

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile



#### Position

Manager – Poverty Environment  
Action for Sustainable  
Development Goals Project

#### Institution

United Nations Development  
Programme (UNDP), Malawi

#### Country

Malawi

#### Education

PhD, Conservation Biology,  
Bangor University (UK), 2014

#### Mentor

Mr. Kenneth Chaula,  
Department of Agriculture  
Extension Services, Ministry of  
Agriculture

#### Area of Interest

Adoption of sustainable  
agricultural technologies,  
decentralized forestry  
management, and incentive-  
based ecosystems management  
approaches

### Linda Chinangwa

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*“A fulfilling part of my career has been participating in community training aimed at promoting gender transformative and poverty reduction initiatives, narrowing the gender gap in agriculture, and improving natural resources management.”*

As a child, Linda Chinangwa thought the two available career choices for women were primary school teacher and nurse. However, her eyes were opened after joining high school, when her biology teacher advised that women’s career options extend well beyond teaching and that public health, medicine, or law opportunities were also available. After enrolling for an Agriculture-Forestry degree at the University of Malawi in 1998, Linda began to develop a deep understanding of how important agriculture was to Malawi’s economy. After graduating, she worked as an Extension Officer in the Ministry of Agriculture.

Linda has since completed a Master’s in Soil Fertility and a PhD in Conservation Biology, focusing on how co-management of natural resources can reconcile community interests and lead to forest conservation. She was also privileged to be awarded the prestigious Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) Postdoctoral Fellowship from 2015-17 in Tokyo, Japan. This allowed her to enhance her

skills in research and data management, facilitation, and communication of scientific findings.

Currently, she works as a Manager for the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) ‘Poverty Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals Project’ (PEA). Through her involvement with UNDP, Linda has seen how entrepreneurship training has empowered women to engage in agribusiness – something she calls “a highlight”. She also notes that “a fulfilling part of my career has been participating in community training aimed at promoting gender transformative and poverty reduction initiatives, narrowing the gender gap in agriculture, and improving natural resources management.”

While Linda recognizes the presence of organizations that aim to promote women in science and technology and innovation, she points out that sourcing research funding remains a challenge for many women scientists, especially those not attached to academic

or research institutions. Despite this, she adopts a ‘forwards ever and backward never’ approach – and building and maintaining professional networks has enabled her to participate in research on food security, urban water and sanitation, and ecosystem services. She is particularly proud of her research on ecosystem services, referenced in a government framework (currently under development) to guide the implementation of payment for ecosystem management projects in Malawi. It has also been included in publications on decentralized forest management approaches.

Linda initially learned about the AWARD GRASP Fellowship on the CGIAR website in the first quarter of 2022, and her inquisitive nature drove her to seek more information. She gathered information from friends who had participated in other AWARD research Fellowships, and they encouraged her to apply after gaining useful experiences and opportunities.

Prior to the GRASP Fellowship, much of Linda’s experience in the policy sphere was through participation in training designed to guide executive decision-making among policymakers. Furthermore, through the UNDP PEA project, she has also played a key role in facilitating the development of poverty, environment, and natural resources management tools, including a training manual on integrated community natural resources management and livelihoods.

During her time as a GRASP Fellow, Linda hopes to enhance her policy implementation skills – and plans to advocate for agriculture and development policies that aim at achieving a gender balance in accessing farm inputs, services, and benefits in Malawi. In her Fellowship role as a mentor, Linda reveals that she also aims to pass on her skills and experience in research, policy formulation, and implementation in Malawi – empowering upcoming female scientists.

“Africa’s agriculture sector currently has a lot of good policies,” Linda reveals. “However, translating these into action remains a challenge. Furthermore, communities are unaware of existing policies, which make it difficult for them to demand accountability regarding their implementation.” Yet she is confident that, as a GRASP Fellow, she will acquire the ability to develop – and actively influence – a network of policy leaders who are willing to be part of creating gender-responsive policies in the agriculture and natural resources sector.

*Linda Chinangwa is among a growing number of women selected for the Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship. GRASP Fellowship is a career development program growing a pool of confident, capable, African women to lead the design and implementation of gender-responsive policies in Africa. The Fellowship is an initiative of African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).*