

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile

**Position**

Principal Fisheries Officer

Institution

Ministry of Agriculture, Ogun State

Country

Nigeria

Education

PhD, Fish Nutrition, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (Nigeria), 2019

Mentor

Prof. Taofik Akinyemi Shittu,
Professor, Federal University of
Agriculture, Abeokuta

Area of Interest

Fisheries marketing for women farmers

Sherifat Ibidunni Adegbesan 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"Fish farmers complain that their harvests are purchased at low prices, so I will learn how to regulate, monitor, and control the prices of fish products."

Sherifat Adegbesan speaks with infectious enthusiasm and passion about working in agriculture – a journey that began when she decided to study Applied Zoology at Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. "As I embarked on my tertiary academic journey, I came across an opportunity to study Applied Zoology – a subject previously unknown to me," she reveals. "I decided to take the chance and pursue it. As I delved deeper, I was captivated by its complexity, and my interest only grew. By my third year, my passion for fisheries and aquaculture had been ignited."

After specializing in fisheries and aquaculture, Sherifat decided to pursue her newfound passion further – and, in 2019, earned a PhD in Fish Nutrition from the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), in Nigeria. As part of her doctorate research, Sherifat explored phytochemicals and how plants like Aloe vera and ginger can be used in fish feeds to promote growth and prevent diseases.

Upon graduating from her undergraduate studies in 2011, Sherifat secured a job with the Ministry of Agriculture in Ogun State – where she still works. In her current position as a Principal Fisheries Officer, she is responsible for enforcing, regulating, monitoring, and evaluating government fisheries policies.

She notes that a career highlight includes being involved in the state-level implementation of the Growth Enhancement Scheme – a federal government program that gives women and young people the tools they need to improve their lives and communities through farming. For instance, in the fishing industry, the program helps farmers obtain elements such as fingerlings and fish feed, while experts like Sherifat offer them advice and support. "I realized that some women lacked the drive to move things along and needed someone to come in and encourage them," she explains. "So I took it as a challenge to motivate the women to join the program. I also became the Secretary of the Fisheries

Society of Nigeria to provide fish farming business training to farmers.”

Despite her many career achievements, including 12 publications in national and international journals, Sherifat’s journey has not always been easy. “One of the biggest challenges I have faced as a woman in agriculture has been gaining recognition and respect as an expert,” she reveals. “It can take time for others to believe in my abilities. Despite this, I have taken on the challenge and work to prove myself by delivering quality results on assigned tasks.”

Sherifat learned about the GRASP Fellowship through a website that curates opportunities for Africans. She made sure she took the time to work on her application, as she recognized the gravitas of the program. “It is an opportunity to learn and showcase my skills, knowledge, and talent in this profession,” she enthuses. Her focus policy area is fisheries marketing – the activities and strategies used to promote, sell, and distribute fish and seafood products – “as it is an area dominated by women,” she states. “I hope my experience will enable me to develop a gender-focused policy that encourages women fish farmers. Farmers, especially the women, complain that their harvests are purchased at low prices, so I will learn how to regulate, monitor, and control the prices of fish products.”

Sherifat is particularly excited about the mentorship aspect of the program. “My mentoring process with Prof. Taofik Akinyemi Shittu will enable me to achieve significant success in fisheries marketing,” she reveals. “Fisheries marketing entails all processes in producing fish products, from farmers to the final consumers. Hence, my expertise in the field of fish production, and his expertise in the area of value addition (food processing and technology), will propel us to success in all relevant areas.” She is also thrilled to have the chance to mentor younger colleagues.

Ultimately, smiles Sherifat, “I am confident that the Fellowship will help me become a policy expert and gain recognition. I aspire to be an international policy expert in the United Nations and ultimately be Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) or the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), as their major roles are to improve food security and fund agricultural production. As an expert in the field of fish food production, my aim is to ensure fish is turned into wealth through robust marketing strategies, especially for women farmers who invest the proceeds in welfare of their wards. This will also help them generate cash flow for continuous agricultural production.”

Sherifat Ibidunni Adegbesan 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).