

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position
Research Scientist

Institution
Science and Technology Policy
Research Institute of the Council
for Scientific and Industry
Research (CSIR-STEPRI)

Country
Ghana

Education
PhD, Environmental and
Geographical Science,
University of Cape Town (South
Africa), 2020

Mentor
Dr. Judith Omumbo, Senior
Programme Manager, Science
for Africa Foundation, Ghana

Area of Interest
Building the climate resilience
of smallholder production
systems and improving
livelihoods

Portia Adade Williams 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"In the face of a changing climate, we must support the poorest and most vulnerable by building a resilient agricultural system."

Portia Adade Williams initially thought she might like to pursue a career in biochemistry. Still her path changed as her interest in agriculture developed after being accepted to study BSc Agriculture at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in 2002. She has continued her interest in the field by obtaining a PhD in Environmental and Geographical Science from the University of Cape Town in 2020.

For the past decade, Portia has worked as a Research Scientist with the Science and Technology Policy Research Institute (STEPRI) of the Council for Scientific and Industry Research (CSIR) – Ghana's policy research institute. Her area of interest is in policy-relevant climate and socio-economic studies, focusing on smallholder production systems' vulnerability to climate impacts and adaptation to the changing climate. "Smallholders produce most of the food we eat and play a significant role in developing

the country's economy," she states. "In the face of a changing climate, we must support the poorest and most vulnerable by building a resilient agricultural system. This includes researching ways to build the adaptive capacity of smallholders against climate change and sustain their productivity."

At CSIR-STEPRI, one of the projects Portia is currently leading is policy coordination of the European Union (EU)-funded "Resilience against Climate Change, Social Transformation Research and Policy Advocacy – REACH STR Project". As part of the project, Portia is involved in building the capacity of development planners at the local level on how to mainstream social transformation and gender issues into their development planning activities. Ultimately, the goal is to strategically empower smallholders and households – especially women – and improve their livelihoods in the Upper West Region of Ghana. "We expect that, as a result, inequalities that women face will be

somewhat reduced. So this project is exciting for me as it advances the cause of women," she enthuses.

A goal of Portia's is to tackle gender imbalances through her work. She heard about the program through the AWARD Ghana country chapter, Ghanaian Women in Agricultural Research and Development (GhaWARD), and has always been interested in becoming an AWARD Fellow. After two unsuccessful initial applications to the AWARD Fellowship initiative, she was thrilled to be accepted to the GRASP Fellowship and is enthused about three aspects of the program: the opportunity to enhance her skills in innovation, policy improvement, and interventions; obtaining practical policy experience and leadership skills from her Mentor; and the chance for others to benefit by serving as a mentor.

With the GRASP Fellowship's focus on designing and implementing gender-responsive agriculture policies in Africa, Portia is looking forward to "conducting research that will be useful for improving policy strategies in Ghana". She adds that exposure to more practical policy processes will also help build her leadership skills in the area. Once she has worked with both her Mentor and mentee during her time as a Fellow, Portia also aims to educate even more individuals and colleagues. "I'm hoping to transfer the knowledge to other researchers."

In the course of her work, Portia has come up against many challenges. A lack of financing for research, she notes, is one of the biggest barriers. "A recent study showed that about 78% of the funding meant for climate research in Africa goes to European and Northern American institutions to conduct research on Africa," she reveals. Meanwhile, Portia adds a lack of research support – in terms of access to the internet and extensive databases – also hinders researchers' ability to conduct and publish their work.

Finally, she highlights that social stereotypes around gender roles also create limitations. "Women generally have greater family responsibilities. For instance, I'm a researcher, mother, and wife," Portia states. "Those present multiple roles compared to my male counterparts," she states. "So if I want to catch up, I need to do three times more work in comparison."

Portia has high ambitions for the future – with aspirations to become a chief research scientist and ultimately climb higher to lead CSIR as the director-general someday. "In combining the Fellowship with my career goals, I see myself developing into a confident policy professional," she shares. "I will have all the skills to become a recognized researcher."

Portia Adade Williams 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).