

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

County Assistant Director
of Agriculture

Institution

Homa Bay County Government

Country

Kenya

Education

MSc, Agricultural Business,
University of Queensland
(Australia), 2018

Mentor

Dr. Gondwe Therese,
Consultant, Alliance Bioversity-
CIAT

Area of Interest

Production intensification
and commercialization for
smallholder farmers

Maxmillah Malongo

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I want to see more women and young farmers participate in agriculture – particularly in adopting modern agricultural climate-smart technologies and penetrating into regional, national, and international markets."

Growing up in Vihiga County in western Kenya, Maxmillah Malongo and her 11 siblings spent all their out-of-school hours on their family farm. As such, she experienced first-hand the challenges of smallholder farming – including the impacts of pests and diseases and poor farm gate prices. In light of her early years, choosing a university course was an easy decision for Maxmillah – and she applied to study Agricultural Education and Extension at Egerton University.

After graduating in 2007, Maxmillah worked for a short time at a high school, teaching agriculture and biology. However, she soon realized her desire to work in the field and interact with farmers could not be ignored. She applied – and was accepted – to be a Divisional Agricultural Extension Officer with the Ministry of Agriculture. During her time in this role, Maxmillah set out to learn how she could promote the commercialization of small-scale farming in Kenya.

This endeavor prompted Maxmillah to pursue a Master's degree – and, in 2017, she was awarded a scholarship to study Agricultural Business at the University of Queensland in Australia. "My research focused on farmers' participation and involvement in agricultural value chains," she notes. Today, Maxmillah is the County Assistant Director of Agriculture for Homa Bay County, where she is well placed to advocate for gender equality in the county's agriculture sector.

Maxmillah learned about the GRASP Fellowship from a friend and believes the program will allow her to handle gender disparities in the agriculture sector better. "I want to see more women and young farmers participate in agriculture – particularly in adopting modern agricultural climate-smart technologies and penetrating regional, national, and international markets."

Maxmillah's area of focus is on agricultural policy relating to the intensification and commercialization of small-scale production – encouraging a shift from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture. This is a continuation of both her previous and current work. As an Extension Officer, for instance, she trained smallholder farmers to produce crops such as maize and bananas on good farming practices and connected them to funding bodies and markets.

During the GRASP Fellowship, Maxmillah hopes to acquire skills and knowledge that will aid her in the development and implementation of national and intergovernmental policies. "These policies would seek to promote robust public-private partnerships to provide smallholder farmers with inputs and subsidies, tax incentives, access to financial credit, and links to markets – with an emphasis on empowering women and youth," she explains. She also hopes to develop her public speaking and negotiation skills during the program, as doing so would ultimately make her advocacy for gender equality in policy more effective.

Gaining a mentor and having access to the wider GRASP network, Maxmillah believes, will help empower her. In turn, the confidence and knowledge she hopes to gain will enable her to pass on knowledge to her colleagues in the county government and other extension officers, on various subjects she will have learnt, to ensure that agricultural policies are effective and achievable in their design, development, and implementation.

"I am grateful to AWARD for this opportunity and for developing the GRASP program," she enthuses. "I look forward to seeing smallholder female farmers become more assertive in agricultural value chains."

Maxmillah Malongo 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).