

## Profile

### Professor Ruth Khasaya Onian'go



#### Professor Ruth Oniang'o

I am from Kenya. The wounds of my country and of other African countries will heal only when the fundamental issues of inequity and social exclusion are addressed. Africans must themselves put in place mechanisms that will address problems at the core of society, of injustice and all manner of discrimination, along gender, religious, age, social class, and ethnic lines. We must be serious about protecting our children and women who die needlessly from preventable conditions that arise out of neglect and misuse of resources. Children die from malnutrition related conditions and women die during child birth due to anemia and poor care.

All my professional life has been spent working on Africa's food security issues, with a special commitment to maternal and child health. I have participated in many international conferences and other meetings as a participant, consultant and resource person and facilitator, often representing my country or Africa as a whole.

I worked in the past with the UN system including with UNICEF, FAO; with foundations and the food industry; and with the centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Always I am trying to engage them to do right by nutrition. I also work with farming communities, men as well as women, trying to exchange ideas on how best good nutrition can be achieved at both family and child levels. Recently I have been very much involved with trying to see whether farmers can improve their productivity through increased use of good inputs and with biofortification, working with HarvestPlus, to enhance the nutrient content of commonly eaten foods.

I am an editor, organiser and advocate. People tell me I am good at advocacy and lobbying, and these skills were enhanced through participation in the Kenyan Parliament.

*Kenyan citizen. Hold a PhD in Food Science and Nutrition. I was educated in Kenya and the USA, at the University of Nairobi, and at Washington State University, Pullman. As member of the Kenyan Parliament for five years, advocated to minimize poverty and hunger. Now an independent consultant. Founder and*

*editor-in-chief of the African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development (AJFAND). Serve on a number of Boards, both national and international. Leader of The Rural Outreach Programme, a non-government organization committed to the improvements of rural livelihoods.*

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## **Prof Ruth Khasaya Oniang'o:**



**PROF. RUTH ONIANG'O, PHD, DSM, SS, MP**

Honorable Professor Ruth Khasaya Oniang'o, PhD, SS (Silver Star), DSM (Distinguished Service Medal), is now a member of Kenya's ninth parliament since January 2003, having been nominated by the official opposition Party KANU (Kenya African National Union) and a position that has been legally gazetted by the President of Kenya. KANU had been in government since Kenya's independence in 1963 and lost general elections for the first time in 2002. Prof Oniang'o has had to take leave of absence from her university position as Professor of Food Science and Nutrition at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology, Nairobi, in order to serve in Parliament. Ruth Oniang'o became the first Nutrition professor in Kenya and probably the first woman Nutrition professor in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa.

She has influenced the development of Nutrition training, research, development and discourse in much of Africa and has participated in consultations, and on committees at the international level whose decisions have shaped global food security and nutrition. Her grasp of African food and Nutrition issues often enabled her to be Africa's voice at many international fora such as the World Nutrition Conference in 1992 and the World Food Summit in 1996.

Prof. Oniang'o continues to edit the African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development (AJFAND) which she founded some six years ago, in order to provide an avenue for publishing scholarly works by Africans and of interest to Africa in the areas of food, agriculture, nutrition and development and to serve as a capacity building effort for the young academics from across the globe. Some of these young scholars serve as interns in her NGO office and get to participate in action research, attend relevant meetings learn the arts of proposal writing,, critical thinking and editing of manuscripts.

Many refine their English grammar skills during this time and their abilities in internet use. Prof Oniang'o is the founder and first Executive Director of Rural Outreach Program (ROP), a not-for-profit community development organization that she created in 1993 following an action research project whose findings catalyzed the founding of ROP. ROP's main goal was to harness the intellectual resource of the university, connect it with the various capacities within communities to try and improve rural poor people's livelihoods.

Through ROP, Ruth Oniang'o has literally transformed the lives of many rural poor families in the Butere-Mumias district of western Kenya and the environs. Her innovative and top notch leveraged interventions that have cut

across the board have addressed a variety of issues including: nutrition and food security, wealth creation, environment, health and sanitation including HIV/AIDS, housing, education, and poverty. ROP's work has been recognized by the Kenya Government by winning a certificate of recognition and by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, through Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Prof Oniang'o has served as external examiner for a number of Universities in Africa and in the process assisted them to develop or revise their Food Science and Nutrition curricula. These include: Moi, Egerton, Maseno and Kenyatta Universities in Kenya; Sokoine University in Tanzania; University of Namibia; University of Zimbabwe and Bunda University College in Malawi.

She has attended and given plenary addresses to International Congresses of the IUNS (International Union of Nutritional Sciences), IUFoST (International Union of Food Science and Technology) and Crop Science meetings. For her outstanding service to her country in community development through action research and rural development activities, Prof. Oniang'o has been awarded two national medals: the Silver Star medal in 1995 and the Distinguished Service Medal in 1998 after her name was proposed and submitted to the Presidential Committee by the communities she works with. Internationally, she won Woman of the Year 2000 award granted by the American Biographical Institute. Additional awards she has won include: International Union of Nutritional Sciences Fellow in 2006, International Union of Food Science and Technology Fellow in 2006, and Fellow of the World Academy of Science and Art, in 2006. Ruth has in 2007 been successfully nominated Corresponding Member of the Medical and Natural Sciences Section of the Royal Academy of Overseas Sciences. This is awaiting signature of the Minister of Science of the Government of Belgium.

In Kenya she has served on a number of committees and commissions including the Poverty Eradication Commission, the National Food Policy Committee and the World Food Summit and International Conference on Nutrition Committee, National Standards Board, and Early Childhood Development Committee.

Prof. Oniang'o has worked as a consultant/expert for organizations such as FAO, ICRISAT, WHO, the Gates Foundation and a number of international and local NGOs and universities. Often her views are sought on Africa in general and Kenya/ East Africa in particular. She currently sits on the following Boards/Committees: International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), International Fertilizer Development Center, and Harvest Plus Program Advisory Committee. Ruth Oniang'o has authored numerous publications many of which have been presented in local, regional and international fora. She has also been appointed to presidential commissions in her country on the review of laws affecting women and children (1995), financing of university education (1995), poverty eradication (1999-2002) and Egerton University Council (1993-2002).

Ruth Oniang'o is one of 12 Kenyans who were nominated to the 9th Parliament of Kenya for a 5 year tenure. As an experienced trainer, a researcher and a development philanthropist, Professor Oniang'o has pledged to continue championing the cause of the youth, the poor and the women in her now very strategic position. She is always at the forefront of debate when it comes to matters of agricultural research, food and nutrition security. Ruth is married with 5 children and three grand children. In her political position, Professor Oniang'o is a trainer with International Republican Institute [IRI].

As a member of parliament, she now finds herself in a better position to address policy issues related to food security and poverty. For example, she has supported a Bill to professionalize Nutritionists and Dieticians, has brought a Bill to address drought and famine and has supported the exploitation of modern technologies including biotechnology by African scientists and policy makers. She is keen to see a green revolution for Africa while she is still alive and as a Board member of IFDC, she is helping to spearhead the implementation of the Abuja Fertilizer summit of June 2006 resolutions by African countries and regional research organizations. She is a strong believer in restoring Africa's dignity by ensuring a Green Revolution for Africa. All these efforts have been carried out from her academic and NGO work, using minimal financial resources. In 2007 She was awarded a **'Lifetime Achievement Award'** by the Kenya Coalition for Action in Nutrition (KCAN) for her recognition in contributions to the advancement of nutrition and development initiatives in Kenya.

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