

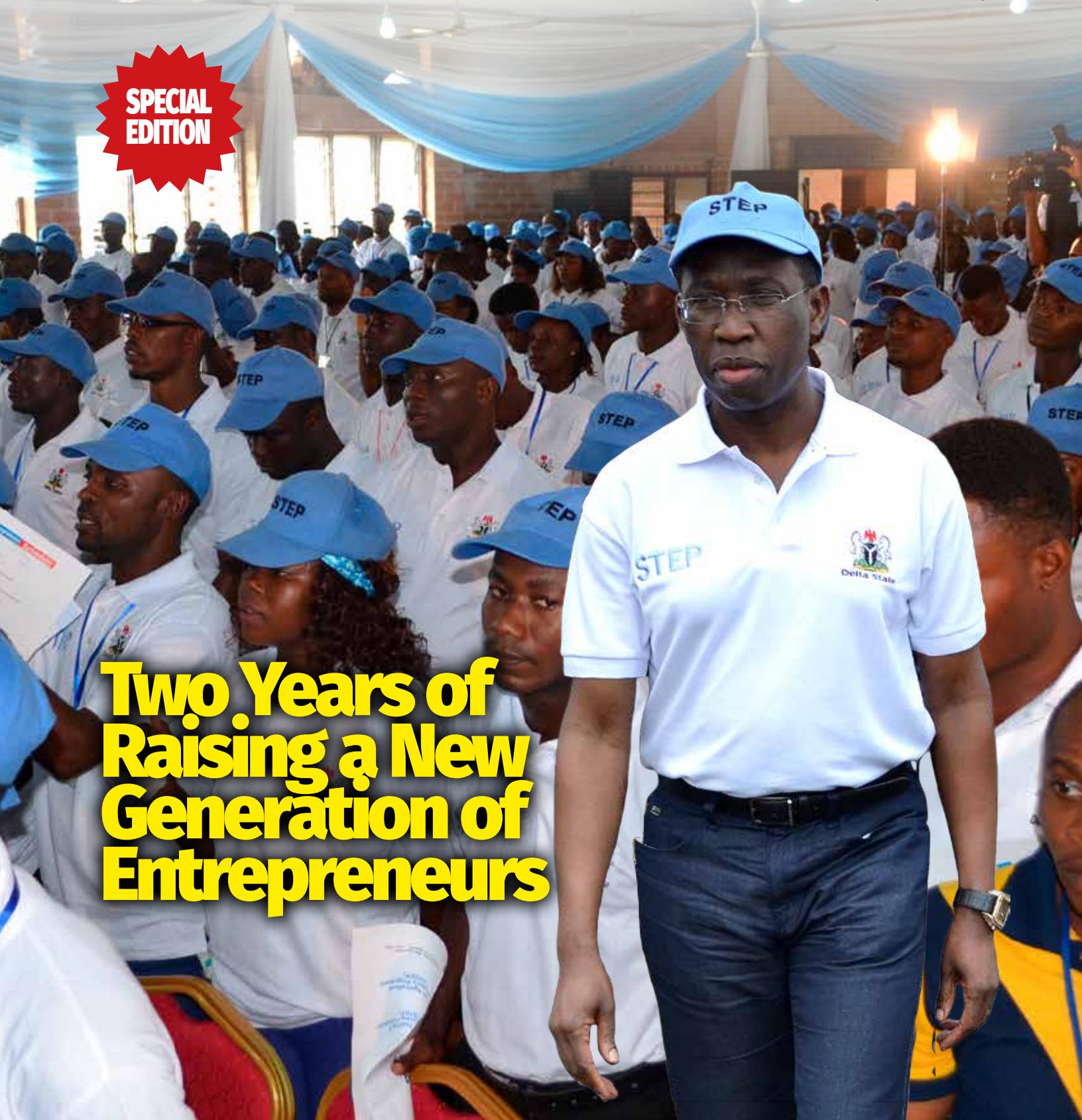
OkowaPlus

A PUBLICATION OF THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF JOB CREATION OFFICER

NO. 4 DECEMBER 2017

SPECIAL EDITION

Two Years of
Raising a New
Generation of
Entrepreneurs



Distribution of starter packs to STEPreneurs and YAGEPreneurs



Certificate of honour for Gov Okowa from Students on Industrial Work Experience at Songhai-Delta



Governor Ifeanyi Okowa conducting Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo round the exhibition stand of STEPreneurs and YAGEPpreneurs at the Investment and Economic Summit to mark the 25th anniversary of the creation of Delta State



November 29, 2017

His Excellency,
Senator (Dr) Arthur Ifeanyi Okowa
The Executive Governor of Delta State.

Dear Sir

GOODWILL MESSAGE ON STEP AND YAGE EXHIBITION/ BUSINESS FAIR

We use this medium to felicitate with the Delta State Government on the exceptional and ground-breaking Product Exhibition and Business Fair for STEPrenuers and YAGEPrenuers to showcase and market their products and business enterprises.

This milestone is a true reflection of the State Government's commitment to ensuring human development and sustainable growth through the SMART Agenda that has proven to be an effective tool geared towards sustainable development and prosperity for all Deltans.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ifie Sekibo'.

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The Management and Staff of



Heartily Congratulate

**DELTA STATE GOVERNMENT ably led by
HIS EXCELLENCY
SENATOR (DR) IFEANYI OKOWA**

**on Its First STEP and YAGEP Product Exhibition
and Business Fair**

*CHI FARMS LIMITED is proud to be part of the success stories of
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The Unfolding of a Vision

*Being Address by His Excellency, **Senator Dr Ifeanyi Okowa** on the inauguration of the Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) and Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP)*

I gladly welcome all of you to this ceremony, the official inauguration of Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) and Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) of our Job and Wealth Creation Scheme.

Today's event is undeniable proof that our administration's S.M.A.R.T agenda is well and truly on course. It goes without saying that Job and wealth creation are the bedrock of the S.M.A.R.T agenda, with YAGEP and STEP as the flagship programmes.

Other programmes under the Job and Wealth Creation Scheme are Production and Processing Support Programme (PPSP), Development of Agro-Industries, and Extension of Microcredit. All the programmes have been strategically designed, stringently planned and specifically tailored to tackle the problem of youth unemployment and produce lasting and sustainable prosperity across board.

Our strategy for making this a reality is through focussed and concentrated efforts to stimulate the growth and development of Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs). While multinational companies and big corporations get all the public attention and acclaim for their capacity to induce foreign investment capital, MSMEs remain the backbone for economic growth and social development in any society.

By definition, MSMEs are companies that employ less than 250 persons and available statistics indicate that 97% of all businesses in Nigeria employ less than 100 persons. Meanwhile, they account for about 50% of Nigeria's productive workforce and 46.54% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The story is not different in other parts of the world. There are approximately 23 million small businesses in the USA and they employ more than 50% of the private workforce and generate more than half of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Similarly, MSMEs account for 99.8% of all companies and 65% of business turnover in the European Union.

It is for this reason that this administration is very passionate, deliberate and focussed in our quest to formulate tangible and lasting policies and/or programmes to support the small business sector. The overarching goal of the job and wealth

creation scheme is to equip participants with the technical know-how, vocational/technical skills, values and resources to become self-employed and employers of labour.

I am aware that there have been similar interventions in the recent history of our State. Unfortunately, these interventions did not deliver on their promises and, therefore, failed to meet the yearnings and aspirations of our people. Not surprisingly, some people have wondered if we are not just reinventing the wheel or going through the same motions without movement. My answer to that is a resounding NO! We carried out a thorough post-mortem of past initiatives in this regard and designed the Job and Wealth Creation Scheme to avoid their shortcomings.

The underlying difference is the desired end result. While previous programmes sought to prepare people for employment, the Job and Wealth Creation Scheme seeks to produce wealth creators and job creators. Critical differences also exist in the selection and screening process, training approach, management system, and collaboration with the organised private sector. In addition, this scheme is not your typical empowerment programme that is often cash based; it is a wealth and job creation scheme. It is not about skills acquisition; it is about building a knowledge economy.

The youth training and development is all encompassing and enduring in nature. It incorporates life skills, mind-set change, leadership and business management skills necessary for our participants to become successful entrepreneurs. To avoid the pitfalls of the past, a monitoring and mentoring mechanism has been incorporated into the scheme to track performance of participants and provide them counselling when necessary. Monitoring is aided by ICT-based information transmission, tracking and reporting technologies. This is expected to greatly reduce the number of drop-outs from the scheme, a major drawback with previous programmes

It is important for us to recognise these differences so that we can embrace the paradigm shift that the job and wealth creation scheme entails. And this is particularly so for our participants here today. I congratulate all of you for making it into the scheme. Beyond the colour and glamour of the day, I want you to know that this scheme is about taking



your destiny in your own hands. It is an opportunity of a life time and I urge you to make the most of it.

Becoming an entrepreneur or a self-employed person is not a big deal neither is it rocket science. It is within reach of any person who will dare believe and go for it. Most successful entrepreneurs were not born; they were made. Or to put it another way, they made themselves. They made themselves, of course with the help of God, because they braved the odds and applied themselves rigorously to some of the things you will be learning in the course of your training.

You will be taking courses in leadership, personal effectiveness, resource management, and problem solving, among many other modules, to be facilitated by thoroughbred professionals and experienced resource persons; men and women with proven track records of success in business and leadership.

After this Orientation Programme, you are expected to proceed to various skills training centres to obtain the requisite necessary technical/vocational skills after which you will embark on an internship in an existing business set-up in your chosen field. The last week of your training will bring you back here to SONGHAI-DELTA for a rigorous and robust education in entrepreneurship and business management. Graduates will then be given starter packs to start their businesses.

The government is investing hugely in this programme and you will be doing yourself, your family and your community great disservice if you squander this opportunity. Training to become an entrepreneur gives you a headstart over some of your friends and colleagues in paid employment. Every employee, whether in the civil service or the private sector, will eventually retire into private business and God help that person who is not adequately prepared for life after paid employment.

You should, therefore, consider yourselves privileged to be getting the kind of training you have been receiving since the commencement of this Orientation Programme. Indeed, you are



Our strategy for making this a reality is through focussed and concentrated efforts to stimulate the growth and development of Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs).

blessed and highly favoured to have been selected from a pool of over 70,000 applicants to commence this scheme. I expect you to make the most of this opportunity by diligently applying yourself to the training programme.

As forerunners of the Job and Wealth Creation Scheme, I charge you to be good ambassadors. You must lead by example and imbibe the qualities of discipline, focus, punctuality, hard work, and accountability that constitute the ingredients for success in life.

As I pointed out earlier, this scheme has a strong monitoring and mentoring component. If you are found wanting at any point in time, you will be asked to step aside. We are very serious about this scheme and only those who show the same amount of seriousness deserve to continue to enjoy support from the government.

Within one year of your graduation from this Scheme it is my earnest prayer and desire to see some of you prospering in your businesses and making progress in your personal life. Your success is our success. In the not too distant future, I am confident that some of you will be back here as resource persons for future phases of this Job and Wealth Creation Scheme.

The scheme is being executed in successive phases and I want to encourage those who could not make it into this first phase to remain hopeful. The introduction of this scheme has enabled us to develop a database of the unemployed in the State. By the next six months when the next phase begins, we will simply pull out the next set of participants from the database. So there is opportunity for as many as are qualified to be enlisted in subsequent phases of the scheme.

Once again, congratulations to all of you participants, and I pray for your success in this journey.

I thank you all for listening.

God bless you.

God bless Delta State.

Better Times for Youths in Delta

At inauguration as Governor of Delta State on the 29th of May 2015, His Excellency, Senator Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa, proclaimed his goal and determination to tackle frontally the scourge of youth unemployment in Delta State through the S.M.A.R.T. agenda. Three months after swearing-in, when many governments were still struggling to settle down, he rolled out the Job Creation Scheme in two kinds, namely Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) and Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP).

Two years after the launch of the scheme, the state is already harvesting its fruits. A total of 2,324 unemployed youths have been transformed into owners of business enterprises, self-employed individuals and employers of labour.

This total includes 1,687 STEPreneurs, 618 YAGEPreneurs and 19 beneficiaries of the newly-introduced Graduate Employment Enhancement Programme (GEEP). In line with the Governor's principle of inclusiveness, STEP and YAGEP beneficiaries comprise males 64% and females 36% and include fifty one (51) Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).

Today, thanks to the vision, leadership and unwavering commitment of Governor Okowa, the entrepreneurial landscape of the state is now dotted with vibrant, innovative and well-motivated educated youths actively and gainfully engaged in their enterprises. Many STEPreneurs and YAGEPreneurs bear various testimonies of life-changing and dramatic personal impacts of the job creation programmes.

Beyond the phenomenal turn-around in their economic and social circumstances, many of them are making progress on many fronts, including as trainers in their respective vocational skills and having products/services that compete well in markets outside the State. There are numerous cases of previously unemployed youths who, through the Job Creation Scheme, have rediscovered themselves and are happily deploying their vocational skills as productive economic agents.

by Eric Eboh
Chief Job Creation Officer



The agricultural impacts of the YAGEP are unique and deserve special mention. The development of farm clusters for poultry, piggery, fish production and crop production around the State and the organization of YAGEPreneurs in these farm clusters have transformed the agricultural landscape of the state. From inception to date, a total of 28 YAGEP farm clusters (crop, livestock and aquaculture) have been developed and are operational throughout the State. These clusters are now significant agricultural growth poles for greater use of more efficient farm inputs and new technologies, enhancement of agricultural productivity and incomes and development of the agricultural value chain in the state.

On their part, the training centres/enterprises (agricultural and vocational) in the scheme have had their share of the positive impacts. The processes of screening, accrediting and using them as training centres have benefitted them in many ways. The benefits include increased demand for their services, increased incomes, increased visibility, improved quality of products and services and higher growth prospects. Furthermore, because of their participation in the scheme, many training centres/enterprises in the State now enjoy greater exposure and institutional support such as microcredit, business networking, capacity building workshops & seminars and enterprise development services.

Overall, the evident outcomes of the Job Creation Scheme have vindicated the vision and leadership of Governor Okowa. Sound planning, faithful execution and enabling environment provided by the Governor, are the foundational pillars of success. In addition, critical success drivers include the transparency and credibility of the selection process, holistic (all-round) design/content of the training model, quality and discipline of the training activities, standardization and integrity of establishment enterprise starter packs and tenacity of the monitoring, feedback and follow-through mechanisms. As a matter of fact, the growing demand for the job creation programmes by unemployed youths, communities and



Resource Persons at an enlightenment workshop on Job Creation Accounting Framework

stakeholders is indication of their credibility and acceptability.

As we relish the results so far achieved, it is crucial to recognize and address the challenge of consolidating on the successes recorded, expanding participation and upscaling impacts

into the future. Going forward, these three imperatives will critically define the prospects and sustainability of the Job Creation Scheme. Already, solid foundation has been laid in the first two programme cycles through a variety of ways. Public confidence and buy-in have been earned as evidenced by the willingness of stakeholders to sponsor candidates independent of government funding.

The implementation strategy of co-locating YAGEP beneficiaries in farm clusters, organizing them into cooperative societies and progressing them as participants in the Central Bank of Nigeria-Ministry of Agriculture Anchor Borrowers Programme are vital building blocks of sustainability.

Moreover, from the standpoint of institutional safeguards, both the Directorate for Youth Monitoring and Mentoring and the Delta State Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency have mandates that promote the sustainable growth and development of STEPreneurs and YAGEPreneurs and their enterprises. Also, the STEP and YAGEP products exhibition and business fair are invaluable ingredients for nurturing

"Overall, the evident outcomes of the Job Creation Scheme have vindicated the vision and leadership of His Excellency, the Governor. Sound planning, faithful execution and enabling environment - provided by His Excellency, the Governor, are the foundational pillars of success."

and growing business enterprises.

Another positive light on the sustainability of the job creation programme is the institutional endorsement from international development partners. For example, following

satisfactory review and assessment of the state's job creation model and its implementation, World Bank Nigeria is providing funding support for STEP and YAGEP under the States' Employment and Expenditure for Results (SEEFOR) project. As Delta State job creation model receives wider endorsement, other international development partners are expected to follow the trail of the World Bank Nigeria in providing institutional and funding support to STEP and YAGEP.

No doubt, better times are here for previously employed youths in the State. Unemployed youths that have benefitted from the programme are testimonies of the transformation that the programme has brought about. Others waiting to be covered by the programme are justifiably hopeful that continued implementation will reach them. Therefore, sustaining the scheme is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders in the State. Let's join hands to scale-up the job creation programmes, widen the impacts and ensure sustainability.



Earthen Ponds supported with Asbestos at Anwai YAGEP Fish Farm Cluster

Forty-Four YAGEPreneurs Commence Business in Anwai Farm Cluster

Forty four YAGEPreneurs in fish farming, whose ponds were recently swept away by ravaging flood, have been re-established at Anwai Fish Farm Cluster. They are to commence business with two fishponds, 2,000 juveniles, fish

feeds to train their fish to maturity, #50,000.00 start-up allowance, and #15,000.00 monthly stipend for 6 months each among other items.

Handing over the fish ponds to the beneficiaries on behalf of the State Government, the Chief Job

Creation Officer, Prof Eric Eboh, thanked them for their patience over the unfortunate flood that submerged their ponds and swept away their fish.

He reiterated the State Government's commitment to re-establishing



CJCO, Prof Eric Eboh addressing beneficiaries at Anwai YAGEP Fish Cluster

them to ensure that they secure a sustainable means of livelihood and that they grow their businesses to

enable them to train and employ other unemployed youths.

“You are here to take ownership of

these ponds, to possess and prepare the ponds to receive your juveniles next week. You will receive your feeds, 22mm first, while 3mm, 4.5mm, 6mm and 9mm will be distributed in batches. Today, you will be enrolled for six months stipend of #15,000.00 each month and #50,000.00 cash allowance next week,” Prof Eboh told them.

On his part, the consultant who developed the technology, Engr. Dele Okhidiebie, said asbestos is used in building fish ponds in swampy terrain, adding that there is no difference between the fish ponds supported by asbestos and the uncovered earthen ponds. He explained that it is a good model of fish farming used in Zimbabwe in swampy areas where the soil cannot retain water.

Job Creation: PwDs Receive Starter Packs

Fifty Persons with disabilities (PwDs) trained under the Delta State Government’s Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) have been presented with starter packs to begin their enterprises. Twenty three of the beneficiaries enrolled under the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP), while 27 are in STEP- Hairdressing and Makeover, Shoemaking, Aluminium Works and Barbing.

Presenting the starter packs to the beneficiaries, the State Governor, Dr Ifeanyi Okowa, congratulated them for the successful completion of their three months training, urging them to put their starter packs into good use in order to become great entrepreneurs. He added that their participation in the programme is proof that the State Government under his watch operates an all-



inclusive government in line with its mantra of prosperity for all Deltans

Represented by the Chief Job

Creation Officer, Prof Eric Eboh, Governor Okowa said he is particularly happy his government is carrying everybody along in the

STEP/YAGEP initiative, stating that the handing out of grants of full package starter packs, #100,000.00 and transport allowance to PwDs is in fulfilment of his campaign promises.

He charged them to take advantage of the business exhibition and fair to be organized by the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency and the Directorate of Youth Monitoring and Mentoring for YAGEPreneurs and STEPreneurs. He

challenged them to be innovative and creative so as to market/ showcase their products and services to the world as a proof of their ability during the business exhibition.

On her part, the Honourable Commissioner for Women Affairs, Community and Social Development, Rev Omatsola Williams, commended the Governor for including PwDs in the State Government's job creation programmes.

While assuring them of government's support at all times, she charged them to work hard to sustain and grow their businesses so

that they can be good ambassadors of the Job Creation Scheme like their other counterparts whose success stories are testimonials at the on-going Governor's Town Hall Meetings across the State.

Responding on behalf of other beneficiaries, Augustina Airenogbuan from Illah in Oshimili North Local Government Area, expressed their gratitude to the State Government for including PwDs in the programme, saying "We are overwhelmed and filled with joy. Governor Okowa has given us a sense of belonging and the reason to live."

Non-Indigenes Benefit from STEP

The all-inclusive leadership style of Governor Ifeanyi Okowa, was brought to the fore when one of the beneficiaries, Marvis Onyedum, of the 2016 Cycle of the Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) officially opened her enterprise.

Mrs Onyedum, an indigene of Imo State, was enrolled, trained and empowered in Catering and Confectionery under the Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) for non-indigenes, proved her worth when she mobilized the Igbo Community in Effurun and its environs to roll-out the drums in appreciation of Governor Okowa's kind gesture.

Present to witness the opening ceremony were the Chief Job Creation Officer, Prof Eric Eboh, the Political Adviser to the Governor, Hon Daniel Omimi; the Special Adviser to the Governor on Non-Indigene Affairs, Hon Nze Francis Onuora; the Special Adviser to the

Governor on Youth Development, Comrade Hope George and other dignitaries.

The Chief Job Creation Officer, Prof Eric Eboh, applauded Onyedum for her commitment, personal effectiveness and grasp of all she was taught during her training programme.

Prof Eboh said her enrolment into the programme indicated that Governor Okowa operates an all-inclusive government, adding that a reasonable slot of the State Government's job creation programme is exclusively reserved for non-indigenes who reside in Delta State.

He emphasized that in its effort at curbing youth unemployment, the Okowa-led administration has engaged over 3,000 youths in its Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) and the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP).

He called on private organizations and public-spirited individuals to partner with the government in order to engage more unemployed youths, stressing that government alone cannot address the unemployment situation in the state.

The Chief Job Creation Officer represented by the Communication Officer in the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer, Mrs Gertrude Onyekachukwu, tasked Onyedum to remain a good ambassador of the programme by engaging in community service in order to train and empower other unemployed youths in the state.

He advised her to remain focused and committed to the success of her enterprise which, according to him, is the one of the yardstick with which the success of the Okowa's administration is measured. "Your success is our success and our success is measured by the level of your success," he added.



The Political Adviser to the Governor, Hon Daniel Omimi Esq declares open Marvis Unique Catering Services in Effurun

On his part, the Chairman of the Ceremony and the Special Adviser to the Governor on Non-Indigenes Affairs, Hon Nze Francis Onuora, remarked that the Igbo Community in Effurun and its environs were gathered to celebrate the prosperity agenda for all Deltans by the Okowa administration.

He expressed his satisfaction over the performance of Mrs Onyedum, a product of STEP and her drive to succeed which is a strong indication that Governor Okowa is working and delivering on his promise of strategic job and wealth creation.

In separate remarks, the Political Adviser to the Governor, Hon Daniel Omimi Esq. and the Special

Adviser to the Governor on Youth Development, Comrade Hope George said what they were witnessing was a demonstration of what the Governor has done for youths in the state, emphasizing that youth empowerment was top on Governor Okowa's administration.

They called on all Deltans and non-indigenes alike to support the Governor in its determination to teach youths how to fish instead of giving them fish, urging other youths who are yet to be admitted into the programme to be patient.

Earlier the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Marvis Unique Catering Services, Mrs Onyedum expressed her gratitude to the State

Government for initiating the job creation programmes to redirect and to reshape the lives of many jobless youths, thereby reducing youth unemployment and crime rate in the State.

While thanking her trainer, the Proprietress of Sheroda Catering School, Mrs Sherry Asorho, for the training she received at her training centre, she urged other beneficiaries to put into judicious use their starter packs and the knowledge acquired during the programme.

The highpoint of the ceremony was the exhibition of her catering products.



2016 Cycle YAGEPreneurs Get Fish Ponds

The Delta State Government has allocated fish ponds to beneficiaries of its 2016 Cycle of the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP).

The allocation of the one hundred and 154 YAGEP fish ponds located at Ugbokodo in Okpe Local Government Area was launched with 77 YAGEPreneurs at the ratio of two fish ponds to a beneficiary to enable them to start their

enterprises in Fishery.

Addressing the beneficiaries, the State Governor, Senator Ifeanyi Okowa, disclosed that the Ugbokodo YAGEP Fish Cluster is one out of the five (5) fish clusters in the State. Other sites are in Mbiri, Alao-Ossissa, Egbokodo-Itsekiri and Anwai.

He stated that each YAGEPreneur would be started-up in the

Fishery enterprise with 2,000 post fingerlings and would be supported with sufficient fish feeds till the fishes mature to table size.

The Governor represented by the Chief Job Creation Officer, Prof Eric Eboh, added that the post fingerlings would be supplied to all YAGEP cluster farms in the State by Songhai Delta, Amukpe, assuring them that they would be placed on a monthly stipend to cater for

their welfare for six months and a micro credit loan immediately they take over their ponds to ensure a smooth take-off.

While encouraging them to organize themselves into cooperative societies in order to benefit from the State Government's Micro Credit Scheme and support to fish farmers, he said the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer will provide them with support for registration with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

He charged them to work hard to become successful entrepreneurs and business managers. "Your success is our success and the success of Governor Ifeanyi Okowa's administration is measured by your success," he added.

He noted that the YAGEPreneurs have the capacity and knowledge to succeed having received classroom-

based instruction in Songhai Delta, Amukpe and internship in different fish farms across the state for three months.

He also said the State Government is synergizing with other agencies involved in tackling youth unemployment such as Chevron sponsored PIND Foundation in terms of provision of technical support and mentoring to the YAGEPreneurs.

He pointed out that the positive outcome of the environmental impact assessment on the area was one of the critical factors considered before the selection of Ugbokodo as a location for fish farm cluster in the State, assuring them that the location is safe from flooding.

Two of the beneficiaries, Blessing Okiti (Okpe Local Government Area) and Williams Ukpaka Victor

(Ughelli South Local Government Area), speaking on behalf of their colleagues expressed their gratitude to the Delta State Government for its efforts at tackling youth unemployment.

They pledged to work hard to become great entrepreneurs and success stories of the Job Creation Scheme.

Present to witness the allocation of the fish ponds to the YAGEPreneurs were the Senior Special Adviser to the Governor on Agriculture, Hon. Julius Egbedei; the Managing Director of Songhai Delta, Amukpe and a member of the Job Creation Steering Committee, Dr Theophilus Okpidi; a representative of PIND Foundation, Mr Charles Agbroko and a Job Creation Resource Person, Mr Harris Smart.



Ugbokodo-Okpe Fish Farm Cluster

'We Are Very Much on Track'

- Kingsley Emu

Dr Kingsley Emu is the Delta State Commissioner for Economic Planning and Chairman, Steering Committee on Job Creation. In this interview with **Amaechi Udemba**, Dr Emu speaks on a wide range of issues, including the progress made so far and projections for 2018.

Kindly give a general overview of YAGEP and STEP performance index for 2017?

It has been very upbeat. We have made progress in the second stream. We have had to do loads of amendments to some of the gaps we experienced in the first year. Two years is too short to have a successful operation. But we have improved in a lot of areas. And it can only get better.

Looking at 2018 budget, it appears that more will be done to speed up the economic development of the State. What role does YAGEP and STEP have to play in all of these?

Our programmes keep overlapping. The 2017 stream is almost being completed. And the budgetary provision is there. It takes us about nine months to complete the entire process. First phase, you have a one month life skill orientation and business skill session. And this is a pre-qualified condition. You now send them to their respective training centres. Then somehow they have varying graduating seasons, some three months, some six months and some nine months depending on the enterprise. Those in cassava do nine months. Those who want to go into rice farming do four months depending on how favourable the weather becomes. Aquaculture is six months maturity.

This year has been a very good one for us because we have deviated a bit from the traditional things that we do. We want to promote human capital development. We want to promote entrepreneurship. We have resolved that we need to empower those from our vocational schools. To empower them, we need to run proficiency test to truly confirm that they have acquired the required skills at the Schools. And this is a very challenging one. We have well over 120 training centres that we use in

Delta State. We practically need to visit all of them to source documents from those organisations. And you will agree with me that it is a lot. We have completed that process. We have shortlisted them. Most of them who don't have starter-packs and are qualified we are bringing them in for our life skills training. For those who require one month complimentary training, we will do that and thereafter proceed to give them starter-packs.

Why are we doing that? These are people who have trained themselves either through their personal effort or family support. And since families don't have enough resources to acquire significant or sustainable starter-packs like we do, we then have to provide those starter-packs. For the *STEPreneurs*, they will constitute well over 50 per cent. So that is why we say that we are going to introduce a new twist into what we are doing. And that will tell you that we are open to innovations. The whole idea is to address the myriads of unemployment and human capital development.

Talking about innovation, it brings to mind our encounter in Amai. One of the trainers spoke on the need for the State Government to provide processing plants to enhance the value chain in crops production. Are there plans towards that?

Yes, of course. That is the next level. The operating environment is so dynamic and challenging that if you don't give the critical support that is required, we will have a huge mortality rate of entrepreneurs that are put out. So what we have done in that direction is that apart from having post-programme mentors, we are also having strong monitoring teams attached to the Governor's office who have oversight functions over the mentors and the mentees for sustainability. We have

also put them together into Cooperatives. And as a Cooperative, they can make good demands on the State Government. We have also provided some facilities for them through Micro Credit to cushion the impact for those who have genuine cases. What you talked about constitute a cluster facility that we are trying to put in place.

Where is the place of YAGEP, STEP and PPSP in the 2018 budget?

Between Job Creation that midwives YAGEP and STEP and Ministry of Agriculture, which manages PPSP is a co-relation because they are supporting small farm holders, cooperatives and all that. The budget is in excess of 2 billion naira. That shows you that we are moving in the right direction. And this is apart from the initiatives of Production and Processing Support Programme (PPSP) that abound, commercial agriculture will also compliment what we do because this is just a State direct intervention. But we are also creating an enabling environment for bigger issues. The Nurse Woody 3,000 hectares of land for palm oil plantation is running. We have another project in Ugbolu focusing on grains and vegetables. This has opportunity to expand our scheme and development. It is not by accident that Delta State in the last National Competitiveness index was rated top in infrastructure and human capital development because there is a conscious effort to develop human capital along the agricultural corridor to diversify the economy. That commitment is total, absolutely total.

From our field observation, it is obvious that changing the economic landscape of Delta State is the driving force behind the YAGEP and STEP programme. Are we on track or we are still far from getting there?

We are very much on track. The strings of successes that we have recorded in YAGEP and STEP are enormous. We have also developed loads of products that are



The operating environment is so dynamic and challenging that if you don't give the critical support that is required, we will have a huge mortality rate of entrepreneurs that are put out.

covering small-time farm holders who are not fortunate to fall into these categories. We have the PPSP, which I told you earlier has supported small farm holders. They have used this intervention successfully. We have also supported them through farm inputs.

What is your final word for our youths?

There is prosperity no doubt. But it is for those who are ready to join the prosperity train. The problem is that of orientation. The youth's orientation must begin to change. And that is why this administration is offering the youth life skills training. We

also look forward to when skills will be taught in schools and tertiary institutions. Education is a means to an end, not an end itself. And that is exactly where it should start. For the first time, we have STEPreneurs who are fashion designers and beauticians. That re-orientation is one of the cardinal points of this administration and it is yielding results.

Don't you think that we need to fine-tune our education policy to suit these needs?

We are already treating that. The polytechnics should focus on technical and vocational education. They shouldn't be competing with the universities to produce accountants. They shouldn't be competing with universities to produce business administrators. They shouldn't be producing skills that are non-functional. They should be producing programmes that have market bearing. The beauty of our job creation programmes is that every enterprise has a labour market demand. This is proven. We had to get a lot of consultants to look at what we are doing. And we are convinced and satisfied with what has been accomplished so far.

IN THE *Beginning...*



Applicants checking for their names on the Notice Boards in their respective LGs



Candidates queing up to be interviewed



Candidates waiting to be interviewed



Chief Job Creation Officer in a briefing with Trainers



Interview session in progress



All hail Gov Okowa!



Trainees entertain during the inauguration of STEP and YAGEP



Dr Kingsley Emu taking a class at the Orientation Course



Governor Okowa arriving for the inauguration of STEP and YAGEP



Inputting the data of applicants at Job Creation Office



Interviewing the candidates



Trainees making a presentation during the inauguration of STEP and YAGEP

Distinguished ALUMNI

The Job Creation Scheme has run two full cycles from August 2015 to date. During that period, a total of 2,324 persons, including People with Disabilities (PWDs), have been successfully trained and established in their choice enterprises. The following pages tell the story of how the Governor Ifeanyi Okowa administration is transforming the lives of Delta youths through its job creation programmes.

INTERVIEWS BY GERTRUDE ONYEKACHUKWU

Cynthia Oma Ehire is the Chief Executive Officer of Oma Events & Oma Makeover, Sapele. She is one of the beneficiaries of the Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP), in the 2015/2016 Cycle. Cynthia Oma stands out among her equals. Her ability to diversify into other affiliated enterprises other than Decoration and Event Management in less than one year of establishment makes her a goal-getter and a pacesetter.

Like so many uninformed youths, she thought the Job Creation Scheme was to follow the pattern of previous empowerment programmes. She saw it was an opportunity to enrol and afterwards sell the starter pack, but all that became history after the Orientation Course at Songhai Delta, Amukpe. "In fact, I entered into the programme with the mind set to take the money and leave the programme. But after the Orientation Course, my thinking changed", she enthused. This actually underscores the importance and uniqueness



Cynthia Oma Ehire and her employees decorating a venue

of the week-long orientation course. It afforded the trainees the opportunity to be exposed to courses in leadership, managerial abilities, life skills, mind-set change and personal effectiveness. In this regard, most testifiers affirmed that their successes were 90 per cent based on the lessons learnt. It influenced their thinking positively.

According to Cynthia, her experience has been awesome. Her decision to stay focused on the programme after the Orientation Course together with the vocational training received from her trainer for three months and her starter pack equipped her to excel in the world of entrepreneurship. She said, "After the three months training, I was given a starter pack



to begin my business. Though it was called starter pack, I call it 'life changer' because immediately I collected the starter pack, my life changed."

Cynthia established her enterprise at 73, Akintola Street, Sapele after she received her starter pack. She said her success began when she was contracted by her first client to decorate and manage an event. The client also requested that she (Oma) arranged for a cake designer and a makeover artist for her. Cynthia obliged. After that encounter, she said to herself, 'you can provide

all these services. Why not acquire these skills instead of inviting others to provide the services'?

"So, I went ahead to learn how to bake cake, pastries and the artistry of makeover. As you can see, I am into cosmetics too. My clients who come for makeover usually seek my advice on the best body cream, cosmetics, facial cream/powder or treatment for their skin types. These questions motivated me to diversify into offering skin therapy services and the sale of cosmetics."

The combination of event management, catering, makeover

and sale of cosmetics and beauty products boosted her financial base. For Cynthia, her enterprise is a one-stop-shop! To crown it all, within a period of one year and four months, she bought a car from the proceeds of the business. "I have never seen anything like this before," she exclaimed. "Job creation opened my eyes to these opportunities- Decoration and Event Management, before I diversified to Catering, Makeover and Skin Therapy."

In one of his speeches, the State Governor, Senator Ifeanyi Okowa stated: "We are training you to become successful entrepreneurs who would train and employ other unemployed youths." To give credence to this statement, Cynthia has trained and graduated nine apprentices while 15 persons are undergoing training in her enterprise. She is fulfilled and happy with what she does to make people's events worthwhile. When asked if she would apply to work as a civil servant if the opportunity presented itself, she retorted, "If I were a civil servant, would I have been able to achieve all these in less than two years? Certainly not! I am a fulfilled entrepreneur and the proud CEO of Oma's Events and Oma Makeover.

She called on other unemployed youths to seize the opportunity provided by the State Government through its job and wealth creation programmes to engage in meaningful ventures to turn around their fortunes. "I advise Delta youths to collect the forms and to key into the programmes so that they can be trained on how to become self-employed and independent in order to contribute their quota to the development of the State", she emphasized.



Bridget Apodor is a Cosmetologist and a Beauty Therapist. She hails from Bomadi Local Government Area and is a graduate of Economics from Delta State University, Abraka. As an entrepreneur, she is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Chevonne Cosmetics located at Kenny Prudence Plaza, Block 3, Shop 2, 23 Road Market, Festac Town, Lagos State. Bridget has nine (9) products, comprising skin care and household products to her credit.

How did you get into this programme?

I was hired to input data in the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer. Coincidentally, I had applied to be trained in Cosmetology. I was fortunate to be admitted into the programme.

Why did you choose Cosmetology?



Bridget Apodor, a Cosmetologist, administering facial treatment on a client

I have passion for beauty, skin care and make-up. I want to make people beautiful, happy and fulfilled.

For how long were you unemployed?

I was unemployed for six years after graduation from the university. I was in and out of private jobs for those years without a steady means of livelihood. I was discouraged and confused. But I remained prayerful. I believed that someday there would be a change. Suddenly the change came. It was a drastic change. I was trained for three months by the Delta State Government at "Body and Mind", Asaba.

How did you go into production of your products?

After the three months training, I had something to do because the Government trained me, but I decided to train further in the production of these products. Initially, I used my home as my business address and with the sum of #115,000.00 I received from the State Government coupled with the support of my husband, I registered somewhere in Lagos where I was taught how to produce skin care and household products.

Speak on your Brand Name, "Chevonne Cosmetics"

I was inspired by the knowledge acquired during the Entrepreneurship and Business Management Training as well as the knowledge I received in Lagos. I can say my success is based on them. There and then, I was taught a lot about branding, re-branding and packaging. Corporate Affairs Commission has granted approval for the registration of my enterprise with the name



Bridget Apodor presents her products - Chevonne Cosmetics

Chevonne Cosmetics. As a result of this approval, I have changed my packaging and labels to correspond with my new name.

Tell us more about your enterprise.

Chevonne Cosmetics comprises Chevonne Lotion; Facial Cream; Shower Gel; Antiseptic; Air Freshener; Dish Wash among others. My business now has an account different from my personal account. In fact, the business is growing. I have clients I am working for. On establishment, I used my equipment that is my starter pack, at home, but I now have a shop at Kenny Prudence Plaza, Block 3, Shop 2, 23 Road Market, Festac Town, Lagos State. I have also procured new equipment, Facial Steamer for facial treatment. Clients come for facial treatment, massage, pedicure, waxing as well as for my cosmetic products. I have good patronage. The enterprise is growing and there is money in the business.

Can you then say Governor Okowa's Job and Wealth Creation Policy has impacted positively on you?

Yes! For six years, I was jobless and I was not meaningfully engaged, but Dr. Okowa gave me reasons to laugh. Some people ignorantly say Okowa has not achieved anything, but I stand to counter it. That is not true. He has done something great for the youth. I am a testimony. I encourage other unemployed youths to key into these programmes. Through Senator Okowa's Government, I have realised that the Government can do a lot for its people. His Government is the best I have experienced. I am so excited!

Chiweike Nwankwo is a YAGEPreneur (2015 Cycle) in Fish Production who hails from Ibusa in Oshimili North Local Government Area. He obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Technical and Vocational Education from the Delta State University, Abraka. Within a year and two months of establishment, Chiweike has distinguished himself by growing his enterprise beyond expectation. He is also into fish processing and is growing some brooder stock to commence fish hatchery. Much more, he has acquired a vast expanse of land to be used as his permanent site.

What were you doing before the training?

I graduated in 2010 but was unemployed. I looked forward to getting a government job without success until I was given hope by the Delta State Government through the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme

(YAGEP).

What was your starter pack like?

After the training which lasted for three months, I was given a starter pack with the following components- 3 concrete ponds at Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) at Ibusa, 2,000 fingerlings, 145 bags of fish feeds and a monthly stipend of #10,000 for 3 months. I also received a smoking kiln from the State Government through my cooperative group.

Share your success story with us.

I am one year and six months old in fish business. Currently, I have 9,500 fish, 7 ponds with an annex located at 2 Dumebi Onwuka Crescent, off DLA Road, Asaba where I have two ponds. The highest number of stock I have ever had was 12,000 fish before I sold some of them at maturity. I now process my fish to add value, to control price and to prevent wastages. In addition, I am growing some brooder stock to enable me begin fish hatchery soon. In December, 2016, I acquired a plot of land measuring 300 feet by 320 feet for expansion from the proceeds of my fish farm.



Chiweike Nwankwo

What is the secret of your success?

It is not enough to begin a business, but knowing the intricacies involved in such a business. Basically, I plough back my profit. By ploughing back my profit, I have been able to grow my business.

What are those intricacies and your challenges as a fish farmer?

I have had ups and downs but it is quite exciting. Sometime ago, I lost about 2,000 fish as a result of expired fish feed which I stored for so long and, at another time, my tarpaulin pond gave way during a heavy downpour with 1,300 fish. I was able to rescue only very few. In all, I was not discouraged. The passion to succeed drives me on. I love fish farming; I communicate with my fish; I identify them and give them names. The challenge I have now is funds for expansion.

How many persons have you trained?

I have trained 12 persons including corps members. I have one employee. ADP sends to me corps members serving under them for training

Are you still in search of a white collar job?

No! I no longer need a government job. I am a busy man.



Chiweike Nwankwo at his fish ponds At ADP, Ibusa

Being a beneficiary of the Youth Agricultural and Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) in the 2015 Cycle, Ethor Odomero had opportunity to choose either fishery or poultry like her counterparts, but she opted for crop farming. Her enthusiasm and commitment to her enterprise is unequalled. She loves crop farming and has taken it a step further by processing raw cassava produce into various end products. Mrs Odomero hails from Isoko South Local Government Area and is a graduate of Religious Studies from the Delta State University, Abraka. She is now the CEO of Model Food Enterprises.

According to the YAGEPreneur, her participation in the Job Creation Scheme transformed her life. "I was trained and empowered through YAGEP. I was given a reasonable amount of money to lease a land and I planted cassava. Today, to the glory of God, I have started processing my cassava to improved cassava flour, fufu flour, packaged starch, garri-vita, beans flour, plantain flour, packaged garri, packaged-starch, tapioca and fufu flour."

In addition to cassava products, she cultivates vegetable such as cucumber, water melon, pepper, tomato and pumpkin leaf seasonally during their peak period. "I receive calls from every part of the country to supply my products and I am not able to meet the demand for my products. The market is there for cassava products everywhere," she remarked. She is not able to meet up with demands for her products because she processes her products manually, which is slow coupled with the fact that she has no grinding machine.

Apart from the three months training received from her trainer, Mrs Odomero has acquired more skills in a bid to improve her skills and knowledge on food processing. She is gradually building a brand for her enterprise. She has great ideas and hopes that with more funding she would procure modern equipment to ease cassava processing and improve packaging of her finished products to meet international standards.

"I have sponsored myself to three different training programmes on food processing and packaging since I established this business," she disclosed. "I do this because I need to update my knowledge in order to meet up with international best practises in food processing."

Driven by the passion to succeed and to give back to her community, Oleh, Mrs Odomero is poised to begin a tuition-free training programme for secondary school students tagged, "Students' Entrepreneurship Training." She said the platform will afford secondary school students the opportunity to acquire relevant vocational skills in agriculture with emphasis on fishery and snailery. She owns a fish farm and a snailery too. This move is in consonance with her dream to diversify into integrated agriculture. "It is my dream to own a large farm where I could invest in aspects of agriculture such as aquaculture, poultry, crop



Ethor Odomero packaging her products

plantations, snailery and so on," she added.

On her plans to own an oil palm plantation, she reaffirmed that her hopes are high and that she is working on it. She once was nominated by the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer for two-week training in oil palm nursery, planting and maintenance at IMC LTD, Nsukwa in Aniocha North local Government Area.

In a bid to grow her enterprise, she solicited for support from government, development partners and private sector investors to help take her enterprise to the next level. She is of the opinion that if the government through public private partnership can invest in granulating machine and cassava processing plant, it will not only boost food production in the State, but would also make cassava farming attractive to the youth.

Like many of her colleagues, Mrs Odomero believes the State Government has taken the right step in the right direction. "I believe this is the way out of unemployment for

our people," she stressed. "I also want to encourage the youth to embrace the job creation programmes. Since it worked for me it will also work for

them. I really want to thank Governor Ifeanyi Okowa for the Scheme. After seven years of joblessness, I am now employed and have even employed

two persons to work for me."

Precious Nwaise, a STEPreneur in Fashion Designing and Tailoring, is from Ute-Okpu in Ika North East Local Government Area. She holds a Higher National Diploma (HND) from the Institute of Management Technology, Enugu, and a Master's Degree in Financial Studies from National Open University. She is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN). Precious holds sway in the fashion world as her designs are unique and bold. She is the CEO of Mega Ecos Fashion Designer located at 117, Ibusa Road beside Winner's Chapel, Asaba.

How did you establish Mega Ecos Fashion Designer?

The Delta State Government established me after a six-month



training. I was given starter pack which comprises a butterfly machine; an industrial weaving machine; a generator; a pressing iron; a cutting table; #30,000.00 start-up allowance; #60,000.00 shop rent and a monthly stipend of #10,000.00 for three months. My husband supported me all the way. He rented this warehouse for me.

Your style is unique. How did you

achieve this?

I created my pattern. Fashion is all about creativity. Though I am practising what I was taught, I added my effort to make it unique. I carry out lots of research to differentiate my products from those of my peers.

What is your specialty?

My area of specialization is majorly designing of African prints into executive skirts and blouses and gowns for women to be used on special occasions. I also design all kinds of materials for men and women. In all, my goal is to satisfy the needs of my customers. To the glory of God, I have published my first fashion magazine.

Were you into fashion designing before now?

No. I didn't know anything about sewing before now. Governor Okowa helped me to realise my dreams. I began my fashion designing career through STEP. I enrolled for the programme as a married woman



Precious Nwaise teaching her apprentices

with three children. I was focused and resolved that I would not fail. My desire was to become gainfully self-employed having been at home as an unemployed housewife for six years. With such passion, everything I was taught by my instructor at Signature Secret, I made perfect at home through personal practice.

How many persons have you trained?

I have trained five persons who have successfully established their own

fashion businesses. At present, I have seven apprentices and eight employees.

Would you accept a government job if the opportunity comes?

With what I have right now, I do not need a government job.

Do you think the government is right in promoting entrepreneurship?

Job creation through entrepreneurship is the right step in the right direction.

I appeal to the State Government to continue its job creation programmes in order to reduce unemployment to the barest minimum.

Your advice to youths.

Our youth should key into the State Government's job creation programmes. They should have a progressive mind set by acquiring skills in addition to their educational qualifications so that they can become self-reliant and employers of labour.

Aghogho Oghenekevwde

is a YAGEPreneur trained in Fish Production in the 2016 Cycle. She hails from Oghara in Ethiope West Local Government Area and is an Animal Science graduate from Delta State University. Barely three months after she got established at YAGEP Fish Cluster at Ugbokodo in Okpe Local Government Area, Aghogho has carved a niche for herself as the first YAGEPreneur in fishery to own a hatchery. In spite of her health challenges, she broke all barriers to move ahead of her peers. Her business name is "AG's Rehoboth Farms".

How did the training impact on you?

The three months training/internship afforded me the opportunity to acquire practical knowledge on fish production and to work with professionals in the field.

What was your starter pack like?

After training, I was invited to Ugbokodo YAGEP Fish Cluster and was allocated two fish ponds, 2,000 juveniles, sufficient fish feeds to grow them to table size, N50, 000.00 microcredit and placed on a 15,000.00 monthly stipend

for six months.

How did you get into fish hatchery?

In the university, learning was basically theoretical. I established a personal hatchery after the three months internship. I learnt how to do it during the training. I painstakingly lived in my trainer's farm for three weeks even when it was not convenient for me because I needed to learn the various processes involved in fish hatchery. I thank God my effort paid off.

How did you fund it?

I saved N10, 000.00 from the monthly

stipend I received during my training and with it; I bought a male brood stock and a female brood stock from my trainer. Since then, I have hatched four times.

What was the output?

It has been very good. So far, I have hatched 16,000 fingerlings. I am currently expecting another 40,000.

What is your advice to Delta youths?

I advise them to be more open minded and to embrace entrepreneurship, which the State Government has made possible. They need to make the best



Aghogho Oghenekevwde

use of it to become employers of labour.

How do you assess State Government's Job Creation Programme?

So good! During my National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), I was involved in an accident through which I sustained a spinal cord injury. I thought all hope was lost, but the Delta State Government through this programme helped me to get out of it. I am grateful to the State Government for the initiative.

Through it, youth unemployment is being tackled but the government needs to be more observant by way of monitoring and mentoring so as to nip every challenge in the bud.



Aghogho Oghenekevwde feeding her fish at YAGEP Fish Cluster at Ugbokodo-Okpe

Frances Onyinye Enyi is a graduate of Geography from Ibrahim Badamasi Babagida University, Minna. She keyed into the State Government's Youth Agricultural and Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) in 2015 after fruitless search for white collar job and ever since, she has remained committed to her vision of having one of the largest poultry farms in Delta state. She hails from Aniocha South Local Government Area. The distinctive quality Frances exhibits is her commitment and passion for her enterprise. She is proof that one does not need to study Agriculture to succeed as a farmer.

The business success story of Frances is motivating and an encouragement to young farmers, especially to young graduates who did not study Agricultural Science. According to her, "I have passion for poultry, but I did not know how to go about it till I came into this programme. In the course of the training, I relocated from Sapele to Asaba because I preferred to

establish in Asaba."

This enterprising young lady is indeed grateful to the State Government for the job creation initiative especially for her starter pack. After the training which lasted for three months, I was given a starter pack with the following components-poultry pen at Aboh-Ogwashi YAGEP Farm Cluster with water facility, 200 broilers, 400 point of lay birds, 150 bags of feeds, medication, a monthly stipend of #10,000 for 3 months and other items. With these starter stock, I began my poultry business.

For these, I remain grateful to Delta State Government".

Frances has made remarkable progress as a young poultry entrepreneur who is resolute and committed to what she was trained to do in spite of challenges facing poultry farmers. In less than two years in the poultry business, Frances has grown her business beyond what she had as starter stock. Impressively, she seems to know her onions as far as poultry farming is concerned. "I have done over 10 broiler cycles with 750 broilers last Christmas season.



Frances Enyi, a YAGEPreneur, picking eggs at her poultry

I have also done three cycles of layers. I currently have 200 broilers, 600 layers, 200 poulets, 50 **noilers** (a special breed of layer and broiler), 10 turkey and a minimum of 12 crates of eggs daily from my layers," she recounted.

As a visionary entrepreneur, Frances is planning ahead towards expanding her poultry to a permanent site. "Last year, I invested #1m into my poultry, bought 750 broilers for the Christmas season. After sales, I realized #2.3m as profit. From the proceeds, I bought a piece of land measuring 100ft by 100ft. I hope to expand to my permanent site."

Though it sounds so interesting, yet it might not be as easy as that! She has challenges. One then wonders what could be the secret of her success.

*The business success story of this enterprising young man, **Paul Chiwete Uzoka**, is one that could trigger off the quest for vocational*

She exudes great confidence in the business. Her poultry, pen and the surroundings, were clean and well swept. This perhaps could be the reason for the very low mortality in her poultry. To clear all doubts, she seems to have answers to all the questions. To her, "commitment is key. On daily basis I study my birds, their droppings and whatever unusual changes I discover I handle immediately. Basically, I plough back my profit. By ploughing back my profit, I have been able to grow my business."

Talking about "her ups and downs", she said one of the challenges she had at a time was water supply when the sumo for the water borehole packed up till she installed a new one for the cluster. The major

challenge affecting the cluster is attack and theft of birds by Fulani hoodlums. She appealed to the State Government to come to their aid, decrying that the ugly trend is frustrating her drive to invest in the business.

On her plans for expansion, she hoped to continue to recycle her funds and looks forward to securing a loan through the government to ease her plans for expansion and owning 10,000 birds in the future and to become one of the biggest poultry farmers in the state. "In the next two years, I wish to become one of the biggest up-coming poultry farmers in Delta State," she declared.

Frances currently employs one person.

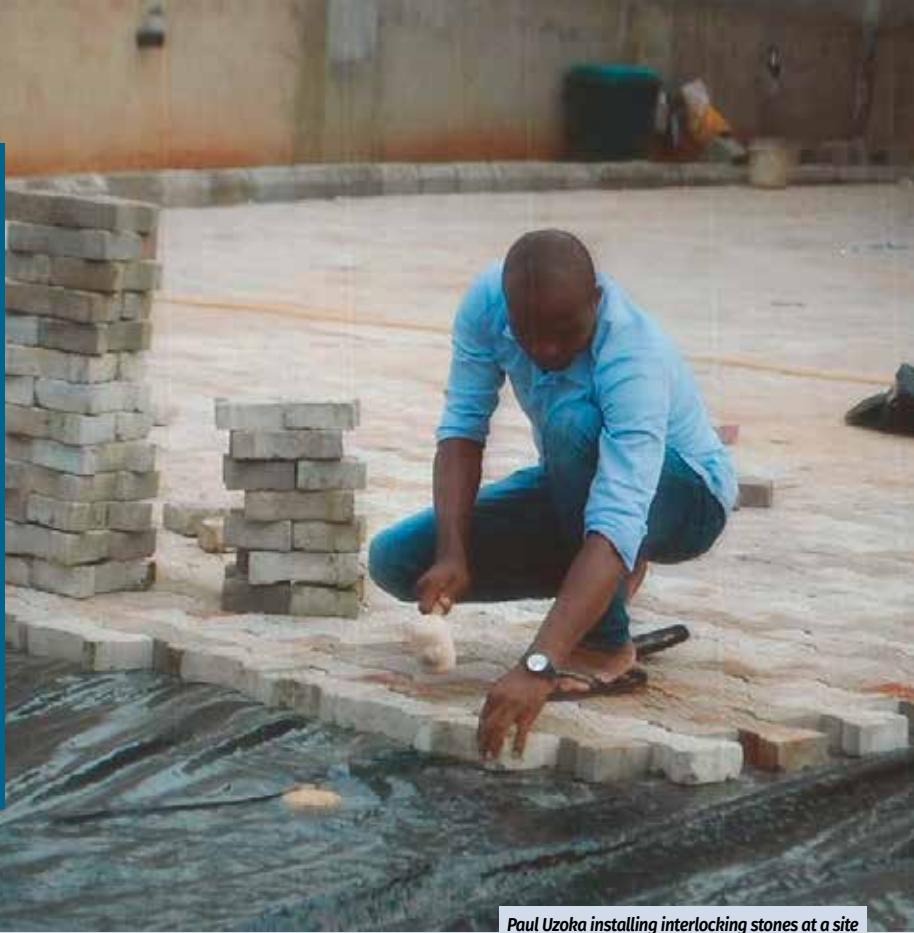


Paul Uzoka, a STEPreneur in interlocking paving stones, working at his site

skills in any unemployed youth. Paul is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Zoks Global Services Limited located at KM 10, Asaba/

Benin Expressway, Asaba. Trained in Interlocking in the 2015 programme cycle of the State Government's Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP), he was able to take advantage of his entrepreneurial ability to diversify into other business ventures as Aluminium Windows, Stainless Rails Design, Door Folding Designs, Real Estate and Media Productions.

Paul hails from Aniocha North and is a graduate of Delta State University, Abraka, where he studied Guidance and Counselling. Within two years of running his enterprise, Paul has made remarkable achievements, bought a car and owes his business success to the Okowa-led administration. Responding to how he got into the programme, Paul said immediately after his passing



Paul Uzoka installing interlocking stones at a site

out parade with the National Youth Service Corps, a friend informed him about Governor Okowa's STEP programme, but he was sceptical. He, however, filled the form online and was called two weeks later to attend an interview in Asaba. He subsequently received an SMS a week later inviting him for Orientation Course in Songhai Delta, Amukpe. The transparency and integrity of the selection process is once again being collaborated by Paul who, like some other beneficiaries, affirmed that they got enrolled in the programme without godfatherism and favouritism from high quarters.

Driven by the passion to succeed, he pointed out that he was motivated by the calibre of resource persons and personalities engaged to speak to them at the Orientation Course, adding that he had a seasoned trainer who trained him in everything he needed to know about Interlocking Production

and Installation. Emphatically, he remarked, "I chose Interlocking because I have idea about building services. I do not believe in failure. My trainer too, BIVI Global Consult is good. I saw that through Interlocking, I could make a decent living and take care of my family. For these reasons, I was focussed."

He expressed satisfaction with the starter pack given to him, saying he received a Compacting Machine; a Wheel Barrow; a Spade; 2 Trowels; 100 Mould Design; 15 pieces of 3 inches Kerbs; 20 pieces of 4 inches Kerbs; 2 Mallets; 3 Brushes; a 750 GeePee Water Tank; 2 Hand Gloves; a Start-Up Allowance of #97,000.00 and 3 months stipend of #10,000.00 per month. Paul was quick to state that he started receiving offers to execute projects while still in training. According to him, "a month into my training, I started having jobs. In fact, we have taken over. I want to thank Governor Ifeanyi Okowa for believing in the youth. If

not for him, I would have remained unemployed. I know I will go far. I have lost count of the number of jobs I have done. Currently, I have two jobs here in Asaba."

One cannot but describe Paul as a very enterprising young man given the number of business ventures he engages in. "Apart from Interlocking, I am into Aluminium Windows, Stainless Rails Design, Door Folding Designs, Real Estate and Media Productions. I have Zoks Media Productions on You-Tube," he remarked. Paul has since bought himself a car out of the proceeds of his business, increased his moulds from 100 to 3,000, his kerbs from 35 to 120. "I have expanded to other branches of building services. I am searching for a strategically located permanent site. Business is all about location." In terms of job creation for others, Paul had this to say: "I have eight casual workers and a secretary."

He, however, appealed to the State Government to patronize its beneficiaries, especially those in Interlocking to enable them to grow. "STEPreneurs in interlocking can interlock some of our feeder roads," he said. "It is cheaper, more aesthetical and durable. We can also be engaged to train up-coming STEPreneurs."

To the unemployed youths he had this to say. "When a child does not know the importance of a herbal leaf, he calls it vegetable. Has any government worker made Forbes's list as the richest man? Only business men and women do. They should acquire skills because it is gainful. It might be tough at first, but in the long run, the sky is the starting point."

Key Enablers and Drivers of STEP and YAGEP

BY ERIC EBOH

After two full programme cycles – 2015/16 and 2016/17, the State Government's Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) and Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) have produced a critical mass of young entrepreneurs, though, previously unemployed, now own and run their respective business enterprises in various parts of the state.

STEP and YAGEP Achievements So Far

Through STEP, YAGEP & GEEP, Delta State now has a total of 2,324 new business owners or gainfully employed youths from the mass of previously unemployed youths. This total includes 1,687 *STEPreneurs*, 618 *YAGEPreneurs* and 19 beneficiaries of the Graduate Employment Enhancement Programme (GEEP). In line with Governor Ifeanyi Okowa's principle of inclusiveness, STEP and YAGEP beneficiaries comprise males 64% and females 36% and include 51 Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). Furthermore, YAGEP has yielded 27 new youth-based farm clusters (crop, livestock and aquaculture) for developing the agricultural potentials and providing exemplary models for youth empowerment through agriculture. In terms of agricultural output, YAGEP has so far added approximately 1,000 metric tonnes to fish output, approximately 26,000 broilers, 49,000 layers and 16.3 million eggs to poultry output and approximately 4,000 pigs to the pig output.

The Success of STEP and YAGEP not by Chance

These products and outcomes of the job creation programmes – STEP and YAGEP – are today the new face of the entrepreneurship development and economic diversification drive of the Governor. The success stories of *STEPreneurs* and *YAGEPreneurs* that are today being highlighted have not come by chance.

For the purposes of public information, lessons learning and posterity, it is important, at this mid-term juncture of programme implementation, to unveil the reasons behind the success of STEP and YAGEP. The reasons are cast as "enablers and drivers." Enablers are those underlying supportive conditions and pivotal factors that were created and availed for the planning, design and implementation of



the job creation programmes. Drivers are the unique features, approaches and methods of planning and implementation which propelled the desired results.

THE ENABLERS

Governor Okowa's Vision Backed by Sound Planning

First and foremost, the clear vision of the Governor is the conceptual foundation of the job creation programmes. He is the owner of the intellectual property that underpins the State's job creation model. As attestation, his campaign manifesto for the governorship of the State spelt out job creation for the youth as a cardinal priority under the larger S.M.A.R.T agenda which encapsulated his development vision and policy priorities for the State.

On June 10, 2015, the Governor constituted an Ad hoc Steering Committee on Job Creation – a multi-stakeholder programme planning and design committee - followed with the creation of a Special Purpose Vehicle known as Office of Chief Job Creation Officer and appointment of Chief Job Creation Officer. Straightaway, the planning machinery went into action.

The underlying question or concern at the planning stage was how to avoid the pitfalls and failures of previous similar initiatives. This entailed making the right analysis and having clear understanding of why they failed. Having identified why previous initiatives failed, our thinking shifted towards what to do and how to do them well. In practical terms, the key planning tasks involved getting an appropriate training design, how to deliver the training, the modes of empowerment and how to deliver them.

The Creation of Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer

The establishment of Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer with authority and responsibility for programme design, coordination and implementation, was a smart innovative institutional infrastructure, vindicated today by the results achieved so far. Working in close collaboration and synergy with the relevant Ministries,

Departments and Agencies (MDAs), the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer is delivering results.

Governor Okowa's Unwavering Political Backing

Equally crucial is the fact that the Governor provided unwavering political backing to the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer in the entrenchment of programme culture that is focused on service delivery and results/outcomes. As a result of this backing, the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer has earned the confidence and support of stakeholders in the private sector, local communities and public sector. The support from a wide range of stakeholders has been highly instrumental in getting the programme design and implementation right on track.

In addition to providing unflinching political backing, the Governor availed the programme constant oversight and guidance. The culture of oversight permeated all layers of programme management and fired up the energies of everyone involved in the programme towards delivering results in a timely and verifiable manner. From inception therefore, the underlying philosophy of the Job Creation Scheme is that "*the success of the job creation beneficiaries is the success of the job creation programme and the success of the job creation programme is measured by the success of the job creation beneficiaries.*" Clearly, the scheme is about the beneficiaries, their successes and their future.

THE DRIVERS

Credible selection process

One of the lessons from the assessment of previous similar initiatives in the State and, in fact, a key factor in programme design is that the beneficiary selection process is critical to getting the right targets which, in turn, is a potent determinant of getting the right programme outcomes. With this notion in mind, the planning process was structured to enable proper and accurate targeting through multi-stage criteria-based selection procedure.

The process is implemented through open calls for applications (using print, electronic and online media), profiling of applicants to pre-qualify the candidates and conduct of physical verification and assessment-of-interest interviews on pre-qualified candidates to produce a short-list for every local government area. Thereafter, the candidates are arrayed based on decreasing order of interview scores and selection is done starting with the highest score progressively through decreasing scores to the candidate at which the pre-determined number (quota) is reached. By this procedure, the selection process is transparent, objective and trusted by applicants and stakeholders. In terms of

coverage, the selection process yields equitable and fair representation across all local government areas.

The all-round design of the training model

The STEP and YAGEP training design is uniquely all-round in nature. The object is to produce entrepreneurs that have the right mind-set, well-motivated, personally effective and totally skilled and equipped for success. In this regard, the training design has three interrelated mutually reinforcing dimensions/phases.

Phase one involves life skills and personal effectiveness training. This training dimension is intended to instil the right mind-set and re-orientation for personal decision and own responsibility for entrepreneurship and productivity. Topics covered under this training include personal effectiveness, self-management, communication oneself, self-development, self-actualization, self-discipline, achieving desired results, managing failures and challenges, setting life goals, time management, coping with risks and uncertainties, team work, managing one's talents and resources and interpersonal relations.

Phase two involves vocational skills or agricultural training in accredited training centres, ranging from three to six months depending on the enterprise. This training activity is designed to equip the beneficiary with practical vocational skills/abilities or agricultural knowledge/skills as basis for owning, co-owning and running an enterprise.

The underlying question or concern at the planning stage was how to avoid the pitfalls and failures of previous similar initiatives

Over the past two programme cycles, the vocational (non-agricultural) enterprises include aluminium works, audio-visual services, bartering, bead and hat making, block moulding, interlocking, PoP, tiling, catering & confectionary, cosmetology, craft/home care products, decoration and event management, electrical installation and repairs, fashion design and tailoring, hair dressing and makeover, ICTs, plumbing, shoe making, upholstery welding and fabrication and auto-mechanic. The agricultural enterprises covered include aquaculture, poultry, crop production, agro-processing and piggery. Agricultural training involves three sub-phases - instruction period (two to four weeks), practical on-farm period (three months) and enterprise incubation period (six months).

Phase three involves training to impart critical entrepreneurship and business management skills/abilities. To complement the personal effectiveness training and having acquired vocational or agricultural skills, the beneficiary is taken through basic entrepreneurship and business management seminars. The idea is to prepare the beneficiary

to own and run his/her enterprise independently. The topics covered in the practical seminars are:

- how to start a business;
- how to finance a business;
- how to market your product;
- how to document your business;
- how to communicate your business;
- how to cope with business competition;
- how to grow your business;
- how to partner/cooperate with similar business;
- how to develop/write your business plan;
- how to use your business plan;
- how to brand your product/service;
- how to cope with business risks and uncertainties;
- how to enjoy your business;
- how to measure whether your business is growing/succeeding or not;
- how to get others to like your business; and
- how to distinguish your business.

High quality of training

For both vocational and agricultural skills, phase two training is based on standard training modules prepared by practitioners and strictly implemented through daily activity logbooks maintained

in every training centre. While the training modules ensure quality assurance by trainers/training centres, the daily activity logbook is the tool for ensuring discipline among the beneficiaries, preventing truancy/absenteeism and upholding the quality of training. The training design has elicited great stakeholder confidence on the grounds of the quality of training, enforcement of discipline and the beneficiary-focus of the programme implementation process.

The integrity of the enterprise starter pack

'Starter pack' is a package of equipment, tools, materials and resources critically required for the graduating beneficiary to set up and run a successful business in the given enterprise. The programme design places much emphasis on the completeness and integrity of the starter pack to ensure that the beneficiary has the critical minimum condition for successful start-up. The essence is to avoid the pitfalls of similar empowerment programmes characterized by incomplete enterprise start-up packages delivered in piecemeal manner.

To get it right, the enterprise starter pack is formulated by a panel of practitioners, adopted by the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer and provided as a full package in a timely manner. The form and content of starter packs vary from one enterprise to another because of the varying needs of respective enterprises. In addition, to ensure transparency, clarify expectations and maintain confidence, the beneficiaries are informed about the enterprise starter pack at the point of entry into the programme.

Monitoring, feedback and self-correction

The effectiveness and sustainability of programme depend to a large extent on the efficacy of the monitoring and feedback mechanism and the use of the information and guidance from the monitoring process. The implementation of STEP and YAGEP has been matched with varied kinds of monitoring and live assessments which are necessary to identify gaps and weaknesses and ensure that programme activities are aligned to desired results and outcomes. The information from the monitoring and feedback system is constantly used to make adjustment in implementation and realign activities towards programme objectives. Specific information from the monitoring process is useful for deciding and applying sanctions on erring training centres and beneficiaries.

The Endorsement Flag

To further buttress the enablers and drivers of the Delta State job creation model, the programme has earned endorsement and partnership from the World Bank Nigeria-

funded States' Employment and Expenditure for Results (SEEFOR) project. The World Bank Nigeria endorsement and partnership are the result of favourable independent, professional reviews and assessments of the design and implementation of the job creation programmes. No doubt, this institutional endorsement/partnership signals a bright future for our job creation programmes.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the success of STEP and YAGEP has come through a combination of 'enablers' and 'drivers'. Both the enablers and drivers are rooted in the visionary, dynamic and effective leadership of the Governor. While his outstanding leadership is today evidenced in the first and second cycles of job creation beneficiaries, posterity will continually extol his leadership virtues, as the beneficiaries of the job creation programmes grow their enterprises and develop themselves over time.

Transforming the Agricultural Landscape through Cluster Farming

BY IFEANYI ELUEMUNOR

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture in Delta State is predominantly comprised of smallholder farms. On average, 81% of the farms cultivate less than three hectares of land, and most farmers earn less than N500,000 per annum. Recently, smallholder farmers in Delta State have joined or formed cooperatives. Some of the reasons for forming cooperatives are to facilitate access to loans and to undertake collaborative marketing of farm outputs to improve income. As the majority of farms are small, acting independently, farmers are unable to meet up with the desired volume and the quality demanded by the emerging institutional market. These institutional buyers include hotels, restaurants, and supermarkets (most especially Shoprite in Warri and Asaba). To participate in these emerging markets, smallholder farmers need to unify and to adjust to the new environment or suffer further marginalisation. However, fragmentation among smallholder farmers continues to present a problem as farmers are seldom committed to their cooperatives.

The establishment of the Job Creation Office by His Excellency, Sen. Dr Ifeanyi Okowa, Governor of Delta State, suggest to any right thinking person that the Okowa-led administration's effort in ensuring that its campaign promise of "prosperity for all Deltans" as encapsulated in the S.M.A.R.T agenda, would be well implemented. In its bid to boost food production and diversify its economic base, Prof Eric Eboh and his team has adopted cluster farming techniques as core strategy towards achieving food security and transforming the State from the current subsistence farming to commercial agriculture.

WHAT IS CLUSTER FARMING

The main objectives of cluster farming are to plant similar crops, grade to a similar standard, consolidate harvest to obtain a higher volume, deliver in bulk to save on transportation costs, and thereby increase net income.

Cluster farming has been defined as individual growers who commit to work together for marketing. It also means designating an area as a top or main producer of a commodity.

It functions as a production and financial planning tool for groups of farmers in a particular area.

The cluster approach has been identified as the best solution to support farmers to gain the necessary competitive position to sustain their business, thereby creating more full time job opportunities, especially in the rural areas where clusters are preferably located.

A cluster can also be referred to as a group of small holder farmers who collaborate on group buying for input requirements, joint selling to the same buyer and joint negotiations and sharing implements, whilst a central packing logistical system further contribute to such successful cluster formation. Such a cluster can also establish a cooperative as a legal entity.

By grouping the small holder farmers into clusters per product, the benefit of aggregation come forward, as well as reaching economies of scale. This makes the transaction cost lower and ultimately contributes to greater



Isheagu Olo Ossissa Fish Farm Cluster

profitability and sustainability of these enterprises.

WHY CLUSTER FARMING

According to Prof. Eboh, cluster farming has the potential to transform the agriculture sector of the State's economy. Some of the many benefits of cluster farming, Prof. Eboh noted, includes "improved programme targeting as a result of high concentration of many *YAGEPreneurs* in one location; peer-learning and cooperation among the *YAGEPreneurs*; cost effectiveness as it enables the provision of infrastructure and services to them in a single location; and provision of a platform to reach *YAGEPreneurs* with external support including agricultural extension services, farm management advisory, common marketing support, joint procurement of input and training or capacity building activities."

CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT IN DELTA STATE

In the 2015 Cycle, the Job Creation Officen established a total of 19 cluster farms for 151 *YAGEPreneurs* engaged either in poultry, fishery or piggery. The cluster farms are located in Aboh-Ogwashi, Ubulu-Uku, ADP-Ibusa, Alisime, Eko-Ibada (Amukpe), camp 74-Asaba, Edjophe, Ekpan Ovu, Koko, Kpakhiam and Mereje. Others are sited in Obiaruku, Oghara, Otor-Iyede, Otor-Udu, Owa-Alero, Ozoro, Umusam and Uro-Irri.

The 2016 Cycle had a total of eight cluster farms, which includes Ugbokodo-Okpe, Egbokodo-Itsekiri, Aloa-Ossissa, Mbiri and Anwai for fish farm clusters and Amukpe, Mbiri and Ogwashi-Uku/Ewulu for tomato/okra farm clusters and Ugili-Amai for rice farm clusters.

Each cluster farm has functional facilities such as well-equipped

pens for livestock, a borehole, water regulator, pumping machine, a generator and other farming items.

UGBOKODO-OKPE FISH FARM CLUSTER

Ugbokodo YAGEP Fish Farm Cluster is located in one of the 200 hundred town and villages in Okpe Local Government Area. The cluster formed in March 2017 is found in mangrove swamp that its water flows in from the sea, twice a day.

The State Government allocated 154 earth ponds to a cluster of 75 trained beneficiaries of Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) for unemployed youths drawn from nearby communities. The farm is currently in its second phase as its farmers has successfully raised and harvested the over 2,000 fingerlings that was part of their starter pack.

Mr Alex Odeseri Emakunu, the vice

president of Ugbokodo-Okpe YAGEP Fish cluster, said he picked the interest of fishery at Songhai. He noted the initial environmental challenge at the commencement of the cluster where there were loss of fingerlings as a result of huge concentration of acid and iron in the sea water. The contamination was from the newly constructed *chicoco* pond but once rectified, the pond had witnessed successful harvests. Mr Emakunu's future expectation includes the creation of a hatchery unit, which is a place for breeding, hatching, and rearing through the early life stages of fingerling.

Mr Bethel Uloho Moses, member of the Ugbokodo-Okpe Cluster and president of Anyan-Obaro YAGEP Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative, noted that the cluster has seen its members form a bond during the trial times and bumper harvest. However, he would like the Government to find an innovative means to either source for or create institutional buyers who would purchase the produce on their

own terms as against the market women who flood their cluster to buy cheap and sell in the open market. As the president of a 10-member cooperative that was formed in April this year but registered in September, he stressed that the cooperative was open to only fish farmers who reside in Ugbokodo and have a farm in the cluster. So far, the cooperative has opened an account with the Bank of Agriculture (BOA) so as to get loans that will support their business.

Most of the farmers present at the time of the report talked passionately about the forthcoming trade exhibition and their readiness to take part.

EGBOKODO-ITSEKIRI FISH FARM CLUSTER

Egbokodo-Itsekiri is a fish farm cluster located in Warri South Local Government Area. It is approximately 10-15 minutes' drive from Ugbokodo-Okpe Fish Farm Cluster. Both clusters are built in the same mangrove swamp. The State Government

allocated 138 startup fish ponds with 2, 000 fingerlings in each to a cluster of 64 trained beneficiaries of the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) for unemployed youths drawn from various communities across the state. The cluster has successfully raised and harvested its fishes. As well, the cluster farm has six registered cooperatives where members are drawn from the 64 trained beneficiaries.

Mr Joseph Akpieyi who has over 15 years' experience, is the cluster chairman/manager and one of the trainers at Songhai. His responsibility as the cluster chairman is to serve as an intermediary between the Job Creation Office and the cluster farm and also to see that beneficiaries put to good use what they have been taught. He noted that the trained beneficiaries' standard of living have undergone significant change.

According to Mr Akpieyi, "there is a need to be less dependent on oil. The few that have been engaged will



Tomato Farm Cluster at Ewuru Ogwashi Uku



YAGEPreneurs at Ugbokodo Okpe Cluster

inform others about the importance of aquaculture and how much dividend it can yield." He equally added that a hatchery unit is in view. He called on the State Government to provide an iron steel walkway that can aid not only persons from safely moving around the cluster but transporters to pick produce. As well as the need to raise perimeter fencing which would give rise to creating a feed mill unit, as it stands, each of the trained beneficiaries contribute a thousand Naira to pay for security.

For Mr Solomon Usuemerai, a trained beneficiary and president of Elo YAGEP MCP, who was a part-time fish farmer before becoming a *YAGEPreneur*, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity. He and his 11-member cooperative believe strongly that the future is bright in this new line of business. The State Government supports its trained beneficiaries with pumping machine, test kit, smoking kiln, scales and hose; usually through their cooperatives. Another primary aim of the cooperative is for members to collectively access funds as well as attend seminars so as to deepen their knowledge.

Miss Agbajoh Blessing, a trained

beneficiary said she had no prior knowledge of fish farming but picked interest while at Songhai. She says rearing her fishes takes up her time from Monday to Sunday but she is happy being close to nature and looks forward to her first harvest. Her training, she noted, has made her more independent.

Ms Adoye Gift, woman leader in the cluster, is proud to have harvested 1,500 fishes of the 2,000 given to her by Job Creation and it took her just four months to generate income. She encourages more women to go into fish farming as it is a profitable venture that can sustain their families.

CHALLENGES

Not all cluster farming has been of great success, the Ogwashi Uku/Ewulu tomato cluster experienced very poor harvest due to wrong application of pesticide that killed or stunted the growth of their tomatoes while Ugili/Amai rice farm cluster was flooded.

As at the time of reporting, these two clusters have come to terms with their loss by seeking other crop alternative as a stop-gap measure or intervention from the State Government.

While emphasis here is on cluster

farming, Prof Eboh and his team have been able to encourage *STEPreneurs* to equally form cooperatives so as to collectively source for more funds as well as do a peer review.

One of such cooperatives is TREDFEPH Multipurpose Cooperative headed by Mrs Roseval Okoh. The 10-member cooperative, duly registered in October 2017, is drawn from trained beneficiaries in decoration, event management, catering and confectionary. The sole aim of the cooperative is to work together to enhance their businesses as they are in a similar sector but most importantly their businesses feed off each other. So far, they have applied to Microcredit for additional funding through the Job Creation Office.

In all, the cluster farming innovation and cooperatives means that a good number of Deltans are gradually finding their feet after many years of despair and are laying the track for other persons to follow suit. Through the Job Creation Office, the emphasis is not on placing many persons in very few and specialised jobs in oil companies but pushing them to be self employed by either learning the rudiment of a trade or collaborating with one another in a farm cluster.

Orodje of Okpe, Mbiri Monarch, Others Hail Job Creation Scheme

It is no longer news that 2,324 youths in Delta have been trained and established in various enterprises of their choice by the Delta State Government led by Governor Ifeanyi Okowa. It is also common knowledge that many of these STEPreneurs and YAGEPreneurs are not only doing well in their businesses, they are also providing job opportunities for others.

The impact of the Job Creation Scheme (a.k.a *OkowaPlus*) is being felt all over the State. We spoke with some prominent Deltans on their impressions of this initiative.

The Orodje of Okpe Kingdom, HRM, Major Gen. Felix Mujakperuo

"White collar jobs are limited. The truth is that the government is too heavy and the allocation is dwindling but the Governor has tried in taking youths off the streets. He has taken it upon himself to empower the youth through the Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) and the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP).

"We have seen a lot of them who were trained and have employed other persons to work with them. Some of them in fashion designing and tailoring are already exporting their products outside Nigeria. The Scheme is a huge success and I hope it is sustained. Yearly, people are graduating from the university and it



Orodje of Okpe, HRM, Major Gen. Felix Mujakperuo

will be a problem if these youths are not engaged. Youth unemployment is the major reason for insecurity. If there is no security, there will be crisis and there will be no development.

"Our youths should acquire skills, go to our technical colleges, remain focused and be grounded in whatever vocational skill they acquire so that they can be proficient in it. Farmers, especially our YAGEPreneurs should shun 'absentee farming.' They need to give maximum attention to their farms in order to get the desired result.

Delta State is a peculiar State with a peculiar people. When you set an examination, you do not expect a 100% performance. If there is a 70% success, it is successful. I rate the Okowa-led administration very high."

Obi of Mbiri, Dr Ifeanyichukwu Aliekwe II

"The Delta State Governor, Dr. Ifeanyi

Okowa, through the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer approached Mbiri Community to provide land for coastal fish farming and to utilize Mbiri Farm Settlement in Ika North East Local Government Area. Through these interventions, many unemployed youths are now employed. This administration believes in agriculture. I score the Governor 80%. Delta State is working. Youth restiveness is going down.

"I appeal to our sons and daughters to use judiciously what Government has given them. They should shun the temptation to travel abroad; nothing good comes easy. The Federal, State and Local Governments should go back to agriculture in order to bring back those good old days when groundnut brought wealth to the North, cocoa and kolanut to the West, palm produce to the East and rubber, cassava and yam to the South.

"This initiative by the State Government is a welcome



Obi of Mbiri, HRM Ifeanyichukwu Aliekwe

development. I was inspired by this initiative to start an animal farm in my palace. I now have concrete fish ponds and have recently stocked one with 1,020 fingerlings. I also rear grass cutter and antelopes. I urge the State Government to continue with the Job Creation Scheme. The Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer should ensure that only serious persons who are really interested in vocational skills and in agriculture are empowered."

**Dr. Theophilus Okpidi,
Managing Director,
Songhai Delta, Amukpe,
an agricultural training/
research institute**

"The outcome of the Delta State Government's job creation programmes has been wonderful. The Governor, Senator Ifeanyi Okowa, in fulfilment of his promise of 'Prosperity for all Deltans' initiated STEP and YAGEP. He was able to implement the programmes in spite of the harsh economic climate in the country. The success stories are tremendous and overwhelming.

"I am more privileged to tell this story being the man in charge of Songhai Delta because we are part of the success story of the YAGEPreneurs. We are in close contact with them and so many of them are flourishing in their respective enterprises. I give kudos to



Dr Theophilus Okpidi

Governor Okowa for this programme. Because of oil exploration and exploitation, our youths were used to begging and looking for white collar jobs, but that is changing now. This is because Governor Okowa took the decision to teach our youths how to fish rather than giving them fish. This is very laudable and a step in the right direction.

"When Jesus chose the 12 apostles, Judas Iscariot was part of them. There is no programme that is 100% successful. Even though we tried so much in the selection process, we cannot predict who will be a disappointment. Nevertheless, I advise those who feel they cannot go into agriculture or acquire a vocational skill to have a rethink and a mind-set change.

"I also want to put on record that through Delta State Employment and Expenditure for Results Project (SEEFOR), the Governor approved the training of 250 youths to go into production of high breed tomatoes in which we have recorded more than 80% success. The Delta State Government's performance on job and wealth creation is excellent.

**Engr Dele Okhidievbie,
Managing Director of
Chibuzor Farm, Ugbolu
in Oshimili South Local
Government Area**

"The job creation initiative of the Delta State Government is the right step in the right direction. It is a plus; no wonder, it is called *OkowaPlus*. It is a golden opportunity that if properly harnessed would give birth to a new generation of entrepreneurs as a result of the multiplier effects.

"I am an engineer by training and profession, trained both locally and internationally. I worked in the public service and in the private sector. I rose



Engr Dele Okhidievbie in his farm

to the position of a Technical Service Manager with Eternit Limited, Sapele, but retired voluntarily from active service to engage fully in farming.

I channelled all my gratuity and investments into acquiring 4 hectares of land in Ugbolu. In 2012, we began with 2,000 birds. With support from First Bank and Bank of Agriculture, we now have 7,000 layers which lay between 150 to 200 crates of eggs daily. We have also diversified into fish farming. We have 25 earthen ponds with the capacity of 30,000 fish, which can be grown to table size of 2kg each.

"Five months ago, through the Central Bank of Nigeria Anchor's Borrowers' Scheme, I was given 30,000 fingerlings which I reared to table size. At present, I have restocked with 20,000 juveniles.

"Our youths should face reality; the white collar jobs are no longer there. Globally, farming is the ultimate. Governor Okowa has created the opportunity for them to become entrepreneurs free of charge. They should take it seriously. I advise the YAGEPreneurs to maintain hygiene to keep infections away from their farms. Though challenges may come, they should remain focused and should not invest in luxury, but plough back their profit and concentrate on expanding their enterprises. I abandoned my Civil Engineering profession to go into farming. Today, I have no regrets.

More Distinguished ALUMNI

We bring you more success stories of our STEPreneurs and YAGEPreneurs.

INTERVIEWS BY GERTRUDE
ONYEKACHUKWU



Sophina Emore, a Cosmetologist, working on a client

Sophia Emore

Enterprise: Cosmetology
LGA: Ethiope East

I am the CEO of Sofina STEP Salon & Spa. I was unemployed for two years after graduation from Delta State University where I obtained a BSC in Management Studies. I was

trained in the 2015 programme cycle and empowered with a starter pack, comprising a bed, facial steamer, magnifying glass, a pedicure bowl, a waxing pot and cream, detoxifying machine, #100,000.00 start-up cash and #10,000.00 monthly stipend for three months. I have been in business for a year and half and I can proudly

say that my enterprise is growing. I enjoy what I am doing in terms of facials and massage because I love beauty.

When I started, I rented a shop with #120,000.00 annually. Nobody was interested in beauty therapy for lack of knowledge. I then realized that I needed to diversify into hairdressing in order to attract clients. The first woman who patronized had her hair made for free to convince her that I am good. As we speak, I have six apprentices and clients all over Asaba and I have plans to diversify into beauty products production. I also engage in free community service. I have trained 15 women in my church to enable them to contribute to the upkeep of their families.

I advise every unemployed Delta Youth to acquire a skill to be independent. They should strive to become CEOs of their own enterprises. No one is too big to acquire a skill. This is the reality; all my apprentices are graduates. God bless Governor Okowa; God bless Delta State.

Marvis Chinedu Onuorah

Enterprise: Catering and Confectionery
LGA: Non-Indigene Beneficiary



Marvis Onuorah (m) at the opening of Marvis Unique Catering Services in Effurun



Marvis Onuorah packaging her products at Mavis Unique Catering Services in Effurun

I am a graduate of Computer Science from Federal Polytechnic, Nekede and the CEO of Marvis Unique Catering Services, Effurun. Catering is all about rendering services to clients. I have passion for catering through my mother, but I did not know how to realize my dream until I enrolled into the State Government's Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP). I was part of the 2016 Cycle; I was trained for three months and given a starter pack and cash to establish my enterprise.

I appreciate Governor Okowa and the Government of Delta State for this opportunity to be one of the

beneficiaries of this empowerment and I appeal that the programme be sustained in order to take more youths off the streets. To my fellow youths, be determined, do not go to sleep! Governor Okowa has given you a starter pack; do not sell it, but put it into judicious use in order to be self-reliant and to contribute your quota to the development of the State.

Margaret Okon

**Enterprise: Hairdressing & Makeover
LGA: Non-Indigene Beneficiary**

I am the CEO of Joe Marvis Beauty Palace located in Achalla Ibusa, Asaba. I have an OND in Business Administration from Delta State Polytechnic, Ozoro. I was trained and empowered by Governor Ifeanyi Okowa. I am particularly grateful to the Governor for this opportunity being a non-Deltan. This is proof that he is a detribalized man and that he runs an all-inclusive government.

The experience has been wonderful all the way, having a business of my own and being my own boss. I am into makeover, braids and all kinds of



Margaret Okon working in her hairdressing salon

hairdo. I make all kinds of executive wigs in braids and human hair.

Business has been good! I employed two workers that I pay #20,000.00 each. We are fast approaching the December business rush and I am set for business. I see a great future for me. I encourage other unemployed youths to acquire a skill. I would have remained unemployed if I was still waiting for a white collar job. I thank God for Governor Okowa.

Glory Emani

**Enterprise: Ankara Shoes and Bags Making
LGA: Warri South**

I was fortunate to be enrolled in the State Government's Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) through which I was trained in Computer Hardware Repairs and Maintenance and equipped with a standard starter pack to begin my own enterprise. Somehow I found it very competitive and challenging. I realised that people prefer to patronize those in rented plaza to roadside shops. When my rent expired, I decided to go back to my first love and passion which is "making of Ankara shoes, bags and accessories". Frankly, there is large market for footwear and bag making in Nigeria. People patronize me a lot now. I have trained two persons and seven more have applied to be trained, but they are on waiting list because I need to concentrate on my works for the exhibition.

I am very happy and grateful to the State Government for the opportunity given to me to be self-employed. That I design Ankara shoes and bags is because the government came my way. I am where I am today because of the training I got in ICT. I used my funds from computer empowerment to fund



Glory Emani displays her Ankara shoes, bags and accessories

what I am doing now. The training and knowledge too are very helpful.

Marvis Nwaeshigho

**Enterprise: Welding & Fabrication
LGA: Aniocha South**

I enrolled into the programme in the 2016/2017 Programme Cycle. The programme afforded me the opportunity to acquire a skill. I was trained for free and given a starter pack to begin my business. I was given a Job Creation Grant of a welding machine

Bx1-315/diesel generator; a welding shield; a pair of welding gloves; a pair of safety spectacle; a safety boot; a fire resistant cover-all; a safety helmet and a Lister generator 10HP 7.5W and other microcredit items, a cash allowance of #100,000.00 and #10,000.00 monthly stipend for three months.

Before now, I was jobless, but now I am a boss of my own. I have a worker and an apprentice. Governor Okowa has done well by initiating the job creation programmes for youth and I appeal to him to sustain it.



Marvis Nwaeshigho, a STEPreneur in Welding & Fabrication, working in his workshop

David Solomon Tam

Enterprise: Fashion Design & Tailoring

LGA: Bomadi

I am the CEO of DS fashion; I have my own label and my enterprise is registered with Corporate Affairs Commission. I did not know anything about fashion before now till I enrolled in the programme. I heard about the programme in the church. I applied and was fortunate to be invited for an interview and afterwards went to Songhai Delta, Amukpe, for the Orientation Course.

It has been wonderful learning something new because I was into poultry and at the same time undergoing my master's degree in Mass Communication. I applied to be trained in poultry, but was admitted into fashion. The experience has been good, even though challenging. In order to cope I had to employ a male and a female fashion designer to assist me. I have also trained a person for six months. As starter pack, I was given a butterfly sewing machine, an industrial weaving machine, a generator, a cutting table, #60,000.00 shop rent subsidy, #30,000.00 start-up cash allowance and #10,000.00 monthly post establishment stipend for three months.

I have been in business for two years. I have expanded. I bought an additional butterfly washing machine, a mini- designing sewing machine and I have renewed my shop rent without depending on anyone. In the next five years, I see myself having a mega fashion outfit where I can design clothes more than what I am doing now. I attend trade fairs and fashion shows to market myself, my products and to learn from others too.



Solomon David Tam, a fashion designer, working in his shop

Andrew Meka

Enterprise: Audio-Visual Technology

LGA: Oshimili South

I have a HND in Business Administration from the Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu. I was out of job when I got information about the State Government's empowerment programmes for youths. I immediately applied and fortunately I was trained



Andrew Meka, a STEPreneur in Audio-Visual Technology, working

and empowered to establish my own enterprise. I am the CEO of Blue Gold Multimedia Services, Asaba.

I chose Audio-Visual Technology because media plays a very important role in reorienting, upgrading, redirecting, informing and educating the society. I have passion for public speaking as a management trainer and active youth leader in my community and I felt being a media person will help me impact on society positively.

I was trained for three months in cinematography, visual editing, set designs and audio editing. I was given a starter pack of a HP Laptop; a Generator-Fireman Sumec 2900; sets of Tripod Stand and a Nikon D5500 Camera and Red Head 800 Three Box Lights. The cash components of the starter pack was ₦50,000 (fifty thousand naira) and monthly stipend of ₦10, 000.00 (ten thousand naira) per month for 3 months.

As a new person in the system, it has been challenging but by my resoluteness and the sheer will to succeed are my driving forces. Business has been rewarding and I see a bigger future.

The State Government has done well in this initiative. The Job Creation Scheme has reduced unemployment, crime and youth unrest. Over 2,300 youths are meaningfully engaged and it is still counting because some of these established youths are replicating the efforts of the State Government by training other youths in their line of enterprise. For instance, I had a rebranding campaign for youths in Asaba tagged,"Rebranding the Youth through Media and Entertainment."

I advise Delta youths to embrace skill acquisition and agriculture. White collar jobs are fading away. In few years to come, skilled-labour and entrepreneurs will take over the wind of progress in every sector of our economy. So, I advise all youths to accept the reality to become self-employed.

Frank Enonuya

Enterprise: Shoe Making

LGA: Warri South

My brother collected and filled the form for the programme in 2015 on my behalf. Funny enough, I bluntly told him I was not interested in empowerment programmes because I had applied for so many in the past without success. Actually, I had lost confidence. However, my confidence was restored when I was invited for screening, subsequently trained in Computer Hardware Repairs and Maintenance and given starter pack to own and run my own business.

I had thought I would thrive in ICT services because I studied Computer Science in Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe, Oghara, but I was wrong. When I discovered that it is highly competitive, I sought for something else-shoe making.

I have trained more than 10 persons

who have successfully established their own businesses. I currently have one employee and 12 apprentices. Recently, I had an encounter with someone who lives in Italy who visited home. When he saw my products, he was impressed and exported some of them to Italy.

I am planning big to showcase my products at the STEP and YAGEP Products Exhibition and Business fair in Asaba. I know the exhibition is an opportunity for me to showcase my products to the world; it is an opportunity to show that things being made by machines outside the world are being made with hands in Delta State. I am planning to relocate to Asaba where I can have a showroom. I also hope to expand to Abuja and Lagos. I have confidence in my work.

I am satisfied with what I am doing now. With confidence, I can boldly say it is sustainable and rewarding. Unemployed youths who still look forward to having a non-existent job in an oil company should face reality. They should acquire a skill in order to care for themselves and others who depend on them instead of being used as political thugs.

Henry Onogide

Enterprise: Welding & Fabrication

LGA: Ughelli North

I graduated from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria where I studied Political Science five years ago. My



Frank Enonuya working in his workshop as a STEPreneur in shoe making

application into the STEP programme became successful in 2016/2017 cycle. I did not know anyone. I got the information through Facebook; I applied; I was screened and eventually invited to Songhai Delta, Amukpe for Orientation Course. My experience in Structural Engineering motivated me to choose Welding and Fabrication.

Enrolment in STEP gave me the opportunity to have a starter pack which consist of a Welding Machine Bx1-315/Diesel Generator; a Welding Shield; a Pair of Welding Gloves; a Pair of Safety Spectacle; a Safety Boot; a Fire Resistant Cover-all; a Safety Helmet and a Lister Generator 10HP 7.5W and other microcredit items such as a start-up allowance of #100,000.00 and #10,000.00 monthly stipend for three months. So far, the experience has been great. I am not just a welder;

I am an engineer. I am into argon welding, structural welding, insulation welding and iron bending fabrication.

Jobs are coming and the patronage is high. I have a professional area of specialisation, which is the construction and maintenance of dredging machine. I receive invitation to service dredging machines in Owerri, Akwa Ibom, Lagos, Agip in Kwale, Patani and Yenogoa in Bayelsa State. The experience has been fulfilling and rewarding. I am grateful to Governor Okowa for this empowerment because I would not have been able to pay for the skill I acquired. If another opportunity comes, I will go for more training to upscale my knowledge.

My passionate appeal goes to our youths. They should acquire skills and resist begging and depending on others. They can become independent in order to assist their families and contribute to the development of Delta State in particular and Nigeria in general.

Austin Atori
Enterprise: ICT Services
LGA: Uvwie

I enrolled into the State Government's



Austin Atori, an ICT STEPreneur, in a training session with his trainee

Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) in 2016 after four years of unemployment. I studied Geology in Delta State University, Abraka. I appreciate the Delta State Government for this opportunity to run and own my enterprise. I was trained for six months in ICT Services after which I receive a standard starter pack- a HP Laptop; a Sumec Firman 2900 Generator; a Printer LaserJet HP 130A; a Micro Workstation Tool Kit; #100,000.00 start-up allowance and three months stipend of #10,000.00 per month.

The experience has been good, but at the time challenging as a result of poor power supply. To enhance business growth, I diversified into software design, writing of programmes, photography and I own a business centre for photocopying and typesetting. Patronage is good and encouraging. I have two staff on my payroll. There is opportunity to train persons who are interested.

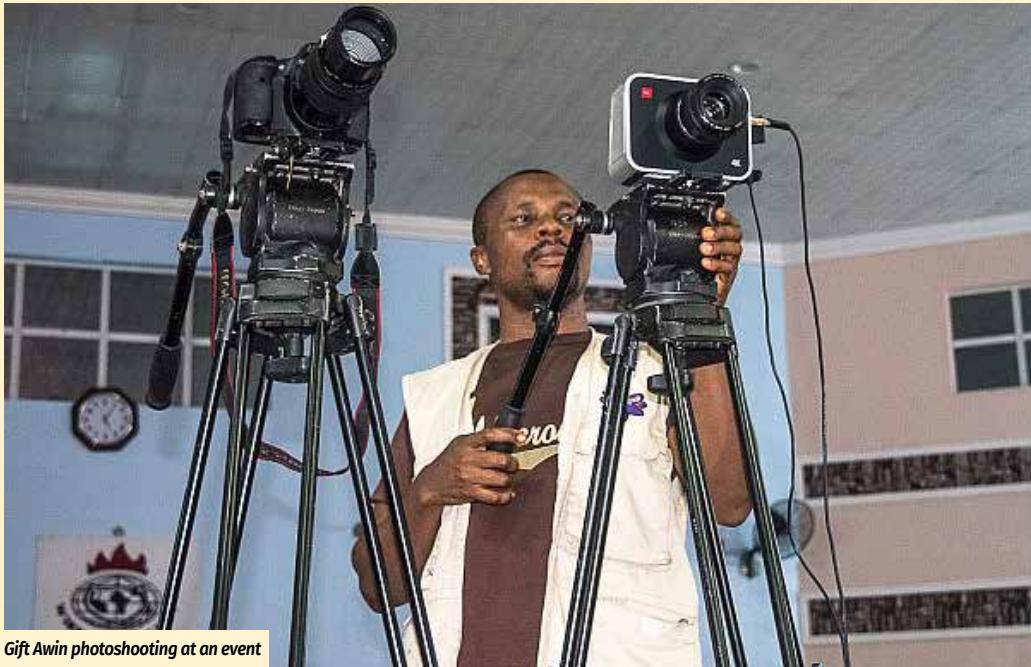
I appeal to the Delta State Government to sustain the programme in order to create more opportunities for unemployed youths to acquire relevant skills that could take them out permanently from the labour market. Also, there is the need for the government to focus more on ICT because that is the direction the world is heading to, especially in Microchip Engineering.



Henry Onogide servicing a sand dredging machine

Gift Awin
Enterprise: Audio-Visual Technology
LGA: Uvwie

I am the CEO of Y3K Productions. I have a Higher Diploma in Electrical Electronics Engineering from Federal



Gift Awin photoshooting at an event

Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti. I chose to be trained in Audio-Visual Technology because I wanted an additional skill. The process that brought me into the STEP programme in 2016 was free and fair. I attended all the interviews and screening before I was invited to the Orientation Camp in Songhai Delta, Amukpe. The orientation course was very relevant. It helped me to stay focused and change my mind set. I realised that I could own my own enterprise and become an entrepreneur. I was trained for three months and, afterwards, given starter pack to run my business.

My starter pack comprised a HP Laptop; a Generator-Fireman Sumec 2900; Sets of Tripod Stand and a repayable loan of a Nikon D5500 Camera and Red Head 800 Three Box Lights, operating cash of ₦50,000 (fifty thousand naira) and monthly stipend of ₦10,000.00 (ten thousand naira) per month for 3 months. Starting up has not been easy; I have been pushing. I have registered my business and I have a business card. I have covered quite a number of programmes such as child presentation, marriages and

burial ceremonies among others.

I am no longer looking for Government job. I want to upscale my potentials. I have applied to run a three-month programme in South Africa using my certificate issued by the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer after training to apply for further professional training in Music Video, Documentary and Sports Coverage Production at SAE Creative Media Institute, Cape Town. My application has been reviewed and I have been offered admission and agreement letter. The course will begin next year. This is to enhance international collaboration and partnership.

Believe Onyedo

Enterprise: Electrical Installation and Repairs

LGA: Ughelli North

I studied Electronics and Computer Engineering from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Akwa. This is the first time I benefitted from any government's empowerment programme. I got information about STEP through

a friend who informed me that the Governor Okowa-led administration designed an empowerment for unemployed youths in the state. Frankly, I was reluctant, but he persisted. He obtained the form on my behalf, filled and submitted it. I was fortunate to be invited for interview and subsequently to Songhai Delta, Amukpe despite the fact that I knew no one. The Orientation Course was very successful and

interesting.

I recommend that the State Government continues with the programme. Through the job Creation Scheme, Delta State has got a lot of up-coming entrepreneurs with rich ideas and potential employers of labour. The programme should be sustained.



Believe Onedo a STEPreneur in Electrical Installation & Repairs

After a six-month training programme, I was given a starter pack to commence my business. I received a Drilling Machine, a 2900 Sumec Firman Generator, one Adjustable Aluminium Ladder, an Electrical Tool Box, a #50,000.00 Start-up Allowance and a #10,000.00 monthly allowance for three months. The only item I did not like about my starter pack is the manual drilling machine. I would have preferred the electrical drilling machine. Nevertheless, I am grateful.

Apart from being an entrepreneur in Electrical Installation and Repairs, I am an ICT Consultant too. I am currently working on a project for government to train secondary students on ICT. For Electrical Installation, I have done three major projects.

My experience so far has been superb because I was afraid of electrical practical while in school, but my trainer, Oduma Integrity & Standard Consulting LTD, Ughelli, simplified Electrical Engineering and brought out the best in me.

I advise Delta youths to think outside the box. They should think of how to contribute to the development of the State and remove the mentality of "na our money". They should be creative, be focused and at the end, their efforts will definitely yield positive results.

Once again, I thank the Delta State Government, Senator Ifeanyi Okowa, the Chief Job Creation Officer and Oduma Integrity for this opportunity to become an entrepreneur.



Nneka Okonjo feeding her broilers

Nneka Okonjo

Enterprise: Poultry

LGA: Aniocha South

I have a Higher National Diploma in Agricultural Science from Delta State Polytechnic, Ozoro. I graduated and was fortunate to be part of the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) through which I was trained and empowered.

I enrolled into the programme in 2015. I was trained for three months and afterwards given starter pack to begin an enterprise in poultry. I was empowered with 400 point of lay birds, 200 broilers, 150 bags of bird feeds, a poultry pen with battery cages and other items.

As we speak, in less than two years, I now have 380 layers, 300 poulets, 200 broilers and 15 turkeys. I have done over 10 cycles in broiler while under layers, I have done two cycles. My layers lay a minimum of ten crates of eggs daily. Poultry business though very challenging, is very lucrative.

I have an employee. I am also into

cassava, yam and tomato farming. I am working towards expanding my business to increase my stock.

Precious Edefeadhe

Enterprise: Fishery

LGA: Isoko North

I was trained and given a starter pack to begin my own fish farming at Otor-lyede YAGEP Farm Cluster.

It has been a great help to me. I can say I am employed. I can pay my bills. It is financial freedom for me. In less than two years, I have grown from 2,000 to 16,000 fish at some point. I sold them off at maturity.

At present, I have only six thousand, five hundred fish. I just restocked my ponds. While 5,500 of them are juveniles, the mature ones are 1,500 in number. I want to expand, leave Government land to a personal land. I have two paid workers. Business has been good and cluster farming has promoted partnership and networking.



Precious Edafeadhe feeding his fish

Reginald Aniche

Enterprise: Fashion Design & Tailoring
LGA: Aniocha South

I attended College of Education, Warri and I live in Uwwie. The first time I applied to be enrolled in the STEP programme, it bounced; the second time was successful. During the orientation and six months training, I was focused and I followed up with every detail I was taught.

My vision is to make clothes of international standard. Therefore, after the end of government-sponsored six months training, I continued training for another three months to strengthen my efficiency in the skill. Of all the knowledge acquired, the Orientation Course and the Entrepreneurship Business Management Training were most

useful. They opened my eyes to the fact that so many fashion designers can be doing the same thing, but the difference lies in how they do it. With this knowledge, I realised that I had to distinguish myself. This was the springboard that took me to this level.



Reginald Aniche, a STEPreneur in Fashion Design and Tailoring, working

The experience has been awesome. I established my business four months ago, so it is still competing. I make my style unique. My greatest challenge is work challenge, meeting up with customers demand. Some clients would come with this, 'I do not like what others have done. Take the money; do it your own way and pattern'. Another customer would come emphasizing, 'This is how I want it without dropping a dime, only to resurface a day to the ceremony to claim the clothes'. The second challenge is financial. I spend a lot on fuel as a result of constant power failure

I specialize in senator wears and I use expensive accessories to make my work unique. I partner with other persons on temporary basis to get very urgent jobs done.

Festus Onyeacholem

Enterprise: Poultry
LGA: Ika South

I came into the programme in 2015. After the Orientation Course and three months training, I was given a starter pack to enable me to run my business as a poultry farmer in Alisimie YAGEP Farm Cluster.

The experience has been great. I started this enterprise with my seed stock, 200 broilers and 400 point of lay birds. Now, I have 800 birds, 200 broilers and 600 layers. My layers lay a minimum of 18 crates of eggs daily. I have done eight cycles of broilers and two cycles of layers. I have sold off all my seed stock. I bought my present 600 layers at day old, brooded them and they are laying now.

By next year, I hope to increase my stock. For me, it has become my permanent occupation. I hope to



Festus Onyeachole picking eggs in his poultry at Alisimie YAGEP Farm Cluster

diversify into fishery soon.

I have two persons on my payroll and have also trained two persons. I wish to become a beneficiary of the CBN Anchor's Borrowers Scheme to help me expand my business.

Rosemary Otene

**Enterprise: Decoration & Event Management
LGA: Ika South**

I am a graduate of Agricultural Economics and Extension from the University of Port Harcourt. I was unemployed for four years till I enrolled in the STEP programme in 2016. Though I studied Agriculture, I chose a vocational skill because of my passion for event management.

A friend of mine informed me about the programme, after which I obtained the form from the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer. I was surprised when I received invitations to attend an interview and to proceed to Songhai Delta for Orientation Course. The Orientation Course was a total turning point for me because I realised that

skill acquisition is more effective than degree. Skill makes one an entrepreneur and an employer of labour while dependence on only degree makes one to remain in the labour market. The knowledge and idea was wonderful.

Event management is capital intensive and it is trendy. I appreciate the starter pack given to me, but I needed to go the extra mile to rent some of the items I did not have to make my jobs unique and different from what everyone does. The first job I executed spoke for me. Through my first job, I bought quality items to augment my starter pack. Ever since, I plough back

my profit. My family has been supportive too, but in all, the State Government is the spring board through which I became self-reliant.

I have two employees and five apprentices. I have moved so fast in less than six months because of

my passion for the work. I have attended a lot of seminars on event management to improve my services.

"After university education, forget pride and acquire a skill in order to become an employer. Youths should forget about this "daddy and mummy thing and grow up."



Rosemary Otene exhibits a bridal canopy she decorated at a traditional marriage

I never bribed to get into STEP, says empowered caterer

- Linda Okolosi

- Bolstered by catering equipment worth over N350,000

MERCY ENOCH. (BUSINESSDAY)

Elohor Linda Okolosi, aged 30, had been jobless for five years after graduation from the university but today, she is an entrepreneur in catering and confectionaries after three months training. Full of excitement after receiving her starter pack from the Job Creation Office of the Delta State Government, she told The Big Heart Digest, "I feel very happy. And I want to tell people out there that the Skills and Training Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) of Okowa-led administration is real. I want to say that the Governor is trying and he is doing his best to empower people, so they too can be part of the programme."

Continuing, she said, "I studied Biology Education in Delta State University, Abraka and I graduated five years ago. After my National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), I tried to get a place to learn catering. I paid for some months but after that, I found out that I needed a helping hand. So, I knew I needed to get a skill in order to succeed. I don't want to sit and wait

for white collar jobs, so I went for catering and after some time, the government began to train me and that's a plus for me".

In Nigeria, most people believe that someone cannot get anything from the government except he or she is 'connected' but Okolosi has this to say: "I didn't bribe anybody to get into this programme. My experience is one I like to tell anyone. Since Catering is my passion, I went for it. I told God this is what I want to do. I did not pay anybody anything. I was short-listed and I went to Camp in Amukpe (the Songhai Orientation Camp located in Sapele LGA) and here I am today, a STEPreneur."

Okolosi hails from Isoko LGA of the state but lives in Asaba. "I did the programme in Asaba. I live in Asaba. My experience was a wonderful one. We were posted to a place where a lady taught us. We did a lot of things. We gained a lot of experience. Right now, I'm a professional caterer. I can bake wedding cakes and do a lot more things with the skill I've learnt. I am strong enough to stand on my own. Two weeks ago, I did a wedding cake which I took to a couple that was wedding in Warri. They took the cake down to Warri. I also make meat-pie and egg rolls which I sell on daily basis. I also make some which I sell in my little show-glass. So, I've been taught well!"

She disclosed further, "I've been able to get a little money to buy some materials I needed before this (starter pack) arrived. You know catering, since I'm a starter, I have to get little money to enable me support my business. I have a very big space in my compound where

I hope to start from. Then, with time, I have to gather money to rent a bigger shop. Renting a shop is not a priority because a caterer can start from her house if she has a very big space. When you get customers, you can work from your house."

Confessing further, she said: "It would have cost me a lot because things are very costly in the market these days. It would have cost me close to N300, 000 to N350, 000 to buy these items from the market but I'm very happy that government has given me a hand. So, I would source the rest by myself. Government gave us oven, deep freezer, chaffing dish, cooler, cylinder 12.5, non-stick pan, potato diser and cake mixer; and a cash allowance of N125,000 to start up. This amount is a repayable fund but not everything is to be paid back. Some are given to us free while some would have to be paid back through the micro-finance bank. They gave us a schedule and from that schedule, I think it's N12, 000 (monthly) with some fractions we are to pay after four months from now. For instance, as we are given the starter packs this May, by September we would start paying back the money monthly, and I think this is reasonable."

"Yes, Catering is a different field from Biology Education but I'm a kind of person that loves doing business. I had told myself that even after graduating from university, I would still have a little skill to do in order to help myself not just from my education alone. Right now, I love my business of catering and that is what I love to do. Even in catering, there are some clients you would meet, you have to speak to them and talk to them well. So, it requires somebody who is educated too to express herself well", she stressed.

On her dream, she said: "One year from now, I hope to see myself having big catering house where I can employ up to 15 persons and engage apprentices who would learn under me too."

On advice to the society, Okolosi is urging her fellow youths to stop looking for white-collar jobs. Skills pay these days. They should learn skills so that they too can empower people. That is what the society needs now", she advised.



Linda Okolosi in her shop

Running With The Vision

BY O. ONYEISI NKENCHOR

CO-ORDINATOR, STEP

When his Excellency, Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa pronounced his administration's vision to help citizens of Delta State "conquer their environment and enjoy decent living conditions," his ideas and pronouncements were mostly met with silent cynicism. When he opined that "job creation will be the chief cornerstone of all our policies..." most traducers believed that it could not be done. But Governor Okowa believed tremendously that he could make a difference in the lives of Deltans. He was emphatic that the S.M.A.R.T agenda is "designed to create jobs, generate and sustain business and stabilize families and communities within a frame work of equity, fairness and justice."

Even while the Governor was making pronouncements, all indices of disruption pointed negative. Government programmes and policies depend largely on availability of financial resources, but the economy was in shambles. Should we or should we not? These were the questions that must have troubled the mind of the Governor. Thankfully, he believed in God and in the capacity of the Almighty to supply the wisdom for achievement of goals and aspirations.

If the pronouncements have been made, there must be a way to make them come good. The Governor was particularly motivated by the challenge of unemployment in Nigeria. Unemployment is one of the very serious causes of insecurity in Nigeria and, in particular, in the quite volatile hotbed called Delta state. His Excellency's vision, directed toward producing managers, leaders and entrepreneurs from amongst Delta State Youths has, within the past two years, led to the emergence of young forward looking entrepreneurs from across the state- young men and women who have been trained and empowered in various hands-on skills in Fashion Design and Tailoring, Decoration and Event Management, Catering and Confectionery, Electrical Installation, Welding and Fabrication, Hair dressing and Make-over, ICT Services, Audio- Visual Services, Interlocking, Tiling, POP Block-molding, Upholstery, Barbing and Bead-making.

Here we have budding entrepreneurs such as Precious Nwaise, a graduate of Accounting who did not know anything about Fashion Design before she was trained for six months in the trade. Today, she is a proud employer of eight people and has trained several people, thereby running with the vision of Okowa. She attributes her infectious ebullience about her future and business to the training she received under the

programme in Personal Effectiveness and Entrepreneurship and Business Management.

When friends and colleagues ask me sardonically, "I hope you people are creating the jobs?" I point to Paul Uzoka, a graduate of Guidance and Counseling who trained in Interlocking in 2016 and is, today, the Chief Executive Officer of his own business, employing several people with dreams of becoming a conglomerate. Bridget Apodor- Awana, a 2009 graduate of Economics has a passion for make-over. Today, Governor Okowa has given wings to her passion. Having trained in Cosmetology for three months in the 2015/16 cycle, she is flying with her Chevonne Cosmetics in Lagos.

For eight years, Ochuko Samuel was exposed to the hard life of a commercial motor cycle (okada) rider. A frustrating tedium that he was forced to take up after obtaining an Ordinary National Diploma in Business Administration in 2009. But his narrative has changed with his training in Fashion Design and Tailoring. He is now the owner of his own fashion design shop with four apprentices and one employee.

These are just a few of the young men and women whose lives have been transformed because one man said: Yes, it can be done. It is being done because to His Excellency, Dr. Okowa, wealth and job creation is a passion. It is a commitment and devotion. Devotion to the people!

It Is Dawn Yet On Job Creation

BY NKECHI MADUEMEZIA

Mentoring and monitoring has shown how the entrepreneurs from the STEP and YAGEP programmes are faring. Some are now employers of labour with offices of their own. Some are still finding their bearing whilst others have thrown away a golden opportunity offered to them on a platter of gold. The process and training to become an entrepreneur is not a day's job. We have well known entrepreneurs who went through thick and thin to reach enviable heights and some who had to close would-be flourishing businesses and dreams due to lack of support both financially and emotionally.

The crop of entrepreneurs that passed through the Office

of the Chief Job Creation Officer has a lot to be thankful for. Theirs is like a pregnant woman who goes through the nine months gestation period filled with the thought of a new addition to the family. She is troubled by anxiety and what would become of her baby. After the birth of her baby comes the weaning period, taking the first footsteps and the period when the baby can stand on his/her own with little or no supervision.

The dream of our Governor was to get our youths off the streets and make them people that would be reckoned with in the nearest future. Hence, he put together a Steering Committee to actualize his dreams and an office filled with hardworking civil servants and politicians that are very passionate with the same dream. They toil night and day irrespective of the fact that they have families who worry always when they got home late. The drivers are always on the move and the officers cannot boast of the normal office hours of 8 a.m to 4 p.m, working up to 9 p.m some days. They bear insults and antagonism from would-be *YAGEPrenuers* and *STEPrenuers* with laughter because they are goal getters. The explanations and counter explanations continue even at odd hours of the night to make sure that the *YAGEPrenuers* and *STEPrenuers* are comfortable. Monitoring and mentoring them never cease.

Today we have entrepreneurs that we can boast of. The range is endless from the fashion designers, event managers, welding and fabrication, tillers to the poultry farmers, crop farmers and others. I doff my hat to the staff of the Officer of the Chief Job Creation Officer for the completion of the second cycle. It is not yet *Uhuru* but your courage, strength and resilience have shown that for anything good to work, a team made up of people with the same passion and determination to succeed is all you need. Let me leave you with the lyrics of Don Williams.

*I know how it feels when you try and try again
And you never win I know how it feels
Then you came my way and tore away the fearful pain,
I won't loose again this time I know
I've got a winner in you
No way I can loose*

The Road Conversation

BY NKECHI MADUEMEZIA

The sun was shining, the air around me was warm and nature at peace. All of a sudden my left eyelid started

twitching. I blinked severally but the twitching continued. Out of the blues I had a voice calling "Aunty, Aunty Job creation." I did not answer at first because I was clad in my job creation office T-shirt. It could be somebody that wants to make fun of me or one of my colleagues from the other MDAs. "Aunty, Aunty" This time the caller had come very close. "Aunty Nkechi, good morning" I turned around and beheld a well fed man. I had to take a second look before I could recognize him.

"*He He hei*" ' Uche, so it is you looking so robust and very different from the young man I used to know' How is business?

'Aunty I am a very happy man and I give God the glory. All these years I have trekked and written so many application to MDAs and private organizations that my shoes revolted against me. They all took that shape called "*I swear to God*" like that of the Arabian night tales we read in class. The Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer was used as a tool by God to take me to this present situation. My poultry business has expanded and I have ventured into fishery. I have in my employment six poultry attendants and my family always has food on the table. I also have money to spend on daily basis. The other day, a friend called that he hardly sees me around our former joints. I told him that I was very busy and he picked offence. But I am unperturbed. I used to have an incurable disease caused by thinking and stress; now it has gone. I just want to say hello and extend my greetings to the team in the Office of the Chief Job Creation Officer. I have to run; see you some other time. Why don't you venture into agriculture?'

He left and my eye stopped itching. I looked at myself unconsciously comparing then and now. I soliloquized to myself, 'if not for the number of years I have put in service I would have voluntarily retired to join these entrepreneurs.' But as the saying goes, discipline is the soul of the army. I need discipline, dedication, determination and selfless service to succeed in any venture I choose. I also need luck and the wisdom to decide the type of skill I am best at. Hmm, I crossed the road without thinking and heard the harsh blaring of a car horn coupled with insults from the car driver

" pooh ponnn, you no dey see? Craze ".

I came back to reality. I quietly walked into my office. Maybe I should venture into agriculture quietly now that civil servants are being encouraged to farm before retirement comes knocking at the door. You never know I might one day be at the other side of the road with a more grandiose story.

Sustaining the Job Creation Scheme Through Business Mentoring

BY IFEANYI EGWUNYENGA AND FESTUS ELIGBO

All over the world, business mentors are a rare breed. They are among the most valuable assets for any business, especially a start-up. Mentors or business coaches come with vast industry experience in specific fields and can be the best advisors for any start-up. While the new entrepreneur has the enthusiasm and the technological awareness, mentors are experts in foreseeing pitfalls, assessing the competition, identifying threats and emerging with viable solutions. They have faced the same situations before in their business pursuit, have gone through the same type of product or service life cycle, learned how to assess trends and stay open to cues from the marketplace.

Studies have shown that start-ups often fail within the first five years of operation as a result of inadequate monitoring and lack of mentorship. For them getting that crucial market share can take a lot of time and, in a majority of cases, ends in failure. Mentors give reality check and encourage entrepreneurs to make smarter decisions in the crucial steps of scaling up and growth hacking. In growing markets, a head for analytics and the advice of mentors can go a long way in identifying strategic market opportunities and coming up with the right pitch to attract patronage. The incubation process improves the survival rate of start-ups by assisting them to become financially viable.



Against this background, Dr Ifeanyi Okowa, the Executive Governor of Delta State, established the Directorate of Youth Monitoring and Mentoring. This proactive initiative, which is first of its kind since the creation of the State, is geared towards ensuring the sustainability of the job and wealth creation programmes of the S.M.A.R.T agenda and that beneficiaries are adequately equipped with post establishment support and guidance to ensure lasting success. The Directorate is charged with:

- Thorough monitoring and evaluation of all youth job and wealth creation intervention programmes in the State to create maximum benefits for the beneficiaries;
- Monitoring and mentoring of beneficiaries of the State's Job and Wealth Creation Scheme to achieve the desired



A cross section of STEPpreneurs and YAGEPreneurs at the interactive session

result;

- Proactive communication and flag-up of issues that may hinder the growth and sustenance of the State's job and wealth creation programmes;
- Providing technical support for all youth job and wealth creation programmes in the State; and
- Providing required statistical information and liaison with the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA's) of Government with responsibility for youth job and wealth creation.

With a deep resolve to ensure that these objectives are achieved, the office is currently implementing the following programmes:

Interactive Session with Established Beneficiaries (ISEB):

This is a post-establishment event meant to kick-off our mentoring programme with established beneficiaries of the Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) and the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) in the State. The interactive session is designed as feedback mechanism from beneficiaries of the programme. The first session was held in seven locations across the State with Governor Okowa in attendance at the grand finale in Asaba. The forum afforded the Governor the opportunity to get first hand feedback from the beneficiaries on the performance of the programme.

Business Mentoring (Mentor2Mentee) Programme (S.M.A.R.T M2M)

The Mentor2Mentee (M2M) is our flagship programme designed to provide a mentorship platform to guide beneficiaries on how

to successfully grow their businesses. Under this programme, beneficiaries will be assigned mentors in their business locality to guide them and provide update on the status of the beneficiaries.

Walk with Role Model/Community Service Programme (RMCS)

The walk with Role Model/Community Service Programme is designed to provide learning, motivation and inspiration to help beneficiaries of our Job and Wealth Creation Scheme (Smartpreneurs) to define their self-concept. By the programme design, selected role models are to walk with beneficiaries every last Saturday of the month and carry-out some form of community service within their locality. This has the potential of giving beneficiaries the opportunity to share their experiences with these role models. This will help inculcate a new sense of community service amongst our youths and change the narrative of the current rent seeking approach of youths in the State.

For the first time in the history of our dear State, a conscious effort is being made by the Okowa administration to create jobs that are measurable. The impact of the S.M.A.R.T agenda would become more visible for all to see in the next five to ten years when these new crop of entrepreneurs begins to dictate the pace in the business world in Nigeria, Africa and the entire world.

Partnership that Works

The second phase of the training programme for STEP and YAGEP beneficiaries involves a hands-on, practical module designed to equip them with vocational skills. In this section, some of the CEOs of the accredited enterprises that partnered with the State Government to train the participants share their experiences.

INTERVIEWS BY AMAECHI UDEMBA

Mr Bonaventure Akpabor, is the CEO of **Bivi Global Ventures** in Asaba, Oshimili South LGA. He trained 20 participants in the production and installation of interlock tiles, paving stones kerbs and romacrete. He speaks on his experience and his expectations on the economy of Delta State in the near future.

What was it like working with the Job Creation office via training of STEP and YAGEP beneficiaries?

It was a wonderful experience. The 20 persons trained by my office exhibited zeal and determination to learn. Governor Ifeanyi Okowa's vision of taking his job creation programme to the grassroots is a winning formula for those of us in the informal sector. From indication, it is obvious that Governor Okowa took time to understudy why previous attempts to alleviate poverty failed. His method of bringing the trainees to well established and existing companies that specialise in a particular line of

business for them to acquire first -hand experience is a workable formula that other State Governments should emulate. So it wasn't difficult to get the trainees to settle down to learn.

How were you able to get the trainees mentally prepared for the task ahead of them?

Though it wasn't difficult to kick-start our training session, I still had to engage them in an orientation exercise to prepare their minds and ascertain their level of commitment. This is important because if they are not going to show commitment, then the training programme is dead on arrival. I made it known to them that they should count themselves privileged to have a



Governor willing to give them basic skills, provide starter packs, set them up, and still provide mentors to guide them even when they are fully established. Because when I was empowered in 2002, it wasn't like this. Nobody gave me this opportunity. We were trained for two weeks and that was the end. In this case, however, much is being given both in financial and technical terms. So I pointed out to my trainees that if they failed to seize this opportunity for a head start in life, then they have themselves to blame. Somehow, it registered because after that session we got down to business.

As a trainer, have you learnt something new because there is an adage that 'he who trains others also trains himself'.

Yes, of course. When you have youths asking you very probing questions, it makes you think deep. I had to do a lot of research in order to be able to meet their expectations. On the commercial side, since April 2017 when the last batch left, I have had business dealings with many of them. We relate through exchange of machines. They come to my workshop to hire bigger machines to execute jobs. For instance, Paul Uzorka, a first batch trainee is a huge success story. He has effectively taken over my clients in Ibusa and Ogwashi-ukwu areas. Others are also doing well. If they have bigger jobs, they get me involved. It is a win-win situation.

Judging from the mental attitude of the trainees vis-a-vis the commitment of Delta State Government, will you say we are headed in the right direction?

The so-called Asian Tigers started this way. It is only policy consistency that is needed to drive Delta economy from oil dependent to non -oil sector. China will be learning from us if successive governments continue this way. Skill is the key to the survival of every nation. With skill nobody will be talking about unemployment. When I see thousands fighting and bribing to join the Civil Service, I wonder what they are going to do there. God has endowed Delta State with so much. Now that we have a Governor who is interested in re-directing the creative energy of our youths to productive ventures, we should cooperate with him to better our State.



Ms Ebimo Perekekeme of Ebimonique Concept at work

Talking about bettering our State, what other role do you want the government to play?

Delta State Government should create an avenue for inter-locking and paving stones business to strive more. In Lagos State, inter-locking and paving stones are now used to construct roads. That can be done here. Also, government contractors should be encouraged to patronise these STEPreneurs. It will help to encourage others to key more into the programme.

Ms Ebimo Perekekeme, is the COO of **Ebimonique Concept**, a beauty salon located in Ughelli LGA . She has so far trained 12 persons and shares her experience with us.

Having 12 beneficiaries of the STEP programme with you must have been a handful. How were you able to cope?

I had them in two batches. In all, they were very cooperative. They exhibited willingness to learn. From my interaction with them, they were encouraged by the good gesture of Governor Ifeanyi Okowa whose programme gave them the opportunity to own their personal businesses. And because of the way the Job Creation office monitors them, talk to them, listen to their challenges, it helps to keep them on their toes. As a trainer, it made me to be better organised. The experience with them has helped me to develop better business ideas. More so, I have learnt to improve on my communication skills with my customers. This policy of not just sending them to training and leaving them but following them through is commendable. It shows that Governor Okowa is not paying lip service to job creation.

You said your experience with Job Creation has made you better organised with improved business ideas. Has that translated into cash ?

(Laughter) I will not share that with you (more laughter). However, it has. I thank God for everything. Through the experience, I have improved in the management of my finances.

Have there been areas of business cooperation between your company and the former trainees?

Since they graduated and collected their starter – packs, we do jobs together. It is an experience that has encouraged many micro businesses to gain firm root in most parts of the State. For example, Ajire is doing very well. When she got her starter – pack, she called to inform me. I went to her shop paid for by the Delta State Government to help her set up. It will interest you to know that few days ago, Ajire and myself did a job together. It is like that with others. Once they received their starter – packs, they usually called to inform me. I do visit them to give words of advice. I must say no State Government has ever encouraged the youth this way.

With what you have seen, if we continue this way, where do you see Delta State in next few years?

The State will be a better place. People will be positively engaged. And there will be less violence and crime in the land. From my association with the trainees, I discovered that the youth are willing to learn. It is just that in the past no government has deemed it fit to engage them meaningfully - train, mentor, provide equipment, periodically send field officers to check their progress. It has never happened before. Indeed, it is now that the State Government's slogan of "Prosperity for all Deltans" is beginning to make some meaning to me. Micro businesses are beginning to gain firm root in the State and those trained are beginning to make money for themselves and their families.

Any suggestion on how the programme can be improved?

Yes. The hair-dressing department is doing well both in training and incentives. But the catering department needs to be looked into, especially as it concerns start-up capital. I think it is too small. Also, the three months training duration is not enough. They should give the trainees under catering more time to learn better. I would suggest six months. Also, money for training should be increased.



Mr Francis Mpieri of Konum Farms

Mr Francis Mpieri, is a Farm Manager with **Konum Farms Limited** based in Amai, Ukwuani LGA. He trained 61 entrepreneurs in crops, poultry and fishery. He speaks on his experience and perception of the job creation programmes.

To have trained 61 beneficiaries of YAGEP is obviously a milestone. That means you have a bag full of success stories to tell us. However, let begin with your making of the relationship between your organisation and Job creation in the area of training of entrepreneurs?

To me, it is a win-win relationship. From inception until now, it has been cordial. We had 13 of the trainees in the first batch. They were trained in crops (2) and poultry (11). Initially, they were not serious but when they saw that the job creation office was monitoring their commitment and they stood the chance of being delisted from the programme, they became more attentive. In the second batch, we had 48 trainees. Twelve were in fishery and 36 in crops production. It has been a great success in the YAGEP training because virtually all the 61 are doing well in their areas of specialisation. Of course, they call me from time to time to seek one advice or the other. For us in Konum farms, the experience has broadened our horizon.

Share with us some success stories of those you trained?

In the first batch, we have Chuks in Idemili, Ossai in Aboh. They are doing well. They still call me and we relate on ideas in poultry business. They bring their challenges and we share ideas. In the second batch, there are three of them in Obiaruku in the persons of Mrs Patricia, Obinum and Mrs Ugbolu. They are doing well. The training has turned their lives around. Today, they are employers of labour and have

clients well outside their immediate environment.

So the State government is getting it right?

Yes. The future is obviously bright. It will get brighter if the Local Government can begin to take a critical look at the informal sector by replicating the farm-clusters arrangement on a massive scale. They have the land. This training has proven that the youth are ready to make money positively if assisted. The Delta State Government, through YAGEP and STEP programmes, has provided the political will to take us to the Promised Land. If all hands are on desk and agriculture is given the same push like Governor Ifeanyi Okowa is doing now, we will not be talking about oil but agriculture.

Having said all this, is there a missing link somewhere?

Yes. The Delta State Government has performed well. However, there is need for the State Government to provide processing plant. If we have all these trainees producing something and we don't have where to process them, then we have done nothing. Therefore, there is urgent need for a processing plant. And the way the State Government can do that is to partner with well-established farms. Production is not the issue. Processing is where the value-chain is. So if the government can do that, our economy will explode.

Mrs Felicia Aghwadoma, is the Chief Operating Officer, **Hofete farms**. She has been in the business of fishery since 2009 and has branches in Asaba and Ibusa. Hofete farms helped train 22 participants since the partnership between her and the Job Creation Office started. She shares with us her experience.

How has it been partnering with the Job Creation Office?



Mrs Felicia Aghwadoma of Hofete Farms

It has been wonderful. Job Creation is doing a good job. God will richly reward the Job Creation Office and Governor Ifeanyi Okowa. Of a truth, so much has been done. So much has been invested in these young people. The training package is excellent. They were posted to well-established and existing farms. That shows the genuine commitment of the State Government to help the youth. At Hofete farms, proper skills were imparted. They got proper training. They got exposed to the practical aspect of aquaculture.

Talking about the youth, were they very keen to learn because there is this general perception that youths are indifference to agriculture?

No. Not with youths from Job Creation Office. Before they came here, they had gone through a very rigorous screening process. That way, the unserious ones were delisted. At the end of that screening exercise, those that get to the trainers have been well polished. They learnt a lot. I really enjoyed training them.

Can you recall some trainees that have made exceptional progress?

Yes. One of my trainees, Kester, won an award during the World Food Day Celebration. Kingsley, Patrick and Vivian are wonderful fish farmers today. They are doing well in Camp 74. They have finished with what was given to them as starter-pack, re-stocked and re-stocked again. These are practical testimonies.

So from your experience, would you say the government is getting it right?

Delta State will be at the apex if we continue this way in the area of food production. The State Government has put in place a workable strategy called the Job Creation Office. With them, you can't cut corners. The monitoring is very intensive. There is no room for poor jobs. Job Creation will locate you and delist you if you try to be dishonest. So that made them sit up and focus on the task. If all those trained by Hofete farms are today successful fish farmers it has a huge cumulative effect on the food basket of the nation. Indeed, Delta State is blessed.



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