

## Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship

### Fellow Profile



**Position**  
Researcher

**Institution**  
Policy Studies Institute (PSI),  
Ethiopia

**Country**  
Ethiopia

**Education**  
MSc, Statistics, Addis Ababa  
University, Ethiopia (2009)

**Mentor**  
Dr. Ashagrie Gibtan, lead research  
in agricultural policy, PSI

**Research Area**  
Addressing women's low ownership  
of land, commercial farms, and  
livestock in rural areas

### **Zemene Yohannes Ayalew** 2023 AWARD Policy Fellow

*"Putting together my experience with the new skills I will get from this Fellowship will help me bring change for many women in rural areas."*

Although Zemene Yohannes Ayalew was born and raised in an urban environment, she had frequent opportunities to experience rural life – and its challenges – when visiting her uncles in the village. She recalls how her female cousins and aunts had to work hard. "Most of them are married early, so they have to do the housework, take care of the children, and help out on the farms," she says.

Motivated by the hardships she witnessed growing up, Zemene was determined to do well at school so she would not have to follow the same path as her female relations. She showed a natural talent for math from an early age and went on to study Statistics at Addis Ababa University. Upon completing her degree in 2004, she began working as a junior statistician for the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia. Part of her role involved participating in national surveys on agriculture – mainly collecting data on crops and livestock production and on who owned the farming land.

Zemene says her time at the Agency gave her vital insights into gender disparities within the farming and livestock industries and fueled her commitment to addressing gender inequalities in agriculture. "What struck me when I was working with the national surveys was the disparities in land ownership and commercial farming," she says – adding that land and livestock are often owned by men who are the sole decision-makers on how to use them.

In 2011, Zemene left the Agency to take on the data manager role at the Ethiopian Revenue and Customs Authority before joining the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) in Ethiopia in 2018. This move, she states, was a crucial career step as it allowed her to work on topics that could bring about change for rural women. For instance, her research at PSI has touched on agriculture and published articles on meat and milk production trends – information she hopes can be translated into recommendations for enhancing outcomes in the field.

Recently, she focused on women's low participation in the labor force and produced a policy brief on the issue. In addition, Zemene has conducted comparative research on the agricultural policies of other countries, such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Malaysia. From this, she was able to enlighten decision-makers and suggest policies that promote the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ethiopia.

Zemene learned of the GRASP Fellowship through a colleague at PSI, and she knew she had to apply. She believes the program will afford her opportunities to acquire skills in reviewing agriculture policies (especially related to gender), which will help her develop her research so she can make a greater impact. Zemene's main aim is to contribute – through research – to bridging the gap in the agricultural sector, particularly addressing the issue of women's ownership of land, commercial farms, and livestock – all important assets for economic empowerment. "Putting together my experience with the new skills I will get from this Fellowship will help me bring change for many women in rural areas," she says.

She is confident that the time spent working with her mentor, Dr. Ashagrie Gibtan, who has several years of experience as a researcher in agricultural policy, will prove significantly beneficial during the Fellowship. Zemene also looks forward to hearing about and learning from the experiences of other participants in the program and hopes to build new networks to access research funding opportunities.

*Zemene Yohannes Ayalew 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).*