

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

National Project Manager

Institution

Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United
Nations (FAO),
Rwanda Country Office

Country

Rwanda

Education

MSc, Gender and Development,
National University of Rwanda
(2012)

Mentor

Ms. Tacko Ndiaye,
Gender Team Lead,
Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations (FAO),
Rwanda

Research Area

Correlation between women's
empowerment and reduction of child
malnutrition in rural households

Caritas Kayilisa

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I want to work on a new model to demonstrate the correlation between the empowerment of women and the reduction of malnutrition in rural households."

As a gender equality expert, Caritas Kayilisa has made an immense contribution to ensuring Rwanda's agricultural policies, strategies, and plans are gender sensitive. Her work with UN Women on coordinating Rwanda's first gender mainstreaming strategy in agriculture changed many things in favor of women and girls.

For example, married couples now have equal ownership of land – depending on the matrimonial arrangement chosen by the couple – whereas, before, women had no ownership rights at all. The strategy also ensures equal rights for boys and girls regarding inheritance, including for land and other income-generating assets.

Previously, only boys were allowed to inherit from their parents, and they would decide on the share their sisters would receive. The third strategy outcome involved improving women's access to productive capital, such as credit and grants, to engage in commercial agricultural activities.

Despite such achievements, Caritas believes more can still be done to empower Rwandan women in agriculture, especially those in rural areas. "I meet many rural women, hear their challenges, and understand how they are involved in agricultural activities to feed the country. I also interact with men and youth to learn how they contribute to the agricultural sector, and I learn how unequal access to resources widens the gap in agricultural production," she states.

From 2009 to 2010, Caritas used her knowledge to help promote gender equality through other government assignments. For instance, preparing and analyzing budgets using a 'gender lens' to ensure gender sensitivity, conducting gender mainstreaming audits to measure the implementation of gender equality principles, and contributing to developing a women's empowerment index for the agriculture sector.

The index compiles data on women's involvement in agriculture and assesses their empowerment compared to men. The government uses this tool to measure how the sector embraces gender mainstreaming and identify critical areas that require strengthening so women are not left behind. As a project manager at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rwanda, Caritas is among a team of experts supporting the government in developing its fifth Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation (2025-2030). Her role predominantly ensures that women and youth are mainstreamed into the strategy.

Since 2019, Caritas has been keen to research the correlation between women's empowerment and the reduction of child stunting – due to malnutrition – in rural households. She was unable to begin her research as planned due to the pandemic but says the Fellowship offers her the opportunity to get now started. Caritas believes the solution to ending child stunting lies in empowering mothers who are responsible for preparing food for children and the entire family.

"I am interested in enhancing the role of women in a way that allows mothers to perform well when it comes to food preparation and feeding the family, so children can grow well without stunting," Caritas explains. She heard about GRASP through an FAO colleague and was excited to apply after reading about the program's aims and the research support provided.

Caritas recognizes the Fellowship will provide her with a valuable platform through which to empower women and youth in agriculture. "It will enable me to collaborate with like-minded individuals to share best practices in gender mainstreaming in agriculture and learn from experts about the development of more inclusive and equitable agricultural policies." She hopes to gain "in-depth knowledge on policy analysis in the context of gender-responsive agriculture" and aims to enhance her leadership and advocacy skills to drive gender equality effectively.

Caritas Kayilisa 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).