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**Gioventù Foundation**

**Quarter 1 Update Report**

**Period: January to April 2025**

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## INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the first quarter of 2025 update report on the donor agreement between the Gioventú Foundation and the Centre of Excellence for Nutrition (CEN), North-West University (NWU). This report aims to provide an overview of the progress made on the various funding activities within this agreement.

## MSc SCHOLARSHIPS

### Current students

Six students – from South Africa, Malawi, and Ghana – are currently in the second year of their Master's degrees and continue to demonstrate commitment and diligence in their academic and research work.

### Completed students

In addition, the three scholarship recipients from Nigeria, Ms Temilade Arulogun, Ms Oluwatoyin, and Mr Mukhtar Mohammed, have successfully submitted and defended their Master's theses – an important milestone marking the culmination of their academic journey. Their theses abstracts and reflection reports are included in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively (their theses would be send as a separate document).

**Table 1: Overview of student research progress**

Name	Country	S1	S2	S3	S4	C
Temilade Arulogun	Nigeria					
Oluwatoyin Oladeji	Nigeria					
Mukhtar Muhammed	Nigeria					
Naomi Makande	Malawi					
Shamane Lole	Malawi					
Roli Mathabi	South Africa					
Makhafola Masodi	South Africa					
Afia Asamoah-Duku	Ghana					
Isabella Cheryl Arbenser	Ghana					

\*S = Semester; C = Completed

The funding is highly appreciated, and it is achieving its aim of funding MSc students for full-time study. Our initial strategy to work with colleagues whom we know will deliver is also working well. We are also happy to see how the most is being made with the funds, and in countries with a lower cost of living, the Foundation is supporting more students. The various institutions admit students to their postgraduate programmes at different times of the year.

### MSc fellowship payment to institutions

**Table 2: Overview of MSc fellowship payments to institutions**

Country	2024		2025	
	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 1	Semester 2
Nigeria	Paid	Paid	New intake	
Malawi	Paid	Paid	Paid	Paid
South Africa	Paid	Paid	Paid	Paid
Ghana	Paid	Paid	Paid	Paid

## SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR PHD STUDENTS

Applications for the 2025 edition (5<sup>th</sup> edition) of the Support Program for PhD Students are now open. Applications will officially close on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2025. The selection of successful applicants will be made on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2025.

The online component of the Program will commence on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2025 and conclude on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2025, after which the face-to-face component will take place from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2025 in Potchefstroom, South Africa.

## AFRICAN NUTRITION LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

Due to the overwhelming number of applications for the 2025 10-day ANLP it was decided to host two programmes in 2025. The first of the 2025 edition (23<sup>rd</sup> edition) of the ANLP commenced on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March and concluded on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2025.

The workshop was evaluated by participants, and the evaluation report follows.

# ANLP 2025 Evaluation Report

## Introduction

The purpose of the African Nutrition Leadership Programme (ANLP) is to develop individual and institutional leadership capabilities in nutrition across the African continent.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> edition of the ANLP took place from March 11<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025, at the Elgro River Lodge, located in South Africa's North West province. This event saw the participation of twenty-one individuals hailing from ten different African nations. For detailed insights into the program, refer to Appendix 3, which contains the ANLP 2025 program, while Appendix 4 provides a list of the attendees along with their respective countries of origin.

## Participants' ANLP experience

Participants were asked to describe their ANLP 2025 experience in 3 words. The results are depicted in the word cloud.

## Participants' learnings about themselves

The ANLP once again proved to be a transformative experience, guiding participants through an enriching process of introspection, growth, and leadership development. This year's first cohort reflected deeply on their personal traits, leadership styles, and the internal narratives that shape their actions.

Many participants discovered profound truths about themselves, identifying their own potential, acknowledging both strengths and blind spots, and recognising the importance of self-awareness in effective leadership. A recurring theme was the concept of *leading from where you stand*, with participants embracing the belief that leadership is not tied to position but rather to mindset, responsibility, and intentional growth.



Self-awareness emerged as a cornerstone of the programme. Participants noted shifts in their understanding of their leadership orientation, emotional response, and personal barriers. Many acknowledged their initial resistance to feedback and external locus of control but left with a stronger sense of agency and the tools to deliberately seek feedback, manage emotions, and foster a growth mindset.

There was also a heightened awareness of stress responses, work-life balance, and the importance of self-care – seen not as indulgence, but as a necessity for sustainable leadership. Participants explored their vulnerabilities, like fear of failure, procrastination, or self-doubt, and found new confidence, calm, and strength in discovering their unique leadership voices.

The ANLP journey empowered them to challenge internal limitations, embrace their creative and communicative strengths, and reframe their inner dialogue. Whether overcoming the fear of starting tough conversations or recognising the value of small acts of kindness, each insight contributed to their evolution as reflective, resilient leaders.

From understanding the importance of managing burnout and delegation, to uncovering the richness of the Johari window and the power of feedback, participants left with a deeper belief in their ability to influence change – starting with themselves.

#### What are participants going to implement?

Following the immersive 10-day ANLP, the first of the 2025 cohort emerged with a strong commitment to translate their learning into meaningful personal and professional action. Their reflections revealed an overarching drive to deepen self-awareness, lead with intention, and pursue growth in all areas of life.

A key focus for many was the active pursuit of feedback – not only from colleagues and supervisors, but also from friends, family, and even students. Participants recognised feedback as a vital tool for enhancing self-awareness and leadership capacity. Structured feedback sessions, journaling, and reflection were among the strategies they planned to implement to foster continual learning and personal growth.

Self-care was also prominently highlighted. Many committed to prioritising their physical and emotional well-being through rest, exercise, setting boundaries, and managing stress more effectively. For some, this was the first time they truly acknowledged the importance of self-care as a leadership necessity rather than a luxury.

Participants showed a strong desire to apply the principle of leading from where they stand, regardless of position. This mindset shift will empower them to take initiative in their workplaces and communities to demonstrate leadership through everyday actions and intentional influence.

Professionally, participants set specific goals such as initiating PhD journeys, finalising stalled research projects, improving communication, and mentoring others. Others committed to fostering team empowerment, conducting bi-annual feedback sessions, and being more present and accountable in their leadership roles.

Several also emphasised the importance of time management, self-discipline, and consistency – vowing to use tools such as reading schedules, reflection plans, and action tracking to stay aligned with their goals. At the heart of all these plans was a unifying theme: taking responsibility for their own growth and well-being, embracing challenges as opportunities, and stepping confidently into their roles as leaders in nutrition and beyond. As one participant shared: *“I am going to set aside time to*

*reflect and be intentional about reflection every day...I will give it all when it comes to my personal life – including my health and character. I have started being kind.”*

The first of the 2025 cohort leaves the ANLP with renewed purpose and clear intentions – ready to embody the programme’s lessons and drive meaningful change.

#### Aspects of ANLP 2025 that participants enjoyed most

The ANLP 2025 offered a wealth of experiences that left participants inspired and motivated. Looking back, they expressed appreciation for various components that enhanced their personal and professional journey.

Some of the standout elements were the sessions on feedback, self-care, and reflection. Participants found these moments to be particularly transformative, allowing them to reassess their growth and leadership paths. Self-awareness sessions, team building, and storytelling were also enjoyed by many, offering a rich space for sharing experiences and gaining new perspectives. The preparation of newsletters and committee work helped foster collaboration and communication skills, creating lasting connections among participants.

The team-building activities were a highlight for most. Whether through the high ropes course or other outdoor challenges, participants were able to confront their fears, develop trust, and strengthen their teamwork abilities. These activities, combined with the reflection sessions, allowed participants to tap into personal strengths and grow beyond their comfort zones.

Participants also appreciated the practical nature of the workshop. The ability to apply new concepts directly to their professional lives added value to their learning experience. The networking opportunities – particularly through the networking café and interactions with peers from different countries – provided a broader sense of community and fostered new friendships.

The programme’s structure, which included a blend of interactive lectures, outdoor activities, and committee roles, was lauded for its ability to challenge and energise participants. These moments, paired with reflection and team-based tasks, encouraged personal growth and leadership development. Several participants also noted how the self-reflection time helped them consolidate the lessons learned each day and integrate them into their personal and professional lives.

Several participants shared that they enjoyed overcoming challenges, such as the high ropes and adventure trips, which offered both physical and emotional growth. Others mentioned how the disconnection from technology helped them realise how much time they waste on their devices, giving them the opportunity to be present and truly engaged.

Ultimately, the blend of practical learning, team collaboration, and personal introspection made the ANLP 2025 an unforgettable experience for all involved. The programme’s unique combination of rigorous activities, self-reflection, and connection with peers allowed participants to sharpen their leadership skills and build lasting relationships that will continue to influence their work and personal lives long after the programme’s conclusion.

#### Participants’ reported knowledge improvement

Several inquiries were made to gauge the participants’ perceptions of their knowledge enhancement in diverse subjects through the ANLP 10-day program. They retrospectively evaluated their perception on a scale from “very low” to “very high,” both pre- and post-program. The areas of inquiry included:

- The significance of applying leadership skills in change-requiring processes.
- The necessity of ongoing leadership competence development.

- The impact of self-awareness on personal leadership growth.
- The role of reflection in fostering growth.
- Utilising reflection as a growth mechanism.
- How one's locus of control affects leadership effectiveness.
- Understanding personal leadership styles.
- The way leadership skills can advance goal achievement.
- Gaining insights into personal leadership strengths and areas for improvement.
- Confidence in creating effective presentations with visual aids.
- The value of external feedback in self-discovery.
- The willingness to seek feedback.
- The connection between advocacy and leadership.
- The use of systems thinking in addressing food security.

Participants consistently reported significant enhancements in their knowledge across all topics addressed in the ANLP programme.

#### Additional comments from participants

As the first cohort of the 2025 ANLP ended, participants took the opportunity to share final reflections and feedback, expressing a deep sense of gratitude and transformation. Many described the workshop as a turning point in their personal and professional journeys – one that catalysed self-discovery, renewed purpose, and leadership clarity.

The venue was widely appreciated for its natural beauty and tranquil setting, which provided an ideal backdrop for reflection and connection.

The intentional and well-organised structure of the programme stood out. Participants praised the balance between theory and practice, the thoughtful pacing of sessions, and the interactive nature of activities. The inclusion of outdoor challenges and team responsibilities allowed participants to apply leadership principles in real-time, building skills such as collaboration, time management, and adaptability. Many appreciated the addition of the November cohort, viewing it as a welcome expansion that allows more professionals to benefit from the programme's impact.

The support team was celebrated for their commitment and hands-on engagement throughout the workshop. Their presence, encouragement, and feedback inspired participants to push through challenges and embrace discomfort as part of growth. Several participants shared that the programme helped them uncover parts of themselves they did not know existed, describing it as a 360-degree transformation touching all facets of life – academic, professional, personal, and even spiritual.

Numerous constructive suggestions were also offered, including to revise the schedule to avoid back-to-back responsibilities (e.g., newsletter and hosting duties); making most newsletters electronic to reduce printing waste; restructuring heavy sessions, such as advocacy, across multiple days for better absorption; improving website and online presence, particularly on platforms like LinkedIn and Instagram; introducing annual alumni refresher sessions, even virtually, to sustain momentum; increasing diversity across countries and age groups within teams; and including cultural celebration days, to showcase participants' heritage and foster deeper connections.

Participants expressed their eagerness to apply the lessons learned, share their newfound insights, and mentor others in their own networks. Many voiced the desire to see more awareness and marketing of the ANLP across national and international platforms to reach those who could benefit most from the experience.



In conclusion, this cohort left with full hearts and sharpened minds. Their parting words reflected a programme that was not just about leadership but about becoming more fully oneself. From tears of breakthrough to moments of laughter, from quiet introspection to energising collaboration, this cohort carried forward a sense of responsibility – not only to lead but to inspire transformation in others. The legacy of ANLP 2025, like the cohorts before, will undoubtedly ripple across the continent.

#### ANLP 2025 Declaration of Intent

During the ANLP programme, a pivotal session was dedicated to the participants' creation of a personal declaration of intent. This declaration, known as the ANLP 2025 Declaration of Intent, represents a collective commitment and a guiding statement articulating their aspirations and goals as leaders in the field of nutrition.

**We declare and commit to lead courageously with a growth mindset to influence sustainable change and lead from where we stand.**

#### Conclusion

The ANLP of 2025 marked yet another powerful chapter in the development of emerging leaders across the continent. Through a dynamic blend of self-reflection, experiential learning, and collaborative engagement, participants experienced personal and professional transformation. They leave equipped with enhanced leadership capacity, greater self-awareness, and a renewed sense of purpose to influence change from where they stand. The insights gained and commitments made – both individually and collectively – signal the ongoing impact of the ANLP in nurturing resilient, intentional, and courageous leaders in the field of nutrition across Africa.

#### ANLP Participants 2025





## Appendix 1 – Master's Theses Abstracts

Temilade Arulogyn

BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO ACCESS AND ADEQUATE CONSUMPTION OF  
FRUITS AND VEGETABLES AMONG STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

BY

ARULOGUN, TEMILADE WEMIMO

B.Sc HUMAN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS (UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN) MATRIC NO:  
185519

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS,  
FACULTY OF PUBLIC HEALTH, COLLEGE OF MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER  
OF SCIENCE (M.Sc) DEGREE IN HUMAN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

APRIL, 2024

## ABSTRACT

Inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption (FV) is a recognised risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), prompting the need for interventions to promote their intake. However, the consumption of these fruits and vegetables is globally below recommendation. More so, fruit and vegetable consumption in the University of Ibadan has been reported to be low overtime. Therefore, interventions aimed at increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables in the university are important. However, the development of such intervention requires a good understanding of the factors that influence consumer behaviour. The aim of this study was to understand the barriers and enablers to accessibility and adequate consumption of fruits and vegetables in the University of Ibadan.

Utilising both quantitative and qualitative designs, this cross-sectional study employed the Fruit and Vegetable component of Global Dietary Recommendation Score (FV-GDR) to assess FV consumption adequacy among 1038 students in UI, guiding the purposeful selection of ninety participants for barrier analysis. Participants were categorised as doers or non-doers based on FV- GDR score of four and above or less than four respectively. The barrier analysis questionnaire and calculator were then employed to identify barriers and enablers to consumption using results between doers and non-doers. The research also included mapping of the fruit and vegetable retail points in the university of Ibadan using the Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping technique; and consumers' willingness to pay for better accessibility to FV using an adapted contingent valuation tool. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 21 while qualitative data was thematically analysed.

Fourteen fruits and vegetables retail points were identified, out of which only one sold different fruit and vegetables while majority of the others sold banana and any fruit available in season. Overall, there was a high prevalence of inadequate FV consumption among both male (87.5%) and female (88.2%) respondents. The barrier and enabler to FV accessibility and adequate consumption analysis revealed that availability, affordability and proximity to vendors were both significant barriers and enablers to accessibility of FV. However, while non-doers cited knowledge of the benefits, attitude, and preference as a barrier (16% vs. 0% of doers), doers identified accessibility as a significant enabler (20% vs. 2% of non-doers) to adequate consumption. Social norms favoured doers, with higher peer approval (84% vs. 67% of non-doers) and parental support (40% vs. 7% of non-doers). Moreover, doers found it less difficult to remember daily FV consumption (78% vs. 29% of non-doers). Additionally, the survey revealed that consumers were willing to pay about ₦100 for one portion of most of the fruits and vegetables.

These findings underscore the importance of addressing multifaceted factors to improve accessibility and adequate consumption of fruits and vegetables and improve overall nutrition and health outcomes among students in the university.

**Keywords:** Barriers and Enablers, Accessibility, Consumption, Fruits and Vegetables.

**Word Count: 453**

DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF A CONTEXTUALISED HEALTHY EATING PLATE  
TO IMPROVE DIETARY OUTCOMES AMONG SELECTED ADOLESCENTS IN IBADAN,  
OYO STATE

BY

OLADEJI, OLUWATOYIN ESOHE  
B.Sc. NUTRITION AND DIETETICS (FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE  
ABEOKUTA)  
MATRIC. NO.: 239136

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN NUTRITION AND  
DIETETICS, FACULTY OF PUBLIC HEALTH, COLLEGE OF MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF  
IBADAN, NIGERIA

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SCIENCE (M.Sc.) DEGREE IN HUMAN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the availability of Dietary Guidelines in Nigeria, poor food choices, unhealthy dietary habits and consequently malnutrition remain high among adolescents. Many developed countries have developed tools to complement and simplify dietary guidelines to promote healthy dietary behaviour, however, none of this presently exist in Nigeria. A contextualised healthy eating plate have been shown to promote dietary behaviour and compliance with recommended health promoting dietary practices. Therefore, this study was designed to develop and validate a contextualised healthy eating plate which would serve as a nutrition education tool to improve dietary outcomes among Nigerian adolescents.

This descriptive cross-sectional study adopted a mixed-method approach and was conducted in Ibadan North Local Government Area. The study was conducted in three phases; co-creation and development phase among 48 adolescents using the Nominal Group Technique (NGT), and expert validation among 25 experts in the field of nutrition, dietetics and public health using a modified semi-structured questionnaire to gather expert opinions on the content, language, design, and sustainability of the developed tool. Pilot testing was also carried out among 45 adolescents to assess the effectiveness, usability, and acceptability of the developed contextualised healthy eating plate. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data were thematically analysed.

Females constituted 60.4%, 84.0% and 62.2% of the respondents for co-creation, expert validation, and pilot testing respectively. About 96% of the experts had postgraduate qualification and 64% had prior experience in tools validation. Key foods and colour are similar across food groups; grains/starchy roots and tubers (rice, maize, yam, and garri)/white,cream,off-white, beans, fish, meat & alternatives (fish, meat, beans, chicken, eggs, and turkey)/dark brown/red/cream, vegetables (waterleaf, bitter leaf, okra, jute leaf, spinach, and scent leaf)/green, fruits (oranges, pineapples, pawpaw, watermelons, and apples)/yellow/orange, dairy (milk and yoghurt)/white/cream/yellow, oil (groundnut, palm, vegetable, and coconut)/yellow/gold. Popular tips included "Drink water before and after eating" "Eat different colours of fruits and vegetables every day", "Take less amount of biscuits and soft drinks." "Meals should be taken in appropriate proportions." "Make your meal colourful." And "Exercise daily and take lots of fruit". The contextualized Healthy Eating Plate obtained an item content validity index (I-CVI) of Section I (0.97; 0.97), II (0.95; 0.99), III (0.94; 0.96) and IV (0.96; 0.97) and total scale-content validity index 0.97 and 0.98 among the experts and the adolescents, respectively which reflects highly acceptable.

The contextualized healthy eating plate demonstrated high levels of content validity based on expert and adolescent evaluations. The tool is culturally relevant, well-designed, and engaging for adolescents. Further studies are recommended ascertain the effectiveness of the plate in improving understanding of nutrition and behaviour change among adolescents.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Healthy Eating, Plate, Dietary Outcomes, Co-creation.

**Word Count:** 433

NUTRIENT INTAKE, MEAL AND DIETARY PATTERNS OF CHILDREN AGED 4–13  
YEARS IN KEBBI STATE, NORTHWEST NIGERIA

BY

MUHAMMED, MUKHTAR MAILATO

B.SC. BIOCHEMISTRY (KEBBI)

MATRIC NO: 239236

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN NUTRITION AND  
DIETETICS, FACULTY OF PUBLIC HEALTH, COLLEGE OF MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF  
IBADAN, NIGERIA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MASTERS  
OF SCIENCE (M.Sc.) DEGREE IN HUMAN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

MARCH, 2025



## ABSTRACT

Adequate nutrient intakes and healthy eating are essential for optimal growth, development, and disease prevention, particularly among children. However, undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and poor dietary patterns in children is a growing concern, particularly in rural and underserved regions in Kebbi State. This study aims at investigating the nutrient intake, meal and dietary patterns of children in Kebbi State, Northwest Nigeria, as well as to evaluate their adherence to nutrient and dietary recommendations.

It is a community-based cross-sectional study of 477 children aged 4 – 13 years, selected using a multistage sampling technique, from seven Local Government Areas across the three senatorial districts of Kebbi State. Socio-demographic and anthropometric data were collected. Food intake data was collected using a 24-hour recall method, while meal frequency was predetermined in the questionnaire using five eating occasions. Data Analysis was performed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software (v 25.0, SPSS, Chicago, IL, USA) using significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . All the categorical variables were analyzed using percentages and frequencies, while mean and standard deviation were used to describe continuous variable. Chi-square test was used to examine for statistically significance difference among the categorical variables.

The result revealed that 34.2% of the children were stunted, about 35.4 % were underweight, and only 2.1% were obese. However, a significant association ( $P > 0.05$ ) was observed between stunting and socio-economic status (SES) of the respondents indicating that children in lower SES households are more likely stunted compared to children in middle-or upper SES households. The eating occasions of the children, showed that about 97.0% had breakfast, 76.0% had lunch, 92.0% had dinner and 17.0 % had midmorning. Conversely, the frequency of snacking was relatively low among both age groups, with more than 46.0% reporting no snack consumption and only 3.0% consuming snacks 4-6 times per day. Moreover, the results revealed that cereals comprised the e majorly consumed and source of energy with 42.0%, followed by vegetables 22.6%, fats and oils 6.9%, condiments and sauces 6.8%, sweet and sweetened beverages 5.6%, milk products, meat and fish, nuts, seeds, and soy each contributed 4.0%, while mixed dishes accounted for 2.0%. Fruit, roots and tubers were relatively low with 0.7% and 0.6% respectively. A total of 99.0%, 91.0%, 99.0%, 58.0%, and 99.0% of the children had inadequate intake below the Estimated Average Requirement value for calcium, iron, iodine, zinc and copper respectively. Moreover, 99.0%, 99.0%, 96.0%, 99.0%, 96.0%, and 79.0% of the children had inadequate intake of vitamin D, K, E, A and biotin respectively. In contrast, both children age groups exceeded the sodium Chronic Disease Risk Reduction recommendation (1500/1800 mg/day for younger and older children age group) respectively.

Public health nutrition education intervention programme is suggested to promote and support healthier diets among children in Kebbi State.

**Keywords:** Nutrient intake, Meal frequency, Dietary pattern, Children and Kebbi State

**Word Count: 456**

## Appendix 2 – Student reflection reports

### Temilade Arulogyn

#### **Reflection on My Master's Degree Journey: Growth, Insights, and Future Directions**

Pursuing a Master's degree in Human Nutrition and Dietetics has been one of the most transformative experiences of personal and professional aspects of my life. Looking back, I see a journey marked by growth, resilience, discovery, and purpose. It is indeed a journey that has deepened not only my academic competence but also my sense of identity as a public health nutrition advocate. This reflection highlights key milestones of my personal development, insights gained through academic work, research assistantship and field experience, and my aspirations for the future.

#### **Personal Growth**

From the very beginning of the programme, I was challenged to step out of my comfort zone and embrace new responsibilities. One of the most significant areas of personal growth was learning to balance multiple demands – academics, professional commitments, and community engagements. The academic rigor of coursework, combined with fieldwork responsibilities and research deadlines, required a level of time management, discipline, and emotional maturity that I had not previously mastered. This taught and encouraged me to set realistic goals, plan strategically, and remain focused even under pressure.

Another area of growth was in communication and leadership. During my time as a master student, I took on several collaborative roles which include mentoring undergraduates, supporting departmental projects, and assisting in lectures and research supervision. These experiences sharpened my ability to lead with empathy, communicate effectively, and contribute meaningfully to the university's work. Now, I am more confident in expressing my ideas and building networks that support advancement in nutrition and public health. Another aspect was the opportunity to learn and grow alongside other Gioventu scholars – Mukhtar and Oluwatoyin. This fostered open communication, peer support, problem-solving and foundation for lasting connections beyond the programme.

Perhaps most meaningfully, this journey has deepened my empathy and commitment to serving young adults and vulnerable populations. Notably was through our research in Kebbi state where I interacted with mothers and children, and individuals struggling with achieving optimum nutrition. This interaction and experience constantly reminded of the real-world impact of our work. These moments anchored my passion and reminded me that our science and interventions are only as meaningful as their impact on human lives.

#### **Insights Gained**

The academic and research components of my MSc programme have equipped me with a more critical and evidence-based approach to nutrition issues. My dissertation, which explored *Barriers and Enablers to Access and Adequate Consumption of Fruits and Vegetables among Students of the University of Ibadan*, was an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to a real-world nutritional concern. Conducting this research exposed me to the multifaceted nature of dietary behaviour; highlighting how factors such as affordability, parental influences, time constraints, food environment, and nutritional awareness all shape students' food choices.

From designing the research protocol to collecting and analysing data, I developed strong skills in qualitative research methods, stakeholder engagement, and data interpretation. I was particularly struck by how socioeconomic realities, convenience culture, and limited nutrition education can inhibit even well-informed individuals from making healthier food choices. These findings underscored the importance of creating targeted interventions and supportive environments that make healthy eating both accessible and desirable.

I also gained practical skills in data analysis, ethical research conduct, and academic writing. Engaging with existing literature sharpened my ability to evaluate evidence critically, while the process of refining my thesis taught me how to present complex findings clearly and persuasively.

Similarly, my field research in Kebbi gave me firsthand insight into the complexity of maternal and child nutrition in underserved communities. The nutritional challenges I observed – ranging from poor dietary diversity and undernutrition to limited access to healthcare – emphasized the urgency of scaling evidence-based interventions that respect local traditions and empower caregivers.

Beyond academics, the conferences I attended gave me a window into current trends, innovations, and research gaps in global nutrition. Interacting with experts in maternal nutrition, adolescent health, food systems, and NCD prevention helped me identify areas I'm passionate about and shaped the direction of my future studies.

Finally, I learned the value of reflection and mindfulness in maintaining personal well-being. Balancing coursework with fieldwork and administrative responsibilities reminded me of the importance of mental health in academic success. Regular self-reflection helped me stay grounded, appreciate small wins, and recognize when to seek support or rest.

## **Future Plans**

Completing this Master's programme has not only affirmed my passion for nutrition but has also clarified my long-term vision. I am now more determined than ever to pursue a PhD in Public Health/Community Nutrition, with a focus on maternal and infant nutrition, and nutrition-related non-communicable diseases. My goal is to become a leading researcher and policy advisor in these areas, working at the intersection of research, advocacy, and program implementation.

In the short term, I plan to deepen my research experience by engaging in relevant research projects, contributing to academic publications, and applying for fellowships or PhD scholarships. I also hope to continue mentoring students and early-career professionals, especially young women in science, as a way of giving back and strengthening the academic pipeline.

Ultimately, I envision a future where I can bridge the gap between research, practice, and policy which ensures that every community, regardless of socioeconomic status, has access to the knowledge and resources needed to make informed nutrition decisions. I am deeply grateful to the Gioventù Foundation for being part of this journey and for supporting my academic and personal development. Your support has made it possible for me to reach this important milestone and dream even bigger.

Overall, this master's journey has been both a test of perseverance and a catalyst for growth. I am leaving this phase of my academic life not only with a degree, but with a renewed sense of purpose, a stronger skill set, and a clearer vision for the future. I am excited for the next chapter filled with research, advocacy, learning, and impact. I say very big thank you to Gioventù Foundation for being a part of this wonderful journey.

### **Reflection on Personal Growth, Insights, and Future Aspirations**

There are moments in life when the right support and guidance can transform not only academic pursuits but also one's sense of purpose and direction. For me, the opportunity to pursue a Master's degree in Human Nutrition and Dietetics (Public Health and Community Nutrition) at the University of Ibadan, made possible by the Gioventù Foundation scholarship has been one of such moment. This journey, enriched by the mentorship of my supervisors, has been instrumental in shaping who I am today, both personally and professionally.

#### **Personal Growth**

Reflecting on my academic journey, I am amazed by how much I have grown in resilience and adaptability. The demands of graduate study such as rigorous coursework, research demands, and fieldwork experiences tested my resolve, adaptability, and perseverance. Balancing academic responsibilities with personal commitments taught me the value of discipline, effective time management, and self-motivation.

Participating in research projects with my peers and faculty was a particularly formative experience. While I did not lead some of these projects, my active involvement allowed me to develop teamwork skills, learn from others, and contribute meaningfully to our shared goals. Engaging in group discussions, assisting with data collection, and supporting the analysis process helped me appreciate the value of collaboration and the importance of every team member's contribution.

#### **Insights Gained: From Theory to Practice**

One of the most significant insights I gained during my studies was the importance of context in public health nutrition. My research project, "Development and Validation of a Contextualized Healthy Eating Plate among Adolescents in Ibadan," stands out as a defining and transformative experience in my academic journey. I was deeply involved in every stage of the project, from conceptualization to execution. With the invaluable guidance and support of my supervisors, Dr. Ariyo and Professor Folake Samuel, I was able to design a robust study and develop effective data collection instruments. Their mentorship was instrumental in shaping the research methodology and ensuring that ethical standards were upheld throughout the process.

Coordinating the fieldwork and overseeing data collection provided me with hands-on experience in managing research logistics and engaging directly with adolescents in the community. I also became proficient with research tools such as SPSS, Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, and KoBoCollect. Learning to use these tools not only improved my technical skills but also deepened my understanding of how data-driven insights can inform effective interventions. The process of working alongside experienced researchers and my peers taught me the importance of attention to detail, and ethical considerations in research.

Professor Folake Samuel's mentorship was a cornerstone of my academic development. Her guidance helped me refine my academic writing, think critically about research problems, and approach challenges with a solution-oriented mindset. I am truly grateful for her patience, encouragement, and the high standards she set for all her students.

#### **Professional Development**

The Gioventú Foundation scholarship did more than ease my financial burden. It opened avenues for professional development that I might not have otherwise accessed. I attended seminars and workshops that exposed me to the latest trends and best practices in nutrition and public health. These experiences broadened my perspective and inspired me to aim higher in my own work. Being part of a dynamic academic environment also allowed me to build a network of peers and mentors. I learned the value of sharing knowledge, seeking feedback, and supporting others in their academic journeys. These relationships have become a source of motivation and encouragement as I look to the future.

### **Future Aspirations**

Looking forward, I am determined to build on the foundation laid during my master's program. My goal is to pursue a doctoral degree and further develop my expertise in behavioural, implementation science, and dissemination research. I am passionate about contributing to research that addresses pressing health and nutrition challenges, especially those affecting vulnerable populations.

I aspire to work as part of a leading research group focused on developing and implementing evidence-based interventions. My vision is to help reduce public health issues by:

- Participating in impactful research that informs policy and practice.
- Supporting community-based interventions that are culturally relevant and sustainable.
- Promoting nutrition education and advocacy through interactive platforms and community engagement.
- Collaborating with organizations at the national and international levels to scale up effective solutions.

Ultimately, I want to play an active role in improving health outcomes and promoting well-being in communities, both in Nigeria and beyond.

### **Appreciation**

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to the Gioventú Foundation for their belief in my potential. Their scholarship was not just financial support. It was a message of encouragement that motivated me to pursue my goals with confidence and determination.

I am especially thankful to Professor Folake Samuel, whose mentorship has been invaluable. Her commitment to excellence, her willingness to share her knowledge, and her encouragement have had a profound impact on my academic and personal growth. I am inspired by her example and hope to one day mentor others as she has mentored me.

### **Conclusion**

As I reflect on all I have gained from this experience, I am filled with gratitude and a strong sense of responsibility to give back. The opportunities and support I have received have shaped my vision for the future and strengthened my resolve to contribute meaningfully to the field of nutrition and public health.

I am committed to using my skills and knowledge to drive positive change, support evidence-based interventions, and advocate for healthier communities. With the foundation laid by the Gioventú Foundation and the guidance of my supervisors, I am excited to continue my journey. One that is rooted in service, collaboration, and a deep commitment to making a difference.

Thank you for believing in me and for making this journey possible.



### **Reflections on Personal Growth, Insights Gained, and Future Aspirations through the Gioventú Foundation Master's Scholarship**

Completing my Master of Science degree in Human Nutrition and Dietetics (specializing in Public Health Nutrition/Community Nutrition) at the University of Ibadan has been one of the most transformative and rewarding experiences of my life. This journey would not have been possible without the invaluable scholarship support from the *Gioventú Foundation*, whose belief in my potential gave me the opportunity to pursue advanced education and meaningful research. I remain deeply grateful. In this reflection, I will share my experiences, personal growth, key insights gained, and the aspirations as follows.

#### **My Personal Growth**

When I commenced this academic journey, I was driven by a desire to understand and address the complex nutritional challenges facing children and families in Nigeria, particularly in underserved communities in Kebbi State, Northwest Nigeria. However, the programme exceeded my expectations, challenging me to grow beyond my previous academic and professional boundaries. Balancing intensive coursework, hands-on field research, academic writing, and personal responsibilities taught me the importance of discipline, adaptability, and effective time management. Through my research project titled *"Nutrient Intake, Meal and Dietary Patterns of Children Aged 4–13 Years in Kebbi State, Nigeria,"* I developed critical thinking and analytical skills. I also deepened my ability to interpret data and present findings that could inform interventions in real-world settings.

A vital and memorable aspect of my academic journey was the unique experience of learning alongside fellow Gioventú Foundation scholars. Attending classes, traveling, working on research projects, and participating in workshops together created an environment of mutual growth and shared purpose. This collective experience fostered open communication, collaborative problem-solving, and emotional support. We acquired new skills together, leaned on one another during challenges, and celebrated our achievements as a team. These shared learning moments laid a strong foundation for lasting professional relationships, enhanced our engagement, and strengthened our ability to work collaboratively skills that will undoubtedly shape our future careers. One of the most impactful relationships I developed during this period was with our supervisor, Professor Folake O. Samuel. Her mentorship provided clear direction, academic rigor, and unwavering encouragement. She consistently challenged us to refine our thinking, improve our scientific writing, and adopt a multidisciplinary approach to nutrition research and practice.

#### **Insights Gained**

Throughout the programme, I gained invaluable insights into the intersection of nutrition, public health and community engagement. I came to appreciate how deeply socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors influence dietary practices and nutritional status, especially among women and children. My research experience in my master's degree research work in Kebbi State revealed the need for tailored, context-specific nutrition interventions. I observed firsthand how caregiver knowledge, household food security, and feeding practices interact to shape child health outcomes. These experiences reinforced the necessity of designing nutrition programs that are not only evidence-based but also sensitive to cultural norms and resource realities.

### **Conference Experiences and Professional Exposure**

A significant highlight of my Master's program and working under Professor Folake O. Samuel, I had opportunity to participate in two major professional conferences, both of which greatly enriched my academic journey and professional outlook. Firstly, I had the privilege of attending the 53rd Annual Scientific Conference of the Nutrition Society of Nigeria (NSN) held in Kano, where I delivered a pre-conference presentation titled "*The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Nutrition Research: Opportunities and Challenges in Nigeria.*" This experience was deeply rewarding, as it gave me a platform to explore the intersection of nutrition and technology, a field I am increasingly passionate about. Secondly, I participated in the African Nutrition Conference held in Cape Coast, Ghana, where I presented a poster titled "*Child Food Poverty, Complementary Feeding and Nutritional Status of Children Aged 6–59 Months in Ibadan North Local Government Area.*" This poster presentation was a culmination of one of my course-based research works and provided me with the opportunity to share findings with a continental audience. Both conferences played a pivotal role in building my confidence, communication skills, and professional visibility.

### **Future Plans**

As I move forward, I remain committed to translating my academic knowledge into impactful practice. My immediate plan is to publish the findings from my Master's dissertation in a peer-reviewed journal. I believe this research has practical relevance for public health programming in northern Nigeria and could serve as a resource for policymakers, NGOs, and nutrition stakeholders. My second plan is to join the academic environment as a Lecturer in one of the Northern Nigerian Universities to impact the knowledge I acquired to the younger generation that are coming in the field of Nutrition. I also intend to collaborate with national and international organizations involved in maternal and child nutrition, food security, and community development.

In the long term, my goal is to undertake a Ph.D. in Public Health Nutrition focusing on food systems, child growth and development, and nutrition policy in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa. I hope to become a researcher, educator, politician and policy advocate one who influences both academic thought and practical solutions to Africa's pressing nutrition challenges. Additionally, inspired by the generosity of the Gioventú Foundation, I dream of establishing a nutrition-focused foundation that supports underprivileged students, conducts community-based research, and promotes nutrition advocacy in rural areas of Nigeria and Globally.

### **Conclusion**

I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Professor Folake O. Samuel, for her invaluable support, mentorship, encouragement, and wealth of experience, as well as for providing a conducive learning environment throughout the course of this study. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to the *Gioventú Foundation* for making this journey possible. Your support has changed the trajectory of my life and career, and I am committed to paying it forward by contributing meaningfully to the field of public health nutrition and to the lives of those most affected by nutrition-related challenges.

Thank you for your belief in me and for walking this journey with me.

## Appendix 3 – ANLP March 2025 Programme

Tuesday 11-Mar	Wednesday 12-Mar	Thursday 13-Mar	Friday 14-Mar	Saturday 15-Mar	Sunday 16-Mar	Monday 17-Mar	Tuesday 18-Mar	Wednesday 19-Mar	Thursday 20-Mar	Friday 21-Mar
Host: Support Team	Host: Support Team	Host: Lion	Host: Leopard	Host: Buffalo	Host: Rhino	Host: Elephant	Host: Lion	Host: Leopard	Host: Buffalo	
	07:00-07:30 Breakfast	07:00-08:00 Breakfast	07:00-08:00 Breakfast	07:00-08:00 Breakfast		07:00-07:30 Breakfast	07:00-08:00 Breakfast	07:00-08:00 Breakfast	07:00-08:00 Breakfast	07:00-08:00 Breakfast & Departure
	Leave for course									
	Teambuilding adventure	08:00-09:30 Growth mindset	08:00 - 10:00 Locus of control	08:00 - 10:30 Lead from where you stand	8:00-09:00 Breakfast	07:30-09:00 Travel to NWU campus	08:00 - 10:30 Advocacy	08:00 - 10:30 Systems thinking in Nutrition	08:00-08:30 Committee feedback	Support team debrief
		09:30 - 11:30 The best leader I know							08:30 - 10:30 Evaluation	
		10:30-11:00 Break	10:30-11:00 Break	10:30-11:00 Break		09:00-10:00 Communication				
			11:00-12:30 The best leader I know	11:00-12:30 Self-care	11:00-12:30 The best leader I know	10:00-10:30 Break	10:30-11:00 Break	10:30-11:00 Break	10:30-13:00 ANLP Declaration	
		11:30-13:00 Leadership orientation				10:30-12:30 Communication	11:00-12:30 Advocacy	11:00-12:30 The Journey - from data collector to director		
12:30-14:00 Informal Lunch	Group photo A	13:00-14:00 Lunch	12:30-14:00 Lunch	12:30-14:00 Lunch	12:30-14:00 Lunch	12:30-13:00 Reflection	12:30-14:00 Lunch	12:30-14:00 Lunch	13:00-14:00 Lunch	
14:00-16:00 Introduction, expectations	13:00-14:00 Lunch					13:00-13:30 CEN tour				
Ground rules, teams & committees	14:00-15:30 Selfawareness	14:00-15:30 Teambuilding	14:00-15:30 Communication	14:00-15:30 Network Café	14:00-15:00 Nutrition workshop	13:30-17:30 Lunch & afternoon out	14:00-15:30 Advocacy	14:00-16:30 Dealing with conflict	14:00-16:30 Celebration preparation	
Housekeeping	15:30-16:00 Break	15:30-16:00 Break	15:30-16:00 Break		15:00-15:30 Break	Moorivier Mall				
16:00-16:30	16:00-17:30 Feedback as a tool for growth I	16:00-17:00 Network Café	16:00-17:30 Communication	16:00-19:00 Surprise trip	15:30-16:30 Nutrition workshop		15:30-16:00 Break	15:30-16:00 Break		
16:30-18:00 Leadership introduction	Reflection				16:30-17:30 Feedback as a tool for growth II		16:00-17:30 Advocacy	16:30-17:30 Open discussion & feedback	16:30-17:00 Group photo B	
	17:30-18:00 Reflection	17:30-18:00 Reflection	17:30-18:00 Reflection	Reflection during trip					17:00-19:00 Closing session	
18:00-19:00 Teambuilding	18:00-19:00 Committee planning meetings	18:00-19:00 Free time	18:00-19:00 Free time		17:30-18:00 Reflection	17:30-late Dinner out	17:30-18:00 Reflection	17:30-18:00 Final reflection	17:00-19:00 Declaration	
19:00-20:30 Dinner	19:00-20:30 Dinner	19:00-20:30 Dinner	19:00-20:30 Dinner	19:00-20:30 Dinner	18:00-19:00 Free time		18:00-19:00 Free time	18:00-19:00 Free time	19:00-20:30 ANLP Celebration	
					19:00-20:30 Dinner		19:00-20:30 Dinner	19:00-20:30 Dinner		
		Lion debrief	Leopard debrief	Buffalo debrief	Rhino debrief	Elephant debrief	Lion debrief	Leopard debrief		
							Lion, Rhino feedback	Leopard, Buffalo, Elephant feedback		
Newsletter: Support Team	Newsletter: Elephant	Newsletter: Buffalo	Newsletter: Rhino	Newsletter: Elephant	Newsletter: Lion	Newsletter: Leopard	Newsletter: Buffalo	Newsletter: Rhino	Newsletter: Special Edition	

ANLP 2025

#### Appendix 4 – ANLP March 2025 Participants

First Name	Family Name	Country
Adetola	Otunla	Nigeria
Anastacia	Masesane	Botswana
Annah	Kioko	Kenya
Annette	Nyangaresi	Kenya
Caroline	Nambafu	Uganda
Doris	Nanga	Malawi
Esther	Omosa	Kenya
Eward	Mushi	Tanzania
Fatuma	Golicha	Kenya
Florence	Mugo	Kenya
Helina	Dinku	Ethiopia
Ianja	Raolisoa	Madagascar
Janet	Ntwiga	Kenya
Khumbo Tricia	Mkandawire	Malawi
Matse	Mokori	South Africa
Monyadiwa	Gaegane	South Africa
Mothusi Walter	Nyofane	Lesotho
Olutayo	Toromade	Nigeria
Onjanarindra	Razafimalaza	Madagascar
Yemisrach	Hussen	Ethiopia
Zelalem	Destaw	Ethiopia