

Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

Fellow Profile



Position

Head of Technical Assistance
Mission

Institution

AFAFI-Centre Program

Country

Madagascar

Education

BSc Advanced Studies in Natural Sciences, Ecology and Plant Biology, University of Antananarivo (2001)

Mentor

M. Christian Camara,
Environmental and Permanent
Representative of the Missouri
Botanical Garden

Research Area

Rural development, land security,
gender issues and agroecology

Yolande Leondaris

2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

"My main goal is to help the emergence of agroecological transition policies for women in rural areas who need resilient agricultural techniques to deal with climate change – and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic."

In Madagascar, Yolande Razafindrakoto Leondaris is considered a leading voice for land tenure security. She has participated in several national projects on this issue. "My main goal is to help the emergence of agroecological transition policies for women in rural areas who need resilient agricultural techniques to deal with climate change – and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic," she declares.

In 2001, having obtained a Master's Degree in Plant Biology, Yolande worked on land tenure security as a Rural Development Coordinator at the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Harmonisation des Actions pour la Réalisation d'un Développement Intégré (Harmonization of Actions for the Achievement of Integrated Development). At the time, the NGO promoted modern beekeeping practices for communities in a rural, landlocked area east of Antananarivo.

Yolande became passionate about finding solutions to issues regarding access to land. In 2004, she

participated in creating a civil society organization called Internal Land Coalition, made up of around 20 associations that facilitate land ownership. She was subsequently called upon to set up the Madagascar National Land Program (2004-2005), which is based on the decentralization of land management. From 2005 to 2009, Yolande headed the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), a United States Government-funded program that aims to assist the rural population's transition from subsistence agriculture to a market economy. According to the Madagascar Land Observatory, access to land for women increased to 24% in 2008 compared to 15% before 2005.

After creating her own NGO to support rural development, Ezaka Fampandrosoana ny any Ambanivohitra (EFA; Effort for Rural Development), Yolande did a two-year stint (2013-2014) in Burkina Faso as Deputy Head of Mission for FAJO, an MCA-funded project for assistance in land governance and man

agement in 47 communes. Upon returning to her home country, she furthered rural development as Head of Mission for a European-Union-funded technical assistance program supporting agroforestry in Antananarivo areas. Since 2020, she has worked for the Institute for Research and Application of Methods as Head of Technical Assistance Mission for the AFAFI Centre, or Let's Protect Family Health Together, a mutual health organization in Antananarivo. "I am sensitive to gender issues in our work," she states. "I incited the AFAFI Centre to set up a gender action plan in line with the European Union's Gender Action Plan. As a result, I can monitor such issues across our activities."

Yolande heard about the GRASP Fellowship from someone at the United States Agency for International Development. With help from her mentor, Christian Camara, an Environmentalist and Permanent Representative of the Missouri Botanical Garden, Yolande hopes to enhance her leadership skills and expand her network to make her dream come true: to make effective agroecological transition policies for women in rural areas a reality.

Yolande worries about the effects of climate change, such as soil degradation and the increase in diseases that affect the population. She believes that women can rise to the challenge and thus reduce their vulnerability. She also hopes that the GRASP Fellowship will be a means to learn from countries that have made significant progress regarding agroecological transition policies that support women in rural areas. "I'd like to have better tools and to be better informed. I aim to join networks of rural women with similar beliefs who know the reality on the ground. This is really important to me. I want to share more experiences," she enthuses.

Yolande Leondaris 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).