

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

National Gender Advisor

Institution

SNV

Country

Ethiopia

Education

MA, Gender Studies, Addis
Ababa University, Ethiopia (2022)

Mentor

Dr. Hirut Bekele, gender, youth, and
social inclusion lead, SCRS-WASH
Project, NIRAS, Ethiopia

Research Area

Advancing gender responsive and
women empowerment policies

Soyome Alemayehu

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I want to be part of the team that challenges the system – the gender-biased agricultural policies, and ensure that implementation of policies is gender-responsive."

As a child, Soyome Alemayehu's dream was to become an engineer. However, when it came to applying for university, she did not have the right grades to study engineering. Instead, she was allowed to join Haramaya University under a government-sponsored agriculture program. Agriculture was a career path she had never considered at the time.

Still, upon completing an Agriculture Extension Services degree in 2000, she could not wait to go out into the world and help change the lives of those working in agriculture. "If I had to go back to my childhood, I would want to study agriculture – because I have seen the lives I have changed and how important the sector is. It requires our collective attention," she states.

Soyome's career started in 2000 when she joined the Rift Valley Children and Women Development Organization to work closely with the government on extension services and gender mainstreaming in agriculture.

However, the government lacked a designated gender expert for the projects – so, to fill this gap, Soyome received training from her own organization on gender affairs. She quickly developed a passion and interest in the subject. She was promoted to the role of project officer and social program manager – where she focused on the gender aspect – before becoming a gender expert within her organization in 2002.

Since leaving the Rift Valley Children and Women Development Organization in 2010, Soyome has worked on various other non-government organization-led projects. This has included a GIZ-funded initiative working to strengthen rural value chains, for which she advised on ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment. She also worked on Alinea International's (formerly Agriteam Canada) Small and Micro Irrigation Support (SMIS) project in 2021, where she was responsible for mainstreaming gender, nutrition, and social development activities.

This work inspired her to pursue a master's degree in Gender Studies at Addis Ababa University – while still working on the project – with a thesis on factors that hinder women farmer groups from participating in decision-making forums in the Amhara and Oromia regions. She graduated in 2022.

Soyome joined GFA Consulting Group after completing her MA, where she was tasked with overseeing projects to strengthen rural value chains, including onions and avocado. “At GFA, I developed a gender-mainstreaming strategy for the projects and identified entry points for women’s engagement,” Soyome explains. She advised the project implementers to ensure women were involved in all interventions – from access to inputs and finances to decision-making and market access.

Since September 2023, Soyome has worked at SNV under the “Realizing Aspiration of Youth in Ethiopia through Employment” project. The initiative aims to create job opportunities for over 200,000 Ethiopian youth, primarily women. Part of Soyome’s role involves working to publicize the project and meet with various players, including youth groups and enterprises, to implement the project.

“Whenever I see a disadvantaged group of women, I try to put myself in their shoes. I ask myself, ‘What if it was me?’ Everyone has potential if they get the opportunity,” she says. “That is why I encourage women to become economically empowered, and I am happy to participate in these projects.”

Soyome first learned of the GRASP Fellowship from a colleague – and previous beneficiary of another AWARD Fellowship. As a Fellow, she plans to build on her experience to advance women’s employability and empowerment. She is particularly keen to learn how to make gender-responsive policies, review policies with a gender lens, and learn the art of negotiation.

“I want to be part of the team that challenges the system – the gender-biased agriculture policies, to influence policies and leaders and ensure implementation of policies is gender-responsive,” Soyome enthuses.

She is especially excited to work with her mentor, Dr. Hirut Bekele, who – due to her extensive practical experience – was hired by the MoA to work with the gender directorate on mainstreaming gender in the agriculture sector. “I am looking forward to being mentored by her. We have much passion in that area,” Soyome smiles.

Soyome Alemayehu 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).