

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile



#### Position

Assistant Chief Land Resource Officer

#### Institution

Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

#### Country

Nigeria

#### Education

MSc, Soil and Water Conservation, University of Abuja (Nigeria), 2021

#### Mentor

Dr. Jumoke Ogunniyi, Lecturer, Department of Soil Science, University of Abuja

#### Area of Interest

Post-harvest handling and storage

### Iyabode Roshidat Oyinlola 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"If women are empowered, then their community and the nation is empowered."*

Iyabode Roshidat's journey into agriculture was not something she had planned. "My foray into agriculture was accidental. If someone had told me I would end up in agriculture, I would have laughed it off as a lie!" she laughs. "Although I worked on the farm with my father and had some experience with farming, I aspired to be a pharmacist, so I could establish my own business and be independent." However, after falling short of the required score on the Nigerian University entrance examination, an uncle suggested that Iyabode consider studying agricultural economics, pointing out its relevance in various industries. This advice led her to a career in agriculture, which she has now come to excel in and is deeply committed to.

After graduating from Olabisi Onabanjo University with a degree in Agricultural Economics, "I joined the Nigerian Civil Service and was assigned to the Department of Agricultural Land and Climate Change Management Services," Iyabode recalls. However,

she realized that, in order to be more effective in her role, further education was required – "so I pursued a Master's degree in Soil and Water Conservation," Iyabode shares. "This really enhanced my knowledge and interest in the field." Today, she works as a Principal Land Resources Officer at the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) in Nigeria – although plans to further develop her knowledge and skillset by pursuing a PhD in Soil Fertility Systems.

Iyabode strongly believes that empowering women in the agriculture field can have a positive ripple effect on communities and the nation as a whole. "When farmers strive to produce food, it is painful to watch those items go bad due to limited access to information, poor handling, and lack of storage," she states. "These factors mostly affect women, whose livelihoods and income for their children are tied to their agricultural work."

A highlight of lyabode's career at FMARD is the opportunity to empower women farmers by subsidizing farm inputs through an e-wallet platform. As a member of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) team in the Ministry, lyabode and her colleagues secured a package from the government that helps women farmers increase their income through improved climate-smart practices. This, in turn, boosts the rural economy. "This has enabled women to send their children who have dropped out of school back to school," she says, enthused about this program's positive impact.

lyabode's interest in policy, specifically land reform, was sparked when she attended training by Sahel Consulting on 'Bridging the Gender Gap by Including Women in Agriculture'. During this, participants assessed the issue of land acquisition and how traditional beliefs and other socio-cultural practices often deny land ownership to women. "People ask why women should own land, and this is a prevalent issue across Nigeria," lyabode states. "I was interested in this issue because I believed it needed to change."

Through her role at FMARD, lyabode has been taking steps to address the prevailing situation. Her department is responsible for clearing land for farmers, and due to her role, lyabode is able to negotiate for larger portions to be allocated to women in the community. However, the success of these efforts has been hindered by challenges such as bureaucracy and poor policy implementation.

lyabode was excited to have been informed of the GRASP Fellowship program by her MSc supervisor, due to her passion for agriculture and gender equality. She sees the Fellowship as a way to expand her knowledge around policy, build her leadership and communication skills, and connect with others working on similar challenges in Africa. "Land reform will take a long time to achieve," she acknowledges, "but we can make a more immediate impact through work on post-harvest handling and storage." As such, she hopes that, through the Fellowship, she will learn more about resources such as cooling systems and training on how to preserve and add value to their products, which can empower women, improve their livelihoods, and contribute to Nigeria's GDP.

In addition to enhancing her awareness and understanding of policy, lyabode hopes the Fellowship will help her stand out among women in agriculture and turn her research into practical applications. She is also excited about the mentorship aspect of the program, as she has long admired her Mentor, Dr. Jumoke Ogunniyi. "I hope to learn from her knowledge, research orientation, competency, skills, and experience," she says enthusiastically.

*lyabode Roshidat Oyinlola 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).*