Together!
Rehabilitation, Education and Profession for All!!!

Orient and Rouse the Blind with Information Technology (ORBIT)
Bi-Annual Report (January 2015 to June 2015)

Submitted to the Internet Society

July, 2015
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1. Summary Information

**Project Title:** Orient and Rouse the Blind with Information Technology (ORBIT)

**Implementing Organization:** Together! Ethiopian Residents Charity Organization

**Country:** Ethiopia

**Project Period:** July 2014 to June 2015

**Reporting Period:** January 2015 to June 2015

**Total Project Budget:** USD 9,970.00

2. Together! Achievement

Since starting operation in August 2013 Together! has been able to bring about significant positives changes in the lives of its target group with its four project components.

2.1. Information Technology:

The one year Information and Technology/IT Skill Training is the only TVET based course in this discipline in Ethiopia. With the 2 years time period Together! has given basic computer skill training for 24 visually impaired individuals and graduated the same with certificates. The IT graduates did not only gain valuable computer know-how for their personal, educational and professional advancement, but a part of the group was also the first one to fully pass the external assessment of the governmental Center of Competence (COC) adding further credentials to their professional inclusion.

After the first year training, all competent graduates succeeded as IT trainers passing on their knowledge to students, teachers and employees with visual impairment to different government and non government institutions, schools, higher educational institutions and public libraries. Together! has cooperated with 5 governmental schools, 2 blind focused organization (Addis Hiwot Center for the Blind and Ethiopian National Association for the Blind) 3 governmental offices as well as Addis Ababa University and Central Braille Library. Within the “Basic Computer Skill Training at Schools” component a total number of 199 school girls and 138 school boys and several teachers with visual impairment received the opportunity to make use of IT to perform their educational duties independently, access information in electronic format and browse the internet.

Together!’s “Inclusive Resource Centre” welcomes all persons with disabilities to have access to Braille library and IT. It provides free-of – charge 3 MB internet access as well as
Braille and audio materials on relevant educational and informational material. Users can also access information from the e-Granary, “The Internet in a Box”, an off-line information store that provides instant access to over 32 million digital resources. In the long run the inclusive resource centre will be a hub of information for people with disabilities.

2.2. Rehabilitation:

The temporary Rehabilitative Shelter for Visually Impaired Mothers and their Children, Drop-In Center for Children of visually impaired parents and the Scholarship scheme led to the successful integration of visually impaired single mothers and female headed families into educational or IGA activities.

2.3. Job Inclusion

With the acquired IT skill and networking efforts, a total number 7 right holders found permanent employment while one right holder is hired as a contract basis.

5 Visually impaired right holders have been organized in cooperative and started fulfilling the legal procedures to open an internet café as means of income generation for their livelihood.

2.4. Awareness Rising

Together! has been working hard to create and raise awareness among the sighted community regarding the challenges and abilities of visually impaired people through different activities and events.

More than 30 lunches and dinners in the dark were organized and more than 250 sighted people took part in the programs. The events received high media coverage by Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, printing press and radio broadcast so that even the wider society was made aware of the event and its awareness raising effects.

Art exhibitions, bazaars and public events were organized to raise awareness among the sighted community.

3. Performed Activities

During this reporting period the 24 computers were purchased from CAMARA Ethiopia. The purchase was delayed than the planned date as a result of Together! was waiting for better
specification computers. The computers were then installed with screen readers, amharic text readers, customized web browsers, and equipped with speakers and head phones.

Initially it was planned to distribute 25 computer (one computer as a loan from Together!) to 4 governmental schools and one blind focused organization. However 2 schools didn’t recieve their computers due to lack of available computer lab, after visit conducted by Together!'s team, and end of this school year. In setember the two schools will recieve their computers.

Addis Hiwot Center for the Blind, Menilik Secondary School and Amha Desta Elementary School each recieved 5 computers installed with both windows and Ubuntu OS, screen reader compatible to each operating system and necessary basic softwares.

Due to the tight schedual of IT instructors at the government schools the planned 2 weeks training on Adaptive Technologies was not conducted at Together!. However Together!'s IT instructor went to each school and gave the training to the different IT instructors. This trasfer of knowledge has assisted the teaches to understand Adaptive technologies further and to troubleshoot Adaptive Technology materials creating a conducive teaching and learning environment.

Together! Considering the digital divide among the sighed and visually impaired people has opened an inclusive Resource center. The establishment of the Inclusive Resource Centre will enable people with disabilities to access the library resource and service without any hindrances.

Improved and increased access to information lead to greater academic and professional success reduced drop-out rates from educational institutions and increased chances of sustainable employment.

The Resource Centre provides free-of-charge 3MB Internet access as well as Braille and audio material on relevant educational and informational material. Offline users can access information from E-Granary, "The Internet in a Box", an off-line information store that provides instant access to over 32 million digital resources.

Due to the efforts made by Together! And the different schools 41 no. of visually impaired students were empowered with basic ICT knowledge and applied the same in their acadamics. 11 visually impaired individuals have made use of their acquired skill to be comitative as their sighted peers in their career endeavours.

3. Challenges
The following are some of the challenges we faced during project implementation.

- Lack of infrastructure, like electric sources, incompatibility of standard lab setting for the training rooms. Together! By sending its professionals to the different schools to assist them in lab setting and work with the available materials.

- Limited skilled manpower especially computer professionals at the partner institutions. Together! To overcome this has assigned the IT teacher to go to the schools instead to give training to the IT instructors.

- Although there were prior discussions with the schools directors and IT instructors we have observed clashes among schedules.

- Due to constructions going on in the city although we have 3 MB of Internet, it is a slow connection. To overcome this for the resource center we have bought and installed eGranary.

4. Lesson Learnt

from this project Together! Has learned to include stakeholders (Schools) from the initial stage of the project till the end.

5. Recommendation

Together! Recommends if Internet Society could include human resource budget in the small grant projects this paves a way for the transfer of knowledge and sustainability.