

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Agroecology and
Agrobiodiversity Advisor

Institution

SNV

Country

Kenya

Education

MA, Rural Development and
HIV/AIDS, Van Hall Larenstein
University (Netherlands), 2010;
MSc, Disaster Management
and Sustainable Development,
Masinde Muliro University
of Science and Technology
(Kenya), 2010

Mentor

Dr. Sarah Olembo, Science for
Africa Foundation

Area of Interest

Gender transformative policies
that support women farmers to
adapt to climate change

Judith Libaisi 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I am living my dream, working with smallholder farmers – celebrating their gains and partnering with other players to find solutions to food producers' everyday challenges."

Like most ambitious high school students, a teenage Judith Libaisi dreamt of becoming a lawyer or doctor. Despite admiring the passion and zest of her agriculture teacher, at no time did she entertain a career in agriculture due to the dominant perception that jobs in the sector do not pay. When it came to selecting the subjects to major in, she had the option of picking Agriculture or Business Studies. She settled on Agriculture to emulate her teacher; a path she has never regretted – and the rest, as they say, is history.

After completing secondary school, Judith received an offer to study Agricultural Education and Extension at Egerton University, a relatively new course to her and her peers. She quickly realized that she had found her calling. "It was the interactions with farmers during my field attachment, listening to farming challenges, celebrating farmers' wins and finding solutions to their

problems, that gave me more drive to be there for them," she explains.

Following her graduation in 2002, Judith secured a Field Coordinator position at the Kenya National Federation of Agricultural Producers (KENFAP), now known as the Kenya National Farmers Federation, (KENAFF), where she was tasked with recruiting farmers and offering extension services in western Kenya, before being promoted to Provincial/Regional Field Coordinator.

During this time, she yearned to increase her knowledge and skills to be able to solve farmer-related challenges. Consequently, she enrolled for a MSc in Disaster Management and Sustainable Development at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology in Kakamega. This was followed by

a scholarship to study for another Master's degree in Rural Development and HIV/AIDS at Van Hall Larenstein University in the Netherlands. She is currently working on her PhD degree in Climate Change and Adaptation at the University of Nairobi.

Upon returning to Kenya in 2010, Judith took on a position in the membership services department at KENFAP's Nairobi office. Alongside training organization members on HIV/AIDS, she also developed an HIV and AIDS workplace policy that facilitated the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS to the organization's core activities through budget allocation, and advocated for non-discrimination and stigmatization. Judith rose through the ranks of the farmer organization and left in 2013 as the Agribusiness and Value Chains Manager.

Judith joined SNV in 2014 as a Business Development and Extension Advisor. She worked on a project that sought to integrate biodigesters (biogas systems) in the coffee value chain and bring women and youth to the coffee business to change the perception that coffee farming is a man's job. Together with other stakeholders, she is proud that they successfully changed some cooperative coffee constitutions and by laws to allow men to allocate coffee trees to women and youth. This allowed women and youth to be recognized and elected to leadership positions.

Currently, Judith is working at SNV on a 'Regenerative Agricultural Practices for Improved Livelihoods and Markets' (REALMS) project, which promotes and oversees the adoption of regenerative agriculture practices among smallholder farmers in western Kenya and western Rwanda. Her role involves capacity building of implementing partners and overseeing agronomy research to generate evidence on regenerative agriculture that ultimately seeks to influence policy.

Among her many successes, Judith says a highlight "is seeing policies work – getting women and youth

to invest and believe in agriculture, and finding meaningful income based on our collaborations with them." She has been involved in the implementation, design, and review of various agriculture projects and policies in Africa. She is a member of Kenya's Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture Multi Stakeholder Platform (CSA-MSP) and the Intersectoral Forum on Agroecology and Agrobiodiversity (ISFAA).

Judith is thrilled to have been accepted onto the AWARD GRASP Fellowship program – although admits that her selection came as a surprise, after two previous unsuccessful applications for AWARD Fellowships. "During a hike, a friend encouraged me to apply again, hoping that the third time would be a charm. Patience pays off!" she smiles. She was keen to become a GRASP Fellow as "I felt what they were aiming for was in line with my passion and work," she explains. "I want to contribute my knowledge on gender-responsive policies in the face of climate change in the agriculture sector in Kenya and beyond."

The Fellowship, Judith hopes, will aid her in harnessing her skills to influence gender transformative policies and help her design projects that will enable women farmers to contribute their voices to climate-smart agriculture. "I am an avid believer that knowledge grows through sharing, and I'm driven by the need to reach women and youth who have traditionally been sidelined in key decision-making processes," she reveals.

Part of the GRASP Fellowship sees Judith assigned a mentor – an aspect she is particularly excited about. "I hope to share the insights I get from the mentorship with my colleagues so that they can also benefit," she smiles. "Ultimately, I look forward to becoming a gender-responsive agriculture systems policy expert and consultant."

Judith Libaisi 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).