

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Project Manager

Institution

Belgian Development Agency
(Enabel)

Country

Madagascar

Education

BSc in Agricultural Engineering,
University of Antananarivo
(Madagascar), 2003

Mentor

Marie Kolo, Regional Director of
People, Power, Inclusion

Research Area

Bringing positive and lasting change
for populations in agricultural and
rural areas, through development
project management

Mamy Rajaonarisoa

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

"As a woman, I have developed emotional intelligence and high self-esteem. This has helped me grow in my job."

Mamy Rajaonarisoa has lived all over Madagascar, moving whenever her parents and public sector teachers received new placements. She happily talks about school years spent in a wide variety of cultural environments and about her love of rural life. "I travelled a lot with my parents. Discovering An'Ala, Moramanga, and many other places was wonderful. I grew fond of the rural world because of these memorable family experiences."

Mamy has embraced her unusual career path. Take, for example, her engineer training in agronomic sciences: she chose to write her dissertation on the nutrition of lemurs, whereas other students chose topics more closely related to producer issues. She has continued to explore unknown territory through her work on development projects with international organizations in Madagascar and abroad.

In 2017, she went to Burkina Faso with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) to

develop agricultural industries. She subsequently worked in Morocco, managing a development project for the cultivation of date palms in oases, and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she managed an agricultural training program and a back-to-work scheme for young people in collaboration with the Belgian development agency Enabel.

One of Mamy's most cherished career accomplishments took place in 2014. As Project Manager, in collaboration with GIZ, she helped to implement a tool that would determine the profitability threshold of vanilla. The project entailed comprehensive and inclusive negotiations between producers and buyers and resulted in a set minimum purchasing price for vanilla in Madagascar. This ensured sustainable production and improved the livelihood of small vanilla producers.

Mamy encountered some difficulties while working in Africa. She explained that her height –154 cm tall

(or just over 5 ft) – could sometimes work against her, prompting inappropriate remarks or a lack of consideration. “I regularly encountered authorities and institutional leaders, such as ministers and funding partners. It was very intimidating. But I pulled myself together and worked on my state of mind; I developed emotional intelligence and built high self-esteem. I consequently knew how to deal with all sorts of microaggressions and verbal harassment based on my physical appearance. Starting an international career heightened this ability.”

Gender issues are also one of Mamy’s interests. When working in the field, whether in Madagascar or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she often noticed that women and girls always come second to males regarding access to education, resources, and basic services. Very few of them have access to higher education or training. Women are often victims of expropriation and violence and lack recognition. Mamy hopes that through the GRASP Fellowship, she will learn to develop gender-responsive agricultural policy to meet such challenges.

Mamy happened upon information regarding the GRASP Fellowship on social media. She promptly applied, certain that her work, which is currently a small-scale endeavor, could positively impact many people. Her goal is to understand the world of public policy better. With help from her mentor, Marie Kolo, Social Entrepreneur, and Feminist Advocate, Mamy hopes to become well-versed in diplomacy to navigate decision-making realms deftly. Finally, drawing inspiration from her career path, she aims to develop practical content to boost self-esteem and hone the capacity for strategic influence.

Mamy Rajaonarisoa 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).