

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile

**Position**

Lecturer

**Institution**

Share World Open University

**Country**

Malawi

**Education**

MSc, Earth Futures, University of  
Glasgow (UK), 2021

**Mentor**

Miss. Shraddha Nair, Head of  
Policy Team, Young Women in  
Sustainable Development

**Area of Interest**

Empowering and supporting  
women to be leaders of climate-  
smart agriculture in their  
communities

**Grace Chilongo**

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"Women in Africa are really the pillar of the society, and are the most productive segment of society."*

Grace Chilongo has long been passionate about working on climate change. Growing up in a community where extreme weather events weakened the capacity of already fragile institutions, she saw first-hand their inability to respond to the impacts of extreme weather events such as drought and floods, which are common in her community. As a woman, she was also acutely aware of how her gender was more vulnerable to disaster-related impacts, especially regarding agriculture productivity.

Grace undertook an undergraduate degree in Environmental Sciences at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), before pursuing a Master's degree in Earth Futures at the University of Glasgow in the UK. These provided her with greater awareness and understanding about how climate change impacts – including increasing floods, droughts, and pests and diseases – negatively affect economic development in many countries, including

Malawi, where the majority of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihood.

Today, Grace's primary focus is helping to create a sustainable agricultural system by empowering and supporting women to be leaders of climate-smart agriculture in their communities. Growth in small-scale agriculture is two-to-four times more effective at reducing hunger and poverty than any other economic sector, and 70% of women farmers play a central role in food and nutrition production. Yet, despite this, significant barriers continue to be faced by women farmers. "They have limited access to and ownership of land, loans, and machinery compared to men," Grace reveals. "They also have the task of balancing paid work with unpaid home labor."

But it's not only within farming that women in the agricultural sector come up against gender-based barriers. Working as a university Lecturer, Grace

reveals that being a young woman in academia can be challenging – as colleagues tend to look down on her when it comes to decision-making. To overcome this, she always tries to focus on positive developments and demonstrates integrity through her work ethic, personal accountability, professional image, and ethical behavior in her role.

After being involved in a project to empower women in agriculture, Grace developed a zeal to help formulate agricultural policies that will address gender equality in agriculture. As a result, she joined YOUNGO – the official children and youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Conversation on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – in January 2022 to gain more experience.

Grace initially learned of the GRASP Fellowship from a former lecturer at LUANAR. As a Fellow, she is hopeful that the program will equip her with the skills and expertise required to work on gender-responsive policy to support women in sustainable climate-smart agriculture in Malawi. For instance, Grace aims to improve her public engagement and research communication skills, enabling her to communicate climate-smart agriculture policy effectively to her target audience.

She is also enthused about working with a mentor as part of the Fellowship. “I am looking forward to gaining skills in analyzing existing policies to identify where new policies are required,” Grace smiles. Doing so will also aid her in “identifying policy barriers or gaps between policies, and maintaining up-to-date knowledge of international best practices to be able to draft policy recommendations from a gender perspective, and weigh policy options and their trade-offs.”

Grace believes that for an individual to successfully design, review, and implement agricultural policy, it’s vital they possess good leadership and communication skills, and can accept constructive feedback – and is of the view that she can achieve these assets during her time in the program. “I would also love to develop the skills to establish effective feedback mechanisms between key policy stakeholders and front-line practitioners through the whole policy implementation process,” she notes.

*Grace Chilongo 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).*