

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile



#### Position

Rural Development Policy  
Advisor

#### Institution

Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit  
(GIZ)

#### Country

Zambia

#### Education

PhD, Plant Breeding and  
Technology, Makerere University  
(Uganda), 2020

#### Mentor

Dr. Rhoda Mofya Mukuka,  
Senior Research Fellow, Indaba  
Agricultural Policy Research  
Institute (IAPRI)

#### Area of Interest

Enhanced women's participation  
in leadership positions at  
agricultural research institutions

### Natasha Mwila

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"Women's participation in leadership positions is low, especially in agricultural research institutions. We need to identify where opportunities lie for them."*

Growing up in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia, achieving a doctoral degree in agriculture was a pipedream for Natasha Mwila. "People were too pre-occupied with mining activities; agriculture was always a distant idea for most miners and their families," she muses. "There was very little agricultural activity to stimulate one in becoming a professional agriculturalist."

However, the privatization of the mines and the financial hardships that followed soon altered Natasha's career options. With limited income, her parents began engaging in agricultural-related activities, such as cultivating crops and chicken rearing for income and food, exposing her to the sector's possibilities. Furthermore, she adds, "I got to start liking and thinking about agriculture at secondary school."

When it came to applying for university, Natasha's mind was set. "I decided to go into agricultural

science with the hope that, one day, I would be a voice on how agriculture is an important sector to support people's livelihoods," she recalls. After several years of hard studying, she completed her undergraduate degree in Plant Science at the University of Zambia – and, in 2020, she went on to obtain a PhD in Plant Breeding and Technology from Makerere University in Uganda.

Today, Natasha works as a Rural Development Policy Advisor for Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). There, her work involves applying research results to real-life situations and using her plant breeding skills to support improved seed varieties. She evaluates current policies linked to various components of rural development in Zambia and develops strategies on how best to address them. A career highlight so far, she notes, has been "securing two post-doctoral research projects in advancing the improvement of legumes in the country, as well as their use."

Natasha's path to success has faced obstacles, particularly regarding gender. "The challenge for women is real. I remember when I started work, I was mocked. Men would tell me that a woman could not be a plant breeder, citing motherly and wifely duties as hindrances," she reveals. While these reactions only served to spur her on and prove the naysayers wrong, Natasha notes that this is another issue in itself. "Women are expected to work extra hard to prove a point beyond what is expected from men," she laments.

Natasha heard about the GRASP Fellowship via friends and through the AWARD website and decided it was the right time to apply. As an Agricultural, Rural Development Policy Advisor for GIZ, she appreciates the role that the GRASP Fellowship will play in her career. "I believe this provides a great platform for my career growth, as well as the use of my skills and knowledge," she asserts. "The Fellowship comes as I take on a new role, moving from technical to rural development policy advisory," she shares. "I hope it will equip me with the necessary skills to successfully implement my role and provide guidance for professional prospects and opportunities."

Her policy focus is derived from her own experiences. "My chosen policy sphere is enhanced women's participation in leadership positions at agricultural research institutions," she reveals. "The objective is to evaluate current policy strengths and weaknesses in relation to women's participation in leadership roles and provide optimum solutions to address identified gaps." Natasha believes that by accessing the networks made available through GRASP, she will be able to identify opportunities for increasing women's participation at agricultural research institutions – and also ensure women are recognized in key leadership positions.

In addition to helping other women through her work as a Fellow, Natasha is looking forward to engaging with her experienced Mentor to learn more about Zambian agricultural systems, policies, and women's participation. Being a mentee, Natasha notes, will also aid "my understanding of how to support the next cohorts and mentor others in this country and beyond."

*Natasha Mwila 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).*