

New strategy launched to empower African women scientists and boost gender equality in agricultural research and policy

Five-year plan focuses on early-career female researchers, and renewed engagement with African policymakers at regional, sub-regional, and national levels.

NAIROBI, KENYA, November 9, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new roadmap for delivering greater gender equality in agricultural research to make African food systems more equitable was launched today.

African Women in Agricultural Research and Development ([AWARD](#)) unveiled its next five-year strategy as part of a renewed effort to address persistent gender disparities in research and policymaking for the continent's agri-food systems.

The strategy, covering 2023 to 2027, builds on AWARD's 15 years of experience and outlines plans to train, mentor and empower women researchers to advance their careers and reach positions of leadership within agricultural research and development. By ensuring a constant pipeline of emerging women scientists and leaders, the initiative aims to shape policies to better account for the different needs and circumstances of men and women.

"Women scientists continue to be under-represented throughout agricultural research and



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Credit: AWARD/Artfuleyes Productions

development in Africa, yet increased diversity in these fields is essential to unlocking much needed gender-responsive agricultural innovations,” said Dr. Susan Kaaria, director of AWARD.

“This new strategy gives AWARD a renewed purpose towards levelling the playing field and closing the gender gap, from the lab to the land, that holds back food security and equality for all Africans.”



Credit: AWARD/Artfuleyes Productions

The strategy is based on three main pillars – investing in individuals, strengthening institutions and influencing the environment – which underpin its mission to transform agricultural research for development. Among its seven overlapping goals is more women in leadership positions, more gender-responsive policies adopted by institutions, and greater awareness and uptake of evidence on gender responsiveness in agricultural research and development.

Execution of the new strategy will include collaborating with continental, national and institutional governance systems at the highest levels to cultivate an ecosystem of agricultural research for development that is more responsive to the unique needs and challenges faced by African women within the agri-food sector.

AWARD’s fellowships to date have benefitted some 1,872 individual scientists from more than 450 institutions in 26 African countries. Almost 60 per cent of AWARD Fellows have also progressed into leadership positions within their institutions and across the African agricultural research and development landscape.

“AWARD has been a trusted partner for USAID since 2008, and we have seen AWARD's contributions in action. We find AWARD Fellows in many organizations breaking barriers and creating opportunities for women,” Kristy Cook, Acting Division Director, Bureau for Resilience, Environment and Food Security Office of Feed the Future Policy, Analysis & Engagement at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

“USAID is proud to partner with AWARD to support African women researchers and ensure that agricultural innovation brings equal benefits to men and women alike.”

Since 2008, AWARD has overseen career development fellowships that have resulted in highly empowered women through mentoring, training, networking, and scientific placements within institutions in Africa and overseas.

However, at present, women represent a [third](#) of all researchers, yet only 12 per cent of national science academy membership. Female researchers also typically receive [smaller research grants](#) than their male colleagues.

“Increasing the number of women in research and decision-making positions ensures that the challenges at the grassroots are adequately addressed when implementing policies. With the support of AWARD, I have been able to gain the skills and confidence needed to further my career and help cultivate positive change in my country,” said Dr. Linda Salekwa, 2021 One Planet Laureate Candidate and District Commissioner in Mufiji, Tanzania.

“I hope that with this new strategy, a greater number of female researchers will likewise be able to benefit from AWARD’s Fellowships, helping to realize the promise of greater gender equality in the agricultural science and policies we produce.”

The new strategy was launched on the margins of AWARD’s annual Steering Committee meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, featuring Fellows and other partners who have participated in AWARD’s programs since their inception.

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Notes to editors

About AWARD

African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) works toward gender-responsive agricultural research for development to drive equitable agrifood systems in Africa. We are investing in individuals, strengthening institutions and influencing the environment by building a pipeline of intergenerational women in leadership, equipping AR4D professionals and institutions to integrate gender in policies and practices and influencing the enabling environment to enhance gender responsiveness. <https://awardfellowships.org/>

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