

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile



**Position**  
Chief Operations Officer

**Institution**  
National Agricultural Export  
Promotion Board (NAEB)

**Country**  
Rwanda

**Education**  
MSc, Agricultural Economics,  
Sokoine University of  
Agriculture,  
Tanzania (2012)

**Mentor**  
Mr. Augustin Kimonyo,  
Gender and Policy Expert,  
Rwanda

**Research Area**  
Agriculture transformation, especially  
the shift from subsistence to modern  
agriculture

### **Sandrine Urujeni** 2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"Our agricultural sector is mainly based on subsistence farming. I always look for policies that can guide us on how to turn smallholder farming into commercial farming."*

As a child, Sandrine Urujeni wanted to become a doctor – but studying sciences during secondary school quickly shifted her focus to agriculture. "I always wanted to have a career that improves people's lives, and I thought agriculture was the main gateway," she reveals. Agriculture holds a special place in Rwanda's economy. It stands out as one of the most strategic sectors in the country's development, contributing to about 31% of gross domestic product and employing around 70% of the population.

To support her quest for change, Sandrine studied for an undergraduate degree in Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness from the University of Rwanda, graduating in 2009. She also has a master's degree in Agricultural Economics from Sokoine University of Agriculture in Tanzania, which she completed in 2012.

For the first five years of her career, Sandrine taught at the University of Rwanda – first as an assistant lecturer, then as a full lecturer of courses such as Farm Resource Management and Institutional Economics. However, in August 2016, her career pivoted to working for the government following her appointment as Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the National Agricultural Export Promotion Board (NAEB).

NAEB is an agency under the Ministry of Agriculture that is responsible for promoting high-value agricultural exports, including tea and coffee, and horticultural commodities, such as flowers, vegetables, and fruits. In 2020, Sandrine was promoted to her current Chief Operations Officer (COO) position after an agency restructuring.

As COO, Sandrine is responsible for coordinating agency operations, including providing technical support to farmers and investors working in producing and promoting Rwanda's high-value agricultural commodities. However, her position also includes directly contributing to policy implementation and providing expert views to sector-wide stakeholder consultations, which can be used to inform policy design or revisions.

For instance, Sandrine contributed to developing Rwanda's fourth strategic plan for agriculture transformation (2018-2024), which aims to make agriculture a central driver for Rwanda's economic transformation, recognizing the critical role of youth and women in the sector. Her input was aimed at strengthening Rwanda's competitiveness as a key exporter of agricultural commodities, such as coffee and tea – which are major sources of foreign exchange for the country and contribute to the employment creation.

Looking ahead, Sandrine is particularly passionate about working on policies that will help transform agriculture from subsistence farming to large, commercial farming operations, thus increasing production and revenues. "Our agricultural sector is mainly based on subsistence farming, so I always look out for policies that can guide us on how to turn smallholder farming into commercial farming," she notes. "Approaching the sector more transformationally could impact the livelihood of millions of farmers and the country's entire economy in general."

Sandrine learned about the GRASP Fellowship online and was motivated to apply due to its focus on gender and agriculture. She believes that encouraging mainstream gender equality within agriculture involves tackling the "low level of women's participation in lucrative parts of agri-value chains and weak institutional capacity for gender-responsive development of the sector."

During her time as a Fellow, Sandrine wants to strengthen her skills and experience in policy design to use these in her career to drive further positive change. As such, she hopes the Fellowship will impart her with knowledge and understanding of how to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate gender-responsive agricultural policies.

*Sandrine Urujeni 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).*