-making skills, and developing personal branding.

A unique element of the training was the emphasis on storytelling. Laureate Candidates were trained to share personal stories related to their work, helping them to stimulate change by engaging various audiences – from local communities to global platforms, and scientific and non-scientific stakeholders. This visibility-enhancing aspect of the training was crucial in helping Laureate Candidates to articulate the importance of their research and contribute to broader public discourse.

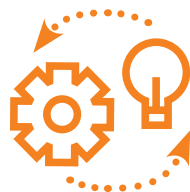
Many participants reported that their newfound skills not only improved their visibility, but also helped them articulate the significance of their research to diverse audiences, from local communities to international forums.



3. International research placements:

In their third and final year, Laureate Candidates were competitively selected to participate in Advanced Science Training (AST). The AST saw 49 Laureate Candidates participate in three- to nine-month-long research placements at 26 leading European institutions, during which they worked with experienced scientists and researchers (also known as Research Supervisors) on mutually agreed research projects.

The AST also visited renowned institutions including the European Commission and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Through the AST placements, the Laureate Candidates improved their research skills and were afforded valuable new partnership opportunities, helping to strengthen links between African and European institutions.



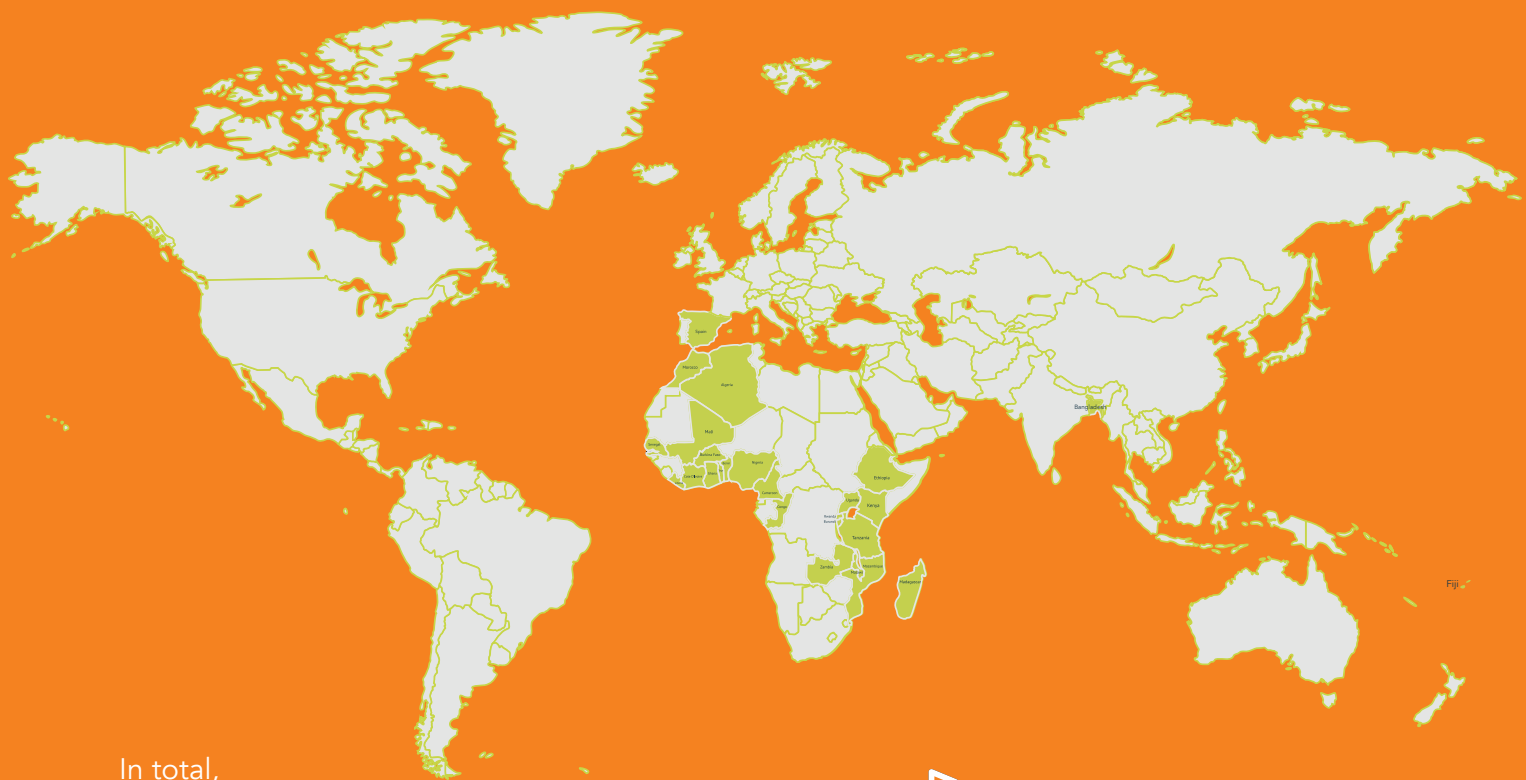
4. Knowledge exchange:

The Fellowship allowed Laureate Candidates, Mentors, and Learning Partners myriad opportunities to engage in seminars and workshops, as well as develop peer networks, through which they could share and receive knowledge.

AST recipients along with their Mentors, and Research Supervisors additionally attended a Science Week at Montpellier, France, during which they presented their research focus, their goals for the AST and how they might explore collaboration among themselves. Together, these events and activities fostered a community of practice among climate adaptation researchers from both Africa and Europe.

AWARD was acutely aware of the gross underrepresentation of women and men African researchers in global Climate Change debates and knowledge forums. The Fellowship was designed to support researchers to prepare for and participate in global conferences where they shared their work, enabling them to make valuable career connections.

Figures and trends —



In total,

483
researchers

from

28 countries

in Africa and Europe directly participated in the Fellowship, whether as Laureate Candidates, Mentors, Learning Partners, or Research Supervisors.



The selected Laureate Candidates were drawn from

89 institutions across the continent.

The Laureate Candidates were mid-career African researchers high-potential African agricultural researchers working on climate change. Over its five-year duration, the program welcomed three cohorts of Laureate Candidates competitively selected from a pool of 3,324 applicants who expressed interest in the 130 available slots.



3,324
applicants

Number of applicants who expressed interest in the

130
available slots

Through the mentoring program, 129 seasoned researchers participated as Mentors⁶, offering guidance and support to the Laureate Candidates.



129 seasoned researchers

participated as Mentors, offering guidance and support to the Laureate Candidates



Additionally,

175 young scientists

from

14 African and

12 European

countries joined the Fellowship as Learning Partners.

The Learning Partners were mentees of the Laureate Candidates, and all were under the age of 30 when admitted, reflecting the Fellowship's aim to build a sustainable pipeline of emerging researchers leading climate solutions for Africa.



all Laureate Candidates were under the

age of **30** when admitted

As part of the program,

55 European Learning Partners were placed in

27 African institutions,

where they spent time gaining exposure to the research priorities and contexts in these countries.



A total of

45

Laureate Candidates were paired with

43

Senior Researchers

from 26 host institutions across 12 European countries for AST placements at these European institutions.

As a result of their engagement in scientific writing and publishing training, and participation in research groups aimed at fostering interdisciplinary, inter-country, and cross-institutional collaborations, the Laureate Candidates jointly published 136 journal articles, and 31 of them won grants during the Fellowship period. The Fellowship supported another 54 Laureate Candidates to participate in global and regional conference in Europe, the USA and across Africa.



136 journal articles published

31 journal articles won grants



⁶ One researcher mentored two Laureate Candidates

A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a dark top and a blue dress with a red and yellow floral pattern, is bent over planting a young green plant into the soil. Another person's arm is visible on the right, also working with the plants. The field is filled with many similar young plants.

Highlight insights



nts and

Unlocking leadership potential

The leadership training provided by the One Planet Fellowship served to empower participants to become more effective leaders and communicators – improving their abilities to manage conflict, engage with communities, and lead teams effectively.

This resulted in greater professional achievements and more inclusive scientific endeavors, with participants also inspiring and positively influencing their colleagues, communities, and their broader fields of work. A huge commitment for the One Planet Fellowship was to produce African climate researchers who can not only lead effectively,

but also pursue leadership opportunities.

The Laureate Candidates acknowledge how they benefited significantly from the Fellowship's leadership training, which honed their abilities as team leaders, principal investigators, and departmental heads among others.

The AWARD leadership training comprised three separate courses, ranging from five to seven days in duration: the Leadership Program for Agricultural Research and Development, Special Women's Leadership and Negotiation Skills, and Foundational Leadership Training for Emerging Scientists. The training covered skills such as successful team management, risk-taking, negotiating and problem solving, and effective communication.





For Laureate Candidate **Maï Koumba Koné** from Côte d'Ivoire, the courses provided valuable in-depth insights across various aspects. "The leadership training helped me improve my self-confidence," she says. "I have gained a concrete understanding of what it truly means to be a leader." The training also helped Maï to feel more comfortable in group discussions, a shift from her previously reserved nature.

Improved confidence in group settings was also a crucial training outcome for Laureate Candidate **Akintayo Oluyemi Titilola** from Togo, as she recognizes the long-term impact of confidently expressing opinions and leading discussions. "Leadership allows you to seize career opportunities and assert yourself in the professional environment," she states. "To move forward in your career, you must be willing to lead and take the initiative."

The training's stance on effective and holistic communication was invaluable for entrepreneur and Laureate Candidate **Rokiatou Traore** from Mali. The courses equipped her with greater self-awareness and insight to navigate complex social dynamics in her work. "Leadership in the community is different. They have their own agenda and visions. How do you align these with your goals?" she states. "The training showed us how to communicate effectively, be sensitive, and compassionate."

For **Sofiane Boudalia** from Algeria, the leadership training taught him to be more empathetic and how to better manage conflict

and boost productivity. More importantly, it enhanced his ability to engage with local communities – a key element of his professional activities. "Through the Fellowship program, I have improved my communication with vulnerable groups," he shares, emphasizing the importance of speaking local dialects and engaging with community leaders first. Taking this approach has allowed him to better understand and address the needs of the groups he works with, in turn, making his scientific endeavors more inclusive and impactful.

Likewise, **Loukaïya Zorobouragui**, a Laureate Candidate from Benin found the training vital for improving her communication abilities, teaching her how to convey messages clearly and confidently, and address community needs and concerns with ease. "The ability to believe in yourself, no matter the situation, is a form of self-confidence, and that's a key aspect of leadership."

Thanks to the skills developed during the Fellowship, **Assani Alassan Seidou's** professional trajectory has seen notable advancements. "Today, I am responsible for a research team of 10 young scientists and serve as the deputy head of my department at the University of Parakou [Benin]," he proudly shares. He has also participated in numerous international conferences and secured significant research funding, including a €500,000 regional project involving multiple West African countries.



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"Leadership in the community is different. They have their own agenda and visions. How do you align these with your goals?" she states. "The training showed us how to communicate effectively, be sensitive, and compassionate."

Balema Rokiatou Traore

2019 One Planet Laureate Candidate from Mali.



Mentoring ripples

Through structured, reciprocal mentorship, the One Planet Fellowship fostered a culture of continuous learning, skills development, confidence building, and enduring professional relationships.

Laureate Candidates played a crucial role in the selection of Mentors, with each Laureate nominating three potential Mentor candidates based on select criteria. A Fellowship committee reviewed these nominees, then carefully selected and recommended appropriate mentors, ensuring their area of expertise aligned with the mentee's career focus.

For Zambian Mentor **Bridget Bwalya**, the experience with her Laureate Candidate, Mirriam Makungwe, was one of mutual learning. In addition to passing on knowledge, "I learned a lot about new ways of analyzing data and applying machine learning from her, which was fascinating because I teach statistics," she recalls. "Mentorship ensured I stayed committed to my plans and aspirations."

Kenyan **Damaris A. Odeny's** journey as a Mentor was similarly reciprocal. Since being a mentee under the AWARD Fellowship in 2010, she has mentored over 60 young scientists – deriving immense joy from their learning and growth and simultaneously developing her own soft skills. "I am now better able to relate to my mentees, and I'm more patient,"

she recalls. "Mentorship is something I want to be remembered for when I'm gone; that I did transfer knowledge." Her mentee equally hailed the mentoring as a game changer for her. "The opportunity to be mentored by inspirational people in my field who have gone ahead of us was one of the greatest impacts of the Fellowship," shares Kenyan Laureate Candidate **Molly Akello Okoth**.

"Having a mentor is a two-way process of how to approach learning and discussing the best way to handle each situation," notes Malawian Laureate Candidate, **Ellasy Gulule Chimimba**. "Being assigned Learning Partners as mentees challenged me to see things from different angles," added Ellasy.

In Nigeria, the support and encouragement that Laureate Candidate **Thaddaeus Ariom's** received from his Mentor, Lyabode Kehinde, helped him win a research grant of nearly US\$4,000. "She proofread my application and encouraged me. She said, 'Keep trying, you will get one 'yes'.'" Winning the grant boosted Thaddaeus's profile and network within the university, and he has since co-authored two papers in the Sustainability Journal.



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"Mentoring is a win-win; both people involved benefit and grow from the relationship."

Thaddaeus Addom, Nigerian Laureate



For **Mbaye Diop**, a Mentor from Senegal, being paired with a female Laureate encouraged him to take into account gender barriers and stereotypes that women face. "It's about embracing different perspectives and potentials," he notes. This opportunity challenged his initial perceptions and reinforced his belief in nurturing talent regardless of background. "Providing equal opportunities is crucial for fostering innovation," he asserts.

With many of the Mentors and Learning Partners coming from the same institutions as the Laureate Candidates, the Fellowship was able to foster communities of champions and influence, where these core groups of scientists were united by a common vision of advancing climate change solutions. These pockets of leadership have strengthened institutional capacity and influence, driving change across the African agricultural research landscape.



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"Mentorship is something I want to be remembered for when I'm gone; that I did transfer knowledge."

Damaris A. Odeny, Kenyan Mentor



“

"It is nothing if you have a good idea and you don't know how to present it in simple terms."

Silaji Salim Mbonaga, Tanzania Learning Partner



Connecting for success

The One Planet Fellowship significantly expanded the professional networks of those involved by providing opportunities to create a vibrant web of relationships and partnership opportunities that have propelled their work to new heights.

Research collaborations were fostered among the Mentors, Laureate Candidates, and Learning Partners under the One Planet Fellowship through approaches such as seminars, workshops, and learning visits. These partnerships helped foster a community of practice and build a vibrant network of climate scientists across the continent and Europe.



For **Paule Prisca Amoin Koumbere**, a Learning Partner from Burkina Faso, the Fellowship provided opportunities to attend conferences and exchange ideas, leading to new connections. "Networking allowed me to broaden my knowledge and opened doors for training opportunities all over Africa," she says.

After establishing a wider professional network through the Fellowship, Malawian Laureate Candidate **Ellasy Gulule Chimimba** now frequently receives research calls and opportunities that align with her interests and expertise. Conversely, "it's reassuring to know I can reach out to colleagues in various countries for research partnerships from Kenya, Mali, Tanzania, and Zambia," she adds.

For Zambian Laureate Candidate **Kalenga Banda**, the Fellowship's model of fostering teamwork and connections among researchers was critical. "The numerous workshops on the importance of working together, and the approach used by the Fellowship to promote these interactions among Laureate Candidates, helped me to actively seek out opportunities for collaboration," she states.

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"Networking allowed me to broaden my knowledge and opened doors for training opportunities all over Africa."

Paule Prisca Amoin Koumbere,
Learning Partner from Burkina Faso

The Fellowship also highlighted the importance of collaboration to its Learning Partners, such as **Auwal Bello Adamu** from Nigeria. "Working alongside diverse peers taught me the strength in collaboration [and] made me realize that I can achieve more than if I was working alone," he shares enthusiastically.

Power in partnerships

The One Planet Fellowship provided myriad opportunities for Laureates to engage with local and international institutions and transcend language barriers across the continent. These opportunities included structured interventions to incentivize research collaborations between francophone and anglophone scientists through research groups.

The research groups were carefully constituted to comprise between six to eight researchers and achieve a mix of multi-disciplinary collaborations.

These collaborations played a pivotal role in the success of many Laureates, enabling them to expand their research, develop innovative methodologies, and foster long-term partnerships across countries and disciplines.

For Laureate Candidate **Austin Tenthani Phiri** from Malawi, collaboration was a key element of his Fellowship experience. Working with

peers during Science Week in Morocco led to his submission of a proposal to the African Plant Nutrition Institute, which earned him the prestigious Phosphorus Award and a US\$5,000 prize which he put towards research on sorghum cropping systems. Austin later joined forces with other 2019 Laureate Candidates to form the Climate-Smart Agriculture Alliance (CliSAA) for Eastern, Southern, and Western Africa. “CliSAA received US\$15,000, which enabled us to research the sustainable scaling of climate-smart agricultural technologies in Kenya, Nigeria, and Malawi,” he reveals.





Collaboration often required Laureate Candidates to bridge different areas of expertise, as in the case of **Ellasy Gulule Chimimba** from Malawi. Together with her European and African Learning Partner colleagues, Virginia Bile and Billy Kachingwe, they successfully blended their specializations in soil management and remote sensing to create a comprehensive research project. "It was a complex but enriching process, pushing us to find common ground and leverage each other's strengths," Ellasy explains. Virginia adds that their collaboration allowed the trio to "leverage our diverse skills to achieve a more thorough understanding of the issues at hand."

Following her time in the Fellowship, Laureate Candidate **Maï Koumba Koné** from Côte d'Ivoire is now engaged in the formation of an

institutional collaboration that she hopes will prove beneficial for all involved. "We are in the process of weaving an agreement between my home institution and the University of Sassari in Italy," she reveals. "This partnership promises to foster future collaborations and enhance the research capabilities of both institutions."

For Laureate Candidate **Assani Alassan Seidou** from Benin, collaborating with European institutions provided his own institution with valuable access to advanced training and resources. He obtained resources that he used to cascade his learnings back home. "This partnership allowed the University of Parakou, Benin to benefit from high-cost training locally, which is rare," he recalls. "I also participated in capacity-building initiatives in Europe, where I focused on developing and using models for animal production systems."





Amplifying impact

The One Planet Fellowship emphasized the importance of storytelling and communication, providing Laureate Candidates and Learning Partners with the necessary skills to effectively articulate their research and engage diverse audiences.

These new abilities also opened doors to leadership opportunities, international collaboration, and stronger connections with communities and stakeholders.

For **Saraka Yao**, a Laureate Candidate from Côte d'Ivoire, the communication training helped him build critical connections both within and beyond Africa. "I now feel very comfortable communicating and engaging with others on an international stage," he reflects. Saraka has since forged partnerships that have led to fruitful outcomes – including with European plant biotechnology specialists, such as Professor Stefaan Werbrouck. Working with Professor Werbrouck significantly enhanced Saraka's scientific skills, ultimately helping him secure a World Bank research grant for his institution.

The communication training proved crucial in building the confidence of **Akintayo Oluyemi Titilola**, a Laureate Candidate from Togo, who experienced a profound shift in her ability to lead discussions and express her ideas in professional settings. "Before becoming a Fellow, I often avoided speaking up in meetings. Now I can confidently express my opinions and lead discussions," she shares. This new confidence allowed her to assert herself, transforming from a hesitant contributor to a proactive leader.

Similarly, **Silaji Salim Mbonaga** from Tanzania learned that effective communication means making his research accessible to the communities he aims to help. "It is nothing if you have a good idea and you don't know how to present it in simple terms," he explains. With enhanced communication skills, Silaji was able to present his research in a way that grassroots communities could understand and apply, ensuring that his work had practical, real-world benefits.

These stories highlight how the Fellowship's emphasis on storytelling and communication skills boosted participants' confidence, allowing them to express their ideas clearly and assertively. As a result, the Fellows successfully shared their research on local and international stages, engaged more deeply with communities, and forged meaningful collaborations.

Nurturing Grantsmanship and Publishing

Before they could become leaders in climate solutions, the Laureate Candidates first had to develop into high-quality scientists. By enhancing research capabilities, the Fellowship ensured that African scientists lead the charge in driving notable advancements in climate science and policy.

AWARD's six-day science skills course included training on writing and presentation skills, as well as more technical aspects of conducting research, including methodologies and ethics.





In the final year of each One Planet Fellowship cohort, top-performing Laureate Candidates were selected to attend a three- to nine-month AST course at leading European research institutions.

The Fellowship carefully designed activities that would enhance the participants scientific writing and grant making skills, positioning them to the influential experts in the continent.

Sharpening her scientific writing abilities during the Fellowship allowed **Edith Kadege**, a Laureate Candidate from Tanzania to boost her research output and visibility. “I have now been able to publish three publications in high-profile journals.” She also obtained a grant of over US\$25,000 for research activities and to partially cover her dissertation research expenses. “The skills I learned through the Fellowship were instrumental in winning this grant,” Edith enthuses.

Laureate Candidate **Elodie Dimon** from Benin recognized that the training – particularly in scientific writing, research methodologies, and the analysis and synthesis of information – profoundly influenced her professional development. “As a result, I have published articles in several well-known journals on small ruminant reproduction and the adaptation

strategies of women and young people facing climate change in Benin,” she notes.

For other Laureate Candidates, such as **Amy Bodian** of Senegal, the AST improved her knowledge in scientific writing, proposal development, and research techniques. “Thanks to this support, I was able to benefit from a research project funded by Canada’s IDRC and publish multiple scientific articles in high-impact journals,” she reveals.

By enhancing his science skills as a Laureate Candidate, Malawian **Michael Chipeta** was able to considerably advance his research. “The skills I gained, including on drafting proposals and developing research ideas, contributed significantly to securing research grants,” he emphasizes – including one of US\$24,000 from the [Kirkhouse Trust](https://doi.org/10.3390/su16135539). These funds enabled Michael to identify sources of resistance for aphids and aphid-borne mosaic virus disease and supported his collaboration with experts from the Department of Agricultural Research Services in Malawi.

⁷ <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16135539>

Increased gender focus

The One Planet Fellowship aspired to achieve a twin sub-goal of increasing awareness of the gender impacts of climate change research while equipping the researchers with the tools and skills to integrate gender in their research.

The training courses were carefully designed to incorporate gender components and enable the researchers to gain an appreciation of the nexus of gender and climate science. The skills and awareness around gender inclusivity have enabled the Laureate Candidates to shift their

approach around research design, community engagement and proposal development and many of them acknowledge their ability to deploy a gender lens to analyze the potential of their research to bridge the gender gap in African agriculture.





For instance, honing his leadership skills and building new connections are not the only factors that helped **Sofiane Boudalia** from Algeria expand his horizons. He admits that, before joining the Fellowship, gender dimensions were not a primary focus in his research. However, the program's emphasis on gender equality has transformed his perspective. "Now, I know the importance of this factor," he asserts, "and we need to develop a lot of research in this area." Today, he ensures that all his projects incorporate gender considerations, acknowledging the unique challenges and contributions of women in agriculture. "We just published [a paper](#)⁷ on the gender dimension in African agriculture," he enthuses. This shift has not only enriched his research, but also enhances its relevance and impact.

Similarly, **Saraka Yao**, an associate professor at Peleforo Gon Coulibaly University à Korhogo in Côte d'Ivoire, has also felt the broader impacts of the Fellowship's attention on gender awareness. His new focus on gender aspects in shea butter production has amplified the social relevance of his work and aligned it more closely with funding priorities. "I am working on shea breeding and the production of shea butter, which is 90% produced by women," he explains. "The program intensified my focus on gender aspects in my projects, ensuring that my work positively impacts women and

youth."

For **Christine Ouinsavi**, a Mentor from Benin, the training she received has heightened awareness of the importance of gender inclusion in agricultural science and research. She is now leading the Gender in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics initiative's project in West Africa, funded by IDRC. "The initiative aims to advance women's leadership and participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. As well as supporting the training of 15 young women agricultural scientists, the project has also identified gender disparities in agronomy and proposed solutions to stem them," she states. "My involvement is a testament to the Fellowship's impact on my approach to gender considerations in all my actions."

Ellasy Gulule from Malawi University of Science and Technology notes that the modules on gender integration were particularly eye-opening for her. As a geoscientist, I initially found it challenging to see how gender fits into my work," she states. "However, the Fellowship's discussions and training broadened my perspective, helping me understand the importance of considering gender, even in pure science fields." This realization has not only influenced her own research, but also how she guides her mentees.



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"The skills I gained, including on drafting proposals and developing research ideas, contributed significantly to securing research grants"

Michael Chipeta, Malawian Laureate Candidate. The Fellowship also opened up my thinking in terms of conducting gender-responsive research," Michael reveals.



About AWARD

African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) envisions transformative change toward gender-responsive solutions that will catalyze lasting impact for equitable agri-food systems for women and men smallholders. We are investing in women's leadership to foster equality in AR4D, equipping AR4D professionals to integrate gender in their work, strengthening institutions to adopt gender-responsive policies and practices, and impacting the enabling environment to enhance gender responsiveness.

Since 2008, AWARD has been implementing career accelerator Fellowships designed to primarily widen the pipeline of women in leadership and equip African researchers to be capable, influential leaders developing innovative solutions for African women and men smallholders. Over the last 16 years AWARD has designed and implemented more than seven different Fellowships delivered in more than 17 cycles (Cohorts) reaching more than 2,000 participants from more than 26 countries.

The One Planet Fellowship is one of AWARD's Fellowships that had a specific focus on climate change and that for the first time, brought on board men as Fellows. 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). AWARD and Agropolis Fondation jointly implement the Fellowship.





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