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**MALAWI**

# FIRST PERSON

## Farmers Elect First Female Chief

**An ambitious woman becomes the first female chair of a farmers' group**



Photo: NASFAM/Camilia Mellenstrand

Fanny Makina talks to a group of smallholder farmers at an association meeting in Mulanje, southern Malawi.

***“When I traveled around the country to attend meetings, I noticed that most women keep quiet. I want them to talk. If women are not strong and don’t speak their mind, men will take advantage. We are all farmers, we are all dealing with the same challenges, why shouldn’t we all be able to speak in public and take the lead?” said Fanny Makina, the chairwoman of a national farmers’ association.***

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“You have nothing to fear, you can do anything,” her mother told her when she was young. At the Ninth Annual General Meeting of Malawi’s National Association of Smallholder Farmers, Fanny Makina proved her mother right when she was elected as the association’s first female chair.

USAID has long supported the association in its efforts to promote farmers’ interests. By selling their products to local and foreign markets, the association provides maximum returns to farmers. Through trainings, members learn agricultural and business skills that help them produce better crops and manage their farms more effectively.

Makina will now lead some 105,000 smallholder farmers towards a future with greater food security. “This is a symbol of entering a new stage when it comes to gender. I hope I can inspire other women to take leadership positions as well,” she says.

Makina is very well educated for a smallholder farmer. When she finished high school, she went to study at the Central College of Commerce. After college, she opened a shop in Blantyre, Malawi’s largest city. When her husband died, she moved back to her village, bringing her business skills with her. Now she runs a farm, selling crops to the association, as well as mushrooms and vegetables to high-end hotels and grocery stores in some of Malawi’s major cities.

Makina had always been very involved in the association. She first served as the chairperson for her local association, and then became a regional chair. In 1996, she became the first women appointed to the national board. After that, she became secretary and, finally, was elected chairperson in 2005.

When Makina is not traveling around the country, she is working in her garden. She grows maize, peas, beans, potatoes, peanuts and mushrooms. She knows that being a farmer means hard work, and she knows women often do a great deal of that work: “A very large share of the agricultural production in this country is done by women; we should have a strong voice in our own organization.”