

STEP initiative to reduce number of out-of-school children in Oyo State

The Start Them Early Program (STEP) can help the Oyo State government reduce the number of out-of-school children in the State. The Coordinator of [IITA's](#) STEP initiative, Adedayo Adefioye, made this assertion on 23 July 2020, during the official launch of the program and the modern agribusiness training facilities at Fasola Grammar School in Oyo West Local Government Area.

To promote an early interest in agriculture, IITA is introducing agribusiness training in secondary schools through STEP. Fasola Grammar School is one of three beneficiary schools selected in southwestern Nigeria. Established in 2018, STEP aims to challenge the mindsets of young Africans about agriculture and expose them to viable opportunities in agribusiness from an early age.

In his opening remarks on behalf of IITA, TAAT Program Coordinator [Chrys Akem](#), spoke about the vision of the IITA Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#) to see the students of Fasola emerge to become millionaires as they embrace agriculture as a business. Speaking on behalf of the IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, [Kenton Dashiell](#), Akem also highlighted the recently launched Agribusiness Education Program of the Oyo State government.

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A STEP-trained student showing Governor Seyi Makinde how to use a planter.

IITA empowers Ogoni youth on agribusiness for sustainable livelihoods



The factory commissioning by Project Coordinator of HYPREP, Dr Marvin Dekil, representing the Honorable Minister of Environment Dr Mohammad Mahmood Abubakar.

The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Ministry of Environment in partnership with [IITA](#), under the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP), commissioned a cassava processing factory in Korokoro Community, Tai Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The Minister of Environment, Mohammed Abubakar, represented by the Project Coordinator of HYPREP, Marvin Dekil, during the commissioning, noted that the factory would serve as a sustainability package for training and equipping Ogoni youth with economic skills.

As a major staple crop in Africa, cassava is one of IITA's mandate crops and is widely grown in Rivers State. The factory

would help to ensure the strengthening of the crop's value chain in the region, following a 3-month hands-on training on cassava processing and the fabrication of cassava processing machines for 15 Ogoni youth at IITA-Onne, Rivers State.

IITA carried out the training in collaboration with the Stakeholders Democracy Network (SDN) and HYPREP.

The official commissioning of the processing factory will ensure that the factory is handed over for direct running by the 15 pioneer graduates trained by IITA, after three months of supervisory running of the factory by IITA and SDN.

The goal is for the cassava processing center to generate income and create an economic hub for the communities through the production of garri, starch, and high-quality cassava flour (HQCF).



The training recipients and representatives of IITA, SDN, and HYPREP. L-R Josephine Nzidee, Isa Wasa, Jesse-Martin Manufor, Grace Ekanem, Richardson Okechukwu, Alex Seneu Ebimaro, and Ifeoma Ndekwu.

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“These two programs, STEP and the youth-in-agribusiness training center, when expanded all over Oyo State, would stimulate the agricultural transformation of the state and create jobs for thousands of youth,” Akem said.

Coordinator Adefioye thanked the Oyo State Governor, Engr. Seyi Makinde, and the people of the State for providing an enabling environment to establish this initiative. He said he hopes the program would lay a solid foundation to transform the students into global entrepreneurs in

agriculture. He said the program would not only reduce the number of out-of-school children in the State but also allow them to complete their secondary school education and even further their academics with income generated in the school agribusiness clubs initiated within the program.

The ceremony also featured testimonials from students such as Motunrayo Folarin, who participated in the program pilot. Folarin expressed gratitude for the depth of the knowledge that he and fellow

students learned about the agricultural value chains. They also learned about mechanization, ICT, and how to add value to their farm products. She urged the governor to assist in expanding the program so that more students in Oyo State can participate and benefit from the initiative.

Another student, Samuel Joshua, spoke of how he used to view agriculture negatively because of the amount of manual labor required. “But today, in just an hour, we can clear two acres of land, which used to take us two to three days,” said Joshua. He also noted that there was no gender discrimination, even in the mechanization training, and that the girls were as active as the boys.

In his welcome address, Vice Principal Ramone Oyebamiji of Fasola Grammar School thanked IITA for bringing the STEP initiative to the school, as this has brought development opportunities to the community. He highlighted some advantages of the program to the school and community, including increased school enrolment due to the conducive environment created in the school. He also acknowledged the positive actions of the state government, which are helping the development of the education sector.

During his short time in office, Governor Makinde has exhibited a determination to make Oyo State a real food basket in Nigeria, and ensure food sufficiency and combat hunger. He has also taken a keen interest in the education sector, and the STEP initiative resonates with his ideas and policies. “This project is a product of the type of innovative thinking that ensures young people learn agribusiness in theory and practice right from secondary school,” said Governor Makinde.

He highlighted some of the past agricultural education initiatives in Nigeria, noting that these programs helped to stir the interest of a new generation towards agriculture. He said the STEP initiative is particularly beneficial to the food security of the State because young people usually pursue the goals they see demonstrated to them.



Top: IITA DG Nteranya Sanginga showing Governor Makinde some of the crop farms.

Bottom: During a tour of the facilities, students showcased some of the value-added products produced.

IITA collaborates with Ogun State government on agriculture

As part of measures to foster partnerships in agricultural transformation with governments in Nigeria, [CGIAR-IITA](#) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the government of Ogun State. With agriculture being a vital source of income in southwest Nigeria and the country as a whole, IITA is exploring partnerships that will out-scale the available agricultural innovations to meet Africa's most pressing challenges of hunger, malnutrition, poverty, and natural resource degradation.

The Ogun State government, based on its commitment to enhancing self-sufficiency in food production, sought to partner with IITA on innovative solutions and capacity building to develop agriculture in the State. A successful partnership is expected to lead to an

increase in the provision of raw materials for agro-based industrialists and generate employment opportunities in the State.

On 23 July, the Ogun State Commissioner for Agriculture, Hon. Adeola Odedina signed the MoU with IITA during a visit to the Institute's headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria. IITA Management initiated the strategic collaboration, and both parties agreed to have the partnership focus on technical backstopping, establishment of demonstration farms, and enterprise development at the Odeda Farm Institute.

Representing IITA Director General Nteranya Sanginga, the Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, Kenton Dashiell, welcomed the team and introduced the activities of IITA.



The Honourable Commissioner of Agriculture, Ogun State, Dr Adeola Odedina, speaking before the MoU signing.



Top: Kenton Dashiell, IITA DDG-P4D (left) and Adeola Odedina, Hon Commissioner of Agriculture, Ogun State (right), signing the MoU. Bottom: The Commissioner and his team took a tour of IITA facilities.

Head of IITA Genetic Resources Center, [Michael Abberton](#), and the Director of Advocacy and Country Alignment Function, [Kwesi Atta-Krah](#), gave updates on the Institute's activities in Ogun State and plans, which include breeding of cassava, maize, and yam. IITA is strengthening its partnership with the State for improved clean planting material production and supply through the IITA Business Incubation Platform (IITA-BIP) among youth in the State. The parties are also working on a digital collaboration of value chains for improved communication, coordination, and access to markets in Ogun State.

The Hon. Commissioner mentioned that the State Governor, His Excellency Prince Dapo Abiodun, is excited about the relationship between Ogun State and IITA. He said, "The proposed collaboration gives us mileage in the state; we are proud to be associated with IITA." He also stated that the meeting is a product of hard work from both parties and that he looks forward to achieving the milestones documented in the MoU.

While appreciating the Ogun State government team for their commitment to the success of the partnership, Dashiell said, "Signing the MoU does not commit any of the parties to do anything, but the commitment exhibited by your team shows that the purpose of this collaboration will be achieved. We hope the partnership grows stronger."

Agrihub launch: Partners meet to map out project plan

On 13 and 14 July, the team of partners working on the implementation of the Integrated Agribusiness Hub project organized a virtual workshop to discuss strategies to actualize project goals.

The ceremonial inception workshop was organized to officially launch the project and create an avenue for partners and representatives of donor organizations to share views on intended project operations and receive feedback from stakeholders on improving the project plan.



The virtual project workshop discussed strategies to actualize the project.

The Integrated Agribusiness Hub is a five-year project funded by the [International Fund for Agricultural Development \(IFAD\)](#) in collaboration with [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit \(GIZ\)](#). It aims to empower African youth through the establishment of a network of youth-centered Agribusiness Hubs across Africa. These Hubs are intended to be transformational and would integrate agricultural production and processing at two levels: (i) through imparting skill sets among employment track youth (70% of trainees), and (ii) through equipping and backstopping young entrepreneurs (30% of trainees). The project will help young people access employment and entrepreneurship

opportunities in the fast-growing horticulture, aquaculture, poultry, cassava, maize, and agricultural processing sectors in Nigeria.

In his presentation, [Tom Anyonge](#), IFAD Lead Technical Specialist, explained, “It takes a combination of talent, technical knowledge, and capital working together with good integration to be able to create jobs for the youth.”

[Kenton Dashiell](#), Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, [IITA](#), reaffirmed IITA’s commitment to empowering youth in agriculture; “We are expected to share our experiences in agriculture with others so that our impact and reach will help groups in Nigeria and Africa.”

Debo Akande, Oyo State government adviser on agribusiness matters, emphasized the State’s support to the program and promised to integrate the program into the six existing state agricultural programs.

Likewise, [Adoyi Ochigbo](#), Director General, [Anambra Imo River Basin Development Authority \(AIRBDA\)](#) in Owerri, expressed the State’s willingness to support the program and create an enabling environment for the project to run smoothly.

For the project kick-off, Oyo and Imo states were chosen strategically to accommodate youth from surrounding states. The Oyo hub (Ibadan–IITA) will host youth in the Southwest (Osun, Ondo, Ogun, and Lagos states) while the Hub in Imo (Owerri–Songhai) will accommodate youth in the South-South/Southeast (Abia, Anambra, Rivers, Delta, etc.)

It is expected that in year 2 of the project, the scope of coverage will extend to cover the northern part of the country with flexible selection criteria on the category of youth targeted under the program.

The workshop had in attendance representatives from IFAD, GIZ, IITA, Songhai, APDC, Ekimiks, AIRDBA in Imo State, the Oyo State Government, private institutions, financial institutions, ICT firms, job recruitment firms, youth organizations, input suppliers, serial entrepreneurs, FADAMA, and existing IFAD projects in Nigeria.

The IFAD Agribusiness Hub program in Nigeria is a national intervention program with gender sensitivity and flexible selection criteria. The program will produce two sets of young people: (i) entrepreneurs who are business owners (agripreneurs) managing their respective businesses and would employ a number of youth in their business operations; (ii) well-equipped set of youth that would attract decent jobs based on the skill set acquired during the hub engagement.

The project will also award special grants to youth with outstanding innovative ideas.