



TGUP Project Details

Major Expansion

Irigithathi Mixed Primary Day School

Naro Moru, Nyeri, Kenya



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Irigithathi is a Mixed Day Primary School in Naro Moru, Nyeri County Kenya. It has 248 mainstream students and 49 Special Needs students in grades one through eight. It is one of the few schools in the country that educates mainstream and Special Needs students together, in what is called the “Integrated Model.”

This project envisions two dormitories to house a total of 80 new Special Needs students (40 boys; 40 girls) at the school. Other major structures needed to support this expansion include a kitchen/dining hall to serve the new students and a new classroom.

The project will be completed in two phases. The first phase, already funded, will build a girls’ dormitory (with bunk beds), a classroom, classroom desks, and wheelchair walkways. It will cost \$82,186. The second phase, yet to be funded, will build a boys’ dormitory, and a new kitchen/dining hall complex. It will cost \$96,244.

BUDGET SUMMARY: (Based on USD:KSH exchange rate of 1:127)

Funded	Cost
Girls' dormitory	\$42,977
Bunk beds (20 bunk beds)	\$5,460
Classroom	\$21,059
Classroom desks	\$5,219
Wheelchair pathways	\$7,471
Total	\$82,186

Not yet funded	Cost
Kitchen	\$12,472
Dining hall	\$22,450
Jikos	\$6,059
Dining hall furniture	\$4,989
Boys' dormitory	\$44,599
Bunk beds (20 bunk beds)	\$5,675
Total	\$96,244

PROJECT PARTNERS



The Global Uplift Project (TGUP)

helps American donors build infrastructure projects in developing countries. Since its founding in 2007, TGUP has completed [more than 500 projects](#) in 26 countries in Asia, Central America, and Africa. It has completed 232 projects in Africa, including [131 projects in Kenya](#). TGUP is a U.S.-based 501c3 nonprofit.

Kiini Sustainable Initiative (KISI) works with communities in Central Kenya to improve access to education for all Kenyan citizens regardless of income or ethnicity. It has completed more than 120 projects for TGUP at schools in Central Kenya, including the extensive renovation of the [Special Needs School at Karatina](#), in 2023. KISI is a registered Non-Governmental Organization under the Kenyan NGO coordinating board.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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COMMUNITY

Irigithathi school is located in Nyeri county, one of Kenya's 47 counties. It is part of the Naro Moru zone, Manyatta sub-location. As of the last census, the county had 854,862 residents. It suffers problems of geography, (mis)development, and demographics, all interrelated.

The county lies on the equator; Irigithathi, itself, less than 1°

south. It sits between the major geologic formations of Mt. Kenya (5,199 meters) to the east and the Aberdare range (3,999 meters) to the west. These facts—latitude and altitude, combined with developmental damage—create unique challenges.

Topography is typically deep valleys and sharp-ridged ravines. Rainfall is plentiful, though seasonal, but has become something of a curse due to over cutting of native forests and poor resultant soil retention. There are many negative externalities of short-sighted, rapacious development.





The main livelihood is farming, but foreign-owned plantation farms growing coffee, tea, tropical fruits, and other crops for export, have eroded soils, and filled natural drainages. The result of all of this is a shallow economic base where much of the profit is removed from the area, leaving little for deep economic development, and with many compounding complications remaining.

Most of the residents are itinerant farm laborers, working on foreign- or domestically owned plantations. There are some small freeholding land owners carrying out subsistence farming, but those are rare. There are some who work for the government, but those, too, are a small minority. The majority of the community are poor, economically tenuous, and uneducated.

There are an estimated eight residents per household. Most households have dirt floors, are made of ramshackle planks with, at best, a sheet of corrugated metal for a roof. Very few have electricity or running water. Few families have any access to healthcare. Parents of existing school children are estimated to have an average of a third-grade education. This might be high. The best analogue for the community's level of development is probably something like Appalachia in the 1920s.



IRIGITHATHI SCHOOL

Irigithathi is one of the few schools in Kenya that educates mainstream and Special Needs students in the same setting. This is extremely desirable because it greatly reduces costs and exposes mainstream and Special Needs students to each other as normal members of society.

Of the 49 current Special Needs students at the school, 41 are physically handicapped, eight are mentally handicapped. Most of the Special Needs students live at the Naro Moru Disabled Children's Home, nearby. It is operated by the Catholic Church. They



come from all over the country and return there at night. There are 15 teachers at the school, four of whom are Special Needs trained and dedicated.

The head Special Needs teacher is Mr. James Tohodo. He has a four-year undergraduate degree, a two-year teaching certificate, and two years of specialized Special Needs education at

the Kenya Institute of Special Education. He has been teaching Special Needs students for 8 years. He is intelligent, articulate, energetic, and exceptionally passionate about his stewardship of Special Needs students. He is well-connected to the Special Needs division in the national Ministry of Education and is a member of the National Special Needs Coordinating Forum. He serves as Secretary of the school's Board of Management (School Board).

Special Needs students at Irigithathi are evaluated upon entrance to the school and placed in developmentally appropriate pathways. Each student receives up to two hours per day of dedicated assistance per their unique needs. Students complete the mainstream classes and are evaluated at the completion of the class for matriculation to the next level.



Matriculation is based on demonstrated competence, not on age.

The mood of the campus is inclusive and affirming of self-empowerment. Students and staff seem to know that they are special and engaged in something special. It is dotted with small signs of inspiration, encouraging all to hold a positive attitude. The administration reports that Special Needs students with physical disabilities often outperform mainstream students on academic subjects.





Mainstream and Special Needs students mix in all academic and social settings. Each Special Needs student is assigned an upper division “buddy” who volunteers for the responsibility. Mainstream students are seen helping Special Needs students, for example, pushing their wheelchairs, helping them up the access ramps, and making special accommodations in classrooms. Mainstream “buddies” report pride

in being able to help their Special Needs peers.

The school itself was founded in 1953. The school accepted its first Special Needs student in 1982 and has steadily added students since. Most of the structures are made of concrete blocks and appear to be well maintained. The grounds are clean and orderly.



The school is oriented in a “horseshoe” fashion that facilitates movement throughout the campus. See the link to the Site Plan in the Appendix. Raised concrete pathways and ramps for wheelchair access are prevalent throughout the school (see photos at right and lower left on the following page), including to the latrines, which are at the edge of the building space.

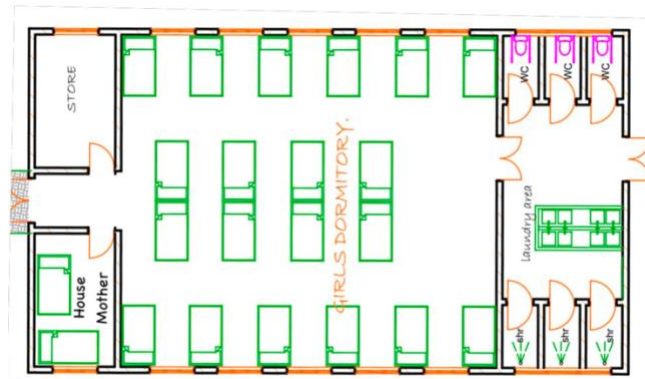


The school sits on a five-acre site. The Site Plan in the Appendix shows the current structures at the eastern side of the property. The intended new structures are those at the western end of the property. This leaves more than two acres of field between the new and old structures, as well as half an acre of gardens at the back which are currently used to grow vegetables to feed the students. These two acres could be used if a “Phase 3” expansion to a secondary

school is undertaken, as mentioned, below.

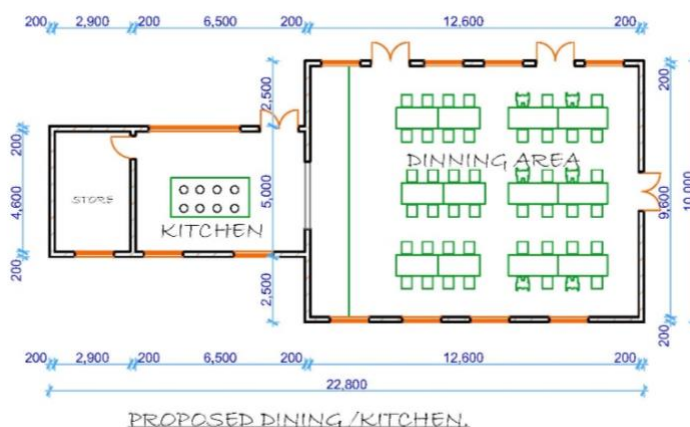
PROJECT DETAILS

- Dormitories:** Two dormitories will be constructed, one for boys; one for girls. Each will house 40 students. The buildings will be 50' X 30'. They will be built on a poured concrete foundation with concrete cinder blocks for walls and zinc-coated sheet metal roofing on rafters for the ceiling.



This meets national building standards for public domiciles. Each building will include a room for a house mother/father, toilets, laundry facilities, and a storage room. See the building design in the Appendix. Students' boarding costs will be met by a combination of government stipend, parental fees, and subsidies by local charity agencies. This is similar to how fees are met by the 120 student boarders at the Karatina Special School where we did substantial work in 2023.

- Kitchen/Dining Hall/Jikos:** The Kitchen/Dining hall will be of similar construction as the dormitories: poured foundation; cinder block walls; and sheet metal roof. It will include a cooking room with two commercial cooking vats (jikos) capable of serving 300 students a day, and food storage. It will also include a dining area with seating for 100+ students at one time. It is likely this kitchen will supersede the existing school kitchen, which is decades old and inadequate for the higher number of students served.



- **Classroom.** The classroom was built to Kenyan national standards for education buildings and completed in July, 2024. TGUP has built dozens of classrooms in Africa, mostly in Kenya, as seen [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#).



- **Other Elements.** Other essential elements required for success include:
 - Raised walkways connecting the residential area to the classroom area;
 - Specially designed desks for the disabled students;
 - Bunkbeds for the dormitories; and
 - Dining tables for the Dining Hall.

POSSIBLE PROJECT FOLLOW-ON

Irigithathi has the space and the willingness to expand to include secondary school students. This is of interest to national education authorities because it addresses two of their primary challenges: integrating mainstream and Special Need students into the same setting; and ensuring their matriculation to secondary school where they can receive vocational training. Only three schools in the entire country are doing this now.



There is a chance to commission a leading Kenyan academic to perform a formal evaluation of the Irigithathi integrated education model, assessing its conformance with theoretical models and its performance against practical standards. Assuming the results are positive, we would share them with the National Ministry of Education for consideration in the national dialogue about Special Needs policy going forward.

DISCUSSION

This is an extraordinary project, in three ways. In what we are calling “**Stage One**,” it is a chance to improve the quality of education for what will become (over the life of the Project) thousands of Kenyan Special Needs students. This will occur because of the mature administration and curriculum of the school, the school’s proven “Integrated Model,” and the fact that it is one of the highest-performing primary/junior secondary schools in all of Kenya. It cannot be left unsaid, the positive benefit to the mainstream students from being exposed to their Special Needs peers.

Stage Two is the direct, open migration path to enact a primary/junior secondary to secondary school using a proven Integrated Model for educating Special Needs students. This is of special interest because without vocational training, which can only occur at the secondary level, Special Needs students’ human potential is left undeveloped and they remain wards of the state. Irigithathi is uniquely situated and able to evolve itself into just such a primary-through-secondary integrated model school.

Finally, **Stage Three** is the chance to influence Special Needs policy for all of Kenya. This nation’s policy for dealing with Special Needs students is in the middle of review right now. Two concerns are especially germane: finding a national model for Integrated Education at all grade levels; and a national model for matriculating primary/JSS students to secondary settings, where they can receive vocational training. The Irigithathi administration and staff are well-connected in the national Special Needs education bureaucracy and will be effective advocates in this important policy discussion.



APPENDIX

- [Kenyan National Special Needs Education Policy Framework](#)
- [Dormitory and Kitchen/Dining Hall Designs](#)
- [Classroom Design](#)
- [Site Plan](#)