

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Senior Community
Development Officer

Institution

Kitwe City Council, Department
of Housing and Social Services

Country

Zambia

Education

MSc, Transformative Community
Development, Mulungushi
University (Zambia), 2018

Mentor

Mrs. Mangiza Chirwa Chongo,
Project Manager, Healthy Food
Africa Hivo's

Area of Interest

Promotion and enhanced
capacity building of local
communities in support of
alternative livelihood options

Mwaka Luguru

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"Having knowledge around gender-responsive policies, social inclusion, equity, equality, and policy formulation is important for empowering more young people and community members in understanding and appreciating the importance of gender issues."

After studying agricultural science throughout secondary school, Mwaka Luguru fell in love with the subject. "It was my favorite," she smiles. Upon moving into further education, she ensured agriculture continued to play a dominant role. "Even though I pursued an undergraduate degree in Development Studies at the Zambia Open University and a Master's in Transformative Community Development at the School of Agriculture at Zambia's Mulungushi University, my passion for agriculture pushed me to ensure that rural agricultural development, food security, gender, and climate change were the focus of my studies at both levels," says Mwaka.

Currently, Mwaka works as a Senior Community Development Officer for Kitwe City Council's Department of Housing and Social Services. Her work involves empowering communities with different skills for socioeconomic development. Her current position exposes her to the realities of policy and implementation via stakeholder engagements

and targeted research with partners such as Hivos (under the Food Safety Programme, Foodlab, and Sustainable Diets for all projects). While previously working at Lusaka City Council, she also interacted with various public entities and communities, through which she was able to influence agriculture and food security-related policy implementation. Mwaka was also a member of the social inclusion and gender mainstreaming technical working group under Millennium Challenge Account Zambia Project (MCAZ), which focused on developing inclusive policies to improve the reach and quality of water services.

In terms of career highlights, engaging with the Green Restoration Programme provided Mwaka with the opportunity to engage with key stakeholders – such as the Forestry Department and civil society actors (such as We-Forest and charcoal traders) – on climate change, and alternative livelihood options for people involved in the charcoal value chain. With this

background, Mwaka's policy focus is on promoting and enhancing local communities' capacity building in support of alternative livelihood options. The main goal is to provide alternative livelihoods for vulnerable groups, especially women, through diversified income sources. Using and understanding data demonstrating women's vulnerability to climate change is vital in achieving this, as doing so can help develop mitigation and adaptation interventions.

She views the GRASP Fellowship – particularly its mentor scheme – as a platform to gain more knowledge and skills on gender-responsive policies, social inclusion, equity, equality, and policy formulation and its effective implementation. "As a Community Development Officer, this knowledge is important for empowering more young people and community members in understanding and appreciating the importance of gender issues," she states.

Mwaka's ambitions as a GRASP Fellow don't end there. "I hope to broaden my networks to opportunities, information sharing, and partnerships," she enthuses. "I also hope to strengthen and build confidence in my research, presentation, and writing skills to support a community-based participatory approach to research proposals for community empowerment."

At a community level, Mwaka notes that the biggest challenge is women's "rather disappointing" unwillingness to get involved in women-only empowerment programs, such as cooperatives. "I have observed that women, especially vulnerable ones, are unwilling to participate in decision-making unless men are involved," she states.

Mwaka believes the patriarchal system is so embedded in women's cultural orientation that they feel inferior to engage in empowerment activities independently. She hopes the Fellowship will empower her with knowledge and skills to engage women to understand the barriers and find ways to help overcome this reluctance.

Mwaka Luguru 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).