

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Deputy Director – Development and Outreach

Institution

CABI Africa

Country

Uganda

Education

PhD, Agricultural Economics, Kenyatta University (Kenya), 2014

Mentor

Dr. Annet Abenakyo Mulema, Senior Program Officer, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Area of Interest

Food safety

Monica Kansiiime

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

“You can have food, but if it’s not safe, then you are no better than being without it.”

While up to 80% of African farmers are women, Dr. Monica Kansiiime was under no illusions that she faced more challenges breaking into a leadership career in agriculture than her male counterparts, who tend to be the key decision-makers. Monica believes that without a solid education, she could not have made the major steps forward in her career which means she is a key decision-maker in a field where many women still play ‘second fiddle’ to men – at least at the lower ends of the value chain.

The GRASP Fellowship recipient, who says she has overcome many barriers in an arena dominated by men, has been determined to succeed and has risen to the position of Deputy Director for CABI Africa. This is a post that she is relishing as a key decision-maker herself – helping millions of smallholder farmers increase their livelihoods and contribute towards greater food security. Her role involves working with national and international partners and donors to facilitate the identification, prioritization,

and delivery of new initiatives and assessment of outreach activities to ensure sustainable uptake and impact of CABI’s work in Africa.

After gaining Bachelor and Master’s degrees from Makerere University, her PhD from Kenyatta University helped her find agricultural interventions to help address community problems and social challenges impacting essential food production. “The biggest highlight of my agriculture career so far is attaining my PhD in agricultural economics in 2014,” she enthuses. “However, getting into the international agricultural research arena through my roles at the Economic and Social Policy Institute in Addis Ababa and later at CABI International was equally humbling.”

As Deputy Director for CABI Africa, Monica is at the cutting edge of developing and delivering strategies that can deliver impactful programming within Africa’s farming systems. This includes the global CABI-led PlantwisePlus program – part of which is increasing

the supply of safer food through enterprises driven by women and youth to meet growing consumer demand in rural, urban, and peri-urban markets.

A key concern for Monica is how women juggle their workloads alongside other responsibilities such as motherhood and being a caregiver in the community and family. Sometimes, women cannot pursue their preferred careers due to location – and they cannot relocate with their families, she says. Monica added, “Challenges linger around the family support system. You might not be able to study because you have no family support or allowance. However, you can progress with what little resources you have, and it adds value to move forward – as opposed to waiting for highly funded scholarships that are hard to come by.”

Monica has been interested in the AWARD Fellowship since its launch in 2008. When she saw the GRASP Fellowship call, she felt it was her time to apply. It required individuals interested in policy analysis, implementation, and monitoring – and she ticked all the boxes. She views the GRASP Fellowship as a timely opportunity to expand upon her experience in policy development and implementation. A key goal is to achieve a greater knowledge of policy analysis and integration and an understanding of the differences between each gender and socio-economic group.

“Some of the programs I am working on at CABI require a lot of policy engagement,” she said. This includes the PlantwisePlus program. The task involves engaging policymakers to address problems such as the sustainable management of crop pests and diseases in the field to better sanitary and phytosanitary conditions further along the food value chain.

Monica’s policy focus is food safety, as she feels this is a key challenge faced by food production and supply. “You can have food, but if it’s not safe, then you are not better than being without it,” she argues. “I will look at underlying causes of food safety issues and how these can be addressed. For instance, food handling in the field, the use of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals, and post-harvest food handling. Food safety issues affect humans but also livestock and the environment.”

Monica has conducted research to understand policy around food safety issues and learn which stakeholders address these. Input is multi-sectoral, ranging from bodies overseeing agriculture and health standards to industry operators and producers. This, she says, means it is critical to create a system where policy and analysis consider all these different players.

Another key benefit of the GRASP Fellowship is gaining a mentor. As a mentee, Monica looks forward to acquiring new knowledge and better tools to aid her in undertaking tasks. She also hopes to network with others and learn from those with greater experience in areas including policy analysis, policy implementation, and networking with policymakers. “In the induction sessions we’ve had, there have been many people from different fields, different countries, and areas of focus,” Monica said. “I look forward to learning from this diversity of Fellows.” Furthermore, as a mentor, she is enthused to share knowledge with younger individuals and give them the platform they need to express their concerns.

Monica Kansiime 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).