

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile

**Position**

Lecturer/Researcher

**Institution**

University of Zambia

**Country**

Zambia

**Education**

MSc, Animal Breeding and  
Quantitative Genetics,  
University of Nebraska – Lincoln  
(USA), 2017

**Mentor**

Dr. Chapwa Kasoma, Post  
Doctoral Fellow, CABI

**Area of Interest**

Enhancing indigenous chicken  
production and productivity  
through the improvement of  
genetic potential and economic  
competitiveness of indigenous  
breeds

### Sylvia Harrison Ng'andu 2022 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"To develop and refine policy interventions for women and other marginalized groups involved in livestock rearing, we must better understand the roles they play in livestock production and, furthermore, what interventions work best to empower them."*

As one of the few animal breeders working in Zambia, Sylvia Harrison Ng'andu is somewhat unique. However, her inquisitive mind, determination, and love of science make her achievement unsurprising. Enjoying puzzles during childhood, Sylvia relished overcoming challenges from a young age. "As I grew up, that magnified into a curious mind wanting to solve problems," she states.

After enrolling as a student at the School of Natural Sciences at the University of Zambia (UNZA), Sylvia felt uncertain about her path. She was unsure what area to major in. However, a discussion with the Assistant Dean of the School of Agricultural Sciences – during which Sylvia was asked what people simply couldn't live without (food) – proved to be a turning point.

"I grappled with the question of why we struggle to meet our food security demands as a country, despite being endowed with abundant natural resources,"

she says. "I wanted to understand more what this meant and what interventions could be implemented. After some research, I felt more could be done to understand and improve the livestock subsector, so I opted to major in animal science."

After graduating at the top of her class and obtaining a bachelor's degree in Agriculture in 2012, Sylvia was recruited as a Staff Development Fellow at the University of Zambia; a program that helps mold graduates in the path of academia. She then decided to pursue a Master's degree in Animal Breeding and Quantitative Genetics from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. After completion, she became a lecturer at UNZA – a role she still holds today.

Currently, Sylvia is leading a collaborative research program with the Golden Valley Agricultural Research Trust Institution (GART) and UNZA, focusing on enhancing indigenous chicken breeds' genetic potential to boost production and productivity.

Backyard, indigenous chickens are extremely important to smallholder farmers, particularly women. Thus, improving productivity has significant potential for providing families with enhanced income and nutrition.

Sylvia believes that empowering women farmers through improved nutritional status and income generation opportunities can also play a key role in influencing gender policy. “These women represent the majority of livestock keepers,” she explains. “They must be empowered – not only so future breeding programs succeed, but to aid in eliminating poverty and rural stagnation through improved production and productivity.”

Although Sylvia describes herself as “an open-minded person who isn’t afraid to face a challenge,” she too comes up against barriers posed by gender inequality. While she considers achieving success in a male-dominated field a career highlight, “the fear of inadequacy looms large,” she reveals. “I second guess myself and wonder whether I am good enough to handle a task in a largely male-driven field.” Furthermore, she adds, “as for most professional women, maintaining a good work-home-life balance can sometimes prove overwhelming.”

Sylvia has made a conscious effort to network with like-minded women to build her professional confidence. “I took a deliberate step to surround myself with women in science who may be facing, or have faced, similar challenges.” For instance, a few years ago, she joined the AWARD Zambia country chapter, *Zambian Women in Agricultural Research and Development (ZaWARD)*, which has provided a valuable source of encouragement, support, and learning – all vital aspects in helping her continue to thrive and achieve success.

Recognizing and appreciating the influence her work can have on gender policy is proving a key driver for Sylvia. “Being in the early stages of my career, I have not had vast opportunity to formulate policy directly. Previously, I did not think policy formulation had any bearing on my specialization,” she states. However, my GRASP Fellowship Mentor has “helped me to realize the potential of my research interests: how wanting to solve a challenge requires policy formulation and, ultimately, implementation. I am now geared up to do my best so that my research results will influence policy.”

For Sylvia, the GRASP Fellowship will allow her to further understand how marginalized groups can contribute to enhancing food security. “The Fellowship is a platform that allows me to make a difference in my chosen policy focus area of enhancing indigenous chicken production and productivity through a combination of knowledge, skillset, and insight,” she enthuses. “To develop and refine policy interventions for women and other marginalized groups involved in livestock rearing, we must better understand their roles in livestock production and what interventions work best to empower them.”

The GRASP Fellowship will also provide opportunities for Sylvia to grow in areas such as project management, communication, and leadership – particularly in her role as mentor to a junior colleague. “I would like to help another young woman realize that they can achieve more than they know if they surround themselves with the right people and are purposeful in their journey.”

*Sylvia Harrison Ng’andu 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).*