AWARD
African Women in Agricultural Research and Development

Profile

2011 AWARD Fellow

Elizabeth Bandason

Position	Lecturer, Entomology
Institution	Bunda College of Agriculture, University of Malawi
Country	Malawi
MSc	Environmental science (Entomology) Chancellor College, University of Malawi, 2010
Mentor	Dr. Themba Mzilahowa, Research scientist Malaria Alert Centre, Malawi

Research area: Focusing on integrated pest management and vector/pest risk management through modeling to minimize preharvest losses and ensure good eco-health through sustainable agricultural production.

Elizabeth Bandason was only 6 years old when her father died, and her grieving mother lost all of the family's property, according to local inheritance customs. "I admire my mother so much. She learned to stand on her own two feet, and she taught me to keep on going and never give up."

A determined young researcher, Bandason says she has always been interested in entomology research, in particular the interface between the environment, human beings, and insects. "I know people don't like insects because they're ugly and scary, but I love them because I am learning about how we can use them to improve people's lives."

Bandason says she enjoys research that tries to improve the livelihoods of the poor using locally available materials and sustainable agricultural technologies. Her work is not without its challenges, however. She was the only woman in entomology throughout her university education, and "people think you're wasting your time with insects—they don't really understand what entomology is about."

Her current area of study is on botanical insecticides, which involves using plants with chemical qualities to minimize insect damage in crops. "The main focus is on the use of extracts from a plant called *Tephrosia vogelii* to control field insect pests," she explains. "We know that women bear much of the work and expense when it comes to farming. Many of the materials they use are toxic, and I want to give them the alternative of botanical insecticides."

In the future, Bandason says she dreams of seeing Malawian farmers be able to produce silk. "Currently, there is no silk industry here, since people depend on tobacco as a cash crop, but we need new, sustainable agriculture." She envisions farmers planting mulberry trees, using the leaves to feed the silk worms, and making mulberry jam and wine to sell.

As an AWARD Fellow, Bandason looks forward to learning from other scientists and expanding her network of contacts. "In my opinion, teamwork underpins research work," she says. "I feel that AWARD will expose

me to many new people and help me discover who I am. I used to think that I would just hide and do my work on my own, but AWARD has already given me the zeal to move forward."

Bandason recently presented her first academic paper at science conference in Mozambique. "I was so scared—but I met another AWARD Fellow who told me, 'Feel the fear, but do it anyway'."

Bandason is one of a growing number of African women agricultural scientists who have won an AWARD Fellowship. 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. AWARD is generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the United States Agency for International Development. For more information, visit www.awardfellowships.org