



Pauline Kalumikiza
Mbukwa
2015 AWARD Fellow

“I look forward to having more impactful radio programs that focus directly on the farmer”

Position	Program Officer, Impact Radio Programming and Capacity Building
Institution	Farm Radio Trust (FRT)
Country	Malawi
BSc	Journalism, Polytechnic University, Malawi, 2006
Mentor	Lusungu Dzinkambani, Campaigns and Advocacy Manager, Oxfam Malawi
Research Area	Agricultural Communications and Rural Development, Radio and Information Communications Technologies

Pauline Kalumikiza Mbukwa is the fourth of five girls born in a rural village called Mchinji in the central region of Malawi, and she learned to plant and apply fertilizer in the family’s garden as a young child. “My father, a commercial farmer made me realize the great potential that exists in farming—that there is income to be had through this line of work,” she says. “He really instilled a love of agriculture in me.”

After completing a bachelor’s degree in Journalism, she worked as a radio producer for one year with Trans World Radio Malawi and four years with Development Communications Trust. But her growing conviction that Malawian farmers are hungry for information prompted her to move to FRT, an NGO established in 2009. “Our organization promotes the use of radio enhanced by other information and communications technologies (ICTs) such as mobile phones, to provide agriculture extension services,” she explains. “What has been lacking in Malawi are research based programs that actually meet the needs of farmers, so all FRT programs are research-based to ensure that we understand exactly what the farmer needs. A cookie-cutter approach doesn’t work.”

Kalumikiza says with the current a shortage of extension officers in Malawi the radio is able to reach a wider audience. “We are working with national and community radio stations, providing information to small scale farmers and through the radio listening groups, the farmers meet to listen, share knowledge and encourage the implementation of new technologies,” she says.

Radio programs have long been used to inform rural communities about agriculture and other services. “Our work is done using both radio and community outreach, whereby field demonstrations are conducted by agricultural extension staff, so that farmers can see the technology that has been promoted on air,” Kalumikiza explains. “In liaison with the agricultural extension officers, we have done a number of community outreach events, with farmers demonstrating the various technologies they learned from a radio program, so the other community members

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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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who were not directly engaged can learn from them.”

FRT broadcasts the programs, and farmers call or send a text message with questions. The use of mobile phones with the radios also enables FRT to get immediate feedback from farmers in the form of questions and comments, which are then addressed by the experts.

Kalumikiza’s core responsibility is to train the broadcasters to design innovative farm radio programs. She is currently the lead in a project, ‘Integrating Radio and ICTs in the Value Chains (IRIVAC)’, which aims at increasing the production of groundnuts, potatoes, soybeans, and dairy. “This project is as a result of a successful implementation of a pilot project, which focused on the aflatoxin in groundnuts,” she notes. “We promoted a technique known as the Mandela cock method, whereby farmers stack groundnut stalks in a circle on top of a platform, with the pods facing upwards. This allows the pods to dry, saving them from aflatoxin contamination and other damage.” Kalumikiza informed farmers about this method via radio programming, and they saw a reduction in aflatoxins.

Kalumikiza visits the communities to monitor the farmers’ use of the radios and get feedback, which helps her team to modify the programs as required, and says this helps farmers to feel valued. She is delighted when she sees farmers adopting new approaches or techniques after listening to radio programs. “It’s not just about putting a program on air, but we follow up to see what impact the radio message has made to the farmer. We conduct a mid and end of project outcome evaluation, going back to the farmers and asking how the program has helped them in their farming. We are essentially a knowledge broker between farmers, researchers, input suppliers, buyers and market link institutions.”

Later in 2015, Kalumikiza expects to complete an MSc in Transformative Community Development at Mzuzu University, which she is attending on a scholarship from Irish Aid and Higher Education Authority of Ireland. Once finished, she hopes to be referred to as a “development communication specialist” and dreams of being a “think tank” for participatory radio programming. “If someone wants to learn more about developmental radio programming, they can contact me,” she says. “I look forward to having more impactful radio programs that focus directly on the farmer.”

Kalumikiza sees her time as an AWARD Fellow as an ideal opportunity to build her skills in science, research, and leadership. “The program is definitely going to increase my skills in science and proposal writing,” she notes. “If I develop my writing skills I can share with the world the benefit of using radio to help farmers. I also hope to learn how to mentor the broadcasters I’m working with.” She is currently responsible for building the capacity of over 20 broadcasters from seven radio stations, and is confident that she will gain valuable skills from AWARD as well as helpful advice from her mentor. “Plus, AWARD is bound to put my institution on the map due to its international status,” she says.