

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Independent Consultant and Entrepreneur

Institution

Soroptimist Club Muhanga

Country

Rwanda

Education

MSc, Gender, Culture, and Development, University of Rwanda (2018)

Mentor

Patrick Ufashingabo, Advisor to the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, Rwanda

Research Area

Increasing women's participation in decision-making roles and enhancing distribution of unpaid care work among family members to reduce the burden on women

Adelphine Mukashema 2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I am passionate about empowering women to have greater access and control over land so they can enjoy the full benefits of their efforts in agricultural development – without being sidelined by men."

As a gender expert, activist, and entrepreneur, Adelphine Mukashema focuses on empowering women and children – a passion rooted in her early-year experiences. Growing up in a rural area of Southern Rwanda, Adelphine faced gender discrimination within her own family. With five sisters and four brothers, she witnessed her mother being shunned by the family and her husband for bearing more girls than boys. Consequently, Adelphine was also prevented from visiting her uncles and aunts as a child.

Adelphine began working straight after leaving secondary school in 1995. However, after simultaneously studying for an undergraduate degree in Social Sciences and Sociology at the Independent University of Kigali, her resolve to support women and children, especially those in rural areas with limited resources and opportunities, was cemented.

Since graduating in 2008, Adelphine has worked with civil society and non-governmental organizations in Rwanda, such as International Alert and Care International. At Care International, she led a project in 2013 that studied and conducted advocacy on women's right to access land. The project targeted unmarried women who were living with their partners. By law, such women do not have rights to the land owned by the men they live with. The project highlighted the issue to local authorities, who encouraged such couples to wed so women could obtain equal land rights formally.

In 2021, Adelphine decided to explore a career in consulting and entrepreneurship in gender-based violence and human rights, as she recognized that working freelance would allow her more time to focus on a wider variety of interests.

Although she has built her career outside the agriculture sector, Adelphine's work has always entailed promoting rural women whose livelihoods depend on agriculture. "Today, land benefits men more than it benefits women, yet women spend most of their time doing agricultural activities," she states. "When coffee is in the garden, it belongs to women. However, it belongs to men when it is ready for sale." To address such inequalities, Adelphine uses her influence, knowledge, and network to advocate for women. For example, she is the chairperson of the Soroptimist Club Muhanga. This non-profit organization trains women on defending their rights and the best ways to engage their partners in constructive discussions around land management. This approach, she says, helps reduce men's hostility of men towards women.

Like many women, balancing work and family life has always been Adelphine's greatest challenge. Still, she remarks that she has always been fortunate to work for organizations that understand and support working mothers. Between juggling responsibilities, she attained a master's degree in Gender, Culture, and Development from the University of Rwanda in 2018.

Adelphine was keen to apply for the GRASP Fellowship due to the program's rich content and focus on gender in agriculture. "I am motivated to learn how to spot gaps in gender-related policies in the agriculture sector – and how to bridge them. The Fellowship can provide these answers," she says. Adelphine hopes the Fellowship will broaden her understanding of increasing women's participation in decision-making at all levels, including rural women's cooperatives. She also hopes to enhance her leadership and advocacy skills and better understand how the burden of unpaid care work on women can be reduced and redistributed.

Adelphine is excited to be paired with her mentor, Patrick Ufashingabo, an advisor to the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, and is keen to learn from him how to drive positive social change for women. She is also eager to meet other Fellows in the program to improve her networking skills and share experiences with those working in the same area.

Adelphine Mukashema 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).