Biannual Report

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Submitted to: Internet Society

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I. 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: July 2014 to December 2014
Total Project Budget: $ 9,970.00
Introduction and Together! Achievement since Establishment

Together! Ethiopian Residents Charity Organization founded in December 4, 2012 and was fully licensed and registered by the Ethiopian Charities and Societies Agency in March 6, 2013.

Since establishment, Together! has developed immensely as a functional disability inclusive organization. Together! has been reaching a total number of 453 persons with visual impairment with its rehabilitation, education and job inclusion services from its onset of operation until today.

It was realized that for the first time in the Ethiopian context, as an institution, that Together!s IT skill training graduates were assessed by an external governmental body, the Centre of Competence (COC), with an elevating result- 100% of the assessed graduates passed the exam and therewith add a significant credential to their professional profiles.

Within the Basic Computer Training at Schools component a total number of 181 school girls and 199 school boys and several teachers with visual impairment gained IT knowledge through the knowledge transfer of Together!s IT graduates. Not only that, Together!s senior IT trainers were paid allowances from several institutions where they provided their service to like the Addis Ababa Education Bureau, and the Ethiopian National Association of the Blind.

Working with the most marginalized group of extremely vulnerable visually impaired women/single mothers and their children it can be considered a great success that each of the women were either enrolled at secondary or higher education level or started an income generating business after their admission.

Through the scholarship component and the Day Care Center significant numbers of visually impaired persons and parents were enabled to pursue their education/ income generating activities/IGA whereby their children were taken care of at Together!.

A total number of 177 visitors took part in the Dinner in the Dark program whereby the program received high media coverage by the Ethiopian Television, printing press and radio
broadcast so that even the wider society was made aware of the program and its awareness raising effects.

II. **Major Activities performed in the reporting period with the fund granted from the Internet Society**

During the reporting period Together! was signed Memorandum of Understanding with selected five schools in order to provide computers and basic computer education trainings for visually impaired students. The selection criteria were based on the presence of high number of visually impaired students there. Based on the amendment of Together! with the Internet Society, a total 24 computers were purchased from the other supplier. So that, provision of 20 computers to the schools will be effected in the near future and now the computers are installing at the premises of Together! with assisting application software and accessories like screen readers, Amharic text readers, customized web browser, speakers and head phones in order to fit the needs of visually impaired users.

The established resource centre equipped with 20 computers of which 4 computers and 2MB Internet access was provided by the internet society. **The above achieved activities were made possible in part through a donation from the internet society.**

As contribution from the other financial partner Together! is fulfilled the resource centre with e-library and other facilities such as chairs, tables, head phones, screen readers, operating systems and internet infrastructures) with the aim to be used by visually impaired students.

III. **Planned Activity for the next period**

- Provide two weeks refreshment training on adaptive technologies for 250 visually impaired people
- Assign one visually impaired trainer graduated from the organization’s training centre for each school as an assistant
- Provide short term basic computer training from the resource and training centre for 50 visually impaired non-student individuals( employees, job seekers and university students)
IV. Challenges
Reduction of school academic period. Due to the 5th national election which will be held in May 2015. All schools of the country are working up to the end of April 2015 so that the visually impaired students will not get basic computer education in the full period of the academic year which is up to June 30, 2015. Considering the challenge Together! is planned to schedule the school based computer education program as per the country’s school calendar and will compensate the remaining time by working on other rest time (Saturday, Sunday and other public holiday).

V. Lesson Learnt
Inviting and working in close collaboration with concerned governmental officials and other stakeholders helped us to promote the organization goals. It also created awareness about the visual impaired people to the sighted ones who are able to learn and utilize technologies (Computers and Internet). In addition, we have learnt that if the visually impaired persons have got the necessary assistive technologies that can compete efficiently and effectively with sighted counterparts.

VI. Recommendation
Despite, there are a number of NGOs or other public organization working on problem of visually impaired community. The challenges of these people are deep-rooted and not fully addressed, especially on adaptive technology. Therefore, if Together! gets more resources from its partners it can contribute own to the difficulties of visually impaired communities.