

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Teacher and Researcher in
Biostatistics

Institution

Regional Study Center for
Improving Drought Adaptation

Country

Senegal

Education

PhD Biostatistics at the Paul
Valéry University of Montpellier,
2018

Mentor

Marème Niang Belko, Agronomist
Engineer

Research Area

The gender productivity gap and
gender-responsiveness in
agricultural research projects

Diariétou Sambakhe

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

"Working in the field makes you realize how much women contribute to agricultural production, from start to finish. And yet, their work is not valued nor promoted."

Diariétou Sambakhe is a mathematician fighting to make a name for herself in agriculture. Although not trained as an agronomist, she believes her work is vital to researchers in every field. She has worked at the Senegalese Institute of Agricultural Research (ISRA) for the past ten years, testing hypotheses and setting recommendations for improving production.

In 2007, Diariétou obtained a Master's in Mathematics from Gaston Berger University in Saint-Louis, Senegal. She subsequently did two internships at the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development at its head office in France. This prompted her to complete a doctorate in Biostatistics as applied to agronomy at Paul Valéry University in Montpellier from 2015 to 2018. For approximately ten years, she has researched biostatistics at the Regional Research Centre for the Improvement of Drought Adaptation (CERAAS) in Dakar, specializing in developing new technologies for adaptation to climate change.

She recalls the time in her life when she was working on her thesis. Married and expecting her second child, she declined numerous offers in Montpellier. She chose instead to return to Senegal, where her expertise would be more useful. "I went back mainly because I wanted to advance agricultural research in my country," she explains. Her difficult decision was one of many challenges. Obtaining her current job, for example, was no easy endeavor, given that agricultural projects are usually entrusted to agronomists.

Diariétou explains that working in a male-dominated industry is not always easy, especially in Senegal. "Women have a lot of household responsibilities in addition to their jobs outside the home. They sometimes feel misunderstood," she states. Women must work twice as hard to prove they are skilled and legitimate.

She read about the GRASP Fellowship on a platform for similar postings. Two of her colleagues are also AWARD laureates. However, the initiative's training programs motivated her the most, which she sees as a means to fill skill gaps and build self-esteem. "If you do not believe in yourself, no one will believe in you," she says.

Furthermore, Diariétou hopes to become a better public speaker to make her numbers and presentations compelling. "Technical skills are important but not enough," she admits. "The goal is to better understand the needs, priorities, abilities, barriers, and opportunities for women and young entrepreneurs." This includes leading "group discussions, surveys, and interviews on how women and young people can contribute to production, management, post-harvest practices, product transformation, and food processing."

Working in the field has made Diariétou realize how much women contribute to agricultural production from start to finish. And yet, "their work is not valued." Although she is not an expert in gender issues, she hopes to better understand the role of women in agriculture and society.

Diariétou Sambakhe 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).