

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Regional Director

Institution

Agricultural Development Fund,
Ministry of Agriculture and
Livestock and the Ministry of
Fisheries and the Blue Economy

Country

Madagascar

Education

Agricultural Engineer, University
of Antananarivo, 2013

Mentor

Mr. Harilala Elian Razanadrakoto,
Agricultural Engineer, Ministry of
Agriculture and Livestock

Research Area

Rural development, agricultural
policy, breeding and animal
production

Laurette Ratsimbazafy 2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

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In 2018, she was selected for the Young African Leaders Initiative, a program funded by the American Government to empower young African leaders. Laurette's experience made her ever more eager to hold senior management positions. Two years later, she became Regional Director of the Agricultural Development Fund for the Betsiboka region in northern Madagascar. The Fund is a public financial institution backed by partners such as the European Union and the African Development Bank, which manages resources for agricultural, livestock, and fishing projects.

"I feel comfortable in my job. The world of agriculture is my field of expertise. This is the most senior position I have held since the beginning of my career," Laurette rejoices. "I wanted to hold a leadership position after my prior experiences. I hope to climb the career ladder and reach higher levels," she says, adding that women can achieve great things.

The Agricultural Development Fund subsidizes producers' projects by providing agricultural inputs and equipment. "We also help with technical training, managing operations, revolving loans, and the management of associations," adds Laurette. The Fund always gives priority to female heads of households and young people. Beneficiary associations must always be at least 70% to 80% women and include at least 30% female leaders. "People running awareness campaigns in communes are mostly all male. This has to change. Women need specific support. They have the ability to do better than their male counterparts. They put their heart into their work; they need to take center stage," she adds.

For a young mother like Laurette, balancing family life and a career was a challenge, particularly when conducting numerous field interventions in an unsafe region or supervising older men.

"Every day brings its share of challenges. You need to assert yourself. Taking on management or leadership roles is often difficult, but if others have done it, so can I," she affirms.

Laurette heard about the candidacy for the GRASP Fellowship from a syndicate of agronomists she belongs to in Madagascar. "The Fellowship is a great opportunity. It is the type of training program I need to advance my career. I really want to help farmers, but my job is currently limited. All we do is carry out decisions," she says.

With help from her mentor, Harilala Elian Razanadrakoto, Agronomist at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Laurette hopes to acquire new skills in lobbying, improve negotiation with partners, and learn about women's leadership, particularly regarding agricultural policy. "Women are underestimated, especially in the agricultural industry. And yet, they are sensitive to the community's wish for socio-economic change. They deserve credit for putting their hearts into every endeavor," she states.

Laurette Ratsimbazafy 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).