



The Seeds

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

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STEP ACTIVITIES SUMMARY

This year, the Start Them Early Program established pilot enterprises for crop production & mechanization, livestock production, ICT in agribusiness, food processing (value addition), and central laboratory, with the goal of redirecting the aspirations of young youths toward fruitful careers in modern agriculture and agribusiness. Through reinforcing coursework with experiential learning in the STEP training mechanism, more students now have access to more up-to-date agricultural instruction and cutting-edge technology. Currently, the program has over 4000 beneficiaries, including students, teachers, parents, and community members alike. More students have furthered their agricultural careers in colleges, set up thriving agribusinesses, and some others facilitate capacity development for other students.

By providing these young people with access to contemporary

tools and small-scale agricultural machines, the program helped them gain perspective on effective and timely methods to execute the laborious tasks that they and their parents perform in their farming and in processing activities. The program's use of a "do-it-yourself strategy" that lets the students practise without much supervision adds the cherry on top and helps the students gain confidence. On the basis of empowering a significant number of young people at a pivotal point in their educational and career pathways, these solutions proposed by the program have, without a doubt, provided a great deal of promise for creating sustainable results. The STEP pilot enterprises have also produced admirable results, as they have continuously contributed to food security in communities. These enterprises specialize in cultivation of vegetables like cucumber, spinach, tomatoes, and pepper, production of catfish, meat and eggs, rearing of goats, production

of liquid soaps and sanitizers, conversion of farm produce to value-added products, digital agriculture, and online marketing to promote agribusinesses. Also, the beneficiaries participated in extracurricular club meetings and learned 21st century soft skills in addition to the practical knowledge gained through the pilot enterprises. A significant number of committed beneficiaries were given the chance to practice by recreating STEP Agribusiness at home, and there are numerous success stories from their businesses.

In conclusion, this program's activities will eventually reorient younger youths and community members, toward involvement in agriculture and agribusiness in each school and community that is a beneficiary. As a result, agribusiness ventures will rise in number and there will be improved food security and job opportunities for young people.



BENEFICIARIES ENGAGEMENT

STEP-Oyo project expands to more schools in the last quarter

In the last quarter of 2022, the STEP-Oyo project commenced activities in rural and peri-urban communities in Oyo State. The schools engaged, namely; Parapo Community Grammar School, Irepo Grammar School, and Ogbomosho High School are recording impressive results in students' and teachers' agricultural participation.

The students and teachers were engaged through orientations, student surveys, evaluation and selection, and trainings on diverse agricultural enterprises. A baseline survey was carried out which hinged on understanding the students' perception of agriculture, and their current knowledge about agriculture and agribusiness activities. The trainings were aimed at developing their capacity in agribusiness enterprises.

Beneficiaries of the project, including community members were active participants during the coursework and experiential activities, and the teachers took on roles as stakeholders in implementing the program and ensuring its success.

Since the project kicked off, 620 beneficiaries - 57% females and 53% males, have been engaged in ICT, Crop and Mechanization, Livestock production, Value addition, and Science. The beneficiaries have

been implementing the knowledge gained, and are consistently finding ways to start agribusinesses that proffer solutions to food problems in their communities. Currently, some of them have launched

agribusinesses, including Tijani Sefiu, who operates a poultry business with eight broiler chickens. Sefiu is raising these chickens in preparation for Christmas in order to make a profit from his sale.



A STEP trainer addressing the teachers during the teachers' orientation.



Students during the orientation exercise in one of the new schools

IITA-STEP summer internship training

During the school summer holiday in August, the STEP Summer Internship program was set up to support STEP champions' involvement in the agricultural sector giving them the opportunity to hone their digital and media skills, gain professional experience, and fulfil certification requirements.

The goal of the Internship program was for them to be able to use the various acquired skills in agribusiness and to address food challenges in their communities.

The pilot phase of the program took place at the Methodist High School, Ibadan, and the students enrolled in courses like; Data Analysis using Microsoft Excel;

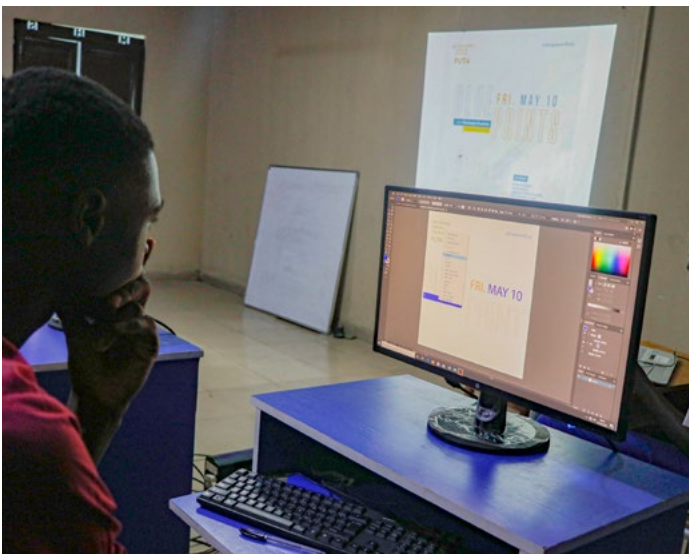
“Successful Negotiation, Essential Strategies, and Skills”; “Create a Promotional Video using Canva”; and “Using Canva to Create Social Media Visuals for Business”, among others, using the Coursera platform. In addition to learning advanced techniques, these courses help ed participants develop the necessary skills to manage, and interpret data. By utilizing Adobe Illustrator, Canva, and Microsoft PowerPoint, they also learned how to create visuals like logos, animated videos/ logos, eBook covers, compelling presentations, and slides that can be used in digital marketing.

Provided with the necessary tools, the students learned the ability to

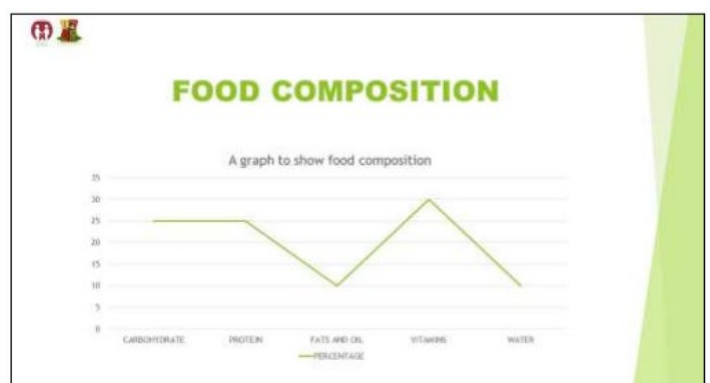
design and produce slideshows using images and graphs/charts.

While the Internship program has ended, the students have developed individual Curriculum Vitae(s) to display their skills and certifications, and are making efforts to put what they have learned into practice.

With social platforms like LinkedIn, the participants are exploring opportunities to get entry-level jobs before returning back to school, which will allow them to improve their skills in their chosen field, while also generating a passive income to relieve their parents' financial burden.



Students during the graphic design class



Some of the slides created by students

Training youths in healthy agricultural products processing

As part of efforts to encourage young club members to become more interested in agribusiness, the STEP DR Congo team recently organized a number of community activities, one of which

was the Healthy Eating Training. The training was aimed at initiating discussions among young people around value chain exploitation issues, while encouraging them to take part in processing agricultural

products for local markets. The training exposed participants to diverse agricultural products suitable for local markets, and entrepreneurial processes for starting agribusinesses.



Youth during training

STEP hosts secondary school students at STEP agribusiness facility, Fasola

About 100 students from five secondary schools in Oyo town, which is about 20 kilometres from Fasola community, visited STEP's pioneer school, Fasola Grammar School, as part of a learning exchange. The three-day program took place at the STEP Agribusiness Centre, and introduced the students to agriculture, the agricultural value chain, and agribusiness as part of their summer camp activities.

The students were taken through the concept of modern agriculture, the methods and practices involved. They were introduced to the basics of agribusiness and the numerous opportunities available in agriculture. This included the career paths they could choose from, to the conventional careers they were already familiar with. The camp activities were divided into three sessions that covered three principal enterprises operating at

Fasola Grammar School; which were the Value Addition enterprise, the Crop and Mechanization enterprise, and the Livestock enterprise.

The IITA-STEP team, the step-down teachers, and the trained STEP students facilitated the program. During the Crop and Mechanization session, participants had the opportunity to see the various modern small-scale farm machines



The Crop and Mechanization session of the visit

The Livestock session of the visit

and learn about their functions. They also took a tour of the screen house. The participants were taught about urban farming, and the various materials and methods that can be used to maximise yield.

During the Value Addition session, participants were trained on agro-

processing techniques and given the opportunity to practise the production of pastry with the use of crops' by-products like cassava flour. At the Livestock enterprise, they were introduced to various types of poultry birds, and various methods of breeding poultry birds;

participants also learned about poultry diseases and some of the treatments for these diseases. The training also covered the agricultural value chain involved in livestock production, from poultry production to commercialization, and a tour of the poultry facility.

SUCCESS STORIES

STEP students excel in their academic pursuit

Since its inception, the IITA-Start Them Early Program (STEP) has exposed secondary school students to viable opportunities in agriculture, and has engaged around 4000 students across Nigeria, DR Congo, and Kenya.

The program facilitates agribusiness training, the establishment of pilot enterprises, open days, and agricultural competitions for students. It also provides conducive learning facilities in the beneficiary schools. These activities promote youthful participation in agriculture as the beneficiaries learn to utilize modern agriculture, agribusiness activities, and digital technologies. As a result, they are now establishing viable businesses and choosing agricultural careers for their university education, and contributing to food security in their communities.

Part of the program's strategy also ensures that the students are equipped with 21st-century soft skills, and a stimulating learning environment. This is helping them thrive in their academic responsibilities and participation in the program.

As a result, IITA-STEP students now outperform their peers in both school promotional examinations and external examinations like the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE).

Their outstanding performance was celebrated recently at Fasola Grammar School, one of the beneficiary schools in the STEP-Oyo Project - a collaboration between IITA-STEP and the government of Oyo State). At the school's Annual School Graduation and Award-

Giving ceremony, held in August, some IITA-STEP students emerged as the overall best students in various subjects, and many were appointed to serve as prefects during the school year, an offshoot of their exemplary academic feat.

Some of the students were Ogundare Esther and Samuel Esther. Ogundare Esther served as the School's Senior Prefect, and was awarded prizes as the best student in English Language, Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry subjects. Samuel Esther emerged as the best student in Economics.

In addition to her role as the outgoing Punctuality Prefect, she is one of STEP's most dedicated students, and she runs a thriving agribusiness that has benefitted from the program's resources.



STEP beneficiaries receiving their gifts

STEP Kenya wins prize at Nairobi International Trade Fair Show

Mwiki Secondary School STEP club members participated in the Nairobi International Trade Fair Show, held at Jamhuri Park in Nairobi from September 26 to October 2. At the fair, the club displayed different products from its

livestock enterprise like rabbits and chickens, which caught the attention of other participants, especially secondary school students.

Meanwhile, the club won the first prize awarded for an outstanding

exhibition at the fair, as many participants came to their booth. The STEP exhibition featured interactions on STEP, agricultural participation, enterprise activities, and products.



STEP Mwiki secondary school club members at the Fair



The First Prize for exhibition awarded to the STEP Club

Home agribusiness interviews

In Fasola Community, Oyo State, Nigeria, IITA-STEP students from Fasola Grammar School are blazing the trail in Livestock production, especially in poultry farming. The STEP-Oyo team interviewed three of these students who have established home agribusiness enterprises to get feedback on their experiences so far. They have been able to raise 40 Noiler birds, and below are excerpts of their testimonies:

OLAYIWOLA ISMAIL

Class: SSS 2

Product: 10 Noiler birds

Feedback: "Since joining STEP, I've always told my parents and friends about what I have been learning there. My father was impressed by my enthusiasm for agriculture, and decided to encourage me by buying 10 Noiler birds to practise what I had learned so far. I am very happy to have my little poultry farm, and I would be selling them when they reach maturity and use the proceeds to buy more birds."



The STEP M&E team observing Ismail's Noiler pen

AZEEZ ROKEEB

Class: JSS 3

Product: 10 Noiler birds

Feedback: “Growing up, I thought agriculture was a job for the elderly and poor, but with the help of STEP, I now have a better understanding of agriculture and agribusiness, and I love it. In the future, I would like to establish a poultry and crop farm to feed my family and community. My parents have been supportive; they assisted me in erecting a little poultry pen where I presently raise 10 Noiler birds. In addition, my siblings have been assisting me with managing the pen and are learning in the process.”



Azeez Rokeeb and his parents.

DUROTIMI MAYOWA

Class: SSS 1

Product: 20 Noiler birds

Feedback: “I have always loved assisting my friend, Taofeek Adekunle (a beneficiary of the IITA-STEP Home Agribusiness Starter Kit for Crop production) on the field. Seeing his zeal piqued my interest in agriculture, which motivated me to join IITA-STEP. Since then, I’ve learned a great deal, both theoretically and practically.”

“I decided to buy and raise Noiler birds to put what I had learned into practice, and this led to a business partnership with my friend, Taofeek. We contributed the



Mayowa and Taofeek at their noiler pen.

money we had previously saved to purchase 20 Noilers, and it has been a fantastic experience for us thus far.

Meanwhile, the STEP experts have also been of great help in mentoring us.”

STEP Products produced and packaged by students in STEP schools across Africa



Cassava Chinchin



Tidbits



Cassava Chips



Liquid Soap



Air-Freshener



Peanuts



Sorghum Cake



Pumpkin Chapatis



Potato Jam

To order or for enquiries, call or reach out to 08039784389

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