

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile



#### Position

Research Engineer, Agricultural Economist

#### Institution

Regional Director of Agriculture, Animal and Fisheries Resources, Central Region, Burkina Faso

#### Country

Burkina Faso

#### Education

MSc Soils and Environment, University of Fada, Higher Institute of Sustainable Development, Burkina Faso, 2023

#### Mentor

Dr. Zacharia Gnankambary, Institute of Environment and Agricultural Research of Burkina Faso

#### Research Area

Empowering rural women through better management of their agricultural land

### Servienne Sebgo

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"In our grandparents' days, land was plentiful. When soil became degraded, all they had to do was to clear land elsewhere. That is no longer an option, largely due to property speculation."*

"All I wanted was to work, regardless of the field!" exclaims Servienne Sebgo, recalling her early career. She initially wanted to be a Social Worker, but the school she would have attended was in a region where she did not want to live. For lack of a better choice, she trained to be a Pedologist or Soil Specialist without prior knowledge in the field. Her interest in agriculture, particularly soil science, emerged from her training.

Growing up in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, Servienne had very limited contact with the rural world. She studied Economic Sciences and Management at the University of Ouagadougou and, having married at a very young age, began looking for work. A few years later, she went back to school and obtained a vocational degree in Pollution Control and Land Management at the University of Ouagadougou, as well as a degree in Engineering and a master's degree in Soil Science and Environment from the University of Fada N'Gourma.

Since she began her career at the Bureau National des Sols in 2011, she has been interested in issues concerning the quality of soil and farmland. In 2020, Servienne became the first Pedology Engineer to have trained solely in Burkina Faso and completed the five-year Integrated Soil Fertility Management program at the Matourkou Agricultural Center (CAP) in western Burkina Faso. She is currently one of a select few female experts in soil management in the country. Since May 2023, she has worked as Agricultural Director of the Centre region.

Servienne remembers her 2011 nomination as Provincial Director of Agriculture, Hydro Agricultural Development and Mechanization in the Boulkiemde province as a career milestone. "It was my first senior management job. For two years, I learned a lot from numerous challenges. In certain regions, men are still not ready to have a female superior," she explains.

Looking back, she is proud of her achievement: “I knew what I was up against. I prepared to the best of my ability by learning about the industry, its customs, and the mistakes to avoid.” Servienne nonetheless struggled to maintain a healthy work-life balance. As a mother of four children, she sometimes had to cut short maternity leave and go back to work.

Servienne heard about the GRASP Fellowship from a friend she does volunteer work with. Her interest in agricultural issues prompted her to apply. Since 2017, she has been Secretary of a women’s association for agricultural development, which helps rural women overcome poverty. The organization trains women to recover and manage degraded land by, for example, producing nutrient-rich compost. “In Burkina Faso, rural women cannot access fertile land. Since they are often given the most degraded land, teaching them how to improve it is vital,” she explains.

An advocate for female autonomy in rural areas, Servienne wants to understand gender issues better and learn from other participants. She is in regular contact with her mentor, Dr Zacharia Gnankambary, and Servienne hopes to benefit from his experience and numerous contacts. “The GRASP Fellowship will help advance my career. It is an opportunity to broaden my knowledge and network,” she rejoices.

*Servienne Sebgo 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).*