



2013 AWARD Fellow
Loveness Msofi

Position	Women's Programs Officer
Institution	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security Blantyre District Agriculture Office Blantyre Agriculture Development Division
Country	Malawi
MSc	Agribusiness Management, National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, Taiwan, 2012
Mentor	Dr. Emma Kambewa, Program Officer Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa

Research area: Analysis of gender issues among rural communities along value chains.

Loveness Msofi grew up in northern Malawi in a farming household, but she never once saw an agricultural extension worker visit her homestead. Her desire to address this prompted her to study agriculture at the University of Malawi's Bunda College of Agriculture.

After graduating with a BSc, Msofi worked as an agriculture teacher where she advocated for agriculture among female secondary school students, because most girls do not pursue this subject. "My hope was to inspire girls to see how they could help their parents and communities through agriculture," she says.

At the end of 2009, Msofi joined the Ministry of Agriculture as a Women's Programs Officer, but took a leave of two years to pursue an MSc in Agriculture, with a focus on Agribusiness, in Taiwan after winning a scholarship from the National Pingtung University of Science and Technology. She conducted research on women farmers' empowerment through analyses of their competitiveness. "I found that women have a number of competitive advantages, including their efficiency to manage resources, ability to diversify enterprises, hardworking nature, and increased efficiency through group work," notes Msofi.

In Malawi, women and youth contribute more than 70 percent of the agricultural labor force. Despite this contribution, most are not able to effectively participate in economic development due to their low or no education, and limited access to input and output markets, as well as information and extension services, and credit. "Most modern technologies do not usually ease the plight of women," says Msofi. "For example, the Malawian government promotes the use of treadle pumps for small-scale irrigation, but they are hard for women to operate, especially mothers with babies on their backs. So women don't use them, rendering their farms and their livelihoods even more vulnerable to changing climatic conditions."

Msofi says that limited documentation exists about these gender perspectives of technological development and adoption at the local level, which is needed to inform policy makers. "Generating knowledge from the grassroots level is crucial, especially since Malawi adopted a decentralization policy about a decade ago for development planning from the bottom of the pyramid up."

Currently, Msofi is conducting research on the impacts of agricultural development projects on gender relations in Malawian farming households with a £5,000 fellowship that she was awarded from Future Agriculture Consortium. This research concentrates on beneficiaries of agricultural projects implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security in Blantyre. "So far, I have found that some projects have had a positive impact on gender relations, while others have not had any impact," says Msofi.

Msofi's long-term vision is to have an all-inclusive agriculture research and development sector that is driven by the values of equity and human dignity. She wants to see a related agenda that weighs the changes in both men and women as being of equal importance when developing agricultural technologies. "This is the only way that gender biases that affect technology adoption can be minimized."

Msofi's career goals include pursuing a PhD and increasing her influence in rural communities by becoming a leading development researcher in gender and agriculture development. Through courses offered by AWARD, she also hopes to develop her leadership skills to prepare to take up more responsible positions.

"As a Women's Programs Officer and Acting Assistant District Agriculture Development Officer, I work with more than 200,000 farmers—most of whom are women—and supervise about 200 staff members. I have a huge responsibility for which I need to build the necessary leadership and management skills, in addition to technical skills," says Msofi. "With those skills, I believe I will be in a better position to understand what farmers face and what opportunities they can seize. After understanding their situation, I hope to propose gender-sensitive interventions to address their problems and improve their welfare and livelihoods."

Msofi is one of a growing number of African women agricultural scientists who have won an AWARD Fellowship. 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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