

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile

**Position**

Sub-County Agriculture Officer

**Institution**

Bungoma County Government

**Country**

Kenya

**Education**

MSc, Plant Protection, University of Queensland (Australia), 2017

**Mentor**

Mr. James Kaunda, Principal Officer, Ministry of Agriculture, County Government of Nairobi

**Area of Interest**

Involving women in leadership, agriculture finance, land tenure, agriculture productivity, climate change, and mechanization

### Lynda Kebaso 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"I am a farmer and enjoy agriculture as a profession. Combining this into my profession has made it the best choice of my life."*

Growing up in Trans-Nzoia County – one of Kenya's breadbaskets – Lynda Kebaso experienced farming first-hand, as her family was actively involved in food production. Despite this, she viewed agriculture as a hobby and was never interested in practicing it; like most of her peers, she planned to pursue a white-collar job.

She had applied to study Medicine and Engineering at the University of Nairobi, yet her plans were thrown off-course when she was offered a place to study Agriculture instead. However, as fate would have it, she soon found herself developing an interest in the course, thanks to her interactions with farmers during practical lessons. Lynda found herself further motivated by memories of how female farmers in her home area played the biggest part in agriculture production. Still, she never participated in marketing, decision-making, financial matters, and land ownership – as that was reserved for men. "My compassion gave me a passion for changing

the narrative by empowering women farmers," she states. "Combining this into my profession has been the best decision of my life."

After graduating in 2007, Lynda secured a job as a Crops Officer with Bungoma County Government in western Kenya. She still held this role until February 2022, after which she was promoted to Sub-County Agriculture Officer in Sirisia sub-county. This has helped her fulfill her dream of working directly with farmers. "Being in agriculture has been a calling. I have been honored to work with so many farmers and learn about their experiences first-hand," she smiles.

Her role certainly keeps her busy, as she is also involved in many areas away from the field. For instance, as part of the County Agriculture Policy committee, she is involved in the domestication, development, drafting, and implementation of agricultural policies and strategies.

Lynda is also a member of the county participatory climate change risk assessment, which helps address climate change by providing climate-smart technologies and innovations to farmers, such as conservation agriculture, agroforestry, and irrigation, among others. These have helped farmers find solutions to their challenges for sustainable land use and increased productivity.

Being in charge of a sub-county, Lynda has been able to help farmers strengthen partnerships and networks with other stakeholders in the agriculture value chain. This has helped create collaboration and linkages between farmers and service providers or private investors, thus providing them with knowledge on how to access credit and grants, markets and market information, and how to use ICT in their day-to-day production activities, especially for women and youth. She is proud that working with the County Government and other stakeholders in agriculture for more than 13 years has enabled her to empower women and youth on organizational development, agri-entrepreneurship, market and market information, financial literacy, and value addition.

A career highlight, she says, was being involved in “a revolutionary initiative,” Lynda states. “Being a trained Plant Doctor and having a Master’s degree in Plant Protection has helped me to use my disease analysis, diagnosis, and management skills, and build farmers’ knowledge – especially women and youth – on integrated pest and disease management, and how they can incorporate their indigenous technical knowledge to increase yields and reduce pest and disease losses.”

Inspired by her own experiences of gender imbalance within the agricultural sector, Lynda also works with women groups, such as women-led community-based organizations. “I motivate and mentor them to

take up various leadership spaces in agriculture while pointing them to various financing options to run successful agribusiness enterprises,” she enthuses.

In addition to helping others, Lynda reveals that her career has helped drive her own development. “I received the Australian-Africa awards scholarship to pursue a Master’s degree in Plant Protection at the University of Queensland in Australia,” she shares. Prior to graduating in 2017, the course helped her broaden her skills and knowledge to tackle one of the biggest problems facing smallholder farmers in Kenya: pests and diseases.

Lynda learnt about the GRASP Fellowship through her work WhatsApp group. “What particularly caught my attention was the policy and gender aspect of the program, as this is an area I have been very keen to pursue,” she explains. She notes that longstanding cultural beliefs and biases continue to prevent women from participating in aspects of agriculture. As such, Lynda’s policy focus is on enhancing women’s participation in leadership roles, agriculture finance, land tenure, agriculture productivity, climate change, and mechanization. “I want to convey the message that, throughout the agricultural value chain, gender balance and greater participation of women in decision-making is vital.”

As well as sharpening her policy development skills during the Fellowship, Lynda hopes to build on her leadership skills. “From this, I want to influence decisions and reach as many farmers and decision-makers as possible,” she asserts. “I hope to initiate conversations by holding frequent meetings with both men and women while pushing for gender-responsive policies.”

*Lynda Kebaso 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).*