

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile

**Position**

Agricultural Officer for Seed and Adaptive Research

Institution

Ministry of Food and Agriculture

Country

Ghana

Education

MPhil, Seed Science and Technology, University of Ghana (Ghana), 2019

Mentor

Dr. Justina Onumah, Senior Research Scientist, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research – Science and Technology Policy Research Institute (CSIR-STEPRI)

Area of Interest

Improving women farmers' access to quality planting materials and seeds, and timely extension services to boost productivity sustainably

Comfort Yelipoie

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"Agriculture is like creating something. The idea of having control over what you grow, which then gives you something to eat – along with working with soils – is what motivates me."

As a high school student in Ghana, Comfort Yelipoie found herself attracted to two professions: medicine and agriculture. So when it came to applying to university, she decided to apply for courses in both her areas of interest – and, impressively, received offers to study both at two different institutions. Weighing up her options, Comfort soon realized that one path was unviable. "I'm not comfortable with surgeries and the oozing of blood!" she reveals. So, she accepted a place to study Agronomy at the University for Development Studies (UDS) in Nyankpala, Ghana.

Comfort has a true passion for agriculture, which allowed her to excel in her studies. "Agriculture is like creating something," she enthuses. "The idea of having control over what you grow, which then gives you something to eat – along with working with soils – is what motivates me." In fact, after graduating with a degree in Agronomy, she began to study for a Master's in Seed Science and Technology at the University of Ghana.

After graduating with her Agronomy degree in 2012, she worked as a Teaching Assistant in the Agronomy Department of UDS before joining the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Ghana in 2013; first as a Data Entry Specialist in 2013, and then as a Research Supervisor. Two years later, she began her current career path of working in the Directorate of Crop Services in Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture, which is responsible for policy formulation and implementation within the crops sub-sector. Initially, she worked at Asuansi Agricultural Station in the Central Region, but in 2022 moved to the head office in Accra. "We mainly focus on policy, formulations, and the implementation of projects and programs, especially in Ghana's rice and seed sectors," she explains.

Comfort is particularly keen to understand how the policies of her directorate will positively impact the lives of those they are working for, especially smallholder women farmers in food security crop

production. “I want to ensure that what we are expected to give these individuals, we do give to them – without holding back,” she states frankly. Because women in rural communities are engaged in most farming activities that feed their households – either directly or through sales – Comfort believes that it’s vital to ensure this group is as empowered as possible.

One project her directorate is currently implementing nationwide, with support from AGRA, is the Seed Demand and Forecast tool to gauge the quantities of seeds that farmers typically require. This data is required to develop a national seed plan and ensure that researchers and seed producers are well-informed and able to provide the quality and quantities of seeds of key food security crops to farmers.

Comfort is also starting work on building a seed database to track the types and quantities of seeds Ghana imports. “Having this information will help the directorate track the types and quantities of seeds imported against the quantity produced in-country,” she explains. The database is also an opportunity to encourage key seed sector stakeholders to develop competitive and improved varieties that are well adapted to the environment and accessible and affordable for farmers.

Even though Comfort has worked with the Ministry for a while, she has only been working in policy formulation for the past year – and looks forward to building on this experience through the GRASP Fellowship. “I’m excited for the opportunity to be mentored so I can meaningfully contribute to practical policy formulation,” she explains. “So far, everything I have been exposed to is more or less theoretical.”

Comfort states that she found the GRASP Fellowship training, which focuses on developing soft skills such as effective listening, building interpersonal relations, and leadership, particularly empowering. “Now, during meetings and engagements, people will be more willing to listen to what I have learnt – and this will help us meet most of our development needs,” she believes. “I will be able to respond to gender issues within the agricultural sector effectively.”

Taking part in the GRASP Fellowship has also ignited Comfort’s passion for educating others about food systems, and she credits the program with motivating her to pursue this. In a year, she plans to study for a PhD in either seed science or food systems – with the ultimate goal of becoming a lecturer or working with a research institution to contribute to data generation that will inform policy formulation.

Comfort Yeliopie 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).