

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile

**Position**

Director of Agriculture,  
Environment, and Natural  
Resources

**Institution**

Nkhata-Bay District Council

**Country**

Malawi

**Education**

PhD, Transformative Community  
Development, Mzuzu University  
(Malawi), 2022

**Mentor**

Dr. Malachi Mkochi, Principal  
Agriculture Gender Roles  
Support Services, Ministry of  
Agriculture

**Area of Interest**

Promoting equal participation  
of men and women in farm  
decision-making processes

**Beatrice Mbakaya**

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"I see the GRASP Fellowship as a great opportunity for me to energize myself to continue pushing for my dream of setting up a non-governmental organization."*

As one of eight children, Beatrice Mbakaya's career aspirations came about after hearing about her elder brother's pursuits as an Agriculture Extension Officer. When she and her siblings visited him during the holidays, he would tell them about the benefits of the role – which prompted Beatrice (along with four other family members) to follow the same route and study for a degree in Agriculture Sciences at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR).

Upon completion of her studies in 2002, Beatrice – like her brother – was offered employment at the Ministry of Agriculture. Working in the Department of Agriculture Extension Services, her initial role involved interpreting policies and formulating strategies for their implementation. For example, in 2000, Malawi began to promote demand-driven extension services, where farmers were encouraged to work together and, as a group, demand extension services. This required forming different extension structures at both farmer and service provider levels.

Beatrice has risen through the ranks to her current position of Director of Agriculture, Environment, and Natural Resources at Nkhata-Bay District Council. Today, she primarily offers policy guidance on activities that affect the forestry, agriculture, environment, irrigation, water, and mining sectors.

Despite this success, Beatrice's career has not been without its challenges. She acknowledges that an ongoing test has been striking a balance between home – including caring for her 13-year-old twin children – and the extensive traveling required for her professional roles, including field supervision. Beatrice also studied for both her Master's degree in Rural Development and Extension from LUANAR and her PhD in Transformative Community Development from Mzuzu University in Malawi while working. However, she says that having the determination to follow her dreams, and support from her husband, have been key.

Beatrice first heard about the AWARD GRASP Fellowship through a colleague that was previously selected for an AWARD program. “I saw the Fellowship as a means to empower me as I drive towards setting up my own non-government organization (NGO), which will promote women and youth participation in farm decision-making,” Beatrice reveals. She is aware that this necessitates input from experienced gender experts and that the processes involved in registering and the various other tasks are a tall order.

Beatrice is also looking forward to acquiring new knowledge and skills from her mentor and learning from and collaborating with other Fellows. “My dream is to use my experience to benefit youth and women involved in agriculture,” she adds. Beatrice’s research focus is on promoting active youth and women participation in high-value agri-enterprises.

“Ensuring that women and youth are engaged in agro-processing of their farm produce through value addition, labeling, and packaging will help them fetch better prices and increase the shelf life of products,” Beatrice explains. She also plans to provide farmers with marketing skills, including the importance of aggregating their products and bargaining, and how to reach new markets online using their mobile devices.

*Beatrice Mbakaya 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).*