

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile

**Position**

Research Fellow

Institution

African Centre for Technology
Studies (ACTS)

Country

Kenya

Education

PhD, Climate Change and
Adaptation, University of
Nairobi (Kenya), 2021

Mentor

Dr. Sophia Huyer, Gender
and Social Inclusion Lead,
Accelerating the Impact of
CGIAR Climate Research in
Africa (AICCRA)

Area of Interest

Supporting smallholder farmers,
especially women and youth,
in overcoming climate change
and post-harvest losses-related
challenges

Dorcas Kalele

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I would like to push for incentives and infrastructure which can support rural farmers, especially women, in better management of post-harvest losses – ultimately enhancing their farm incomes, improving food security, and eradicating poverty."

Dorcas Kalele was initially devastated when she was offered a place to study Horticulture – a newly introduced course – rather than her preferred subject of Business, at Moi University. Accepting the place, she resolved to change the course once she was there – but her request was declined. Forced to pursue Horticulture, Dorcas reveals that, "I performed dismally in my first year."

By her third year, she had fallen in love with the course – and attributes her change of heart to her experiences and engagement with farmers during field excursions. "We were frequently out in the field meeting farmers and visiting flower farms," Dorcas recalls. "One was devastated about some pests that had wiped out her entire crop, while another was ecstatic about a bumper harvest he was expecting after trying a new seed variety." Seeing farmers overcome numerous odds fueled her motivation and passion. After graduating in 2005, she earned a scholarship to study for her Master's degree in Crop

Protection (nematology option) at Ghent University in Belgium.

Upon completing her studies, Dorcas returned to Kenya. She secured a job with the Pest Control Product Board (PCPB) – a government institution involved in regulating, distributing, and monitoring pest control products. After a short stint, she moved to the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate (KEPHIS), where she was involved in developing plant health regulations and certification, farmer advisories and capacity building.

While at KEPHIS, she developed an interest in climate change and would read about the subject on her way to work. Inspired to learn more, Dorcas secured a scholarship to study for a PhD in Climate Change and Adaptation at the University of Nairobi, which she planned to undertake alongside her full-time job. However, a few months in, she found the pressure of combining work, family, and studies was taking its

toll, so she left her position at KEPHIS to concentrate on her family and studies.

During her PhD journey, which she completed in 2021, she engaged in short-term research and consultancy assignments with organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Alliance for Bioversity International, and CIAT, among others. "A key highlight was my support to the Alliance for Bioversity International and CIAT in developing county climate risk profiles, as well as my involvement in enhancing smallholder farmers' capacity to integrate climate-smart agriculture practices in Yatta Sub-county," she enthuses.

Currently, Dorcas is a Research Fellow at the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), a development research think-tank. She is responsible for coordinating a multi-country project aimed at supporting the adoption of smart-hybrid solar drying technologies by smallholder farmers to address post-harvest losses in fruits and vegetables in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. It is an area close to her heart, having seen first-hand at her mother's farm how these losses devastate farmers' livelihoods and incomes.

Dorcas first heard about the GRASP Fellowship via a colleague and is excited to have been accepted onto the program. Keen to continue the work she is doing for ACTS, her focus area is on the issue of supporting smallholder farmers in reducing post-harvest losses. She wants to generate evidence-based knowledge to inform policies and investments on using smart-hybrid solar technologies and gender-responsive policies and regulations to enable inclusive commercialization of the technology.

"There is limited incentive and infrastructure to support farmers in addressing post-harvest challenges," she states. "I would like to push for incentives such as access to credit, low cost technologies, knowledge platforms to spur business development skills and innovations, as well as the establishment of infrastructure such as cold chain facilities, aggregation centers, and sustainable markets in rural areas which can support farmers in better management of plant health losses – ultimately enhancing their incomes from production, improving food security, and eradicating poverty."

Dorcas reveals that accessing funding is one of the biggest challenges facing women scientists working at the local level in Africa. As such, she shares, "I appreciate that AWARD is investing in women scientists. This is inspiring a new pool of researchers who are making much-needed contributions to the agriculture sector and the economy."

As a GRASP Fellow, Dorcas hopes to advance her research and policy skills "through networking with policy experts. I will tap from the great minds, wealth of experience, and skills towards perfecting my engagement and participation as a change agent in the policy landscape in agriculture." She is also looking forward to a fruitful interaction with her mentor to gain from her experience in food systems and gender and social inclusion dynamics. She looks forward to engaging with policymakers and negotiating for the inclusion of gender-responsive policies based on action-oriented research through conferences and dialogues with peers, especially those that can support agro-processing, value addition, and addressing market challenges for smallholder farmers.

Dorcas Kalele 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).