

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Senior Agricultural Technician
Responsible for Promoting the Rural
Economy

Institution

Provincial Directorate of Agriculture,
Animal and Fishery Resources of
Comoé

Country

Burkina Faso

Education

MSC Monitoring-Evaluation of
Projects and Programs (SEPP) at the
Institut science campus, Burkina-Faso

Mentor

Abibata Ouattara, Water and
Sanitation Safety Specialist at
Winrock International

Research Area

Women's access to cultivable and
fertile land

Mariam Ouattara

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

"Once the farming season ends, women and young people have nothing else to do. If we can give them the skills and the means to transform what they produce during the rainy season, it will keep them busy and give them a source of revenue."

Born in Kéné Dougou, in the far west of Burkina Faso, Mariam Ouattara has always wanted to work in agriculture. She attributes this to her grandmother, who was passionate about farming and whom she grew up with.

After three years at university studying Project Management and Local Development, Mariam enrolled in an Agronomy program at the Centre Agricole Polyvalent de Matourkou (Multipurpose Agricultural Centre of Matourkou) in the country's west. Most Agronomy students are recruited and sent by the State. In Mariam's case, her interest in agronomy drew her to the school.

She began her professional career as a Rural Facilitator for the Association for Small African Projects (ASAP), a non-governmental organization in Bobo-Dioulasso. She worked with women who parboil rice, helping them get microcredits and handling business dealings with rice producers.

"It was my first job. I realized how important product transformation as a source of revenue can be, especially for women," she says.

In 2009, she joined the Ministry of Agriculture as an Advanced Agricultural Technician. Her job entailed promoting the rural economy in the Comoé Province, one of the country's largest and one of its principal agricultural areas. Her daily duties included advising farmers on proper production management. "We helped them to determine what to set aside for consumption and what to commercialize. We also provided advice on commercialization," she explains. Mariam considered her work vital since farmers often sold off their production instead of storing it and selling it at a better price later, increasing their revenue.

Working with rural producers opened Mariam's eyes to the condition of women. "It is impossible to remain indifferent to their plight, particularly in my work areas.

Women and children provide most of the farm labor, whereas men benefit more from the revenue," she declares. The situation prompted her to create a women's cooperative to generate revenue from rice transformation processes. Mariam is also interested in women's access to arable land. She has observed that women are determined and hardworking. Still, they have limited access to land, which acts as capital, a guarantee of agricultural production, and a means to improve their living conditions.

Mariam learned about the GRASP Fellowship from her sister and mentor, Abibata Ouattara, Water Security and Sanitation Specialist at Winrock International. Mariam did not think twice about applying. "I work in a field that I really love. I will seize every opportunity I can to improve my skills and feel fulfilled in my job," she states.

As an agronomist, Mariam is particularly drawn to monitoring/evaluation, in which she has theoretical knowledge. She wants to acquire hands-on experience and learn to use technical tools, programs, and software. She also hopes that GRASP will help in her community activities.

Mariam Ouattara 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).