

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile



#### Position

Lecturer and researcher

#### Institution

Adigrat University

#### Country

Ethiopia

#### Education

MSc, agroecology and sustainable development, Mekelle University, Ethiopia (2012)

#### Mentor

Dr Yayneshet Tesfay Gebre, General Manager, Zebu Consulting Firm, Mekelle, Tigray, Ethiopia

#### Research Area

Promoting agricultural research and leadership development

### Rahwa Abrha

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"From the first time I stepped out of university and met a group of farmers, I knew I was ready to change their lives the way I had always wanted to."*

Growing up in a farming family in the Southwest Tigray Region of Ethiopia, Rahwa Abrha witnessed first-hand how poor agronomic practices, such as the overuse of chemicals, contributed to soil degradation and low yields. This, coupled with discriminatory land administration policies – such as women not being entitled to land or the proceeds from their farms – pushed Rahwa to pursue a career in agriculture and sustainable development.

Rahwa wanted to help farmers fix the production problems they faced. So, after passing her secondary school exams, she joined Jimma University Department of Crop Science, College of Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine, and graduated with a BSc in crop science in 2008. She immediately became a crop protection expert in the Ministry of Agriculture, stationed in Medebay Zana District, Tigray, in Northern Ethiopia. Her duties involved offering extension services and distributing farm inputs to smallholders.

Her work with the Ministry was rewarding, but Rahwa wanted to do more – and, in 2011, while continuing with her job, she enrolled for a postgraduate degree at Mekelle University. She graduated in 2012 with an MSc in agroecology and sustainable development.

Her new academic credentials earned her more responsibilities at the Ministry, including working with the environment desk, where she trained farmers to adapt to climate change by cultivating drought-resistant crops, using water management techniques, and embracing climate insurance. She also trained community-based organizations and private-sector businesses to interact with farmers on climate change matters.

*"From the first time I stepped out of university and met a group of farmers, I knew I was ready to change their lives the way I had always wanted to," she says.*

“I knew I needed to work and learn more because the problems affecting them were so many and complex.”

Rahwa is proud of her achievements but has had to contend with gender-related challenges throughout her career, such as missing out on leadership positions and being looked down upon by male colleagues, particularly in decision-making. “I realized that if you want these things as a woman, you must fight for them! Nothing comes easy,” she exclaims. To overcome stereotypes, Rahwa has invested in further training to develop her leadership, communication, and dispute-resolution skills and has relied upon networking and assistance from mentors.

After working in the field for seven years, Rahwa landed a job at Adigrat University as a lecturer and researcher in the Department of Plant Science, College of Agriculture. In 2020, she was promoted to assistant professor and researcher, a position she holds.

As part of her current role, she develops projects on building farmer empowerment and resilience while working with her peers to formulate government policies that enhance farmers’ resilience to climate change. Throughout her career, Rahwa has also worked on many research papers published in international academic journals, including the International Journal of Research and the Life Sciences International Research Journal – and she is excited to continue shaping knowledge on agricultural challenges.

Rahwa learned about the GRASP Fellowship on Facebook and hopes it will enable her to develop her knowledge in policy formulation. “The training and exposure I will get from the GRASP Fellowship will be key to furthering my agricultural research and leadership development career. As I look towards building more research in academia and also working with farmers to implement the projects that are guided by my research, I hope the GRASP training will equip me with the right tools to write winning proposals and grants, oversee projects, and measure their success through the lives they change,” she notes.

*Rahwa Abrha 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).*