

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile



#### Position

Data Services Expert, Former Young Expert Program

#### Institution

IAkvo Foundation, West Africa

#### Country

Burkina Faso

#### Education

MSc in Statistical Engineering and Economics from the National School of Statistics and Applied Economics in Côte d'Ivoire

#### Mentor

Lydia Tapsoba, Expert in Sexual, Reproductive and Gender Rights, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

#### Research Area

Enhancing entrepreneurship among rural women in Burkina Faso through gender-based agricultural policies

### Halimata Sawadogo

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"Data, monitoring, and evaluation are vital to developing good public policy for agriculture, especially in rural areas. It is the best way to learn from your mistakes and improve."*

Halimata Sawadogo was born into a family of farmers in Gorki, a village in northern Burkina Faso, where animal husbandry is as important as subsistence farming. She helped her parents with the livestock during the rainy season or worked in the fields. While maintaining an interest in the rural world, her area of focus, somewhat by chance, became statistics. "I trusted my intuition and went wherever the winds took me," says Halimata.

After studying Economics for two years at the University of Ouagadougou, she enrolled at the National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ENSEA) in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 2016. She developed a passion for statistics and an interest in current issues such as climate change. In 2020, she won "best writer" in a school contest for her article "L'Afrique face aux défis du changement climatique".

Since 2021, Halimata has worked as a Data Services Expert at Akvo, a Dutch non-governmental organization focusing on agriculture, the environment, water management, and sanitation. She joined the organization as a participant in the Young Expert Program (YEP), an initiative led by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which helps young professionals develop expertise in water management, renewable energy, and agri-food.

As an engineer in statistics and economics and a data collection and analysis expert, Halimata believes data is vital in developing good public policy for agriculture, especially in rural areas. "Quality data and monitoring can, for example, tell us which cultural criteria to consider when implementing a project. It is also the best way to learn from your mistakes and to improve," she explains.

According to Halimata, context is essential to project implementation. She remembers her father participating in a failed beef farming project as a child. Most beneficiaries sold the cattle and used the money to fix their own problems rather than renewing the herd and running the business. "I have come to realize that certain projects did not sufficiently take local realities into account," she declares.

A researcher friend who knew of Halimata's interest in agricultural issues told her about the GRASP Fellowship. Halimata saw the program as a way to advance her career, particularly her ambition to set up a consultancy firm for agricultural business projects.

Halimata has focused on women and youth entrepreneurship in rural Burkina Faso. Every time she returns to her village, she notices the same thing: women remain vulnerable due to numerous challenges, such as limited access to quality land and a lack of time to develop their own agricultural projects. "Burkina Faso has a single rainy season. I want to find alternatives for young people and women on which they can spend their free time during the dry season, such as entrepreneurial activities," she explains.

With support from her mentor, Lydia Tapsoba, an Expert in Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Halimata is carefully determining her area of focus and working on a roadmap. She hopes to acquire skills to develop and manage gender-responsive projects. As a YEP participant, she realizes how beneficial an international program such as GRASP can be. "It is a wonderful opportunity to learn about different cultures and experiences and to build a network for your future career," she rejoices.

*Halimata Sawadogo 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).*