

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile

**Position**

Principal Agricultural Research  
Officer

**Institution**

Zambia Agricultural Research  
Institute (ZARI)

**Country**

Zambia

**Education**

PhD, Crop Genetics and  
Breeding, Chinese Academy of  
Agricultural Sciences (China),  
2018

**Mentor**

Dr. Catherine Mungoma, former  
Director, Seed Control and  
Certification Institute

**Area of Interest**

Gender-responsive agricultural  
technologies, particularly in  
horticultural research

**Emelin Mwenda**

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"Through the GRASP Fellowship, I hope to grow professionally and become a confident scientist who can drive the gender agenda."*

Despite developing an interest in agriculture during her school days, Emelin Mwenda's path into the field didn't go quite as she'd planned – with her selected university closing before she was able to take up her course. "At the time of applying to university, a BSc in Agricultural Science was only being offered at the University of Zambia. However, they had to delay intake due to forced closure," she reveals. Not one to be deterred, Emelin looked for a Plan B. "Instead, I opted to apply for a BSc in Forestry at the Copperbelt University – the only program close to my desired course." Keen to develop her knowledge and understanding of the field, Emelin has since completed a Master's degree in Agronomy from the University of Zambia in 2010, and a PhD in Crop Genetics and Breeding from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences in 2018.

After finishing her undergraduate studies in 2001, Emelin worked for a start-up microfinance company before taking on a position with her current

employer, the Zambia Agricultural Research Institute (ZARI) under the Ministry of Agriculture, in 2005. With 10 research stations across the country, ZARI is the largest agricultural research entity in Zambia, providing technologies and knowledge that enhances household food security and equitable income-generating opportunities for the farming community and agricultural enterprises.

At ZARI, Emelin holds the position of Principal Agricultural Research Officer, heading up the horticultural research team. Her work involves devising and adapting crop and soil technologies to increase agricultural productivity and diversify production, including developing low-cost sustainable farming systems for all.

Between 2019 and 2022, Emelin was appointed as the Programs Officer for Mt. Makulu Research Station, the headquarters of ZARI – a tenure she calls a career highlight as she was the only female Programs Officer

on a 10-member team. Her responsibilities revolved around coordinating all of the station's research activities.

However, her career has not been without its challenges, and Emelin highlights the negative impact of the patriarchal system on women's empowerment. "In a male-dominated society such as ours, most programs are designed in a gender-insensitive manner, usually in favor of men," she laments. Such challenges are exacerbated when women's wifely and motherly duties are factored in, Emelin adds. "Balancing life as a career woman, wife, and mother is not easy. Fortunately, I have good multi-tasking skills, which help me manage competing demands."

Gender stereotypes, Emelin reveals, also make it a challenge for the few women who succeed in the science sector to influence policy. As such, much of her experience in the policy sphere has been more indirect, centered around the development of technologies such as breeding and the development of production packages for various crops designed to improve the agricultural sector – which, in turn, influences policy.

Building her experience in the policy arena is something Emelin would like to achieve as a GRASP Fellow – an opportunity she learned of through a colleague. "I am delighted to have been selected and I hope to gain knowledge on policy designing,

development, and analysis, and ultimately influence gender-responsive agricultural policies," she enthuses. "I also hope to grow professionally and become a confident scientist who can drive the gender agenda at ZARI."

Emelin's research focuses on influencing gender-responsive policies that recognize both the priorities and realities of men and women. Based on knowledge garnered during her 18-year-long career, she notes that "most research technologies designed for our farmers are not gender-responsive, as they do not recognize the specific needs and capabilities of women and men." Fruit tree production, for example, is not often a sector women choose, as inadequate irrigation facilities mean they must travel long distances to collect water. "However, having more drought-tolerant varieties and technologies to store and use available water efficiently would lessen this restriction," Emelin reveals. She hopes to establish connections through the GRASP network that will support her in achieving her vision.

*Emelin Mwenda 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).*