



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Feed the Future Newsletter: Focus on Women in Research

This month, marking the critical role that both research and women's empowerment play in advancing global agriculture and food security, the Feed the Future Newsletter profiles three scientists whose research is supporting the initiative's goals and making a difference in the lives of smallholder farmers.

Lusike Wasilwa

"Meaningful agricultural research cuts across value chains and should extend all the way from high yields to processing."

Dr. Wasilwa is a molecular plant pathologist with over 25 years of research experience. She currently serves as the assistant director in charge of the Horticulture and Industrial Crops Division at the [Kenya Agricultural Research Institute](#) (KARI), where she leads several projects. Her work stretches beyond research on plant diseases to developing strategies across the entire product value chain, from farm to market, for increased productivity, commercialization, and competitiveness.

For instance, Wasilwa was involved in developing mechanized presses for sunflower processing and low-cost grinders for groundnuts, which have helped farmers in western Kenya better market their products. These innovations are also well-adapted to serve women farmers, as the new machines require much less physical strength to operate.

Wasilwa holds a bachelor's degree in agriculture from the University of Eastern Africa; a master's degree in horticulture and a doctoral degree in plant science from the University of Arkansas; and a post doctorate from Rutgers University. She was inducted into Sigma Xi (The Scientific Research Society); Gamma Sigma Delta (Honor Society of Agriculture); and Phi Beta Delta (Honor Society for International Scholars) while at the University of Arkansas. As an avid scholar, she has authored and co-authored several publications, scientific articles, and technical papers, and is an active member of various local and international professional bodies.

Wasilwa is a recipient of three service recognition medals from the International Society for Horticultural Science and a fellowship from the Gender and Diversity Rockefeller Fellowship Program for women crop scientists in East Africa. She was recognized by [African Women in Agricultural Research Development](#) (AWARD) for excellence in mentoring from 2008 to 2010.

Wasilwa is also the chair of the [Horticulture Collaborative Research Support Program](#) managed by University of California Davis, and serves on the Kenya Agricultural Productivity and Agribusiness Program (KAPAP) grants advisory and approval committee, as well as the advisory board for the African Journal for Horticultural Science.

Kimberley Lucas

"Applying science and knowledge to practical problems—such as food insecurity—has always been the 'hook' for us, landing me and four generations of my family in the midst of agriculture and other human development issues."

Lucas, director of USAID Cambodia's Office of Food Security and Environment, isn't the first woman in her family to be on the frontlines of agricultural research. Her grandmother, Marion Griffiths, was a plant pathologist and agro-botanical researcher who completed groundbreaking work on corn smut and wheat rust with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the 1920s, some of which is only now being recognized 80 years later!

Following in her family's footsteps, Lucas is a formidable scientist in her own right. She holds a doctorate in applied

agricultural anthropology from the University of Kentucky and a master's degree in applied anthropology from American University, where she focused on agricultural development policy. She completed her master's field research on differential innovation adoption patterns of male and female farmers in the Taita Hills of Kenya, while her dissertation field research focused on agronomic, economic, social and political risk management practices of smallholder farmers in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania.

Lucas first worked with USAID as an intern in 1985 and eventually joined the Agency's Africa Bureau as a fellow with the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1998. Here she served as a food security advisor to President Clinton's Greater Horn of Africa Initiative, the first presidential food security initiative, and an endeavor to break the "cycle of despair" between food insecurity and conflict in the ten countries of that region.

Lucas joined USAID's Foreign Service in 2002 and served in a wide range of capacities, including as South Africa coordinator for President Bush's Initiative to End Hunger in Africa and as a deputy director of USAID Mission Afghanistan's Office of Agriculture, where she helped manage an agriculture and environment portfolio of over \$1.2 billion, providing coverage for issues ranging from high value horticulture promotion and wheat stem rust tracking to education of security personnel and the military on issues related to IEDs and fertilizer chemistry. She has served with USAID in Cambodia since 2010.

Adey Melesse Yalew

"I'm not locked in a lab. I know what my community looks like, where my food comes from, and how farmers struggle."

Yalew is an associate researcher at the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) and a 2011 AWARD Fellow. She holds a bachelor's degree in animal science from Alemaya University of Agriculture and an master's degree in applied microbiology from Addis Ababa University. At EIAR, she works on animal nutrition, aiming to help Ethiopian farmers produce improved fodder for their livestock. Yalew also works on poultry research and product quality, especially salmonella prevention. Prior to joining EIAR, she was a research technologist at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), where she was taken on as a mentee by the current head of the Genebank. Her previous experience at ILRI enabled her to set up a new animal biotechnology laboratory at EIAR.

Yalew regularly trains smallholder farmers directly on best practices for maintaining the health and nutrition of poultry and dairy cattle, both of which are major industries in Ethiopia. Through her experience as an AWARD Fellow, she has come to feel increasingly responsible for passing on the training she receives to others, which she calls "wave thinking." She has improved her presentation skills and now mentors young people in her community and local schools to encourage them in their studies and professional goals.

Yalew has plans to obtain a doctoral degree and conduct livestock feed research integrated with forestry and ecology. She credits AWARD with much of her personal and professional advancement, including working on the World Bank's [East Africa Productivity Program](#) and joining the leadership of the Ethiopian Society of Animal Producers. "There are so few women in agricultural research in Ethiopia, so you have to stand up and be noticed," she says. "Now, I am visible."

AWARD is a professional development program that strengthens the research and leadership skills of African women in agricultural science, empowering them to contribute more effectively to poverty alleviation and food security in Sub-Saharan Africa. Under Feed the Future, USAID supports AWARD in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.