



2014 AWARD Fellow  
**Bettie Sindi Kawonga**

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Position	Lecturer
Institution	Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR)
Country	Malawi
MSc	Animal Science, University of Malawi, 2011
Mentor	Patricia Mayuni, Chief Animal Health and Livestock Development Officer, Ministry of Agriculture
Research Area	Characterization of smallholder production systems as a tool for sustainable agricultural development in Malawi.

Bettie Sindi Kawonga always “had a feel” for agriculture. She started off helping out on her family’s small backyard farms in Blantyre, Mzuzu, and Lilongwe, Malawi, and on her grandmother’s farm in the village. “I used to help my father grow vegetables and look after chickens at home,” she says. With this background, it seemed natural that Kawonga would opt to study animal science at university and work in agricultural extension, conducting training sessions with farmers to disseminate her research findings.

Kawonga’s desire to work with farmers was prompted by memories of her grandmother and aunts struggling to make a living from growing maize. “The work was back-breaking, but they never harvested enough to sustain the family,” she recalls. “Their alternative livelihood, rearing indigenous chickens, did not earn much money because prices were low, and when disease struck, they lost most of their birds.” Her BSc research project put her on the path to working with women. The project focused on increasing production of indigenous chickens on smallholder farms located close to her college.

Realizing that the information accumulating in universities and research institutions did not reach farmers, Kawonga knew she had to act. “I had to do something to help bridge the gap in some small way so that the information could trickle down to farmers to save their animals and crops.”

Kawonga’s current research is on the characterization of smallholder dairy-production systems. Most policies and development programs target the large generic group called smallholders, yet the various sub-categories of farmers experience different challenges. Any intervention must be modified for each target group.

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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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"For 50 years, Malawi has been trying to improve the lot of smallholders, especially women, yet nothing seems to have changed," explains Kawonga. The government now is willing to invest in improving smallholder livelihoods. Working with these groups will foster development, as they will learn from each other. She feels this work is important because it will have an input on research-based policy, rather than on generic knowledge.

"I want the next 50 years to be different for Malawian farmers," asserts Kawonga. "We don't want farmers to accept a situation where they get 10 liters of milk a day from animals that can produce 60 liters a day. We need to figure out where we went wrong; the problem is not only the farmers, but the entire system, including researchers, extension workers, and government policies on livestock." Kawonga is determined to be part of the solution.

While Kawonga was pursuing her MSc, one thing stood out for her: the small number of female lecturers in Malawi. "My supervisor was the only female lecturer in my department," she says. She decided to apply for a position as a lecturer, and was successful; the department now has three women.

Kawonga recently obtained a Borlaug Higher Education Agricultural and Development scholarship for her doctoral studies at an American university. She expects that the AWARD Fellowship will help her to gain leadership and research skills, which she needs to be fully equipped to conduct research and join university senior management. "I want to be dean of students at LUANAR because there is only one female in top management at the moment."

Kawonga is also eager to pass on the skills that she gains from AWARD courses to colleagues and students at the university. "My greatest satisfaction comes when students I have taught excel in their careers, and farmers are able to improve their livelihoods through the adoption of innovative technologies in livestock production," she says.