

December 2016



# NEWSLETTER

We wish all our readers a restful and peaceful festive season.

## A Successful Year

Our year began with the hugely successful Big Give, in which you, our supporters, responded superbly to help us achieve the target we'd set ourselves; with our sponsor providing a donor to match much of the donated money, we finished with £15,000, more than we'd ever handled before. Ethiopiaid then helped us further offering to seed fund for two years three new posts at the Mekele Blind School. Darge, Ililta and Abel were appointed in March to support development in three critical areas: Security, Resources and IT, in all of which the school was falling behind mainstream provision.

Ian visited Mekele at Easter, and in late summer there were two visits to lay the ground for, and to execute a trial of, the Peek project, under the auspices of Dr Usha Danesha.

At the beginning of November Pete and Gary spent two weeks with the SENT team, Gary principally helping to drive the Talking Textbooks project, and Pete providing training in a number of areas.

SENT itself, under Masho's energetic leadership, has grown during the year with the three new Blind School staff (referred to above) whom SENT directs in their daily work. Preparing, recording and editing textbooks for the Talking Textbook project has taken up much of their time, but Masho has also confirmed charity status for SENT for a further 3 years, and worked tirelessly to establish links with others both for operational and financial purposes.

He also found time to get married!

## BRIEFING: About us and our Mission

SEN Ethiopia is a registered charity created by concerned individuals with the aim of supporting children in northern Ethiopia who are classified as having special educational needs (SEN).

In Ethiopia, children with SEN do not have access to specialised education and are often disregarded by society. SEN Ethiopia seeks to change this mentality and advocate for these students who have little or no voice of their own, and who, without support, have little chance to show their ability.

This organization firmly believes that every child deserves to receive a primary and secondary education. It should be the inalienable right of every child to obtain an education to the maximum of his or her ability, despite any physical or mental handicap.

## Status of the Talking Textbook project

Following their successful visit last year at about this time, during which Aklilu, the project manager for the Talking Textbook implementation was appointed, Pete and Gary visited Mekele again, in early November, to check on progress.

In the year between, The Big Give has provided a large tranche of funding, an initial bulk order of MP3 Envoy players has been delivered to Mekele (mostly in small batches, stashed in suitcases), and the training in preparation, editing and recording delivered during the last visit has been enthusiastically taken forward by the SENT team, and Aklilu in particular. Twenty different readers, reading in both Tigrinya and English, as appropriate, have recorded more than twenty textbooks, which may be up to 200 pages each. The recordings have been made in the Regional Education Bureau's (REB) own sound studio using professional equipment, and then edited for uploading to the players. Each player has all the textbooks for one academic year, so students can be issued with a player for a year, before returning it for the next year's textbooks. All this is a mammoth task, but we found Grades 5 – 8 almost completely finished.

By the time we left Mekele a fortnight later, we had witnessed the first (trial) distribution of players to students and the teacher training to accompany it, and even conducted some initial feedback sessions a few days later with users. Gary produced training and distribution plans for the remainder of the players (800 or so) – bearing in mind that Tigray is the size of Wales, with many areas very remote and hard to reach – and we understand that these are currently being implemented. In an email two weeks ago, reassuring us about progress with distribution, Masho wrote: “The students are very enthusiastic in using their ATPs (Audio Textbook Players). They are protecting the ATPs as a sighted person protects his or her eyes and are always very eager to listen to their talking textbooks in depth.”

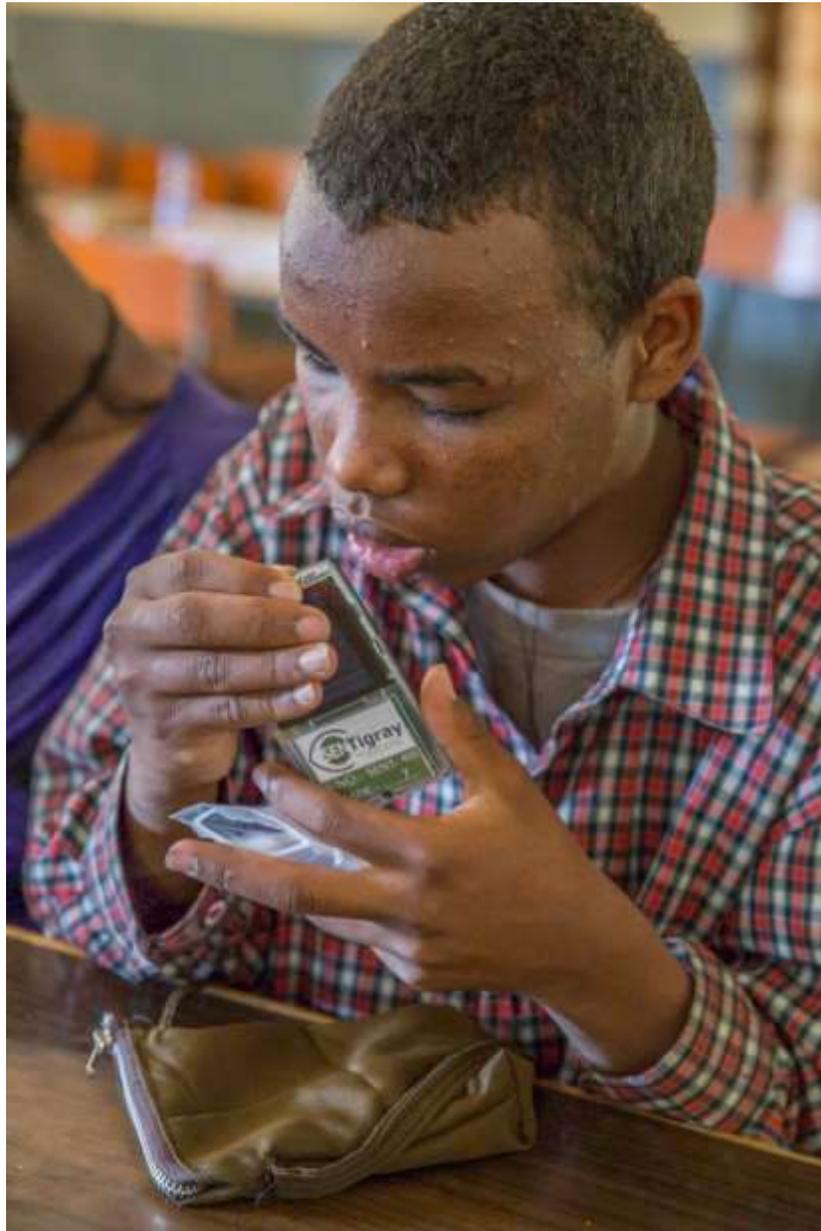


Listening to the lessons again at the end of the day using the Talking Textbook

The Regional Education Bureau are strong supporters, collaborators and now joint funders

of this project. This was an idea and an initiative we took to them, which they endorsed as being in line with national and regional targets for inclusive education in Ethiopia. We estimate that more than 2,000 players will be needed for Grades 1 – 12, and negotiations are in progress to fund and supply further tranches. Meanwhile, recording of textbooks for other grades continues.

This is a project which has been several years in development, and it's reassuring that at last we have significant numbers of audio players in the field, providing some real equality of opportunity for visually impaired students.



Concentration – as a Blind School pupil first gets his hands on a Talking Textbook (and the bag)

## Visit to Mekele, November 2016

A major objective was to monitor the progress of the Talking Textbook project, into which a significant amount of funding had already been sunk, but also to assess other project work, and offer such help, advice, consultation and native English as might be useful.

One item we stressed was the importance of feedback to donors generally – whereas, as a registered (Ethiopian residents) Charity, SENT MUST supply financial and other reports to the Charity and Societies Agency of the Government of Ethiopia, it is also important to keep donors informed about the use to which their funds are put. To that end we welcomed Hazel Vint, a photographer and friend of Gary's, who followed our operations for a week recording SENT's doings in Mekele. Her photographs decorate this Newsletter.

We held a useful meeting with the trustees of SENT, many of whom are old friends, all with qualifications and energy to help Masho and the organization realise their goals.

Pete (a former project manager) conducted a number of training sessions with SENT staff, including on finance and spreadsheets, on planning and gantt charts, and on Perkins braille maintenance.

Of course, we visited the Blind School, where Ian's first impetus for supporting SEN children in Tigray arose. In many ways it is a hugely improved place compared with 12 years ago, when Ian first visited. Borehole water is controlled and stored in tanks on site; there is a nurse's station; there is a resources room and a library; a protective wall circles the compound; there are IT learning facilities; when we were there, two washing machines were being delivered; and these are all the results of many different donors and providers. But SENT has a special relationship with the Blind School and the Regional Education Bureau: it is always on site, it speaks the language, its director is an alumnus, and although our work now looks beyond the Blind School, we are no longer visitors in the way that many donors are, and indeed, as we once were. Thus, we are pleased have a partnering agreement with the USA-based Friends of Mekele Blind School, to manage funds for them.

And there is still much that needs doing.

The three Blind School administrators funded by Ethiopiaid work to Masho:

Abel has a large room with 6 desktop computers, each equipped with JAWS (Job Access With Speech), a screen reader; Abel teaches the students to use this powerful tool, and the Education Bureau may provide senior students with JAWS-equipped laptops in future.

Ililta helps to direct compound security, but has also introduced better hygiene training (almost immediately reducing incidence of sickness), and a Girls' Club, where Women's Issues can be and are discussed. A Boys Club will be organized too.

Dargie is responsible for resources, and helping teachers to use them, and teaching is improving.

Masho is a hugely energetic character, charismatic, well-known and connected, and, as a trained lawyer, very knowledgeable. He's also blind, and a graduate of the Blind School. To

watch him working at close quarters, as we did for 2 weeks, is to feel humbled, as a sighted person. Hadush, his right-hand (sighted) man is vital to him, but the adeptness with which he uses the relatively basic IT he has, is truly impressive. It was always Ian's goal that SENT should become self-sustaining, so when we asked him about his future plans, our concerns were mainly that he might be trying to take on too much, in his enthusiasm.

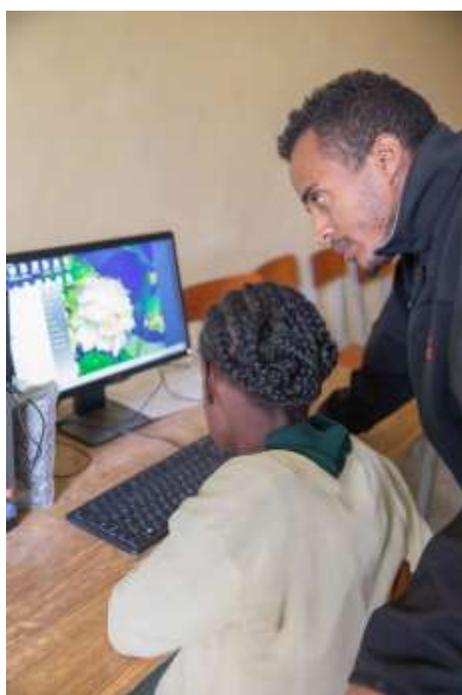
A Screening and Assessment programme is to be developed jointly with the Bureau of Health, to identify ALL disabled children in Tigray region. SENT would manage the project and the resulting database.

Peek project: we reported in the last Newsletter on a successful trial, and SENT is keen to roll this out across the region if the necessary funding can be found. Teachers are trained to use a smartphone App to diagnose children's vision problems so they can be addressed either with spectacles or otherwise. Currently there is NO routine testing of this sort and many children with sight problems (often easily curable) are lost to education.

Gary, with SENT, has applied for an American Peace Corps volunteer to work for SENT, and assist Masho with some of the organizational work, which can be culturally more Western than Ethiopian-orientated; there would be minimal cost to SENT.

Luckily the State of Emergency declared in Ethiopia shortly before we left impacted Tigray Region only minimally, and we weren't really hindered, although some of the senior people we'd wanted to speak to were engaged on Government meetings, and unavailable.

We left feeling exhausted but exhilarated, as is often the case. There is, and will be for many years, much to be done, but we genuinely feel we are making an impact and moving gradually towards a more equal access to education for the disabled in Ethiopia.



Abel teaching IT; unthinkable 10 years ago.    Setting off for school, with slate and stylus for notes

## What is ahead for SENEthiopia in 2017?

We have two major projects to fund. Firstly we want to continue to support the talking textbook project by raising funds for an additional 800 Envoy MP3 players. They cost about £30 each. We estimate we will need to raise £30,000 to complete this project.

Secondly we would like to seed fund the next stage of the PEEK project aiming to test vision and hearing in schools and reduce the high number of children who drop out of school because they do not have the support (often simply spectacles or hearing aids) that will enable them to fully and equally access the education that other children are able to enjoy.

In addition, next Easter, Beth is intending to run a workshop on inclusive education for the Regional Education Bureau and Woreda Directors.

Finally we hope to visit the Deaf School in Mekele and play a more significant role in addressing the problem the deaf students have accessing schooling beyond grade 8 - currently no deaf students progress beyond that level.

We look forward to developing a close partnership between SENTigray and Ethiopiaid.



Masho and a blind student make the point: the student is holding two braille textbooks, out of the 6 recorded on the Talking Textbook Player held by Masho

*OUR THANKS*, as always, to all our valued donors and supporters without whom we wouldn't be able to continue this work. Lots of you have contributed not only to the textbook project but others we've completed; and, as hinted elsewhere in this newsletter, there are other SEN fields in Tigray we need to get into if all children in Ethiopia are to have equal access to education.



# Gift Aid declaration

Name of charity or CASC: **SENEthiopia**

### Please treat

- The enclosed gift of £ ----- as a Gift Aid donation; **OR**
- All gifts of money that I make today and in the future as Gift Aid donations; **OR**
- All gifts of money that I have made in the past 4 years and all future gifts of money that I make from the date of this declaration as Gift Aid donations.

*Please tick the appropriate box*

You must pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April one year to 5 April the next) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that the charity or Community Amateur Sports Club will reclaim on your gifts for that tax year.

### Donor's details

Title ----- Initial(s) ----- Surname -----

Home address -----  
-----

Postcode ----- Date -----

Signature -----

### Please notify the charity or CASC if you:

- Want to cancel this declaration
- Change your name or home address
- No longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

### Tax claimed by the charity or CASC

- The charity or CASC will reclaim 28p of tax on every £1 you gave up to 5 April 2008.
- The charity or CASC will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 you give on or after 6 April 2008.
- The Government will pay to the charity or CASC an additional 3p on every £1 you give between 6 April 2008 and 5 April 2011. This transitional relief for the charity or CASC does not affect your personal tax position.

**If you pay Income Tax at the higher rate**, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self Assessment tax return if you want to receive the additional tax relief due to you.