

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile

**Position**

Urban Food Systems Expert

**Institution**

Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the United  
Nations (FAO)

**Country**

Kenya

**Education**

MSc, Agriculture and Applied  
Economics, Egerton University  
(Kenya), 2012

**Mentor**

Dr. Margaret Ngunjiri, Gender  
Expert, Sabio Policy Consulting

**Area of Interest**

Food recovery initiatives to  
reduce food waste in urban  
areas

**Rebeccah Wanjiru**

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"It troubles me that we throw away perfectly good food while other people are going hungry."*

Growing up in an urban setting, Rebeccah Wanjiru had little interest in agriculture – only experiencing rural life during visits to her grandmother. As she got older, Rebeccah noticed that whenever her grandmother visited, she always brought a basket full of fresh farm produce, such as arrowroots, sweet potatoes, and fruits. She wondered how one woman – a widow – managed to produce so much to feed her extended family in the village and have some left to share with others.

Halfway through high school, Rebeccah was given the option of taking agriculture or business classes. Curious to understand what really goes into farming and inspired by her grandmother's work, she selected agriculture. From the first time she stepped onto the school farm plots, she never looked back. "I got this thrill imagining my grandmother on the farm and all the work she put in to feed us," Rebeccah smiles. "I knew then that agriculture was the career I wanted to pursue."

In the pursuit of her newfound passion, she studied for an undergraduate degree in Agriculture and Economics at Egerton University, after which she enrolled for a Master's in Agriculture and Applied Economics at the same institution. As part of the course, Rebeccah spent three months at Pretoria University in South Africa, where she took the opportunity to learn more about policies and how they affect ordinary farmers. "We analyzed agriculture and trade policies and their impacts on the community and growth of a country," she recalls.

Since graduating in 2012, Rebeccah has held various positions in agriculture research, including data analysis and community training. She currently works as an Urban Food Systems Expert with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). In this role, she collaborates with local governments and communities to develop food system policies and implement projects that promote food and nutrition security, minimize negative environmental impacts,

and support small businesses to run profitable enterprises.

For instance, “I worked with the Nairobi County Government to offer technical support in drafting a food system strategy,” Rebecca explains. “This was designed to address urban food system challenges that contribute to food insecurity, such as food price hikes, high food demand due to increased population, low production, food waste, and unemployment – and then develop and recommend actions to address these challenges.”

In addition to working with high-level actors, Rebecca believes it’s important to collaborate closely with those the policies are designed for. “I am very passionate about urban food systems,” she asserts. “My job not only involves the high-level policy work but also engagement with communities – especially on livelihood improvement for women and youth.”

Another issue that Rebecca is keenly focused on is food waste. “It troubles me that we throw away perfectly good food while others are going hungry. Studies show that over 50% of Nairobi city dwellers are food insecure,” she laments. As such, “one intervention I am keen to pursue is implementing a food recovery mechanism to redistribute surplus food to those who are food insecure.”

Rebecca first learned about the GRASP Fellowship through a colleague, and she is positive about the pivotal role it will play in advancing her career. “The challenge in Kenya is that we have many policies, but we are not good at implementing them,” she noted. “I aim to discuss this with my peers at GRASP and consider how to address it.”

Her policy focus is on devising food recovery initiatives to reduce food waste in urban areas. She hopes that this will have a positive impact on improving food and nutrition security in urban areas. Rebecca shares that she is looking forward to gaining leadership skills from the Fellowship training and hopes she will be afforded opportunities to interact with different industry players within the food system. These interactions will aid in understanding what it takes to negotiate with the government and other actors in designing and implementing policies.

Alongside working with her mentor, Rebecca is also excited to interact with other women scientists in the program. “I hope that, during the Fellowship and beyond, we will be able to leverage each other’s strengths, skills, experiences, and knowledge.”

*Rebecca Wanjiru 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).*