



Kalenga Banda

2021 One Planet Laureate Candidate

Position

Special Research Fellow

Institution

University of Zambia (UNZA)

Country

Zambia

Education

MSc, Horticulture Biology,
University of Stellenbosch, South
Africa

Mentor

Dr. Mweetwa Alice Mutiti,
Deputy Executive Secretary
& Senior Lecturer of Soil
Microbiology, Regional
Universities Forum for Capacity
Building in Agriculture
(RUFORUM)

Research Area

Postharvest management of
sweet potato.

Kalenga Banda is currently a PhD candidate at Cornell University in New York and she will soon defend her PhD thesis that focuses on postharvest storage management of sweet potatoes.

When asked about how she got into agricultural sciences, she says, "It's a rather funny story. "I got into natural sciences with a dream of getting into medical school, but when I didn't make the cut, I decided to major in mathematics. However, the procedure to register in the mathematics program was very long, so when a friend mentioned how easy it was to register for the agricultural sciences program, I quickly jumped on the bandwagon and I have never regretted it."

After getting her BSc in plant science at the University of Zambia, she went on to get her MSc in horticultural biology at Stellenbosch University in South Africa.

Kalenga then spent a year at the University of Zambia teaching undergraduate courses in plant physiology and postharvest biology before proceeding for her PhD. Kalenga has been five years in New York—it has become like home to her—although she is looking forward to heading back to her home country Zambia in January 2022, where she will resume her faculty position at the University of Zambia.

"I think I got into agriculture sciences without really knowing what I was getting into," she admits. "I began to get a glimpse of some of the challenges that farmers face, especially in rural communities, when I was involved in some projects in rural Zambia with the World Food Programme just after graduating from my bachelor's program.

From then on I was motivated to do work that would directly contribute to the well-being of rural farmers," she says.

"I think I like the idea of being able to see the direct impact of my efforts on people's livelihoods and maybe that is why I think I enjoy teaching too—I can see the immediate impact of my efforts as I graduate students."

Kalenga heard about the One Planet Fellowship from a friend who is an AWARD Fellow. "I was feeling disconnected because my PhD program was initially meant to be a sandwich arrangement where I could work on an African problem in horticulture in an African and U.S. institution, but because of the COVID-19 pandemic, things didn't go as planned," she says.

"I ended up doing most of my research work in the U.S., specifically addressing some of the challenges that sweet potato farmers in colder climates face.

I was happy to hear about the opportunities that the One Planet Fellowship offers because I felt it was just what I needed to help me refocus my research and build collaborations with other African scientists. I am delighted to have been accepted."

"Something I appreciate is that the One Planet Fellowship not only provides an opportunity for formal mentorship, but also the tools necessary to make this process a success," she continues. "I thrive best when I have someone to give account to, so this is just what I needed at this stage in my career."

Kalenga is also confident that the connections and collaborations she will make with other scientists will broaden her research perspective.

"I have learned a lot about myself—just going through the MOW has been an eye-opening experience already. The biggest take away so far has been that I am in charge of my own destiny. I can be deliberate about what I want and how to get there—I feel rejuvenated and ready to take on the world."

Kalenga says her view has changed drastically. "I know I have a role to play in bringing meaningful change to my community," she stresses. "The One Planet Fellowship is not only an opportunity to enhance my leadership skills but it has helped to reignite a passion for what I do."

Her goals include being a successful teacher and an established researcher who will positively impact farmers and communities. "I would like to contribute to the growth of the horticultural industry in my country and the wider region through teaching, research, and innovation especially in light of the challenges that come with climate change," she continues.

Through her research on postharvest management of sweet potatoes, Kalenga aims to make tangible contributions to the welfare of small-holder farmers in Zambia and the sub-Saharan region through teaching and innovation especially in light of the challenges that come with climate change.

"This may be in an academic position or even in a policy position, where I can contribute to decision making and bring about positive change."

"I have faced a lot of challenges, including maintaining a balance between my career and family life. But I have overcome thanks to great support from my parents, my family, my friends, and my church."

Kalenga Banda is one of the growing number of candidates selected to participate in the One Planet Fellowship. The One Planet Fellowship is a career development initiative that is building a robust pipeline of highly connected, inter-generational scientists equipped to use a gender lens to help Africa's smallholder farmers cope with climate change. The One Planet Fellowship is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the BNP Paribas Foundation, the European Union and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) and Agropolis Fondation are jointly implementing the Fellowship.

Do you have any further questions? Send an email to: oneplanet.award@cgiar.org

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