

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Senior Plant Health Inspector

Institution

Department of Plant Quarantine
and Phytosanitary Service,
Ministry of Agriculture

Country

Zambia

Education

MSc, Agriculture Science
(plant protection), University of
Queensland (Australia), 2018

Mentor

Ms. Peggy Mlewa, Director,
Department of Policy and
Planning, Ministry of Agriculture

Area of Interest

Improving access to local and
international agro-markets
for small- and medium-sized
enterprises, including women,
youth, and small-scale farmers

Justina Chivanga

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

“By providing women and youth with relevant information, education, and resources, they can enhance their capacity to access international agro-markets with ease.”

Justine Chivanga’s route to becoming a plant health inspector has been somewhat convoluted. She initially wanted to study Business Administration but went on to complete an undergraduate degree in Forestry at Copperbelt University in Zambia. It was only when Justina began working as a Plant Health Inspector for the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in the Department of Plant Quarantine and Phytosanitary Service (PQPS) that she discovered her true professional calling. She obtained an MSc in Agriculture Science (plant protection) at the University of Queensland in 2018.

Justina has been working as a Plant Health Inspector at PQPS since 2011, and was recently appointed as a Senior Plant Health Inspector; a position she believes has allowed her to make a positive contribution to the Department. PQPS is mandated to provide regulatory services that seek to prevent the introduction and spread of plant pests, while facilitating safe trade and movement of plants and plant products within and outside the country.

In terms of career highlights, Justina points to her appointment as Head of the Standards and Regulations Unit under PQPS. This position, she says, “has created a suitable platform for me to represent the Department, MoA, and Zambia at plant health and trade-related meetings at a local and international level” – a rare opportunity she does not take for granted.

However, rising to such a senior position in her field has posed challenges for Justina. “My work has been quite demanding,” she admits, “and it has been difficult for me sometimes to balance work, family, and professional studies.” Fortunately, she has found that her ability to delegate work to other team members has been very helpful in overcoming this challenge.

Justina learned of the GRASP Fellowship through a WhatsApp group. Moreover, recognizing the opportunities the Fellowship has to offer, she is thrilled to have been accepted onto this life-changing and

career-advancing program. “I look forward to being equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills that will enable me to appropriately suggest, design, and implement gender-responsive agricultural policies to improve the livelihoods of small-scale farmers,” she shares.

Her policy focus is derived from issues seen first-hand during the 14 years she has worked for the MoA. “My policy focus is aimed at improving access to local and international agro-markets for small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs (SMEs), including women, youth, and small-scale farmers,” she enthuses.

A key issue, Justina reveals, is the information gap among SMEs regarding agro-markets and cross-border trade. Although most of the application processes and services for agro-international trade are now online, Justina notes with concern that most SMEs are not technologically savvy. And she adds that a lack of resources and capacity to comply with phytosanitary measures and standards only exacerbates the challenges that women-owned firms face in cross-border trade.

“I believe the Fellowship will help me make a difference in the lives of smallholder farmers by equipping me with the necessary knowledge and skills that will enable me to ensure that the design and implementation of policies empower women and the youth,” she says. She further highlights how providing relevant information, education, and resources will enhance their capacity to access international agro-markets with less difficulty.

The mentorship aspect of the GRASP program is another element that Justina is particularly excited about. “As a mentee, I hope to be inspired and build my confidence on policy-related issues,” she shares. “And, as a mentor, I hope to encourage and inspire a younger colleague to identify and achieve her career goals.”

Justina Chivanga 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).