



2014 AWARD Fellow
Lucia Victoria Chigamane

Position	MSc Student
Institution	Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR)
Country	Malawi
BSc	Forestry, University of Malawi, 2010
Mentor	Dr. Wezi Mhango, Senior Lecturer, LUANAR
Research Area	Researcher-designed, farmer-managed study to determine the effect of P fertilizer on the availability of residual phosphorus and zinc in soils.

The main objective of Chigamane's research is to help farmers grow crops despite the high acidity of the soil, which has long been a problem in Malawi.

Lucia Victoria Chigamane's interest in agriculture began on her mother's small farm, close to the city. "I went there on weekends with my mother and siblings. My mother, a woman with keen attention to detail, would ask why some of our maize fields required more fertilizer than others," she says. I noticed that our maize yields, although relatively higher than our neighbors', were less than the projected yields on the fertilizer packaging, and I wanted to know why."

The first of her siblings to go beyond an undergraduate degree, Chigamane also won a fellowship from the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa's Soil Health Program in 2011. She expects to finish her master's in Soil Science (Integrated Soil Fertility Management) at LUANAR in the near future.

"Postgraduate study has sharpened my analytical skills," Chigamane says. "I look at things more critically than I did in the past. It has also exposed me to different viewpoints through interactions with international students, and above all has taught me to focus."

Her current research centers on plant nutrition, where she is studying zinc and phosphorus interactions in soil. "I am engaged in a researcher-designed, farmer-managed study that involves the use of different rates of phosphorous to see its effect on residual phosphorus and other trace elements in zinc availability in acidic soils."

Chigamane hopes to advocate more for specific fertilizers so that farmers get what they need. "We only have standard formulations right now, regardless of the soil, except for big commercial farms."

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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.

AWARD is generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development, and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. For more information, visit www.awardfellowships.org

The main objective of Chigamane’s research is to help farmers grow crops despite the high acidity of the soil, which has long been a problem in Malawi. “I am exploring the use of P fertilizer combined with zinc—current formulations don’t have zinc. P fertilizer works to increase the root volume, but the next step is to bring in the forestry component by exploring the use of tree leaves, including neem leaves, which are said to help in reducing soil acidity.”

Once Chigamane has completed her master’s degree, she wants to further hone her research skills. She enjoys teaching, and would eventually like to get a PhD.

As a young scientist herself, she likes to encourage fellow youths in their careers. “Starting your research career while young enables you to implement long-term experiments and see the results of your work and improve it.”

Chigamane expects the AWARD Fellowship to help her improve her research and communication skills so that she can better help smallholder farmers, especially women farmers. “Research has to be communicated in order to be beneficial to farmers,” she notes. “I hope to learn how to write reports and clearly present my findings. I also look forward to improving my scientific writing skills, and attending conferences to connect with others in the field of agricultural research.” She is excited to work with her mentor, and is keen to connect with other AWARD Fellows. At LUANAR, Chigamane plans to mentor undergraduate students, and is confident that her skills will improve through AWARD’s training.