

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile



#### Position

Head of Programs and Policy

#### Institution

Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET)

#### Country

Malawi

#### Education

MSc, Global Public Health Nutrition, University of Westminster (UK), 2017

#### Mentor

Mrs. Beatrice Makwenda, Southern African Programme Coordinator, TrustAfrica

#### Area of Interest

Agro-ecology and sustainable diets

### Tendai Museka Saidi 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"When practiced properly, agro-ecology provides diversified ecosystems which become the source of diverse and rich diets, improving health outcomes for the most vulnerable, including women and children."*

Despite obtaining a nutrition-focused undergraduate and Master's degree, Tendai Museka Saidi only became heavily involved in the agricultural sector two years ago – but is already making a big impact through her efforts in the policy arena. "It was when I was doing my Master's that I took an interest in agriculture," Tendai reveals. Her course had an element that was strongly rooted in sustainable food systems, which quickly piqued her interest. "I learned about the need for interventions to ensure our food systems are more sustainable and how food systems can solve the nutrition challenges facing the country."

After becoming more focused on the agriculture sector, Tendai has been actively involved in policy analysis and advocacy. A few years after graduating, in 2021, she began working at the Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET), where she is currently the Head of Programs and Policy. In this position, Tendai has been key in strengthening the organization's role in scaling up Malawi's food systems.

Since joining CISANET, one of Tendai's primary goals has been to address barriers in food systems as they influence nutrition. Society is currently facing the triple burden of malnutrition: "undernutrition, in terms of wasting or underweight; hidden hunger, which is micro-nutrient deficiencies; and overweight or obesity," Tendai explains. "The food systems approach is a holistic approach of looking at some of the nutritional challenges we face as a country. Interestingly, while over 70% of women are involved in farming activities, they rarely have access to technologies and information necessary to transform these food systems."

Tendai reveals that one of the biggest challenges in her day-to-day work is the fact that the nutrition profession is often overlooked across all sectors. "I have always felt the profession is undermined, and this could be in part because nutrition is often considered a woman's issue," she states. "Nutritionists are often not invited to the decision-making table, but they

need to be at the forefront of making sure policies incorporate good nutrition as a key outcome." As such, Tendai has developed a thick skin and works hard to fight against gender imbalance in the policy space.

After learning about the AWARD GRASP Fellowship from a colleague at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Tendai immediately recognized it as an opportunity to enhance her policy analysis skills and learn how she can better influence others. Tendai's research is centered on agroecology and sustainable diets. "This is because agroecology looks at a farming system that is rooted in the caring of the environment," she explains. "It offers an opportunity for our soils to heal, building the diversity they have lost and making them more fertile. When practiced properly, agroecology also provides diversified ecosystems which become the source of diverse and rich diets, improving health outcomes for the most vulnerable, including women and children." She hopes that agroecology is the future for sustainable food systems and believes it can help end Malawi's triple burden of malnutrition.

By participating in the GRASP Fellowship, Tendai also hopes to gain and enhance her skills in strategic thinking, problem-solving, and communication. "In this ever-changing world, where new challenges are constantly emerging, there is a need for young women who think strategically towards achieving set goals," she asserts. "Problem-solving becomes a soft skill necessary for future leaders to navigate some of the world's challenges and people. I hope to emerge from the program a better leader."

The mentorship aspect of GRASP also appeals to Tendai. "I hope to receive coaching and guidance in the policymaking and advocacy space from a seasoned professional," she says. "I'd also like to transfer similar skills to a policy junior."

*Tendai Museka Saidi 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).*