



Zione G. Kalumikiza  
**2015 AWARD Fellow**

Position	Lecturer
Institution	Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), Bunda Campus
Country	Malawi
BSc	Food Science and Human Nutrition, 2012
Mentor	Rex Chapota, Executive Director, Farm Radio Trust
Research Area	Capacity building within communities to improve maternal and child health and nutrition in Malawi.



“It would be more fulfilling to know that the knowledge I generate benefits others while providing solutions to problems affecting communities in my country”

As a young girl, Zion Kalumikiza admired a successful woman who was a nutritionist, and this inspired her to follow the same path. When selecting a university, her first choice was an agricultural institution because it offered a degree in that field. “My dad wanted me to be a doctor or economist but my goal was to contribute to health by focusing on nutrition,” says Kalumikiza, who credits her father, a commercial farmer, as encouraging her to do her best in school.

“Nutrition is a science beyond food—it’s a science that is cross-cutting and a prerequisite for development,” says Kalumikiza. “It is not just food, cooking, and home economics. This is a science that has the capacity to contribute to or derail development.” She argues that focusing on nutrition means investing in a nation’s health, which has a significant impact on productivity. “If we do not concentrate on nutrition, it has the potential to cost nations millions of dollars in agricultural productivity losses, as well as the related cost of treating the many health challenges that are caused by nutritional deficiencies,” she cautions. She cites micronutrient deficiencies as an example. “If a woman has severe iodine deficiency during pregnancy, she would give birth to a child with a severe mental disorder, who would become an unproductive adult,” she says, adding that this would only contribute to furthering the cycle of poverty.

“Nutritional deficiencies such as those causing stunting will affect productivity and brain capacity—however, it is difficult to make a case for investment in nutrition, as is the case with other programmes, because people would like to see direct impact within a short period of time,” says the nutritionist, explaining her passion for her field of study. Kalumikiza is keen to use research data to demonstrate the impact of nutrition on agricultural and national development.

Kalumikiza is passionate about teaching and is also involved in research activities at LUANAR, where she coordinated the Scaling Up Nutrition

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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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(SUN) operational research program at its inception. This is a multi-sectoral capacity-building initiative to end stunting by scaling up interventions known to have an impact in reducing malnutrition. The movement focuses on a person’s first 1,000 days when development is critical—from conception through pregnancy and lactation to a child’s second birthday. “In order to have an impact on agricultural problems, it is important to capitalize on the critical period of growth and development,” she says, noting that interventions at this stage can prevent malnutrition. She is also part of a team conducting action research with a focus on poultry farming to improve household food and nutrition security through dietary diversity in rural communities where diets are predominantly plant based.

Working with some of her students, Kalumikiza is involved in research aimed at making agriculture more nutrition-sensitive. “What makes people grow certain crops, rear livestock, or purchase specific food items?” she wonders. These findings would help determine how crop and dietary diversification can be improved in line with behavior change to create healthy food systems. “We need evidence to make a case that will influence policy,” says Kalumikiza, who is currently looking for opportunities to pursue a PhD around the agriculture nutrition nexus or the nutrition transition facing the developing world. “As we are struggling with under nutrition, trends show a slow increase in obesity,” she observes.

An alumnus of the African Nutrition Leadership Programme, Kalumikiza wants to be the “go-to” person on matters of nutrition, with excellent research skills, while ensuring that solutions trickle down to the community. “My career goal is to generate evidence-based information to influence policy—research that responds to the needs of the community,” she states.

“As a young scientist, this is a process of self-discovery,” says Kalumikiza, who sees her participation in the AWARD Fellowship as an opportunity to further expand her networks in order to reach more smallholder farmers. “By the end of this year, I will have established a lot of networks—particularly from my mentor, who is working with an organization that directly disseminates information to farmers.”

Through role-modeling and interactions with her students, Kalumikiza plans to share the knowledge she is gaining from AWARD. “It would be more fulfilling to know that the knowledge I generate benefits others while providing solutions to problems affecting communities in my country,” she says.