

January 2012 Newsletter



**Enabling communities
to help themselves**

The 'Marks' in Nekemte

On 26th November, Mark Hodgson and I took an overnight flight to Addis Ababa on the start of our two week visit to Nekemte. On arrival at Bole airport, Qes Alemu Nega, the development officer with EECMY was there to greet us and although we had intended to travel down to Nekemte together the same day, Mark Hodgson's rucksack had not made the journey with us! This meant we had to spend two days in Addis while we waited for his luggage to arrive, but this gave us the opportunity to meet up with Ato Debele Kenea, who has recently taken over as Development Director of EECMY DASSC and to spend an evening sampling Ethiopian food, music and dancing. After a tentative overnight wait, Mark was thankfully relieved to be reunited with his belongings and we could finally begin the journey to Nekemte. The road to Nekemte is still in the process of being rebuilt, and although the journey as far as Bako was fine, from this point forward we were subjected to a bone-shaking five hour journey until we finally reached Nekemte! Other members who have visited in the last few years have commented how Nekemte is developing fast, and this is evident in the number of new buildings, hotels, shops, vehicles and people who are populating the town.

The next day, we met up with Mark Smith who had travelled ahead of us and who had already been assessing progress with linked schools and planning new projects, as well as making links with two new VSOs, Jo and Liz and Rho, an American Peace Corp Volunteer, all of whom are working to improve education in schools and the Teacher Training College. The focus of our visit to Nekemte was to evaluate the water and sanitation projects and other items we had

funded in schools, a pilot project to install fuel efficient stoves and the support given to an Elder's group in Nekemte.



The three Marks, VSO's Jo and Liz and American Peace Corp Volunteer, Rho at the Soona Restaurant

Schools & education projects

We visited ten schools altogether, including two schools which we have not previously supported, one of which is connected to the Nekemte prison and teaches not only the prisoners, but also the children of prisoners and other local children. In 2011, we provided funding to schools for a variety of purposes, including concreting classroom floors, desks and library shelving. During the visit we also provided £500 to Calalaquii Elementary School to purchase laboratory equipment and also delivered work produced by pupils from their linked school, Clyst St. Mary. At Biftu Naqamte secondary school we witnessed the building of girl's toilets which we had provided funding for, and at Diriba Elementary School we were shown the new desks purchased for classrooms and the additional shelves erected in the library. We also attended a disability awareness day organised by the EECMY Nekemte School for the deaf which we had supported by providing

funding for promotional materials for the day (see separate article).



School director, Ato Tesfaye Areda in the library at Diriba Elementary School

Apart from schools, we also visited the New Generation University (NGU) to meet the 5 new scholarship students who are being funded by members of the link. They are all studying IT; a skill which is sought after in Nekemte as technology begins to take off. There are currently 16 students at NGU receiving scholarships via the Exeter Ethiopia Link members. We also met the coordinator for vocational training in Nekemte, who took us to visit the Nekemte Technical College and the TVET institute, both of which provide a variety of vocational training, as well as Wollega University to assess the viability of providing a revolving fund to help disadvantaged students start a business following graduation and creating short vocational courses for vulnerable/disabled students who do not achieve the usual grade 10 entry requirements.

Women's projects

In 2011, we provided funding to start a project to produce and install fuel efficient stoves into village homes. During the visit we met three different women to see their stoves and interview them on the benefits they had provided. All three women were very happy with their new stoves, saying that the stoves used about half the firewood compared to open fires, saving time on collecting firewood (which also has an environmental benefit) and that the stoves were hotter thus reducing cooking times.

There was less smoke and as the stoves were built on a high base it was not necessary to bend down, making it more comfortable during pregnancy! One woman in the village had been trained to produce and install the stoves providing her with a source of income generation.

We also met four Rural Women's Affairs Officers who work within East Wollega Woreda (county) to provide assistance to women via a number of different projects including micro-finance, health, education and fuel efficient stoves! We hope to be able to work with this group on future projects.

Health & social care projects

On a previous visit, some of our members had met with a group of pensioners in Nekemte who had set up a committee to assist some of the older vulnerable people in Nekemte. In 2011, the link provided the 'elders group' with some funding to start developing a place for social events and income generation and during our visit we also met with the elders group to discuss their plans.

They had managed to attain land from the town council, which is now fully fenced and on which a shelter has been built. They have also bought a machine to produce hollow building blocks which they will sell to provide income to develop social activities and buy items, such as blankets, to assist other pensioners. We are hoping that this will be the start of an exciting project that will develop to provide social interaction and assistance to older people in Nekemte who are relatively unsupported.

We also visited the eye clinic, now being supported by a Swiss charity and continuing to provide eye treatment to both rural and urban populations. A Korean ophthalmologist had just arrived to spend a year assisting the staff at the clinic, and apart from viewing the new guest house, built to provide a place to stay for visiting ophthalmologists, we also saw the washing machine purchased from funds raised at a talk given by Nigel Birch, a link member.



A patient being diagnosed in the eye clinic

Water & environmental projects

Apart from providing funding for toilets at our linked schools, we also continue to improve water supplies which are used for drinking, irrigating school gardens, and cleaning. During the visit we checked the well and pump at Diriba Elementary School which is now working after being renovated using funds collected from the community and will be used to irrigate a school garden which they have just started. During the visit, we also assessed the viability of a rural irrigation project, spring capping, a micro-hydro project powering a grinding mill and tree-planting, which could be financed via our carbon-offset fund to provide income generation for schools and communities.



The water pump at Diriba Elementary School

... all work and no play?

Although it was a busy visit, Mark Hodgson and I managed to find some time to hire some bikes and take to the road for an afternoon cycle, as

well as taking a 15 mile Sunday stroll into the Wollega countryside! It was both an enjoyable and productive visit and it was good to see firsthand, the benefits that Exeter Ethiopia Link continues to provide to the communities in and around Nekemte. Of course our visit would not have been possible without the support of all the staff of our partners, EECMY DASSC, so many thanks to them.



Taking a break during our cycle ride

Mark Howells, Mark Hodgson & Mark Smith

Gift Catalogue

The 2011/12 gift catalogue is now on our website with a booking form which details how to pay. We're trialling the opportunity to donate online for the first time this year in order to make it easier to buy gifts from the catalogue. The weblink for this is

www.charitygiving.co.uk/eelgift

Ethiopian Fairtrade coffee
Roast and ground from the Co-op
Mild-Medium strength, not cheap but very nice!

Also, Sainsbury's Ethiopian Sidamo Fairtrade coffee
&
Aldi's Lekemti (Nekemte) coffee
Not Fairtrade but helps the local economy

School Library Award Launched

Exeter Ethiopia Link has developed seven libraries in both town and rural schools but one of the things that we were aware of was the need to improve their usage. To do this we designed a School Library Award to build the capacity of schools to use their libraries to maximise their potential for class and individual learning. The award enables schools to set achievable targets as to how to improve their library. On achieving a certain number of the targets they can obtain a bronze, silver and gold award. In addition it allows us to focus further funding and book donation on those libraries which are making the greatest progress and having impact.

The award has been fully endorsed by the zonal and town education office and translated into Afan Oromo. All the schools have been trained and set targets and baseline data collected. In addition to the seven libraries supported by EEL, six other town schools who have, or want to set up, their own libraries asked to join the award. In December we trained the directors and librarians of all the schools and they all set targets of how they wanted to develop their libraries. Already in a short time we have seen big improvements with much better displays in the library, increased opening times and better organisation. A number of schools plan to open reading clubs and one even started an outdoor library. Now we need to equip them with more books.



An outdoor library session

International Disability Day

EEL provided £100 to support international disability day in Nekemte. The aim of this was partly to raise the profile of the Exeter Ethiopia Link in the town which we all felt we really succeeded in doing but moreover it really inspired the organising committee. For the first time the School for the Deaf was allowed to compete in sports with a town primary school. The moment they won at volleyball and the subsequent pitch invasion by the whole school was a moment to cherish.



The moment the school for the deaf won the volleyball

The next day, the learning disabled children from the centre we support, performed traditional dancing in front of the mayor. This had the whole audience, standing, clapping and dancing. In addition to EEL's money the committee organised fundraising in the town for a microfinance fund for disabled people amongst local businesses.

An amazing \$1000 was raised with additional promises of work experience places. The link will supplement this and have a model to build on; one of our partners ran a similar fund in another town and all 17 loans were fully repaid and for some people there were remarkable changes.

Mark Smith

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***Exeter-Ethiopia Link
Registered Charity No 1000293***

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.

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