

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Principal Economist

Institution

Ministry of Agriculture

Country

Malawi

Education

PhD, Agriculture Resource Economics, Norwegian University of Life Sciences (Norway), 2021

Mentor

Associate Professor, Goodness C. Aye, Senior Lecture and Head of Department of Agricultural Economics, Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi

Area of Interest

Enhancing equitable ownership of, access to, and sustainable use of agricultural land to improve food systems in Africa

Sarah Ephrida Tione

2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I believe research should be done to inform policy. This is a synergy that is key for development."

"I remember looking at this book titled 'Economics' on the bookshelf at home, which my dad – who worked with the Ministry of Finance – would read often," recalls Sarah Ephrida Tione. "This inspired me to be like him and that was the starting point of my career in agriculture marketing and resource economics."

Pursuing her dream to follow in her father's footsteps meant applying to university – after which Sarah was offered a place at the University of Malawi – Bunda College (now called Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources) to study for an undergraduate degree in Agriculture. Once there, "I worked hard to get the required grades to be offered a place in the Agriculture Economics program," she states.

Since then, Sarah has undertaken a PhD in Resource Economics at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. This is an achievement in itself, but she

is particularly proud of the published research that came about as a result of her studies. "To get your work through a peer review requires discipline, patience, and understanding," she states. "Every review is a learning process."

After graduating with a Master's degree in Agriculture and Applied Economics from the University of Malawi – Bunda College in 2010, Sarah joined the Ministry of Agriculture's planning department as an Economist – and has continued working there since, making her way through the ranks. "My role involves working on policies, programs, and projects," she says. For instance, "in 2015/2016, I was part of a team that developed the first overarching National Agriculture Policy for Malawi. I believe research should be done to inform policy. This is a synergy that is key for development."

She reveals that, like many women, she has faced gender-related barriers and stereotypes throughout

her career. “Some people think that being a woman means you cannot deliver on some assignments.” However, a supportive upbringing helped Sarah develop the confidence to push back against such hurdles. “My mom, a teacher by profession, would always say that being a girl is not a reason to fail on anything that involves using your brain, as there is no brain difference between girls and boys,” she smiles. “So, I always focus on the task and not the obstacles.”

Sarah first heard about the AWARD GRASP Fellowship through a colleague and is excited to have been awarded a spot in the program. “Through this Fellowship, I hope to strengthen my ability to prioritize policy options that are inclusive and promote the needs of Malawians,” she shares.

Her policy focus is on enhancing equitable ownership of, access to, and sustainable use of agricultural land to improve food systems in Africa. Sarah is confident that, by focusing on gender-inclusive policy design, implementation, and review, she will be able to learn the analytical research skills that are key for policy analysis in food systems and agriculture.

One element of the Fellowship involves mentoring others, and Sarah is especially excited about the opportunity. “I plan to use my mentoring skills to mentor upcoming women agricultural economists who can also take up the policy challenge in Malawi,” she enthuses.

But Sarah’s goals for influencing others extend even further. She is hopeful that, following the GRASP Fellowship, she will be able to inspire others at policy roundtables – particularly on “issues of prioritization, resource mobilization, and efficient policy implementation both in Malawi and across Africa. I also hope to learn the different local contexts that support gender-responsive policies across African countries and share experiences from Malawi with other GRASP Fellows.”

Sarah Ephrida Tione 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).