



Catherine Mloza Banda
2015 AWARD Fellow

“I want to become a seasoned agricultural communication expert and to train colleagues in agricultural communication to fill the gap between scientists and farmers.”

Position	Agricultural Value Chain Officer
Institution	Farm Radio Trust (FRT)
Country	Malawi
BSc	Agriculture (Crop Science), University of Malawi, 2009
Mentor	Dr. Catherine Mthinda, Senior Lecturer, Extension Department, Lilongwe, University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR)
Research Area	Design and development of innovative, participatory, and gender-sensitive ICT-based agricultural research and extension models that link smallholder farmers to agricultural research and technologies, thereby improving their food security.

Catherine Mloza Banda enrolled at Bunda College of Agriculture when she finished high school, following in her parents’ footsteps. She chose to study crop science because “not many girls choose it” and she wanted to be different. But she struggled with her course choice after her first year. “Many of my friends were studying economics and nutrition, and I wondered if that was a better course,” she recalls.

During her third year she joined another class on a visit to the Department of Agricultural Extension Services at the Ministry of Agriculture, and discovered a way to combine agriculture and communication. “I have always had a passion for communication. During that visit, I learned about different communication technologies, how to use radio and other media in development, and realized I could pursue a career in agricultural communication after graduation,” she says enthusiastically.

Mloza Banda graduated at 18 years of age, the youngest student in her class. As she looked for a job, she kept herself busy by volunteering at a radio station and doing small assignments for her former lecturers. She eventually found an employment opportunity with the Farmers’ Union of Malawi. She also enrolled in a master’s program in Rural Development and Agricultural Extension at LUANAR.

For her MSc research Mloza Banda looked at factors contributing to the successful scaling up of conservation agriculture (CA). “The extension policy in Malawi advocates for pluralism in agricultural extension,” she notes. “However, many organizations disseminate conflicting information, resulting in low and patchy adoption of CA.”

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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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She examined how issues of coordination affect farmers, and how the technical aspects of CA are disseminated to farmers. She also conducted qualitative research into how farmers perceive the practice of CA.

Her research showed that coordination of organizations and harmonization of CA approaches and messages have an impact on adoption. This is especially important for issues surrounding herbicides. “This was a contentious issue at the time because one organization felt it was too expensive for resource-poor farmers to afford, while another was advocating for herbicide use and included it in a project package,” says Mloza Banda. She has successfully defended her MSc work and will graduate later in 2015.

Currently, Mloza Banda is an agricultural value chain officer at FRT, a non-governmental organization that works with radio stations to provide innovative agricultural advisory services through radio and information and communication technologies. She plays an advisory role, conducting research to develop content for radio programs. She is also involved in linking broadcasters with relevant individuals in the agricultural value chain.

“I want to become a seasoned agricultural communication expert and to train colleagues in agricultural communication to fill the gap between scientists and farmers,” says Mloza Banda. She also hopes to be a role model to encourage younger women to pursue higher education. She has already mentored three young women in secondary schools, all of whom are pursuing tertiary education.

Forming networks and partnerships is crucial to Mloza-Banda’s role in her institution, and she expects the AWARD Fellowship to enhance her ability to fulfill this role. She also hopes the courses will help prepare her for a role as a leader in communicating science to farmers.

Her greatest satisfaction derives from receiving positive feedback on her efforts: “When farmers I have worked with say ‘We were involved, we contributed and we benefited,’ this makes my day,” she says.