

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile

**Position**

Senior Lecturer

Institution

Micheal Okpara University of
Agriculture Umudike, Abia State

Country

Nigeria

Education

PhD, Applied and Experimental
Nutrition, Michael Okpara
University of Agriculture
Umudike (Nigeria), 2012

Mentor

Dr. Bartholomew I. Brai, Federal
University Oye-Ekiti

Area of Interest

Adolescent nutrition

Patricia Ogechi Ukegbu 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"Adolescents are the future, and their nutritional status is critical for the wellbeing of society."

During Patricia Ukegbu's second year of studying for an undergraduate program in Food and Science Technology at the Institute of Management and Technology in Enugu, she took a nutrition course – and promptly fell in love with the subject. Her passion for agriculture and food ignited. Patricia soon realized that she wanted to dedicate her life to improving nutritional outcomes for others – particularly adolescents. In pursuit of this goal, she went on to complete a Master's degree in Applied Human Nutrition and a PhD in Applied and Experimental Nutrition, both at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike.

In addition to enjoying learning and working in the agriculture and nutrition fields, Patricia appreciates the critical role adolescents play in sustaining future generations. "They are the future, and their nutritional status is critical for the wellbeing of society," she states.

Patricia began working at Michael Okpara University in 2006 and has since moved up the ranks to become a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Human Nutrition and Dietetics and Deputy Dean of the College of Applied Food Sciences and Tourism. In addition to teaching her students, Patricia has also acted as South East Coordinator for the National Food Consumption and Micronutrient Survey in Nigeria – a study aimed at understanding the nutrition levels and eating habits of women of reproductive age (15-49 years), adolescent girls (10-14 years), and children (6-59 months). "I am happy to have contributed to this survey," she enthuses. "The preliminary findings have been published with relevant data to help policymakers know where to best focus their interventions that could help curb hunger and malnutrition, especially for vulnerable groups in the population."

While she has faced challenges – such as gender bias in leadership roles – throughout her career, Patricia

views them as learning experiences that strengthen her. To help overcome negative cultural beliefs in the workplace, she reveals, "I see my male colleagues as equal partners and treat them with respect, ensure I communicate effectively, and foster a team spirit of working together."

Patricia first learned about AWARD in 2008 and has previously applied twice for different Fellowships but without success. Not one to be deterred, when she learned about the GRASP program, she knew she had to apply. "I am so happy I was successful and selected this time around," she says.

Patricia's focus is on promoting evidence-based policy to improve and champion healthy diets among adolescents. "I believe the Fellowship will help me get a good 'grasp' of what gender responsive agriculture is about and how to promote a policy that addresses issues around that," she enthuses. "It will also help me develop my leadership skills and advocacy competence so I can empower adolescents with adequate knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their nutrition."

One aspect of the Fellowship Patricia is particularly thrilled about is having a mentor – and she counts herself lucky to have been paired with Dr. Bartholomew Brai. "I want to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with him that will help me in my activities," she asserts. "I want to gain the skills to be able to write better proposals, as well as gain more experience in leading and managing international multidisciplinary projects. I'm also looking forward to tapping into his expansive network so I can grow professionally."

Patricia Ogechi Ukegbu 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).