

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Monitoring, Evaluation, and
Knowledge Management Officer

Institution

International Labour
Organization

Country

Ethiopia

Education

MA, Regional and Local
Development Studies,
Addis Ababa University,
Ethiopia (2008)

Mentor

Remko Vonk, Private Consultancy,
Netherlands

Research Area

Exploring self-employment
opportunities for youth, with
an emphasis on young women

Genet Asgedom

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

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Growing up, Genet Gebremariam Asgedom had no real connections to agriculture. Born in Addis Ababa and raised in Mekelle, a town in northern Tigray, her family had a business background, and, as the second child, she split her time between school and working at the family pharmacy. Upon finishing school, Genet decided to pursue an Economics and Local Development Studies degree at Addis Ababa University, graduating in 2008.

Following graduation, Genet began working as a monitoring and evaluation expert on development projects for various international organizations – such as the Global Green Growth Institute, an inter-governmental organization supporting sustainable economic growth in developing countries and emerging economies. Between 2012 and 2018, Genet participated in several field trips, which allowed her to see first-hand the harsh realities of rural life.

"It struck me to see so many jobless young people in the villages," she recalls. She also observed rural working women's precarious situation, who are "overly tasked with domestic and farm activities and not duly acknowledged for their contributions, yet [work] with smiles."

However, despite these challenges, Genet recognized that the agriculture sector holds great opportunities for job creation and improved livelihoods. This realization pivoted her focus to agriculture, as she knew she wanted to make a difference to those working in rural communities. "During my field trips, I realized there was a lot to do to help our brothers and sisters who are short of jobs in rural areas," she says. "Fortunately, we have the solution right there, in agriculture."

Between 2018 and 2021, Genet's endeavors focused on a food security program, 'Realizing Sustainable Agricultural Livelihood Security in Ethiopia (REALISE),' which comprised various projects. One was the Bilateral Ethiopian Netherlands Effort for Food, Income, and Trade (BENEFIT), a partnership supported by the Dutch Embassy, where Genet worked as a monitoring and evaluation expert. The project aimed to select and promote the best-fitting farming practices and time- and labor-saving technologies for farmers.

For instance, Genet remembers seeing rural women busy with childcare, cooking, and farm work. However, educating households on good agronomic practices can help ease the burden of day-to-day farming activities and create time for income-generating pursuits, such as goat fattening or keeping chickens. "As a monitor officer, I frequently visited beneficiary households to see if the intervention changed their livelihood. I was inspired by seeing how women improved their lives," Genet recalls.

Determined to make greater strides in improving youth employment and gender equality, Genet joined the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2022. In her role as monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management officer, she supports the ProAgro project, which aims to create job opportunities for women and young men in the agribusiness sector. Since starting work at the ILO, her duties have included monitoring the effectiveness of the project's interventions and capturing lessons learned for informed implementation and decision-making.

Ironically, despite working to create greater equality within communities, Genet has faced her own gender-bias challenges in advancing her career into a leadership position – despite having a wealth of experience. As a married woman with three children, she often lacks the institutional support and flexibility that would allow her to progress.

Genet learned about the GRASP Fellowship through a friend and wasted no time applying. She's thrilled to have been accepted into the program as she believes it provides flexible learning opportunities not offered by the traditional educational system. For instance, she is keen to acquire skills related to bargaining and negotiating, which will help her tackle gender disparities by advocating for gender-responsive policies effectively. As a GRASP Fellow, Genet wants to explore career opportunities for young people, particularly women, within agriculture. "But it is not only about making opportunities available," she explains. "I also want to help see which ones best suit the women and which are ideal for young people."

She hopes her time as a Fellow will aid her work with organizations such as the ILO so that she can encourage real change. "I am very optimistic that I will see a new version of myself, with new knowledge and networks, at the end of this journey," Genet concludes.

Genet Asgedom 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).