



2014 BHEARD Scholar
Justice Munthali

Profile

Country of Study:	South Africa
University:	University of Pretoria
Department:	Food Science
Student Position:	Graduate Research Assistant — MSc
Home Country:	Malawi
Home Institution:	Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security
Home Position:	Food and Nutrition Officer
Mentored By:	Malawi: Dr. M. Nyamanda and Limbani Matumba

Research Area: Food Science

BHEARD PROGRAM START DATE: January 2015

HOMETOWN: Mzuzu, Malawi

UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION: University of Malawi, Bunda College of Agriculture, Bachelor of Science in Agriculture

RESEARCH INTERESTS: Nutrition

A recent report jointly released by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Program (WFP) and International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) in Rome states that malnutrition remains a challenge in Malawi with 50% of children under five being stunted and 12.8% underweight. This prolonged occurrence of high levels of malnutrition is evidence why Malawi is in recent years fighting hard to eradicate chronic malnutrition in the communities through the Scaling Up of Nutrition (SUN) initiatives which gives special attention to the first 1000 days of life from pregnancy to two years.

Justice believes Aflatoxin is one of the neglected aspects of child nutrition that will contribute greatly to chronic illnesses in later years of life. Aflatoxin contamination can be associated with a number of health problems. Aflatoxins cause liver cancer, contribute to 40% of disability adjusted

life years (DALYs) (Wu et al., 2011), and are associated with stunting and kwashiorkor in children and immune suppression (Gong et. al., 2002, 2003, 2004; Turner et. al., 2003, 2007).

Children under five remain particularly vulnerable to Aflatoxin exposure significantly hindering children's growth and development while damaging their immunity. Due to the above statements coupled with passion for nutrition developed from childhood, school and work experiences, Justice became interested in Aflatoxins. He will conduct research to assess Aflatoxin levels in locally made complementary foods to document an extent of the problem and raise alarm to supplement efforts by Malawi Government through Agriculture Sector Wide Approach (ASWAP) and Africa as a whole through the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program (CAADP). Justice's research will result into the formulation of comprehensive and inclusive policies and interventions in dealing with malnutrition.

PERSONAL STATEMENT:

With acceleration of knowledge, skills and acumens in academia acquired through this training, Justice plans to devote his time in molding effective and efficient participatory learning strategies and models to build the capacities of fellow staff members to unprecedented levels within the Ministry of Agriculture and the District Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC) at the local council level. He also plans to develop a learning approach/tool by modifying the farmer field school and the farmer business school concepts to 'Farmer Nutrition School Package' whereby a group of farmers will be trained in a participatory and hands-on manner in various nutrition topics for a predefined time period in their locality using various multimedia training tools and models. After which these farmers will graduate into lead nutrition farmers, as such they will be the agents of change in nutrition knowledge, attitudes and practices in their communities.

Academically, Justice plans to influence change in food and nutrition arenas in Malawi through participation in fellowships, symposiums, and conferences. He also hopes to use his postgraduate research knowledge to excel in other research activities, thereby, influencing and advocating for positive change in policy, programs and strategies as far as nutrition is concerned.

There is nothing that fascinates Justice more than encountering new things, new information, and new places through reading and travelling.