

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile

**Position**

Gender Specialist

**Institution**

TechnoServe Zambia

**Country**

Zambia

**Education**

MSc, Business Administration,  
University of Zambia (Zambia),  
2020

**Mentor**

Mr. Caesar Cheelo, Researcher,  
Zambia Institute for Policy  
Analysis and Research

**Area of Interest**

Improving women farmer's  
access to quality farming inputs,  
implements, and improved  
extension services

**Bwile Musonda**

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"I'm inquisitive and love working with people – learning their challenges and sharing new ideas and concepts."*

Bwile Musonda believed she was destined to be a medical doctor. However, life had something different in store for her, and she found herself in the School of Agriculture Sciences at the University of Zambia pursuing a bachelor's degree in Agriculture Economics – a move she has no regrets over. "Before university, I had never heard of agricultural economics!" she admits. Fortunately, she enjoyed pursuing this program. It was "a perfect combination for my love of social science and natural science. I'm inquisitive and love working with people – learning their challenges and sharing new ideas and concepts." Bwile obtained her BSc in Agriculture Economics in 2012 and later pursued a master's in Business Administration from the University of Zambia, graduating in 2020.

Today, Bwile works as a Gender Advisor for the non-profit organization TechnoServe Zambia – a role she excels in. Her work involves supporting small and growing food processing businesses in adopting gender-responsive business practices – creating

opportunities for both women and men to thrive in the food processing value chain.

Bwile reveals that she is particularly proud of her work in using a gender-responsive business practice tool, which allows her to 'diagnose' clients' businesses and determine how gender-responsive they are. From there, she supports the clients in developing gender action plans and implementing gender-responsive business practices.

Despite working as a gender advisor and helping people recognize and overcome gender-based constraints, Bwile continues to face them in her career. "Balancing my role as a wife, mother, and a professional has not always been easy," she says. "There have been times when I've had to pass up certain career opportunities because I was pregnant or had a small baby, and relocating was not feasible." She laments that while certain laws have been enacted to support women's empowerment, individual and

societal attitudes remain largely unchanged – and these must also evolve for genuine equality to be achieved.

Bwile first heard about the GRASP Fellowship through social media platforms and decided to apply as its gender focus aligned with her values and work. Her policy focus is on improving women smallholder farmers' access to quality inputs, implements, and extension services – and, in turn, improving their productivity, incomes, and quality of life.

“I think that smallholder women farmers are some of the most hard-working people, but their quality of life remains poor. They stay in poor quality houses which lack water and sanitation facilities, have limited access to health facilities, and are unable to send their children to good schools,” she notes. “I hope this Fellowship will give me the skills to develop, implement and advocate for gender-responsive agriculture policies to help me improve women's quality of life.

Bwile also believes that this Fellowship will offer a wealth of personal benefits. “I have learned about gender programming and gender policies largely through experience,” she reveals. “The Fellowship is a highlight of my career because it will enable me to methodically learn about gender-responsive agriculture policymaking process and this will qualify my expertise.”

Bwile is also excited to learn from her Mentor, Caesar Cheelo, and other experienced professionals during her time in the program. She is equally enthused about acting as a mentor herself. “When I started my career, I applied for jobs with the main focus on income – not career and passion,” she admits. As such, “my focus is to ensure that my mentee is focused on a career path and not money alone.”

*Bwile Musonda 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).*