研究報告

# Educational Opportunities in Local Communities: Undertaking Projects in a Slum School in Nairobi:

## Reflections on the 11th Research Meeting of the Faculty of Contemporary Policy Studies, Josai University

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**要　旨**

　本投稿は、2023 年 2 月にケニアのナイロビにあるスラム街にある学校で開催された城西大学現代政策学部第 11 回研究会で発表した講演の要約である。講演では、2016 年に著者が行った教育プロジェクトについて論じている。これは、スラムの子ども 1000 人以上が通う学校にデジタル教科書を接続したコンピューターラボの設置が含まれている。また、貧困、暴力、疎外による多くの課題に直面するコロゴチョの子どもたちの教育の質とアクセス向上を目的としている。観察、インタビュー、調査に基づき、この講演では、プロジェクトの影響、メンテナンスやセキュリティなどの課題、カリキュラム統合や地域参加の必要性などの教訓についての発見を共有している。ケニアの教育状況とデジタル・ディバイドについての見解が提供され、著者が住む日本との比較がなされている。2 国間の類似点と相違点が強調され、協力と交流の機会も提示されている。

**キーワード**：地域コミュニティ、ケニア、スラム学校、パソコン教室、教育政策

## Introduction

This paper is based on a talk that I gave at the 11th Research Meeting of the Faculty of Contemporary Policy Studies of Josai University. The meeting took place on February 24, 2023, at the Grapesyard School library in Korogocho, one of the largest slums in Nairobi, Kenya. It was also broadcasted live via Zoom, allowing participants from different locations and countries to join and interact. In this paper, I summarise the main points and arguments of my talk, as well as provide some additional information and references.

The talk was based on a computer laboratory project that I initiated and implemented in 2016, in collaboration with Grapesyard School. The project involved setting up a computer lab with laptops, connected to a digital textbook server at the school, which serves over 1,000 students from the slum. It also included training the teachers and students on how to use the

computers for learning and communication purposes. The main objective of the project was to enhance the quality and accessibility of education for the children in Korogocho, who face multiple challenges and disadvantages due to poverty, violence, and marginalisation.

In my talk, I shared some of the findings and implications of the project, based on my observations, interviews, and surveys with the teachers, students and administrators. I also discussed some of the challenges and lessons learned, such as the need for maintenance, security, curriculum integration, and community involvement. Furthermore, I offered some perspectives on the current situation and challenges in the realm of education in Kenya and the digital divide and made a comparison to the situation in Japan.

## Educational Initiatives in Local Communities: A Case study of Grapesyard School

Greetings to you all and thank you for joining us today. I have been working on a number of projects with colleagues from Japan and partners at Grapesyard School in Nairobi since 2015 and today's talk will introduce some of these initiatives, particularly focusing on how and why I developed a digital computer laboratory to encourage pupils, many whom live in dire conditions, to give them the opportunity to better themselves through embracing technology and to remove the digital divide[1] that is particularly prevalent in Kenya. I will first introduce some general information about Kenya, followed by a comparison to Japan in terms of education and demographics. I will then outline how and why I established a need for computers and technology at Grapesyard School, before introducing to you the computer laboratory project and then finishing with the state of the project now and future directions. Before I begin, I would like to introduce Mr Edmond Oloo, the director of Grapesyard Organisation and school to you.

## Opening Remarks from Mr. Edmond Oloo

Thank you so much for coming. It means a lot to me to have you all here today. My name is Edmond, and I'm the founder and director of Grapesyard Organization. I'm thrilled to connect with all of you from Japan. Our partnership with Professor Ritchie has been incredibly rewarding, and I'm excited to share the impact we've made together. Before I dive into the present, let's rewind to 1999. Kenya was facing numerous challenges, with HIV/AIDS, poverty, and limited access to education deeply affecting communities like Korogocho Slum. We started Grapesyard with a simple dream: to provide a safe haven for children impacted by these struggles. Our journey began with a small daycare centre, offering care and support to children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Soon, through partnerships like the one with Professor Ritchie, we expanded our reach. We established a feeding programme to combat hunger and

malnutrition, and later, a computer laboratory to equip students with vital skills for the digital age. Each step forward was a testament to the power of collaboration. After an American volunteer who visited us witnessed the struggles of a young boy, her story sparked a ripple effect. Back in New York, she started a fundraising campaign that led to the sponsorship of 300 children on our programme. The Management University of Africa also played a pivotal role. Their students and contacts in Japan, including Professors Miller, Parrish and Ritchie, recognized the potential within our community and joined hands to build a computer lab. This wasn't just a building; it was a gateway to opportunities, empowering our youth with the tools they need to thrive.

Today, Grapesyard stands as a testament to our collective efforts. We are recognized by the government for our work, and we're proud to be entrusted with opening a junior secondary school. Challenges remain, but the past has shown us that together, we can overcome anything. As we open this new chapter, I urge you to consider partnering with us. Your support will help us build a state-of-the-art computer lab, equipping our students with the skills they need to navigate the digital world and pursue their dreams.

I believe that each of you has the power to make a difference. When you return home, consider how you can leverage your skills and resources to support our mission. Remember, even the smallest act of kindness can have a ripple effect, creating a brighter future for generations to come. Thank you for your time, your support, and your belief in the power of education to transform lives. Together, we can build a world where every child can reach their full potential.

## Introducing Kenya

Thanks very much for your opening remarks, Edmond. I will now introduce a little background information and provide some context, before discussing the computer laboratory project itself. Kenya is located in the east of the continent, right on the equator. It borders five countries – Ethiopia to the north, Somalia to the east, South Sudan to the northwest, Tanzania to the south, and Uganda to the west. Kenya also has coastline on the Indian Ocean along its southeast border.  In terms of area, Kenya has a total land size of 580,367 square kilometres. To give some perspective, this is around 2.5 times larger than Japan in land area. Within its territory, Kenya contains a range of topographical features. The coastal region on the Indian Ocean is relatively flat and hot, while the interior consists of the Kenyan Highlands with a more temperate climate with Kenya's highest peak, Mount Kenya, reaching 5,199 metres above sea level. To the north and east, the landscape is semi-arid with deserts.

Kenya has an ethnically diverse population stemming from its geographical position along

historic trade routes. Today the population is estimated at approximately 53 million people, making it the 5th most populous nation in Africa. Kenya's population has been growing rapidly in recent decades. In 1950, the total population was around 6 million, so it has increased nearly 9 times in 70 years.

Chart 1: Population of Kenya 1950−present
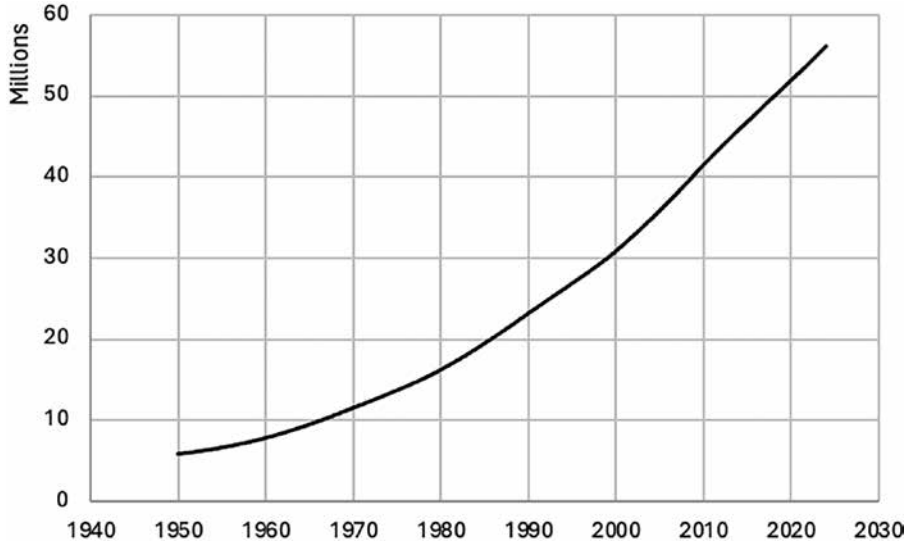


Source: UN World Population prospects 2022

The most populous ethnic group are the Kikuyu representing 22% of the population, followed by the Luhya, Luo, and Kalenjin groups each representing between 10-15%. There is a total of 43 officially recognized ethnic groups and languages in Kenya.

## Challenges Faced by Kenya

Compared to a country like Japan, the population demographics in Kenya skew to the young. As you can see in this chart, around 39% of Kenyans are aged 14 or under, compared to only 13% in Japan. At the other end of the spectrum, just 3% of the population is over 65 years old in Kenya versus 28% in Japan. If we examine the population pyramids of the two countries, Kenya is a traditional pyramid with most of the young at the bottom, while Japan is becoming inverted. Kenya's young population profile poses both opportunities in terms of economic potential and challenges for the education system and job creation, which the government recognises. Indeed, the government developed a long-term strategic plan, "Kenya 2023 Vision" which will play a vital role in solving many of these issues. It focuses on four pillars: economic, social, political, and enablers and macro.[2]

**Table 1: Japan vs Kenya Population Structure（as a percentage）**

| Age Group | Kenya | Japan |
|---|---|---|
| 0-14 years | 38.71% | 12.49% |
| 15-24 years | 20.45% | 9.47% |
| 25-54 years | 33.75% | 36.80% |
| 55-64 years | 4.01% | 12.06% |
| 65 years+ | 3.07% | 29.18% |

Source: Index Mundi（2020, Est）. Compiled by the author.

## Education in Kenya

As part of its 2030 vision, the Kenyan government has made education a priority, emphasising the need for education in rural areas; the importance of establishing human resource support in university education; technical, vocational education and training programmes; the training of artisans; the establishment of education management information system; laptop programmes; integration of information, communication and technology into teaching and learning.[3]

In Kenya, the language of instruction is in English from primary school onwards. The other national language alongside English is Kiswahili[4], which is also widely used in everyday life. Primary education has been compulsory for 8 years since the government introduced free primary schooling in 2003. This policy helped boost enrollment rates which had been lagging, although there are still some major issues with the implementation.

There has been a massive expansion in the number of universities in recent decades to cope with a rise in demand for higher education in Kenya, like what Japan went through during the 1960s and 70s.[5] As of 2023, there are 74 universities in Kenya and of these, 30 of which are public. This compares to just 5 public universities in 2005.[6]

While progress has been made, Kenya still faces a range of socioeconomic challenges. Poverty remains widespread with around 30% of the population unable to meet their daily food needs. Meanwhile, one in five in rural areas lives in abject poverty, and a third in cities.[7] Among youth ages 15-24, unemployment remains high at around 15%[8], which can trigger social tensions. There are also significant gaps between the more developed urban areas primarily around Nairobi and Mombasa compared to poorer rural regions, and a lack of infrastructure in power, healthcare and education hampers development. Finally, tensions occasionally erupt between ethnic groups during election cycles.[9] The above provides broader context for the educational challenges faced in the poor slum areas of Nairobi in which I focus on the

computer laboratory project.

## Visiting Grapesyard for the First Time

Education in Kenya is still underfunded and lacking in many critical areas such as quality, infrastructure, curriculum and student teacher ratios. This is especially true for informal settlements which often lack schools altogether, and in such instances, it is left to the private sector to pick up the slack. One such school was formed by the Grapesyard Organisation in Korogocho. Korogocho is one of the largest urban informal settlements in Africa. It is located just 5 kilometres southwest of downtown Nairobi. The population density is extremely high up to 200,000 residents crammed into an area of just 2.5 square kilometres.[10] Living conditions in Korogocho are dire for most residents. Housing generally consists of temporary structures crowded tightly together with little space in between. There is no formal sewer system and only intermittent access to clean piped water. Drainage and waste disposal are therefore major problems, posing risks of water-borne diseases. While the government has invested some funds in recent years to pave roads and upgrade infrastructure, the scale of implementing it is immense.[11]

I was first invited by a colleague to visit the Management University of Africa in Nairobi in 2015 by Richard Miller, who is now a professor at Osaka Jogakuin University.  During that initial visit, we were provided with the opportunity to visit Grapesyard Organisation's orphanage and School in Korogocho to witness firsthand the challenges students faced in accessing education.  Grapesyard School was established in 1999 by Edmond Oloo, a businessman and alumni of The Management University of Africa, to serve vulnerable children in the community who could not afford school fees and supplies. The school provides not only academics but also daily meals, clothing, and counselling support. During that initial visit, we took part in some of the classes with students to gain an understanding of how education was undertaken in some of the poorer, disadvantaged informal settlements. Naturally classrooms were extremely overcrowded, with insufficient desks and chairs, textbooks and other learning materials. The teachers I spoke to described the difficulties of supporting students with special needs or who had fallen behind peers due to missing school. There was a severe lack of facilities, supplies, and training to adequately support the number of students. However, the students demonstrated such strong motivation and hope to learn, even in the face of scarcity.  During my time there, I noticed that several old computers in the corner of a room, no doubt donated with good intentions from overseas partners, yet they were too old to be of use. This got me thinking about possibly getting together some computers from Japan and bringing them with me in the future in order to contribute to the digital education of the children. Upon my return to Japan, I discussed potential initiatives we could undertake to support education in Korogocho with colleagues and the idea for the

computer laboratory was born.

## The Computer Laboratory

In 2016, I worked with a group of colleagues in Japan in collaboration with Grapesyard School to establish a small computer laboratory on their grounds. The computers came from donations from teachers in Japan with support from several partners who developed a server consisting of a Raspberry Pi device loaded with educational content and digital textbooks covering subjects such as English, mathematics, science, health and life skills.[12] This allowed students to access and work with rich learning materials without requiring internet connectivity. An official ribbon cutting ceremony was held at Grapesyard School to open the computer lab during our delegation's visit in March 2016. Although starting small with just a few computers donated by participants who also attended a peace conference at the Management University of Africa, it was an important first small step toward integrating technology to improve educational opportunities for the children, and especially timely since it coincided with a government mandate to introduce ICT into schools in 2016.[13]

A year later in 2017, a group of us returned to Nairobi and as part of the trip we not only increased the numbers of computers, but we also undertook a study on the impact of the computer lab project, through conducting interviews with teachers at Grapesyard School. The findings were that increased access to technology produced benefits for students including greater engagement with educational content. However, some challenges also emerged:

1. Teachers needed more technology skills training themselves to properly leverage the lab equipment and troubleshoot any technical issues.
2. The pre-loaded software content did not fully align with Grapesyard's curriculum. Closer collaboration was required to match content with learning objectives.
3. There were difficulties monitoring student usage of the computers during lab sessions. More oversight was required to ensure proper use.

Recommendations included further expanding the lab to serve more students, incorporating technology more intentionally into lesson plans, developing local partnerships to create relevant content, and providing teacher training to build technical capacity.[14]

To contribute further to the Grapesyard computer lab, in 2019 I organised a study trip to Nairobi for a group of 9 university students from Josai University. As part of this trip, we provided an additional 14 laptops to the Grapesyard School, procured from kind donations and online crowdfunding carried out by the students themselves. As part of the trip, the students also took responsibility for the teaching of some classes at Grapesyard, and introduced aspects

of Japanese language and culture by introducing traditional Japanese items like origami paper, chopsticks, fans and manga books to showcase elements of their culture.

In addition, we toured the Korogocho slum to witness first-hand the local context and challenges residents faced. This gave the Japanese students a greater understanding of daily life for Korogocho youth and got them thinking about the wealth gap between life in Japan and Kenya. For many students, this experiential learning opportunity in Kenya proved to be a transformative experience. In post-trip reflections, several students commented that this motivated them in their own studies and future careers by contextualising how education can empower lives.

The computer laboratory has now grown to around 100 computers through the ongoing donations from partners in Japan and elsewhere. And the school has continued evolving its educational programme year after year:

1. In 2019, they celebrated the 20th anniversary of the school's founding.
2. In 2020, Grapesyard opened an on-site health clinic to serve both enrolled students and the wider local community.
3. In 2020, they constructed a basketball court to provide enhanced sports opportunities which are limited in the densely packed urban area.
4. In 2021, internet connectivity was finally established in the computer lab, greatly expanding functionality now that students could access online resources.
5. In 2022, Grapesyard expanded by opening a junior secondary school to extend classes from grade 6 up to grade 8. This helps transition students to high school.

## Future Directions

Through perseverance in the face of adversity and community support, Grapesyard school has progressively expanded its offerings over the past two decades and now provides critical services spanning education, healthcare, counselling, and nutrition for one of Nairobi's most underserved populations.[16] However, immense challenges remain. The school faces sustainability issues in securing funding to maintain and expand initiatives like the health clinic and computer lab internet access. There is a continuous need for more computers and educational resources as enrollment grows. Teacher professional development is essential to keep up with advances in curriculum, technology, and student needs. And strong community partnerships are key to coordinating support and aligning training programme.

In the future we hope to continue collaborating with Grapesyard School to address these needs through several approaches:

1. To expand the computer lab through additional laptop donations from universities and partners in Japan. Each year we aim to supply more computers to keep pace with Grapesyard's growing student body.

2. To discuss the potential of developing a Japanese language and culture curriculum that could be delivered partly online from Japan, supplemented by short teaching visits. This could foster exchange and understanding between youth in our countries. Content could cover topics like language lessons, virtual tours, cuisine, sports, and youth culture.

3. To facilitate more educational trips and exchanges at the university level. We have had initial discussions with the Management University of Africa about establishing a framework for faculty and students from Japan to visit for research, internships and volunteer work. Such collaborative experiences allow Japanese students and researchers to learn from local communities while also sharing knowledge.

4. We are connecting Grapesyard School with primary and secondary schools in Japan to pilot virtual exchanges. Their students could correspond through video calls, emails and joint virtual projects to learn from one another. This promotes global awareness and friendship across cultures.

5. To reach out to the Kenyan diaspora in Japan to support educational initiatives back home. Their on-the-ground insights and transnational networks can help mobilise resources efficiently to where needs are greatest.

In summary, our collaborative educational projects aim to harness the power of exchange and partnerships to expand access to technology, resources, and opportunities for underserved youth in Kenya. We have seen firsthand through our partnership with Grapesyard School how students thrive when provided with greater support and chances to learn. There is still important work ahead, but the motivation and resilience of the students inspires us to persist.

I hope you have gained some insight into the local context in Kenya, the challenges facing slum communities, and the positive changes that can come through education. While progress takes time, each contribution makes a real difference in individual lives. I welcome you to join us in this meaningful endeavour. Let us keep the dialogue going on how we can collaborate to open more doors through education. Just give a little, and together we can change the world.

## Final Remarks

As part of the trip to Nairobi in February, we also focused on academic exchange, digital empowerment, and community engagement. At the heart of this mission was another donation of a dozen more computers. These devices contributed significantly to the computer laboratory, which remains an under-resourced space struggling to cater to the needs of its

pupils. This latest donation represents a tangible commitment to digital education, a crucial aspect of equipping young minds with the tools to navigate the 21st century. The computers do more than just offer access to the internet and educational software. They became bridges, connecting the classroom to a world of possibilities. In the context of a project providing computer access to disadvantaged children at Grapesyard School, significant changes have been observed. Previously, the children's outlook was largely shaped by their restricted circumstances. However, with the introduction of digital resources, their prospects have been considerably enhanced. This project highlights the importance of digital literacy in mitigating poverty and creating opportunities.

Finally the trip wasn't just about hardware; it was also about the human connection. It provided a platform for open dialogue and knowledge exchange, allowing both sides with the chance to engage with each other in an academic setting and set of discussions about online Japanese language teaching and cultural programme. These diverse perspectives are creating a path towards collaborative endeavours, enriching both pedagogical approaches and understanding. The team also pursued potential student programmes with the Management University of Africa. Recognizing the immense value of cross-cultural immersion and academic exchange, the discussion explored avenues for future student exchanges between Kenya and Japan. Such programme would foster deeper cultural understanding, enriching young minds on both continents.

### Notes

1　The term *digital divide* refers to the gap between individuals who have access to information and communication technology and those who do not (Internet Society, 2017). It can divide and reinforce and accelerate inequalities and as the world becomes more digitally dependent, it threatens to exclude those that remain disconnected (ITU, 2023).

2　Refer to Kenya Vision 2023 for more information: "Kenya Vision 2030 is the long-term development blueprint for the country and is motivated by a collective aspiration for a better society by the year 2030. The aim of Kenya Vision 2030 is to create "a globally competitive and prosperous country with a high quality of life by 2030". It aims to transform Kenya into "a newly-industrialising, middle income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens in a clean and secure environment"" (Kenya Vision 2030, n.d).

3　Ibid. For the full list of initiatives to be implemented regarding education, refer to Education and Training in the Social Pillars section.

4　In my personal conversations with many young people in Kenya regarding the use of English and Kiswahili, many have told me that the young often prefer to use English among their peers as it is seen as cool and hip.

5　Refer to Yamamoto (2004): In Japan, following World War II, rapid economic development led to a rapid rise in secondary school enrollment, and in the 1960s higher education became a mass system; between 1960 and 1975, the rate of 18 year olds going to university increased from 10% to 40%, in

line with demands for higher education and economic growth. Meanwhile, in Kenya 85% of pupils completed high-school in 2022, and university enrollment is increasing exponentially, with 9% growth between 2019–22. See: Ministry of Finance, Republic of Kenya 2022 Education Sector Report（2022, p. 6）.

6   Ministry of Finance, Republic of Kenya 2022 Education Sector Report（2022, p. 6）.

7   In recent years poverty has actually been declining in Kenya, particularly before the pandemic. In 2019, almost one-third of Kenyans（33.6 percent）were living below the national poverty line, a 13.1–percentage point decline from 46.7 percent since 2005; meanwhile, in rural areas, poverty declined from 49.7 to 37.0 percent. In comparison, the urban poverty rate fell from 34.5 to 26.0 percent（Kenya Poverty and Equity Assessment, 2023）.

8   Between 2021–2022 the youth unemployment rate was around 15%, or around 30% including a combination of unemployment and potential labour force）.（Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2022）.

9   Things were quite muted during the 2022 elections, but since the 1990s, elections in Kenya have often  resulted in violence and unrest, and ethnic tension and accusations of police abuse and vote rigging. 2007 was particularly violent, where 1,100 people were killed.（ENACT, 2024）.

10   According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics（2019）, in Korogocho there are 36,900 people （11,757 households）, in an area of 0.9 km$^2$, with a density of 42,401 persons per sq. km. people in an area of just 0.9 km$^2$. People I have spoken to who know the slum well estimate it to be up to 150,000 people, in an extended area of up to 2.5 km$^2$.

11   For a detailed examination of living conditions in Korogocho, refer to: UN-Habitat.（2010）. *Final Report Korogocho. A Snapshot* [PDF]. Retrieved from https://habnet.unhabitat.org/sites/default/ files/documents/Final%20Report%20Korogocho%20S%20A%20a%20snapshot.pdf

12   The software for the server consisted of around 80 textbooks, mainly samples, developed with partners in India by the now defunct DEC Publishing.

13   Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology（2016）

14   In 2017, Ritchie and other researchers interviewed several teachers and administrators at Grapesyard School regarding how they implemented the computers in their classrooms and curriculum, and some of the issues that occurred during the first year of operation.

15   Refer to a conversation with the director of Grapesyard School, Mr. Oloo for more details on some of the initiatives undertaken to expand and improve education（Ritchie, 2021）.

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## Undertaking Projects in a Slum School in Nairobi：
### Reflections on the 11th Research Meeting of the Faculty
### of Contemporary Policy Studies, Josai University

Zane Ritchie

**Abstract**

This paper summarizes a talk presented at the 11th Research Meeting of the Faculty of Contemporary Policy Studies at Josai University, presented at Grapesyard School in the Korogocho slum of Nairobi, Kenya in Feburary 2023. It discusses an education initiative undertaken by the author in involving setting up a computer lab for the pupils with the aim to to improve educational poossibilities through ICT tools and accessibility for disadvantaged children. Drawing on observations, interviews, and surveys, the talk shares findings about the project's impact, challenges like maintenance and security, and lessons including the need for curriculum integration and community involvement. Perspectives are akso offered on Kenya's education situation and the digital divide, with comparisons to Japan. Similarities and differences between the two countries were also highlighted, along with opportunities for future collaboration and exchange.

**Keywords**：local community development, slum school, Kenya, computer laboratory, education policy