



2014 AWARD Fellow
Madalitso Zelda Chidumu

Position	Enterprise Development/Private Sector Engagement Coordinator
Institution	Self Help Africa
Country	Malawi
BSc	Agri-business Management Bunda College of Agriculture, 2010
Mentor	Dr. Judith Kamoto, Senior Lecturer/Head Forestry Department, Faculty of Natural Resources Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Research Area	Creation of sustainable and profitable smallholder farmer-led enterprise-development programs fully linked to the private sector, especially focusing on women.



“Farmers tend to be the price-takers instead of price-makers. The private sector is controlling the value chain.”

Madalitso Zelda Chidumu registered immediately when she learned that her university had launched a new Department of Agri-business Management. As a first-year student, she was determined to be among the initial specialists in that sector in Malawi.

Chidumu credits her father with spawning her ambition to lead and be on the cutting edge. As a lecturer at a community development college, he believed in the importance of educating girls and including women in development activities. He pushed each of his five daughters to excel and to strive to be among the top women in their fields of endeavor.

Chidumu’s natural aptitude for business attracted her to agri-business management. Although her studies were initially focused on food security, she quickly changed her orientation once she was introduced to the business side of agricultural development.

“Most smallholder farmers in Malawi are producing food only on a subsistence level,” explains Chidumu. “To move beyond that, to raise the value of their production and increase their incomes, they need to become market oriented.”

As Enterprise Development/Private Sector Engagement Coordinator with the NGO Self Help Africa, Chidumu trains smallholder farmers, especially women, to help them integrate into agricultural value chains from production to market. She also trains her staff members on agri-business, business management, linking farmers to markets, and engaging the private sector. They work with farmer groups to

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AWARD is a career-development program that equips top women agricultural scientists across sub-Saharan Africa to accelerate agricultural gains by strengthening their research and leadership skills through tailored fellowships. AWARD is a catalyst for innovations with high potential to contribute to the prosperity and well-being of African smallholder farmers, most of whom are women.

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help them understand issues of costing and pricing, negotiation skills, and how to add value to their products. They also show them how and when to engage with the private sector, addressing such challenges as product quality and supply.

“Farmers tend to be the price-takers instead of price-makers,” says Chidumu. “The private sector is controlling the value chain.”

To command better prices, Chidumu is convinced that farmers need to improve their bargaining power, upgrade the quality of their product, and use sustainable farming technologies to move further up the production value chain. Challenges exist all along the production chain—from land preparation and planting, to postharvest handling, to poor-quality seed, coupled with a lack of access to improved technologies or crop-management practices.

Projects to increase farmers’ access to business skills, improved technologies, and better markets have shown promising results. For example, an agreement with a major mango pulp-producing company gives farmers a market and a guaranteed price for their fruit that is more than five times the price they fetch at their local markets.

Chidumu notes that special efforts must be made to ensure that women, as well as the elderly, disabled, or people with HIV/AIDS, are included in program interventions.

“Men tend to be earlier and more prompt adopters than women, unless you come in with a social inclusion policy or intervention, with guidelines to ensure that women play a role and benefit,” she says.

One exception is in some parts of central Malawi, where women traditionally maintain ownership of land and crops.

Chidumu’s long-term vision for Malawi is an agricultural system that is more closely linked with development objectives and centered on farmers’ needs and realities. She hopes to see a consolidation and expansion of traditional markets and new emerging market niches.

Her personal goals include advancing in her academic and professional careers. She aims to attain greater decision-making power and achieve a wider impact within Malawi and beyond. As she begins to study for a master’s degree and strive for professional promotion, Chidumu anticipates that the AWARD Fellowship will help her build her skills, confidence, credibility, and visibility as a leading woman in her field.

“I want to be able to say I have made a big difference. I want to establish a name for myself, and encourage other young women to move into top positions, too,” she concludes. These are words that would undoubtedly make her father proud.