

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile

**Position**

Lecturer

Institution

Michael Okpara University of
Agriculture, Umudike Abia State

Country

Nigeria

Education

MSc, Economics, Human
Development, and Food
Security, Roma Tre University
(Italy), 2013

Mentor

Dr. Tulika Narayan, Vice
President, Climate Change,
Mathematica Policy Research

Area of Interest

Gender-based inequalities and
violence

Treasure Lilian

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

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"As a child, I had a small diary where I jotted my dreams and aspirations," remembers Treasure Lilian. "I recall writing that I would venture into agriculture and go around the world." Born into a farming family – where her father worked as a Researcher, her mother owned a small garden, and her uncle owned a commercial farm – Treasure's passion for agriculture began at a young age. Sadly, her father died when she was eight, after which Treasure began to appreciate agriculture in a new light. "Agriculture was our go-to source when dad was no longer there, as it provided financial and nutritional security for us during critical times," she shares. "Knowing that we had our cassava and maize stored and we could harvest and process at any point during the year was very soothing."

As a result of her early experiences, Treasure went on to fulfill her childhood dream of studying Agricultural Economics at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike Abia State. She graduated in 2009 to the pride of her community and in memory of

her father, and with a desire to help farmers in need of agricultural support.

Shortly after, Treasure began work at the African Agricultural Technologies Foundation in its regional office in Abuja, Nigeria. During this time, a colleague advised her to pursue scholarship opportunities to foster professional growth – and this soon took Treasure to Rome, where she studied for a Master's in Economics, Human Development, and Food Security at Roma Tre University in Italy, graduating in 2013. During her MSc, Treasure worked as an Intern for the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nation's (FAO) Office of Knowledge, Research, and Extension. However, after nine months at FAO, Treasure decided to return to Nigeria in 2015 to give back to her community – and accepted a position as an Agribusiness Lecturer at the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Abia State. As an academic researcher, Treasure was given an opportunity to work on a contract with at the National Root Crops

Research Institute (NRCRI) in 2015 working on a HarvestPlus Project, an international program aimed at improving nutrition by breeding staple crops that are rich in essential vitamins and minerals, such as iron and vitamin A.

Despite her impressive successes, Treasure's journey has had its challenges. "In the work environment, I have seen scenarios where opportunities come up and the man is preferred – despite your qualifications, track record, and passion," she reveals. "But it's not just about me – it's a problem many women face. In the field and in classrooms, it is the same. So it got me thinking about how we can break this barrier."

This awareness influenced her choosing of gender-based inequalities and violence as her policy focus. The GRASP Fellowship opportunity was shared with Treasure by a friend just a few days before the application deadline, who knew it would be "right up my alley." This is because she is currently working on a PhD in Development Studies, focusing on layered inequalities and gender-based violence, at the University of Greenwich, London – and believes the two pursuits will complement each other and help "fill in any research gaps."

Treasure also believes that the GRASP Fellowship will give her the impetus to create a policy project that can influence farmers – especially women – and change perspectives around gender equality in sub-Saharan Africa's food systems. "This is an area of increased urgency, and we need to act fast," she asserts. "I believe the Fellowship will help me become a confident researcher, skilled in leading transformative changes in the agrifood system through equity, empowerment, and effective rural pilots."

She is particularly enthused by the prospect of having a mentor during the GRASP Fellowship: someone with experience in her field and from whom she can learn and share ideas. "I am fascinated and excited about my Mentor Dr. Tulika Narayan and the Fellowship, as there is a sense of commitment and monitoring and that gives me confidence," she smiles. "From my Mentor, I hope to acquire the leadership skills I need to grow my career, learning from her experiences running multi-country projects and to emulate her exceptional acts of positive change."

Treasure Lilian 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).