

What was your job in your country and what made you decide to study in Japan?

In my home country, Nigeria, I worked as a Programs Manager at one of the top innovation hubs, where I was responsible for designing and implementing projects that facilitated social and economic development, primarily focused on supporting tech startups. One of the most impactful programs I managed was the NINJA (Next Innovation with Japan) Incubation Program, in collaboration with JICA.

This program aimed to empower tech entrepreneurs and foster innovation within Nigeria, and it was through this role that I first became familiar with JICA and, by extension, Japan. When I received an offer to further my studies in Japan under a JICA program; ABE Initiative, I was thrilled by the opportunity to deepen my understanding and experience in a country globally recognized for its cutting-edge advancements. It felt like a natural next step in my journey to contribute meaningfully to the development of tech-driven solutions in my home country and beyond.

Please describe your study at Hiroshima University and things you are now working on, especially about Enzin Project (How did you find it? What made you actively join in this project?).

My experience at Hiroshima University has been incredibly fulfilling, largely because of the supportive and welcoming environment created by everyone here. Most importantly, my professor has been the most instrumental figure in my journey, consistently providing me with the necessary guidance and support for my studies and research. His mentorship has been invaluable and has significantly enriched my academic and personal growth. The idea for Declutterjp was conceived from my firsthand experience as an international student in Hiroshima, where I noticed the challenges many of us face in acquiring and disposing of household items.

Recognizing this as a common problem, I began brainstorming potential solutions that could create a more sustainable and accessible approach. I learned about the Enzin Project through the Momiji platform, and it seemed like the perfect opportunity to test this business idea in a structured environment with access to mentorship and resources. Joining the project has allowed me to develop Declutterjp into a practical solution, while also deepening my understanding of the local market and the needs of the Higashi-Hiroshima community.

Is there any difference between when you just came to Japan and right now.

When I first arrived in Japan, everything felt new and slightly overwhelming, adjusting to a different culture, language, and academic environment was both exciting and challenging. Over time, however, I've grown more accustomed to life here and have developed a deeper appreciation for Japan's culture and the incredible hospitality of its people. I've built strong connections with peers and mentors, which have been instrumental in making my journey here so enriching. One significant change is how I've embraced a healthier lifestyle. Since coming to Japan, I've taken my fitness journey seriously, incorporating regular gym workouts and participating in other sporting activities. This routine has not only helped me stay physically fit but also mentally refreshed, enabling me to balance my academic responsibilities and entrepreneurial pursuits more effectively. This commitment to fitness has become an integral part of my life, and it's something I deeply value in my time here.

Please describe the best moment in Japan.

It's hard to pinpoint the best moment in Japan, as there have been so many unforgettable experiences. However, a few stand out vividly. One of the most memorable was when Declutterjp won an Excellence Award at the recent demo day, it was a testament to the hard work of my team and I have put into building something meaningful, and it gave me a sense of pride and accomplishment. Another highlight has been exploring some of Japan's breathtakingly beautiful places. From the serene peace of Miyajima Island to the captivating sights of Hiroshima Peace Park and even smaller hidden gems in local neighborhoods, these experiences have deepened my appreciation for Japan's culture and natural beauty. Each moment has been a reminder of the richness of life here and the opportunities I've been fortunate enough to experience here in Japan.

Other than Enzin project, do you interact with local Japanese people during the stay in Japan? If not, would you like to do something to interact with local people?

Yes, I interact with Japanese people even outside the Enzin project, and these interactions have been truly enriching. I have participated in several intercultural exchange programs organized by JICA Chugoku here in Higashihiroshima. These programs have provided me with opportunities to learn more about Japanese culture, connect with residents, and share aspects of my own culture. Additionally, I've participated in various learning programs outside Higashihiroshima, which have further broadened my understanding and appreciation of Japanese society. I look forward to continuing these interactions and contributing positively to the communities around me.

Anything you want to share about you and/your life in Higashi-hirosima. Such as hobby, food, Japanese culture, your country.

Life in Higashi-Hiroshima has been an incredible blend of personal growth and cultural exploration. One of the highlights of my routine is playing futsal twice a week with a diverse group of friends, it's a great way to stay active and bond over a shared love for sports. I've also taken my fitness journey seriously, going to the gym regularly to stay in shape and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

During my downtime, I enjoy café hopping and discovering new spots in Hiroshima City, as well as spending time clubbing with friends, which has been a fun way to unwind. Holidays have been a fantastic opportunity to travel to other prefectures and explore the breathtaking beauty of Japan, from historic landmarks to serene countryside landscapes.

I've also developed a deep appreciation for Japanese food, with favorites ranging from sushi to okonomiyaki, and I always look forward to trying new dishes while going around with my spice of course lol – as Japanese food isn't spicy enough. Living here has allowed me to embrace Japanese culture in a way I never imagined, and it has enriched my life beyond measure. At the same time, I take pride in sharing my own culture with others, making these exchanges even more meaningful.

After you graduate, how would like to apply what you learned in Japan to your job. Also, are you planning to keep in touch with Japanese community/people?

After graduating, I plan to apply the knowledge and experience I've gained in Japan to both my career and entrepreneurial ventures. My upcoming long-term internship with a company aiming to expand into African markets is an exciting opportunity to start putting my learnings into practice. This role will allow me to leverage my understanding of business strategy and cross-cultural collaboration, which have been deeply influenced by my time in Japan. Additionally, my work with Declutterjp will continue to be a vital link to the Japanese community. Even after graduation, I intend to provide ongoing support for the platform until it reaches a stage where it can operate independently. This will not only keep me connected to the community in Higashi-Hiroshima but also allow me to give back to the place that has been such an integral part of my journey.

Message to future JICA participants.

Embarking on this journey will be one of the most transformative experiences of your life. Japan is not just a place of incredible technological advancements and groundbreaking research, it's a land where tradition and innovation blend seamlessly, offering a wealth of opportunities to learn and grow. When you arrive, don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. Engage with the local community, immerse yourself in the culture, and embrace the differences. The friendships you form here will transcend borders and stay with you for a lifetime.

The JICA programs are a gateway to not only enhancing your academic and professional endeavors but also discovering parts of yourself you never knew existed. Be open, curious, and intentional in your journey. Remember, this is a unique chance to contribute to global development while building bridges between your home country and Japan.

Finally, cherish every moment, the challenges, the small wins, and even the quiet times. Each step you take here will shape your perspective and inspire you to dream bigger. Wishing you the best as you begin this incredible adventure.