

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile

**Position**

Country Director

Institution

Rainforest Alliance

Country

Uganda

Education

MSc, Governance, Policy, and
Political Economy, ISS Erasmus
University (Netherlands), 2013

Mentor

Ms. Elizabeth Nsimadala,
President, East African Farmers
Federation

Area of Interest

Women and youth participation
in policy processes

Rashida Nakabuga 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I have seen a big gap for women and youth to participate in policy discussions, and it is where I derive my zeal to work."

Today, when Rashida Nakabuga speaks about working with smallholder farmers, you'd be forgiven for thinking she's been involved in the sector all her life. However, growing up, she believed a career in agriculture was for the old – and only began working in the industry a decade ago after initially working as a broadcast and print media journalist after graduating. In her current role as Country Director at Rainforest Alliance in Uganda, Rashida leads the implementation of the Rainforest Alliance certification program, along with overseeing other interventions in Burundi and Rwanda. As well as training and supporting certified coffee, cocoa, and tea farmers, "I also participate in multi-stakeholder platform discussions to push for policies that support sustainable production and Rainforest Alliance certification," she reveals.

One of Rashida's biggest accomplishments to date is steering smallholder farmer participation in the coffee policymaking process and expanding the Rainforest Alliance certification program, which

has enhanced market access for farmers. "At the international market, coffee is sold expensively, yet the amount smallholder farmers make is little," Rashida reveals, "and this is a factor that has driven me. One of my highlights was steering and working towards developing the National Coffee Policy that the government enacted into law a few years ago. It wasn't a solo effort to ensure the policy was developed, but I supported the research for greater smallholder farmer participation in this policy space."

Rashida is also focused on reducing gender discrepancies within agriculture – particularly in the policy arena. "I have seen a big gap for women and youth to participate in such discussions, and it is where I derive my zeal to work," she explains. As such, she is passionately involved in the International Women in Coffee platform, and actively spearheads and champions the equitable participation of young girls in policy spaces.

“There are lots of opportunities for women in the country, but sometimes their role in society is quite limiting,” Rashida states. “When I worked with smallholder farmers and looked for business managers to support communities in training, organizational growth, and marketing, I fought for a more equal share for women and men to take on these roles. The result was about 35% women to 65% men.”

Rashida learned of the GRASP Fellowship from one of her work colleagues and, upon further reading, was particularly drawn by the prospect of having a mentor to help her grow and review her work. The opportunity to mentor younger women also holds great appeal – although she remains conscious of keeping things balanced. “I intend to work with young girls while also creating room for young boys to participate in different processes to find different opportunities,” she reveals.

Following the launch of the Fellowship, she states that meeting a variety of people has also been a highlight. “The induction sessions were interesting. There are many people from different countries with varying expertise. I hope the two-year program will be an enriching journey in terms of looking at where I am and where I want to grow my career,” she enthuses. “We learn a lot through exchanges of other people’s lessons, but also by zooming in on issues across the country – especially the roles of women and youth in decision-making processes.”

Studying governance, policy, and political economy at university equipped Rashida with essential skills and knowledge for her work – and she hopes the GRASP Fellowship will allow these to develop further, particularly in relation to gender.

Her selected policy focus involves working with a pool of women and youth to develop policy engagements. In turn, this experience will help enhance these groups’ leadership and management skills so they can strengthen their capacities to address pertinent challenges and enable their communities to thrive effectively. “I chose this area because the certification program I work with also highlights with great attention the need for gender and youth to be a key component. Yet, I see issues that affect women and youth at different levels – so it’s where I want to put my focus,” Rashida concludes.

Rashida Nakabuga 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).