

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Agribusiness Development
Officer

Institution

Ministry of Agriculture,
Livestock, Fisheries and
Cooperatives, Meru County
Government

Country

Kenya

Education

PhD, Agriculture Economics,
Justus Liebig University
(Germany), 2017

Mentor

Dr. Esther Kanduma, Senior
Lecturer, University of Nairobi

Research Area

Integrating gender issues in
smallholder agricultural value
chains to reduce inequalities,
improve food and nutrition
security, and increase
household incomes

Scholastica Musyimi 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I am proud to help farmers achieve food and nutrition security and increase household incomes, while also bringing more women and youth into the agriculture sector."

Scholastica Musyimi has always been a numbers girl, developing a passion for mathematics as soon as she started school. So, when she received a letter from the University of Nairobi offering her a place on their General Agriculture course, she was taken off guard. Scholastica decided to accept the place and try to change to a course in either mathematics, finance, law, engineering, or medicine upon enrolling. But it wasn't to be, and she found herself studying agriculture – a topic she had never considered.

Fortunately, Scholastica quickly excelled in the subject and found she loved interacting with farmers during her course fieldwork. "If I had to apply to university again with the knowledge I now have, I would pick a career in agriculture every time because of how many lives I have seen changed by the sector," she states enthusiastically.

After completing her undergraduate degree in 2006, Scholastica secured a job with World Vision International, first as an Assistant Agricultural Extension Officer and then as an Agricultural Economist, training farmers on farming for business and establishing agricultural enterprises. However, after one year with the organization, she could not resist the urge to continue her studies in the field – and was awarded a scholarship at the University of Nairobi to pursue a Master's degree in Agricultural Resource Management.

Following her Master's studies, from 2007 to 2009, Scholastica spotted a job advertisement from the Ministry of Agriculture and decided to apply – from which she was employed as a Divisional Agricultural Extension Officer in Meru region of eastern Kenya. During her first months in this role, she was exposed to the realities of patriarchal attitudes within agriculture. Meru North, for example, predominantly grows khat

(chewed like tobacco, which produces a stimulant-like effect) as a cash crop – and women who work in the fields growing the crop are often not allowed to enjoy the proceeds. She also found herself affected. “I would be looked down upon by male farmers who believe that women are not allowed to be in leadership positions,” she recalls.

Scholastica returned to education in 2013, having successfully been granted another scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service to study for a PhD in Agriculture Economics at Justus Liebig University Giessen. After completing this in 2017, she returned to Kenya, where she was re-employed at Meru County Government, and still works today in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, and Cooperatives.

In her current role as Agribusiness Development Officer, Scholastica is responsible for coordinating various agribusiness affairs, such as devising policies, policy briefs, bills, and strategies, some of which are presented to the county’s cabinet. In all of these, she strives to incorporate elements of women empowerment – as driven by her sights and experiences, Scholastica is an avid promotor of gender equality in the agriculture sector.

For example, in an agri-nutrition initiative promoting the uptake of a highly nutritious bean variety, she ensured that a certain percentage of women were involved. “It is one of the ways we want to ensure that women have crops they can call their own, where they are benefitting from, in cultivation, feeding their families, and accessing markets,” she noted.

Scholastica is excited to have been named a GRASP Fellow. She is particularly looking forward to enhancing her leadership and communication skills, and learning from her mentor and other Fellows so she can progress her work around gender policy during the program and beyond. “I hope there will be platforms and groups where we can share experiences, lessons learned, and opportunities.”

Scholastica’s policy focus is on bringing gender issues to the forefront of smallholder agricultural activities, policies, and strategies. “Achieving this will help reduce gender inequalities, promote food and nutrition security, and increase household incomes,” she notes.

Ultimately, she shares, “I want to learn how to write winning proposals and grants. I also want to discuss with others how to move from formulating policies to implementing them – as this has been quite a challenge.”

Scholastica Musyimi 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).