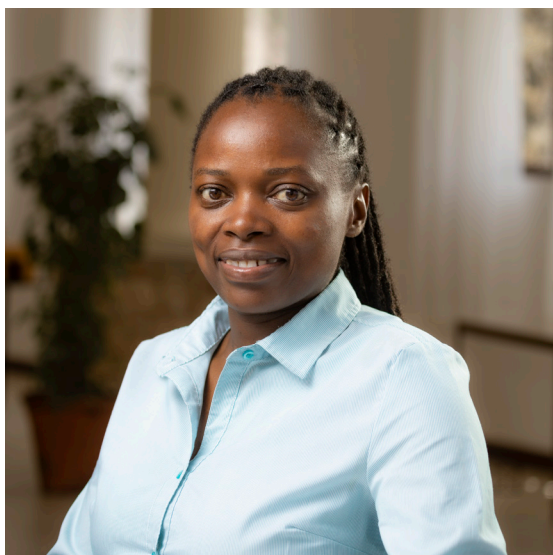


Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

National Representative

Institution

Young Professionals for
Agricultural Development
(YPARD) Rwanda Chapter

Country

Rwanda

Education

MSc, Agricultural Economics
and Policy, Université Ouaga II,
Burkina Faso, 2015

Mentor

Dr. Mark Eghan,
Principal Agricultural Economist,
Africa Development Bank,
Ghana

Research Area

Increasing awareness of
opportunities in agriculture and
encouraging youth participation

Helene Uzayisenga

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I believe the Fellowship will provide a strong package of skills that will enable me to achieve my dreams."

While Helene's passion for agriculture did not develop until her university years, it has become a fundamental part of her life. Growing up, she had wanted to become a doctor, but when she didn't achieve the grades needed to study medicine, she turned to agriculture. While working on her undergraduate degree in agricultural sciences at the University of Rwanda, which she completed in 2013, Helene understood the fundamental importance of the sector for her country. "Agriculture is the source of livelihood for most of the Rwandan population," she states.

Inspired to continue building her agricultural knowledge, in 2013, Helene applied for – and was granted – a scholarship to pursue a master's degree in Agricultural Economics and Policy jointly led by two universities in West Africa: Université Ouaga II in Burkina Faso and Accra University in Ghana. Upon completion of her master's studies in 2015, Helene returned to Rwanda. There, she started a social enterprise to increase knowledge of

agricultural activities among youth and mobilize them to take up opportunities in the sector. Her approach was to use the internet, especially social media, to reach out to and share information on agriculture with this demographic.

However, wanting to develop further the skills attained at university, Helene simultaneously searched for other opportunities. "At that time, my focus wasn't on employment," she admits. "I wanted an internship or a similar arrangement to help me become a professional since I was already academically qualified."

By 2016, Helene had secured an internship at the African Development Bank (AfDB) in Chad, where she spent four months monitoring and evaluating two AfDB-funded agricultural projects in Chad and the Sahel Region. "This was the turning point in my career," she says. The experience she gained provided the foundation for her career path as a consultant for AfDB and agricultural organizations, especially in project monitoring and evaluation.

Since then, Helene has steadily built a career in the agricultural sector and has worked as a consultant in Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Rwanda. Alongside AfDB, in 2019, she worked for Access Agriculture, a non-profit organization in Kenya that promotes organic farming. "I am passionate about reducing risks in the agriculture sector so they do not affect farmers severely," she says. "The sector has many risks, but they can't be compared to its benefits."

In addition, Helene is the national representative of Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD) in Rwanda, an international movement for young people in the agricultural sector. Founded in 2006, YPARD has chapters in 72 countries and works to empower and connect young people to food systems. In her role, she runs programs that mobilize youth to become active in agricultural activities.

Using digital media is key in Helene's activities – such as increasing the agricultural sector's appeal among younger generations, promoting career opportunities, and educating the public about farming. It was through social platforms that Helene learned about the GRASP Fellowship. With the goals and values of the Fellowship aligning closely with her own, she did not hesitate to apply.

Reflecting on her previous work, Helene's research focus with GRASP is on increasing awareness of opportunities within agriculture and encouraging greater youth involvement. She particularly hopes that her time in the Fellowship will allow her to gain insights into analysing gender policies and programs within the agriculture sector. This will complement the knowledge she acquired when working on AfDB-funded projects in Chad.

Finally, Helene hopes to enhance the networking, negotiation, and leadership skills she uses in her daily work. "Taking part in the Fellowship will be vital in the implementation of my current duties, and it will also be an opportunity to network and collaborate with fellow women in the same sector," she reveals. "I believe it will provide a strong package that will enable me to achieve my dreams."

Helene Uzayisenga 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).