

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Gender Equality and Social
Inclusion Consultant

Institution

International Livestock Research
Institute (ILRI), Ethiopia

Country

Ethiopia

Education

MSc, Food Security and
Developmental Studies, Addis
Ababa University, Ethiopia (2020)

Mentor

: Dr. Wuletaw Abera, senior scientist
at the International Center for T
ropical Agriculture (CIAT), Ethiopia

Research Area

Empowering women in rural areas
through backyard gardens for
economic incomes and food security

Tsion Abate

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

"I am fortunate to be part of the GRASP Fellowship. It is crucial for my career and will help me greatly in my commitment to empowering women as one means to achieve food security."

Growing up in an urban town, Tsion Abate's interest in nutrition and food security was sparked during trips to visit relatives in rural villages – where she became aware of the issue of child malnutrition. "I was struck when I saw severely underweight children, and I discovered they were eating the same food almost daily," she recalls. To help such children, Tsion studied for an undergraduate degree in Nutrition and Nursing, which she attained from Hayat Medical College of Addis Ababa in 2016.

After working as a nurse for the German-funded organization Signum Vita, she joined the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) as a nutrition research assistant in 2019.

Tsion realized that to get to the root of the issues she was observing, she had to expand her knowledge of the area – so she decided to leave her job and undertake a master's degree in Food Security and Developmental Studies at Addis Ababa University.

After graduating in 2020, she interned at the Development Fund of Norway, contributing to the organization's work in the food security domain. Just a year later, she was again offered a job at ILRI, but this time as a gender equality and social inclusion consultant – a position she still holds today.

There, she supports different projects in mainstreaming gender and social issues by providing advice and technical guidance and researching and writing reports, such as on food security and the impact of climate change on men and women in their farming activities.

Tsion also helps identify interventions that empower girls, women, and disabled people. For example, she recently worked with ILRI's partners on a significant research program focused on water, land, and ecosystems, aiming to empower farmers to adopt sustainable land conservation approaches.

Tsion conducted research and field visits in rural areas, working closely with women to advise them on restoring degraded land. She considers contributing to this program one of her career's most exciting moments. "I saw how the program helped them to become resilient, and I learned much about how women can contribute to ecosystem restoration while ensuring land availability," she says.

Tsion notes that her career has not been without its challenges. For example, she experiences firsthand that some men are unwilling to accept women in leadership positions, arguing that women are too busy with home tasks and, therefore, cannot adequately deliver on their project responsibilities. However, Tsion knows what she has to do to prove she is equally worthy of opportunities. "Once I get my chance, I work hard to get good results and meet the deadline to demonstrate that my bosses were not wrong in trusting me," she says.

After learning of the GRASP Fellowship from her supervisor at ILRI, Dr. Wuletawu Abera (also her mentor in the program), Tsion knew she had to apply. During the Fellowship, she will continue to research a topic that she focused on for her master's thesis: empowering women through backyard gardens and building market linkages so they can obtain seeds and sell their products. "In Ethiopia, female farmers face difficulties accessing seeds, water, and land," she explains. "They also don't have a proper market for their produce" – all issues she aims to address.

Tsion hopes that her time as a Fellow will afford her the knowledge and skills to take her career to the next level and contribute to gender-responsive policy-making. As well as improving her leadership skills, she aims to expand her understanding of gender and agriculture broadly and learn how to devise good policies that will address the issues women farmers face.

Tsion Abate 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).