

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile

**Position**

Lecturer

Institution

Lilongwe University of
Agriculture and Natural
Resources (LUANAR) – Natural
Resources College campus

Country

Malawi

Education

PhD, Environmental Science,
Ehime University (Japan), 2015

Mentor

Mr. Teddie Kamoto, Deputy
Director, Department of
Forestry, Ministry of Forestry
and Natural Resources

Area of Interest

Policy harmonization in Malawi's
environment and natural
resource management sector

Ponyadira Corner Kabwadza 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"Humans are a key element to either the sustenance or degradation of our environment. We ought to be good stewards of the environment and natural resources around us."

Ponyadira Corner Kabwadza's initial ambition was to follow in the footsteps of her older siblings and study accounting and business administration. However, after learning about the environment from her father (who was the Director of the government's Environmental Affairs Department) and achieving excellent O-level grades in sciences, her path quickly changed. After finishing secondary school, "I was selected to the University of Malawi (Bunda College of Agriculture)," explains Ponyadira. "Of the list of available programs, one particularly caught my attention: Environmental Science."

Ponyadira quickly fell in love with her course. "I realized that there is so much to learn from the broad and diverse field of environmental sciences." This recognition prompted her to pursue a Master's degree and a PhD in Environmental Science, too – most recently obtaining her PhD from Ehime University in Japan. "Graduating with a PhD in

Environmental Sciences at the age of 32 was no mean achievement!" she smiles.

Today, Ponyadira works as a Lecturer in environmental sciences at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) – Natural Resources College (NRC) campus – and believes it's important to educate young minds on the importance of preserving our natural ecosystems. "Humans are a key element to either the sustenance or degradation of our environment," she states. "We ought to be good stewards of the environment and natural resources around us."

When asked about challenges she has faced, Ponyadira notes the many balls she has to juggle. "Being a wife, mother, employee, researcher, and member of my immediate family and extended family – including other social and religious circles – has been a challenge," she laments. "I am required

to try and balance the requirements of my work and my personal life.”

Ponyadira first learned of the AWARD GRASP Fellowship from a LUANAR colleague, who shared an AWARD brochure with her.

Most of the courses that Ponyadira teaches at LUANAR incorporate some policy elements – and, as such, “conducting basic research and analysis of policies, especially in the sectors of agriculture, environment, and natural resources sectors is paramount.” In light of this, her research focus is on policy harmonization in Malawi’s environment and natural resource management (ENRM) sector. “It is evident that there are sectoral policies which, in some cases, are conflicting,” she reveals. “This leads to fragmented implementation and impacts the smallholder farmers who are beneficiaries in the ENRM sector. I plan to sample a few policies and critically review them. Once reviewed, possible areas that have conflict which may require harmonization will be highlighted.”

Ponyadira is especially excited to learn from her Mentor, Mr. Teddie Kamoto, who has vast experience in forest governance at the management level. “By engaging a mentor who is a seasoned policy expert, I will benefit from his guidance, knowledge, and experience in the area,” she enthuses. “His insights will provide vital information which will shape my focus area and provide relevance to the prevailing conditions in Malawi.”

In addition, she recognizes that networking opportunities that arise through the program will aid in enhancing her knowledge and improve the visibility of her work in the sector.

Ponyadira Corner Kabwadza 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).