

May 2010 Newsletter



Enabling communities
to help themselves

Alemu Nega to visit Exeter

Our friend and partner Qes Alemu Nega, who has been the key person in Ethiopia working at building the Exeter-Ethiopia Link, will be visiting Exeter next month at our invitation. We first met Alemu when he was studying at Reading University in 1994-96. During that time he encouraged us to persevere when we were so disheartened by communication difficulties that we were on the point of giving up. Since then the Link has grown and gone from strength to strength thanks to Alemu's efforts in Nekemte and his support for all our activities and visits to Wollega. Without him, the Nekemte Eye Clinic would never have come into being; neither would we have been able to successfully conclude our own 3 year involvement in the Eye Project which continues under Alemu's leadership and is now funded from Austria and Germany.

Alemu will be arriving in England on 5th June so you are all invited to Cream Tea at our place the following afternoon to welcome him to Devon (see box for details). During his fortnight in Devon, Alemu will be busy visiting the eight primary schools in the Exeter area which now have links with schools in and around Nekemte thanks to the tireless efforts of our Education Officer, Penny Pullen. At the end of his visit on Saturday 19th June we will have a committee meeting to plan future development of the link with Alemu. *Richard King*

CREAM TEA

WELCOME ALEMU TO DEVON

You are all invited to join us at 7 Rewe Court, REWE, EX5 4HQ

3.30 – 6.00 pm on Sunday, 6th June 2010

To find us take the A396 Tiverton road from Exeter, through Stoke Canon and Rewe. After passing Rewe Cross on the left, continue for about ¼ mile, past the 40 mph sign and turn first right just after the cottages. Go ¼ mile down the lane, turn right into Rewe Court and enter through the archway. If in doubt, phone me. Share lifts if you can, as parking limited, or bike it!



EX5 4HQ - Google Maps.mht

If you can, let me know the week before if you expect to come.

Richard King - 01392 860 046 – noparking@tiscali.co.uk

WACHA WOMEN'S SAVINGS & LOAN SOCIETY

Following EECMY's decision in November 2008 that they didn't want to continue with the Women's Donkey & Sheep Project, Rachael Jamieson, who was in Nekemte at the time, had discussions with EECMY's Women's Dept and Hanna Hagstrom who were contemplating a Women's Income Generating Project in Wacha on the North-Eastern outskirts of Nekemte. Following Rachael's return, the Jan Greet Memorial Fund sub-committee was reactivated and subsequently agreed to provide 11,000 birr funding (approx. £700) to initiate a pilot project.

The Wacha women insisted that their first priority was water, but the Nekemte water supply has since been extended to Wacha, partially funded by Dr Alem - an Ethiopian animal health expert who had recently returned to set up a dairy farm on family land in Wacha, after a lifetime working in Finland. Dr Alem assumed leadership in helping the local women to set up a 'Savings & Loan Society', and EECMY passed our 11,000 birr funding over to her last July.

In October 2009 we received a progress report from Dr Alem. She told us that the Wacha Women's Income Generating Group (WWIGG) had been formed and that it had 66 members each of whom got a loan of 160 birr (£8) and that a savings group had been formed of the 66 in WWIGG and a further 30 women who did not get a loan. The group meets monthly and those with loans repay at the rate of 10 birr/month. The repayment record is very good.

On our visit in November to Dr Alem's farm we were able to meet some of the women and, of course, Dr Alem. The group cover a wide range of ages, and once they got over their initial shyness, were very positive and, as time went on, were eager to speak.

Many points were made. It was not easy to extract information about if or how much income is actually generated. One reason given for this was the taxman. But nearly all earn cash from chickens bought with the loan. Now they each want a cow! Local cows would cost about £40-£50 each and a cross-breed about £75+. Perhaps the next gift catalogue can include cows?

The group would also like a tent and benches in which to hold their meetings. Dr Alem is costing this.

We left Dr Alem with an additional 10,000 birr (£500) to be spent on:

- Ø Basic sanitary training and family planning
- Ø Small business training for some of the women
- Ø One cross-bred cow as a trial
- Ø Vegetable seeds for next season
- Ø Expenses for one/two of the women to act as secretary/treasurer.

The women obviously thought very highly of Dr Alem and sought her advice on all manner of things. We too were impressed with Dr Alem and 'her' women. We believe that this scheme can benefit many and as we and Dr Alem learn from this continuing experience, it can be extended and applied elsewhere.

Dick Benn

AN INTRODUCTION FROM OUR NEW CHAIR

At the AGM in March I was elected as Chair of the link and although I have met or communicated with many of you over the years in my previous roles as membership secretary or treasurer, I thought I would give a brief profile of myself for those that I haven't had the pleasure of meeting.

I joined the link in 1998, and have been on the committee for most of that time. I eventually got around to visiting Ethiopia in 2004 and saw for the first time the positive impact our interventions had on the lives of those that we have supported. The visit also allowed me opportunity to meet our partners in EECMY, particularly Qes Alemu Nega who has been at the forefront of our projects over the years. I have been particularly proud to have been part of the group that has worked on the project to build, staff and equip the eye clinic in Nekemte and look forward to seeing it in operation when I next visit.



Mark (with Alex Taylor and Jill Grainger)

I have always had an interest in development and have sponsored children in developing countries through the charity, Plan for over twenty years. However, my interest really developed when I came across the concept of appropriate technology whilst studying for my degree in engineering. This motivated me to take my studies further and I completed an M.Sc in development management in 2007. On a professional note, I spent 10 years as an electronics engineer before becoming a lecturer at Exeter College where I spent another 10 years. Last year, I decided to change my career towards community development and have just completed a social inclusion project with Age Concern.

I have lived in Exeter and East Devon most of my life and love the area. My family is limited to myself and my wife Şöhret, who is from North Cyprus and apart from spending my time on link activities, I enjoy the cinema, competing in triathlon, walking, gardening and the inevitable DIY!

I am looking forward to representing the link as chair over the next year and hope I do the role justice. I would like to thank Peter Grainger, whom I am succeeding, for his relentless efforts over the years and look forward to continuing to work with him and the other committee members who all deserve a big thank you, especially Alex Taylor who was the led the eye project and resigned from the committee this year.

The new committee for 2010/11 is made up of the following persons:

Chair: Mark Howells; **Vice-Chair:** Mark Hodgson; **Treasurer:** Dick Benn; **General Secretary:** Richard King; **Membership Secretary/Fundraising:** Ella Huffman; **Newsletter Editor:** Bruce Hebbard; **Other Committee Members:** Peter Grainger, Diana Benn, Penny Pullen, Rachael Jamieson, Fran Jenkin, Cathy Kiddle, Anthea Duquemin, Fran Hamilton, Caroline Huxtable, Peter von Lany.

We currently have a vacancy for a **Minutes Secretary** and **Media Officer** (see back page) if there is anyone out there who would like to join us?

Finally, I would like to thank you as members for your support, without which the link would not be what it is, and I do hope that I get the opportunity to meet you in person at one of our fundraising or social events happening this year.

Mark Howells, Chair

Ethiopia - Anatomy of a Traditional Polity - by John Markakis

This book written by our friend John Markakis, who lives in Exeter for part of the year, was originally published by Oxford University in 1974, shortly before the revolution which overthrew Haile Selassie. As it is still considered a significant work for Ethiopian politics students, it has recently been republished in Addis by Shama Books. Having taken the opportunity to reread it, I decided that I would like to share some quotes from the book which I think are still very relevant today. I have highlighted the quotes in italics with my own comments in normal text.

The 19th Century Conquest of Wollega under Emperor Menelik

'In the 19th Century Ethiopian methods for dealing with their enemies were based on the Fetha Nagast: "When you reach a land to fight against its inhabitants offer them terms of peace. If they accept ... the men shall become subjects and give you tribute, but if they refuse go forth and oppress them since the Lord your God will make you master of them".'

The Leqa Nekemt Oromo ... submitted peacefully and retained local autonomy.' *'Wollega eventually came under direct control of central government... but... the office of provincial governor ... has (still) been entrusted to member of the traditional ruling group.'*

There is a lot more background here to the ambivalent attitude of people in Wollega to central government which was dominated until 1991 by the Amhara and subsequently by the Tigreans.

The Balabats

The Balabats - traditional headmen - proved themselves indispensable intermediaries between the central government and the peasants, and were accorded status and privileges.

'The multiple exactions imposed on the southern peasantry by northern landowners and their own balabats entailed loss of a considerable portion of the peasant's production, onerous labour service and manifold other impositions. '... the cumulative tribute represented a heavy burden... as well as a disincentive to production increase.'

This burden was removed by the land reform of 1975, but before long the Derg's requirement that any surplus be sold to the state for a fixed low price provided a continuing disincentive to agricultural production. Although this has since changed I suspect that the effect on underlying attitudes lives on.

Land

'As the head of state, the emperor exercises political control over land.... Ethiopian emperors traditionally have acted on the premise stated by Emperor Seyfe Arad who is said to have declared 'God gave all the land to me.'

'Primarily the state claims the right of tribute over all land The burden of payment of tribute falls on those who work the land, that is, the peasant cultivators.'

This was all swept away by the Land Reform of 1975 but all land is still vested in the state. There is no 'freehold', only leasehold, mainly in urban areas, and peasants have the right to cultivate land but this is subject to local political control. However, I suspect that there is still an underlying feeling that those coming from outside come to take from the peasant, as the tax and tithe gatherers did, not so long ago in the feudal era.

Power and Control

'Haile Selassie set the pattern of personal control over the operations of the central government which was to become characteristic of his rule. It is said that Ethiopians are averse to delegating authority because they believe that to share power with an inferior is tantamount to recognizing him as an equal.'

'No one can refuse obedience to him, nor is it wise to try; in fact, as the saying goes "the greatest wisdom is submission to the King" '.

Even 35 years after Haile Selassie's overthrow in 1974 these attitudes underpin government behaviour, and response to authority in general.

Delegation of authority

'No matter how important the position a man occupies, he must not appear to be acting on his own or simply on the authority of his office.'

'A rule of thumb for the knowledgeable retainer is to pass on the matter, and the responsibility, to a superior - which means that important matters are passed up the hierarchy' *'Excessive caution - verging on inability to decide any, save the most trivial matters - has been the characteristic trait of successful officials.'*

These comments were made with respect to Haile Selassie's governments, but such attitudes are still commonplace in bureaucratic behaviour in all sorts of organisations today.

Voluntary Associational Activity

The book describes the Mecha-Tuloma Self-Help Society founded in 1963 by two Oromo groups to promote development in areas of Shoa and Wollega. Before long the society fell foul of Haile Selassie's government because of its perceived political activities which were thought to undermine the state's control from above.

'As a matter of policy, the government discourages the formation of modern associations through a rigid registration policy, and restricts the capacity of existing associations for action through oppressive surveillance tactics and the maintenance of a general atmosphere of intimidation.'

This still appears to be the case, and is a key aspect which has made it much more difficult for us to build a Community Link with Ethiopia than it would have been elsewhere in Africa.

Trade and craft skills

'The Christian Ethiopian despised trade as an unbecoming profession..... Trading was controlled by Ethiopian Muslims, who were excluded from state service and generally barred from possession of land. Besides despising trade, the Christian Ethiopian abhorred most forms of labour not directly related to agriculture. Craftsmanship also was regarded as socially demeaning.... As a result essential crafts such as smithing, tanning, weaving, pottery making and hunting became the monopoly of minorities and submerged groups...'

We have had difficulties over the years with poor quality workmanship, particularly with plumbing, but I think that the traditional attitudes described above also show in the general reluctance to carry out maintenance of equipment. I suspect that these attitudes are particularly related to the more basic trade skills, as it is well known that 'Ethiopian Airlines' is renowned for its high standard of aircraft maintenance. The Vocational School in Nekemte has had a lot of support in recent years from - GTZ - German aid - which we hope will filter through into improved workmanship in the future.

Anyone who would like to borrow the book to read, please contact me on noparking@tiscali.co.uk Richard King

easyfundraising.org.uk

Shopping on the Internet? If so, you can raise money for the link at no extra cost.

1. Visit www.easyfundraising.org.uk
2. Register choosing Exeter-Ethiopia Link as your chosen cause.
3. Before purchasing an item - log-in to easyfundraising and search for the retailer you wish to use (over 600 to choose from including Amazon, Boots, Next, Argos etc)
4. Make your purchase as normal and a percentage (varies from each retailer) will automatically be donated to the link: £143 has been raised in the last year. Use www.easysearch.org.uk as your search engine and even more money will go the link. Happy Shopping and Searching...

Media/Publicity Officer Wanted

The committee is keen to find somebody who would be interested in taking on this role in order to give the Link a higher local public profile. If you're interested and would like to know more about this please contact:

Mark Howells on 01392 202 713 or mshowells@blueyonder.co.uk

Exeter-Ethiopia Link

The Exeter-Ethiopia Link was set up in 1987 to promote a Community Link between Exeter in Devon, England and Hareto in Wollega, Ethiopia. In 1994 the Link included the town of Nekemte.

The Link supports: Health, Water, Women's and Educational projects in Hareto and Nekemte and links between schools in Exeter and the communities in Ethiopia.

For further information contact:

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