



2014 AWARD Fellow
Mphatso Edda Chapotera

Position	Technical Officer
Institution	Challenges Africa Limited
Country	Malawi
MSc	Aquaculture, University of Ghent, 2009
Mentor	Dr. Patrick Kambewa, Associate Professor Chancellor College, University of Malawi
Research Area	Gender analysis of fish value chains to increase women's incomes and employment opportunities in processing and marketing.

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Mphatso Edda Chapotera was inspired to become a scientist by her father, a meteorologist, and her sister, a doctor. “I remember dad looking up at the sky and predicting when and where it would rain,” she recalls. “He was always right, and I was always so impressed. Plus, I thought, if my sister could do all those hard calculations I saw in her chemistry books, then so could I.”

The severe famine in Malawi in 2001 prompted Chapotera to study agriculture. “People had money, but there was no food to buy,” she says, wondering why the country could not feed itself. Her own family cultivated a maize field when Chapotera was young. “Dad used to say that if we were really Africans, we had to learn how to farm, so each of us had to hoe, and received a reward if we had the best crop. We learned how to make ridges, weed, plant, apply fertilizer, and harvest.”

Chapotera later chose to study aquaculture, and has worked with smallholder fish farmers since she left college. She initially served on a WorldFish project that helped women processor groups add value and increase the shelf life of fish through smoking, solar drying, and packaging the processed product. The women were linked to urban markets in Blantyre, Zomba, and Lilongwe, where the processed fish fetched higher prices.

In Malawi, most market fish come from lakes and rivers, but the country's stocks are dwindling. Farmed fish can fill the gap, but producers make little or no money from the enterprise, abandoning it for more profitable ventures.

In her current work, Chapotera promotes fish farming among smallholder farmers in southern Malawi. She assists farmers who have integrated

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aquaculture into agriculture, providing technical expertise on managing ponds, using feed to maximize fish weight, and marketing. She helps identify potential buyers in urban markets and links them with fish farmers. "The aim is to expand smallholder markets to improve farmer incomes," she says. The project also links farmers to microfinance institutions so they can get loans to improve their fish-farming enterprises.

Initially, the project targeted women because they are responsible for tending to fish ponds, while men do the marketing. Furthermore, female-headed households are poor and fishfarming could increase their incomes. However, not enough women met the project inclusion criteria.

Chapotera's experience with this project and at WorldFish highlighted the gender imbalances in the fish value chain. "How can we help women increase their incomes?" she asks. "How can we encourage women to sell fish directly to urban markets like men?" She is working to make the project gender-responsive.

Chapotera plans to enroll in a PhD program to study the different roles men and women play in fish farming, and identify ways to increase participation of women in the value chain. She wants to empower women to work throughout the whole value chain so they can see the benefit of their inputs. "Women are the first contact, but when it comes to the money, men are the first," she notes. Through AWARD training, she expects to learn to write successful research proposals so she can find answers to the questions raised in her work.

Chapotera finds great satisfaction in helping farmers prosper and wants to do more. "I am happy when I see fish farmers moving from subsistence level to earning an income, enabling them to increase household assets, such as buying bicycles or putting iron-sheet roofing on their houses. This encourages other farmers to do the same."

Inspired by her former supervisor at WorldFish—the institute's first African director—Chapotera is aiming high. She hopes to eventually work at the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) or the World Bank so she can influence policy. She believes that the self-confidence she will gain as an AWARD Fellow will help her achieve this goal.