

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile

**Position**

Research Scientist

Institution

International Centre of Insect
Physiology and Ecology (*icipe*)

Country

Kenya

Education

PhD, Development Economics,
University of Bonn (Germany),
2013

Mentor

Ms. Dorcas Mwakoi, Senior
Programs Officer, Alliance for
a Green Revolution in Africa
(AGRA)

Area of Interest

Gender-responsive and
transformative agricultural
systems

Beatrice Muriithi

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"My conviction has always been that research is the greatest way I can help impact the lives of smallholder farmers and transform agriculture in Africa."

For Beatrice Muriithi, growing up in rural Kenya came with its fair share of learning and responsibilities. Agriculture was predominantly a woman's job, and her mother oversaw food production for their family. Working with her on the farm gave Beatrice her first experiences in agriculture – including seeing the challenges that smallholder farmers face.

When Beatrice started school, she decided she wanted to study agriculture: there was so much she wanted to address, change, influence, and inspire. But, during high school, she developed a passion for business studies and mathematics. So, when it came to selecting a course to study at Egerton University, she settled on Agricultural Economics to combine her interests.

During her degree, the motivation and mentorship she received from her lecturers inspired her further – and she decided to focus on researching and promoting innovations for smallholder farmers.

Beatrice graduated with first-class honors in 2005. "That academic achievement, coupled with a passion that I developed when I was young, opened doors for me and allowed me to meet different experts in agricultural research fields," enthuses Beatrice. "My conviction has always been that research is the greatest way I can help impact the lives of smallholder farmers and transform agriculture in Africa."

Keen to expand her skills and knowledge, Beatrice then pursued a Master's degree in Agricultural Economics, which allowed her to visit South Africa as part of the course and appreciate the country's advanced farming techniques. "I became convinced that our farmers could increase yields and livelihoods if they embraced innovations like their counterparts in South Africa," she asserted. Determined to change the lives of ordinary farmers, she applied for a scholarship to study a PhD in Agricultural Sciences, specializing in Development Economics, at the University of Bonn in Germany.

After completing her advanced studies in 2013, Beatrice joined the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (*icipe*) to work as a Post-doctoral Fellow, and was later promoted to a Research Scientist – a position she holds today. “*icipe* has given me the avenue I have been looking for,” she smiles. “We develop innovations for solving challenges associated with agriculture.”

As a woman in a professional environment, Beatrice has had to contend with maintaining a good work-life balance, which sometimes limits the activities she can partake in – especially those outside of the country. However, she is grateful that *icipe* has taken steps to create a conducive environment for working women. “They’ve invested in mother-friendly facilities, such as a creche and daycare center where children and caretakers are accommodated,” she notes. “They also have flexible working hours that allow staff to work remotely in special circumstances.”

Beatrice has been aware of AWARD for over 10 years and previously applied twice for the organization’s flagship Fellowship during that time. However, in 2022, she applied and was thrilled to be accepted onto the AWARD GRASP Fellowship – an opportunity that she says is timely and resonates well with her work.

As a GRASP Fellow, Beatrice’s goal is to strengthen her capacity as an agricultural economist scientist so that she can design and implement more gender-responsive and transformative policies. “I’ve previously worked with other scientists to develop innovations that our widely published research shows have the potential to empower women and address gender issues,” she explains. “What has been lacking, however, is their inclusion in policy.”

Through GRASP, she is also keen to pass on her knowledge and skills by mentoring young researchers and scientists through the program. “I am grateful to AWARD for designing this important program that brings together women from different countries and disciplines,” Beatrice affirms. “We are learning a lot from each other, and as we connect, we hope the connections will go beyond the Fellowship.”

Beatrice Muriithi 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).