



**2011 AWARD Fellow**  
**Jean Chitsano Sauti-Phiri**

<b>Position</b>	Agricultural gender roles extension support services officer (AGRESSO)
<b>Institution</b>	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
<b>Country</b>	Malawi
<b>BSc</b>	Agriculture, Bunda College of Agriculture, 2000
<b>Mentor</b>	Dr. Grace Malindi, Director of Agricultural Extension Services Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security

*Research area: The effectiveness of the lead farmer extension approach: a critical analysis of the role of female lead farmers in sustainable agricultural development technologies in male-dominated societies in Malawi.*

Jean Chitsanzo Sauti-Phiri has overcome tremendous hardship to reach the place she is at now as an agricultural researcher. She and her siblings grew up near the research stations where their father, an agricultural scientist, worked, and she says it was expected that she would follow this career path.

Her early school years were not easy—she repeated grade one and grade six—but before long she was number one in her class, particularly relishing the competition with boys. In secondary school, Sauti-Phiri achieved 100 percent in math and science. “I wanted to take engineering, but my dad faxed the university and changed my discipline,” she explains.

Sadly, just as she began university she lost both parents and her young brother in close succession, leaving her responsible for looking after her remaining five siblings. Struggling to make ends meet and concerned for her siblings’ well-being, she wound up quitting school in second year to take a job as a house helper. Soon afterward, a kindly American woman, Dr. Natalie Hahn, adopted Sauti-Phiri and her siblings and sponsored their education, and has been her source of inspiration.

Sauti-Phiri is currently enrolled in a master’s program in sustainable agriculture and rural development at University College Dublin, where she recently won a scholarship. In her role as a researcher at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security in Malawi, she is looking at gender roles in agricultural extension. “In Malawi, women provide 71 percent of the labor force,” she says. “However, regardless of women’s significant contributions in agriculture and economic development, they are often subjected to social exclusion, gender discrimination, and gender-based violence.”

Sauti-Phiri says she works with some outstanding female farmers. “These women have been selected and organized by their communities. I am hoping to use them as role models to enhance sustainable agricultural technology adoption.” She and her team are analyzing technology adoption trends as well as trends that show who is following male lead farmers as compared to women leaders. “The data will be used to inform the ministry for policy development strategies and program design.”

This resilient young woman says she gets the greatest joy from seeing underprivileged people learning to stand on their own and do things to uplift their status.

In 2009, Sauti-Phiri was mentored for a year by a senior scientist who was an AWARD Fellow. Prior to the program, she says she had no aspirations for further education, and little interest in research and development, preferring to remain working directly in the lab. "But my eyes were opened, thanks to AWARD, and I am now interested in leadership and research. I'm now thinking big." She is planning to do another master's degree in strategic management, and then hopes to pursue a PhD.

As a woman researcher, Sauti-Phiri says she has dealt with rejection in the workplace. "It made me aggressive—I had to fight for my rights. Gender issues are real and have to be addressed. But now with AWARD, I will learn to be assertive, and I also hope to develop conflict-management and negotiation skills."

*Sauti-Phiri 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](http://www.awardfellowships.org)*

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