



2010 AWARD Fellow Chikondi Precious Chabvuta

Position:	Eco-health research assistant
Institution:	Bunda College of Agriculture, University of Malawi
Country:	Malawi
BSc:	Environmental Science Bunda College of Agriculture, University of Malawi, 2009
Mentored by:	Dr. David Mkwambisi, Lecturer Department of Natural Resource Management Bunda College of Agriculture, University of Malawi

Research area: Evaluating the potential of ecosanization products (humanure and urine) for improved soil quality and waste management in low-income urban areas.

The first member of her extended family to attend college, Chikondi Precious Chabvuta was celebrated by her entire community when she started her studies in Environmental Science at Bunda College in 2005. “My interest in and dedication to the lab work on the nutrient contents of manure caught my lecturer’s attention,” she recalls, “and right after graduation, he called and offered me a job on a project investigating the effect of human manure and urine on maize yield.”

Little did Chabvuta know that she would be required to train resource-poor, slum-dwelling women on how to use the composted night soil from Ecosan toilets. “Because of my inexperience in working with people, I ended up losing half of the group of 15 women within the first week,” she remembers. “But then I decided to show them with my own hands how to use the composted manure, and they were convinced that, if a college graduate could do it, they could.”

Soon, Chabvuta was working in three slum communities in Lilongwe, where women asked for more Ecosan toilets so they could compost and sell the manure, since the maize growth and yields spoke for themselves.

In Malawi, the government provides farmers with coupons for mineral fertilizer at subsidized prices or for free. Chabvuta says this system should be replaced by affordable local resources, including the manure produced by farmers themselves. She is convinced that the community would adopt the idea. “When one of the women told others: ‘You are a walking coupon’—that’s when I knew I had won them over.”

Chabvuta’s greatest challenge is dealing with the negative image her work raises with colleagues. “Yet when I see the women harvest and move 15 bags of maize from a garden plot in the slums, and the huge impact on those poorest of the poor households, I feel joy and satisfaction. When your heart is in something, you can overcome any obstacle.”

Now pursuing her master's in Environmental Science, Chabvuta looks forward to increasing her leadership capacity and self-confidence as an AWARD Fellow. "I am now working with 60 households as part of my MSc, and if I present my work well at an international conference, I can raise more funds for my research."

Chabvuta is one of 180 African woman 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. For more information, please visit www.awardfellowships.org
