

A bi-monthly compendium of stories and articles
about the Start Them Early Program (STEP)

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Governor Makinde launches STEP-Oyo Project at Fasola



Oyo State Governor, Engr. Seyi Makinde (2nd from left) with the IITA DG, Dr. Nteranya Sanginga (3rd from right) and other stakeholders at the inauguration ceremony

On 23 July, 2020, the Governor of Oyo State, Nigeria, Engr. Seyi Makinde, inaugurated the IITA Start Them Early Program (STEP) at Fasola Grammar School, Fasola, Oyo State. School facilities upgraded by the program through the leadership of the Director General of IITA, Dr. Nteranya Sanginga, were also inaugurated.

Governor Makinde expressed joy that students were getting a mix of classroom

training and experiential learning in agribusiness through STEP. He cited the agricultural clubs and practical activities such as Young Farmers' clubs and school farms that existed in the 1980s and early 90s, as platforms where theoretical and practical learning of agriculture condensed.

The governor who described STEP as a wake-up call for Oyo State, and indeed, the entire country, agreed that the program

would refocus the minds of young people to identify profitable ventures along the agricultural value chains.

Restating his administration's commitment to the transformation of agriculture in the state, the governor said:

"We remain steadfast in our resolve to grow our economy through agribusiness. This project that is starting in Fasola Grammar School will be extended throughout Oyo State, and soon through STEP, we will have a new generation of Agripreneurs in Oyo State."

The launch marked the inception of the STEP-Oyo Project with the government promising to scale the program across the six geopolitical zones in the state. Six schools have been identified by IITA and Oyo State government for the implementation of the project.

Present at the launching were Mrs. Olubamiwo Adeosun, Secretary to the State government; Chief Bisi Ilaka, Governor Makinde's Chief of Staff; Commissioners of Education and Agriculture; and other aides of the governor. Members of the IITA Women's Group led by Mrs Charlotte Sanginga, heads and representatives of various units in IITA, STEP team and development committee members were also in attendance.

Oyo extends STEP to six new schools

Impressed by the success recorded at Fasola Grammar School, the Oyo State government has indicated interest in extending the STEP project to the six geopolitical zones in the state. The decision was taken after the state Governor, Engr. Seyi Makinde inaugurated the first agribusiness incubation centre established by STEP in the state at Fasola.

The government said the move would extend the benefits of STEP to more students as the program would be implemented in six additional schools identified by the STEP-Oyo team.

The implementation began in two schools in Ibadan - Bishop Philips Academy and Methodist High School - in September 2020. The schools, which were strategically selected, have been visited by the IITA DG, Dr Nteranya Sanginga, the STEP-Oyo team, the construction and rehabilitation team as well as a new group of volunteers.

Prior to the take-off of the project in the two schools, the STEP Nigeria team, on 19 and 20 August, 2020, held an implementation workshop with support



STEP-Oyo Implementation Planning Workshop in session

from the IITA Youth in Agribusiness Office in Ibadan. The principals of Bishop Philips Academy and Methodist High School, representatives of Oyo State Agribusiness Development Agency (OYSADA), the STEP-Oyo team,

construction and rehabilitation team were key participants at the event. .

The purpose of the workshop was to ensure that all partners had a comprehensive understanding of



Group Photograph of Workshop Attendees.

the project, including its approach, objectives and key activities. It served as a platform for knowledge exchange and exploration of ideas on how to effectively and efficiently engage the students. The workshop leveraged the

results and outcomes of STEP at Fasola Grammar School towards the design of an implementation strategy for the first phase of the expansion of STEP to six secondary schools.

At the end of the workshop, a rehabilitation plan for each school was developed, work plan for STEP training activities was drawn and roles and responsibilities of partners were assigned.

STEP sets up pilot enterprises to build capacity of Fasola students in agribusiness

The Start Them Early Program (STEP) has commenced experiential learning activities at Fasola Grammar School (FGS) in Oyo State, Nigeria. The training which started on 20 April, 2020, is aimed at building the capacity of the students in agribusiness and nurturing them into a new generation of agribusiness leaders. Coursework, establishment of extracurricular clubs and pilot agribusiness enterprises are already in place at the school, with the students showing keen interest in the activities.

To ensure that the program ran seamlessly, STEP set up a new infrastructure and rehabilitated some of the school buildings among which are the staff room, the abandoned workshop, the school hall, laboratories and classrooms.

Pilot enterprises in Fasola

Three pilot agribusiness enterprises – crop production, animal production and food processing (value addition) - are currently operating in Fasola according to the STEP model. These enterprises are running on the standard greenhouse, two poultry pens, a processing centre and ICT facilities provided by STEP.



New school infrastructure; Renewable Energy (Biogas)



Greenhouse facility



A few students of Fasola holding broiler birds



Eggs from the poultry



Processed broiler chicken packaged for sale



STEP students at Fasola undergoing training



STEP students in Fasola carrying out a value addition process (baking)

Crop Production: The students are engaged in greenhouse agriculture for crop production. With STEP promoting the use of modern tools and equipment to attract and retain the interest of young people in agriculture, the students of Fasola are taught how to use small farm machineries to irrigate, weed and plant. They are also able to cultivate crops like maize, soybean and vegetables on the open field using modern agricultural techniques.

Animal Production: The two poultry pens provided for the school have a 1000

capacity for layers and 300 for broiler birds. The students were taken through practical training on egg production and poultry meat production. The students whose interest in the poultry activities keeps growing profoundly, feed the chickens, collect the eggs and dress the broiler birds for sale.

Food Processing (value addition): STEP teaches the students how to make money from value added products. The students are able to produce cassava doughnuts, tidbits, bread and other confectioneries, having been taken

through the process of baking and packaging products made from cassava and soybean.

Use of ICT in Agribusiness: STEP is also exposing Fasola students to the use of digital tools and devices, facilitating their ability to adopt Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in agribusiness.

The experiential learning activities are tailored towards teaching the students and teachers the efficient and effective production, management and profitability of agricultural enterprises.



STEP students at Fasola showcasing baked products



A STEP student in Fasola being trained on use of ICT.

LAUTECH student benefits from STEP agribusiness training

A 400-level student of Ladoké Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), Ogbomosho, has become the first student of a higher institution to benefit from the student-in-agribusiness training programs of the Start Them Early Program (STEP).

Ms Rukayat Opeyemi, a student of Agricultural Economics at LAUTECH, who was undergoing a three-month internship program at the State Stock Farm (Fasola Farms) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Oyo State, decided to spend the concluding week of her internship at the STEP Agribusiness Facility at Fasola Grammar School.

She had visited the school in August after hearing about the transformation it went through in just six months as a result of the STEP agribusiness training programs. During her interaction, she was amazed by the confidence the students exhibited while discussing the value chains of agriculture. After touring the facilities of the different pilot enterprises established by STEP, Opeyemi showed interest in the value addition enterprise and then requested to learn from the students who were also excited to share their knowledge and skills with her.

The undergraduate said she wished to add the new knowledge on value addition to her academic discipline, and leverage on both after graduation.



Ms. Rukayat Opeyemi (L), learning how to produce tidbits from one of the STEP students trained at Fasola Grammar School

She confessed that before the training, she had no knowledge of High Quality Cassava Flour (HQCF) and how it could be used together with wheat flour to make cassava snacks. She received training on food processing, as well as the making of cassava doughnuts and tidbits.

Expressing surprise at how much the perception of Fasola students had changed as regards agriculture and the dedication they show towards agribusiness, Opeyemi praised STEP for having such an impact on youths and the community at large. She also appealed to IITA to extend STEP it to as many schools as possible.



Ms. Opeyemi showcasing the cassava snacks she and STEP students made



How STEP defied COVID-19 challenges to advance in DR Congo



Harvest of amaranths in Weza by a student member of the vegetable growing club

The STEP team in DR Congo defied the challenges of COVID-19 to advance its work, helping young people demonstrate their ability to innovate in time of crisis, and deploying their time and skills against the impact of the pandemic on health, food supply, education and business

While the pandemic forced a stay-at-home on many between March and August 2020, young beneficiaries of STEP showed leadership and became frontline workers in discharging roles ranging from tackling disinformation in their communities to implementing handwashing awareness campaigns.



Maracuja juice produced by the STEP Club UEA team



Weza, the training site for 5000 young people in agribusiness

They proposed ideas, led actions, organized discussions and disseminated information through social media and public awareness campaigns, saving many lives as a result.

STEP also organized young people to maintain food security and safeguard the livelihoods of the most vulnerable by ensuring the continuation of the supply of vegetables in the Nyangezi region of DR Congo where quarantine measures forced border closures and disrupted supply chains between DR Congo and Rwanda.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of the education sector across the world and in DR Congo in particular, the STEP team harped on the need to for African governments to prioritize education to save the future of the continent.

To ensure that the barriers and distancing created to limit the spread of COVID-19 do not dampen the zeal and involvement of young people in agribusiness, STEP DR Congo tested a new approach called C5 (Club of 5 people). The approach involved grouping members of the school clubs into small groups of five young agripreneurs to carry out activities on breeding or producing vegetables at home. The approach produced tremendous results as parents were supportive of the C5.

STEP members have continued to capitalize on agribusiness training to empower themselves in order to cope with the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Members of STEP Club UEA regularly produce fruit juice which they supply to supermarkets in Bukavu on a monthly basis. The product, Maracuja juice, has gained a lot of acceptance with people even placing orders without waiting to buy from the supermarkets. The innovative step is creating jobs for young people and oiling the economy of DR Congo in its own humble way.

STEP has also initiated a program called Training Campaign of 5000 Young People in Agribusiness in the country. The program, which is already in progress, will be carried out in Weza for 12 months. For the program to succeed, STEP has created a Distance Training Internet Platform for agribusiness that currently impacts 3200 young people, many of whom are from other provinces including North Kivu, Ituri, Kinshasa, Kasai and Katanga, and have expressed the desire to travel to Weza for the training.



A student member of C5 in her henhouse at home

STEP recruits new graduates in Nigeria

The rapid expansion of STEP in Oyo State, Nigeria, has necessitated the recruitment of 12 new team members from the volunteer group. The new team members called the **STEP-Alphas** were selected based on their competence and excellence in recruitment tests.

In a meeting with the new recruits on 3 September 2020, the Director General of IITA, Dr Nteranya Sanginga, called for dedication and commitment to the vision of STEP as well as their assigned responsibilities.

“STEP is not a job; it is an opportunity for you to explore what the future holds for you. Each of you basically has a Baccalaureate, which means you still have a lot to do and

a long way to go. Aspire to go further in your education, do your Masters, even your PhDs,” Dr Sanginga advised.

He also stressed that ideas, passion and hard work were core values of successful people the team members should imbibe. According to him, through hard work and passion, STEP, which started on a zero budget, has now gotten the attention of the Oyo State government with a \$1.2m funding.

The recruitment of the 12 is a testament to the impact of youth-in-agriculture initiatives such as STEP. Although its core vision is to change the mind-set of young people in secondary schools, towards viable life opportunities in

agribusiness, several other youth groups are finding career development opportunities through STEP. Having documented all the recruitment steps and results, the STEP-Nigeria team can now replicate the process for subsequent recruitment exercises. “Just like we have done with IYA, we must have a vision to expand STEP to all states in Nigeria and throughout Africa,” Dr Sanginga urged.

The DG encouraged all team members to work together with a goal-oriented mind-set, positive attitude and team spirit which is key in team building. Discouraging all forms of unhealthy competition and jealousy, Dr. Sanginga urged the old STEP team members to be open to new ideas from the new team and balance them with their experience.



STEP-Oyo Team and the Director General.

Meet the STEP-Alphas

Alabi Adeola Atinuke



“I studied Aquaculture and Fisheries Management from the University of Ibadan. I joined STEP because I have a passion for aquaculture and agribusiness and I want to gain more experience on agribusiness. Also, I would love to teach the younger youths about agribusiness.”

Ogunsola Akinola Caleb



“I hold a degree in Computer Science with a view to impacting the world positively as much as I can. STEP provides the platform to achieve this as I now have the chance to create a better future for the entire world through the spread of agribusiness as a viable career path for younglings.”

Alimi Abdulazeez Akanni



“I hold a degree in Agricultural Engineering with the aim of making agriculture an interesting and fascinating prospect to the young, aged and the entire world at large as much as I can, and I hope with STEP, the dream is coming to a reality.”

Adedokun Aderonke Abimbola



“I studied Agricultural Economics and Extension Services at University of Benin, Benin-City, Edo State. I did my compulsory NYSC and a year internship in Cassava Breeding Unit IITA. I joined STEP because I have very strong passion for agribusiness and value addition. This program has given me the opportunity to gain better experience while interacting with like minds. Motivating and educative, the program will give me the opportunity to add value to secondary school students through education on the importance of agribusiness.”

Oghumah Praise Oluwaferanmi



“I am a graduate of Computer Science and Information Technology from Bowen University. I joined IITA in December 2019 as a youth corper and worked at Cassava breeding unit. I am a great dreamer and an aspiring world class entrepreneur. My major goal is to provide services that will improve the livelihood of people around the world and make the world a better place. It’s a great privilege to be among the STEP team, and the program has given me a great opportunity to acquire the skill set I need to achieve my goals.”

Robinson Jesutofunmi Sharon



“I am a budding plant scientist with a Bachelor’s degree in Botany from the University of Ibadan. I am in the pursuit of impactful academic and scientific research career. I joined IITA in 2018 as industrial training intern and had my National Youth Service at the Genetic Resources Centre of the institute. Basically, I joined the Start Them Early Program (STEP) to intensely develop my capacity and contribute my quota towards advancing the goals of the project as I would be glad to see us imparting young lives and redirecting their aspirations towards modern agriculture.”

Idowu Oluwadamilola Olayinka



“I studied Crop Protection and Environmental Biology from the University of Ibadan. I joined IITA July, 2019 for my NYSC program where I served at Virology unit. During my service year, I got to know about STEP and what they do. This made me develop interest in changing the mindset of young ones towards agriculture and also encourage them to go into agriculture and agribusiness. As we all know, the future billionaires will be from agriculture.”

Adedokun Olufunto Taiwo



“I am a B. Agric. graduate of Agronomy from the University of Ibadan. My long term dream is to be a major producer of food crops, especially fruits and vegetables in Africa. My vision has been to feed the world, ensure food security and promote zero hunger in Africa. My stay in IITA has given me great insights, motivation and opportunities into actualizing my dream. I am convinced that the IITA Youth Agripreneurs enterprise is the place to be for realization.”

Dan-Aighewi Osarugue Tifu



“I am a graduate of Food Science and Technology from Bowen University. I got posted to IITA for my NYSC and worked in the food nutrition and science lab during which I came to know about STEP. STEP has been a real eye opener and motivation for me. The program has also given me great opportunity to gain more skills and knowledge.”

Mosadoluwa Omolade



“I am a graduate of Food Science and Technology from Bowen university. I was posted to IITA for my NYSC where I served at the Analytical service laboratory of the institute. I joined the Start Them Early Program in August, 2020 as a volunteer and the experience has been great. It is a rare opportunity to be able to develop one’s capacity while also imparting the next generation and STEP offers this opportunity. I believe it is a great STEP in my career path and I yet look forward to the exciting journey ahead.”

Usman Abdullhai Opeyemi



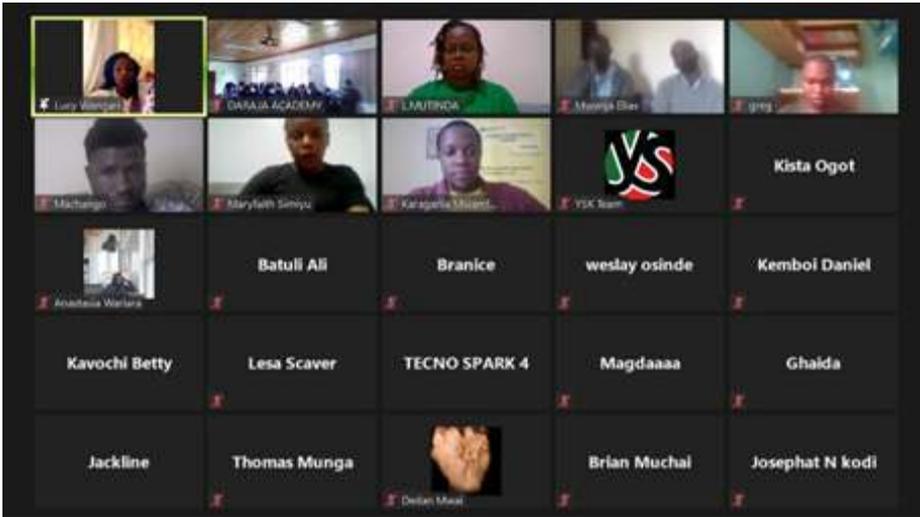
“I studied Agricultural Science Education at Obafemi Awolowo University. STEP was initiated to end poverty and unemployment by clearing the misconception youngsters have about agriculture, and guide them in choosing career paths in various fields of agriculture. My knowledge and expertise both in the field and in class will be of great help in attaining the goals of STEP and developing myself through the course of the project.”

Babadiya Oluwasegun Emmanuel



“I am a graduate of Animal Production and Health from Ladoko Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH). I was posted to IITA for my NYSC after which I got to know about Start Them Early Program (STEP). My goal and dream of impacting lives through agriculture and also becoming someone relevant actually motivated me to join this group. My experience so far has been awesome because I’ve met with various dignitaries and my mindset about business in agriculture has been widened.”

STEP-Kenya inspires students at young scientists' career fair



A cross-section of the webinar participants.

The STEP-Kenya team recently inspired students at a career seminar organized by the Young Scientists Kenya Program for the purpose of engaging young people in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). The STEP-Kenya team was at the career fair webinar to contribute to the discussion on agriculture.

The STEP team members who got the chance to interact with secondary students at the webinar, shared their individual journeys and, showed that individual backgrounds and disciplines can be adapted to create opportunities. The team also shared the history, vision, and activities of the STEP program in Kenya.

In her speech, Welissa Mulei, the STEP-Kenya country coordinator stated that young people can make a living from agriculture by deploying innovative methods, techniques and technologies. "A lot of young people are now making a living from agriculture, all you need to do is find a niche and do not farm the way your parents did", she said.

The event's host, Karagania Mwamlole, stressed the importance of STEP saying he wished he had such an opportunity while growing up. He then encouraged the participating schools to reach out to the STEP team. Mr. Wesley Osinde, an agriculture teacher in Mwiki Secondary School, a STEP school, speaking on the importance of urban agriculture as a city dweller, maintained that food is needed in the city due to the large population size and that students attracted to agriculture should not to be discouraged by limited space "but instead, try urban agriculture."

Drawing from the lessons learnt from the *Career Affair*, the STEP team will be organizing webinars for the STEP students.

STEP-Kenya explores partnerships with Ministry of Agric, Nairobi County

The Start Them Early Program Kenya team had a meeting with the County Director of Agriculture, Mary Kibira, in Nairobi to collaborate with the county government and increase the visibility of STEP in Kenya.

The Ministry of Agriculture in Kenya is

engaged in a number of activities with secondary schools across the county. These activities align with the objectives of STEP and they include setting up green houses in schools, providing drip kits to the schools and creating young farmers' clubs. The county agriculture officers work closely with schools and partners to

provide capacity building and extension services to students in secondary and primary schools.

The County Director of Agriculture who said she was impressed by the work STEP is doing in Kenya, expressed willingness to partner with STEP once the necessary approvals are secured.

Engaging students amid the COVID-19 pandemic; STEP Kenya's home agribusiness challenge and e-learning.

In the course of trying to meet its objectives, the STEP-Kenya team has had to develop innovative modes of operation to deal with the limitations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of such innovations was the creation of an Agribusiness Home Initiative to help the students sharpen the skills acquired during practical trainings in their schools. The initiative encourages the students to establish home gardens at their respective homes. The aim of the initiative is to foster a 'Do It Yourself' mentality while still cultivating an interest in agribusiness among the students.

The students received farm inputs in form of seeds, seedlings and vines to plant at their home gardens while the harvested produce were either sold or consumed by their families.



Peer-to-peer learning while receiving the Agribusiness Home challenge inputs

Labelling the current approach as the pilot phase, the STEP-Kenya team seeks to use this COVID-19 pivot strategy to engage more than 50 youths before the resumption of school activities. It is hoped that the initiative would improve the skill sets of the students, foster assimilation of lessons learnt by managing their home gardens and direct the students towards urban agriculture while gradually changing their wrong perceptions about agriculture. The lessons learnt from this phase will be documented and referred to in subsequent phases on how to better engage and maintain interest of youth on home based agricultural activities.

To sustain interactions, the team used virtual meetings and developed an online learning platform for e-teaching and e-learning. The platform offers online and offline materials to students and teachers, with an assessment test feature to enable participants evaluate their progress. It also has interactive materials in form of *Microsoft PowerPoint presentations, PDFs, illustrative videos, and gradable quizzes.*



A student's project for the Agribusiness Home challenge.

STEP signs agreement with OFFERCentre for training activities in Osun school

Following the resumption of STEP training activities at Oluponna Community High School, Iwo, Osun State, the STEP Nigeria team has signed an agreement with OFFERCentre Agricultural Institute, in Osun State, to leverage the institute's facilities for STEP training activities in the school.

OFFERCentre is an Innovative Enterprise Institute (IEI) accredited to award diploma in practical agricultural courses in aquaculture, poultry farming, food processing, cuniculture, pig farming, apiculture, amongst others. The institute also doubles as an exquisite resort/recreational centre with a guest house

and hostel facilities. Even though IITA and OFFERCentre are already partners on other projects, the partnership with STEP was predicated on the center's proximity to the Oluponna Community High School and the prospect of training the students in agriculture and agribusiness. OFFERCentre serves as a



Fish pond facility at the Centre



STEP team having a planning meeting with the Rector of OFFERCentre, Fr. Olatunji Macarius (far left)

point of reference and model for STEP's agribusiness facility at Fasola.

The terms of agreement entailed the upgrade of some facilities and provision

of operational running costs for the trainings by STEP, while OFFERCentre will provide support, expertise and facilities for the smooth implementation of the program on the condition that

OFFERCentre would be properly referenced as a partner on the project. At the meeting where the agreement was signed, the rector of the institute, Rev. Fr. Macarius Olatunji, commended the STEP team for the agribusiness training facilities set up at Fasola Grammar School, and activities that propelled the Oyo state government to expand STEP to six schools in the state; and to Kano, Kaduna and Lagos through a partnership between IITA and MasterCard Foundation. He expressed joy at the indigenization process of the STEP initiative in Nigeria, and particularly in Osun state.

Present at the partnership meeting were members of the STEP core team; Rev. Fr. Macarius; the Vice Principal of Oluponna Community High School, Mr. Adewale D.G.; the Administrator for OFFERCentre; Mr. Segun Amuda and the Inter Business Development Personnel at the center, Mr. Francis Eyo.



STEP students in Fasola being taught how to use a rototiller

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