

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Head of Special Economic Zones and Export Facilitation

Institution

Rwanda Development Board

Country

Rwanda

Education

MSc, International and Development Economics, University of Louvain, Belgium (2010)

Mentor

Ms. Thereze Mukarigiza, Monitoring Specialist, Unity and Reconciliation Commission, Rwanda

Research Area

Increasing value addition in the agricultural sector and the involvement of women in agro-processing

Diane Sayinzoga

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

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Not many people can say they began working in the heart of government straight after graduation, but Diane Sayinzoga boasts such an achievement. After completing an undergraduate degree in Economics at the National University of Rwanda in 2006, she began working as a business analyst in Rwanda's Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN) in 2007. There, her job involved analyzing the Ministry's business activities and making recommendations to senior members.

Diane's ongoing thirst for knowledge saw her leave her role to pursue a Master's Degree in International and Development Economics at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. Upon completion in 2010, she returned to the Ministry in her home country to undertake a role in the strategic planning unit, where she contributed to the development of MINECOFIN's three-year rolling strategic plan and annual action plans.

"That role was very important for me in terms of knowing what was happening in the Ministry from the macroeconomic side – so national budgeting and planning," says Diane.

By February 2012, Diane felt ready to employ her skills and knowledge in other areas, and she secured the position of Division Manager in charge of Trade Development at the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), a government agency responsible for investment, trade, and tourism promotion where she continues to work.

However, between May 2016 and June 2017, she left her position. She spent a year at the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Geneva under the Mo Ibrahim Fellowship, where she worked as an advisor in the office of the executive director.

Her time there afforded many exciting opportunities, including working on the ITC's SheTrades Initiative, which is designed to empower women who engage in international trade and to create a fairer, more women-inclusive business ecosystem.

After returning to Rwanda from Geneva in 2017, Diane began her current role with RDB as head of special economic zones and export facilitation. Much of her work has focused on coordinating trade and investment-promotion activities, for instance, she worked to facilitate a partnership between the Government of Rwanda and the Alibaba Group (a Chinese multinational technology company), which resulted in the e-commerce giant selling Rwandan coffee on the Chinese market.

Although Diane does not work in agriculture directly, she works with multiple stakeholders in the sector. Nearly 70% of Rwandans work in agriculture, and most small and medium export enterprises deal with agribusiness and agro-processing. Furthermore, outside of work, Diane runs a small business that grows avocados and vegetables to sell – and this affords her additional opportunities to connect with agricultural stakeholders.

Diane read about the GRASP Fellowship online and was excited by the focus on designing policies and projects in the agriculture sector – with a gender perspective. Regarding policy, Diane is particularly interested in increasing women's involvement in agricultural value addition, which she believes will help transform Rwanda's agricultural sector and increase its contributions to job creation.

But she explains that, due to limited access to credit, women tend to concentrate on subsistence farming, and few take up large commercial agricultural projects. Through the Fellowship, Diane hopes to gain valuable insights on how women can be empowered to enhance their involvement – such as through e-commerce, so they can market and sell their agricultural products virtually. "I want to see what types of policies the government can put in place to facilitate value addition, such as transformation of locally-produced products," she states. Diane is thrilled to have been accepted onto the Fellowship, as she believes it will act as an invaluable platform through which she can exchange ideas with other fellows and her mentor. She also hopes to develop her leadership, communication, and networking skills as part of her career growth.

Diane Sayinzoga 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).