**The Geez Alphabet Project (GAP)**

1. **Background**

The origin of Geez script (writing) dates back to the 4th-century AD during the Axumite Empire which lasted from 1st Century AD to 9th Century AD.

Extinct as a [vernacular](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vernacular) language, Geʿez is the ancestor of the modern [Tigrinya](https://www.britannica.com/place/Eritrea) and Tigré languages of Eritrea and Ethiopia. The oldest known inscription in the language dates from the 3rd or 4th century and is written in a script that does not indicate vowels. Subsequent inscriptions found in the ancient Ethiopian capital of [Aksum](https://www.britannica.com/place/Aksum-Ethiopia) were written from the 4th through the 9th century in a script that does indicate vowels. The [Bible](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bible) was translated into Geʿez between the 5th and 7th centuries. Although the language ceased to be spoken popularly sometime between 900 and 1200, it continues as a liturgical languagees.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Geez-language>

The Geez Alphabet is used in many parts of present-day Ethiopia, the whole of Tigray and highland Eritrea. Unfortunately, it is now in the process of extinction as the young generation in the Diaspora are gradually shifting from reading and writing in the Geez alphabet to reading and writing in the languages of their host countries. Commonly used English transliterations of mother tongue words and phrases by the young people in the social media or other media outlets are a good case in point.

The aim of the Geez Alphabet Project (GAP) is to preserve, maintain and enrich the Geez script, an intangible heritage, and pass it on to the current and future generations. It is imperative that the language and the script is preserved and provided as a rare heritage to this generation and the generations to come.

Most childern who arrived in the UK at a young age and those who were born in the UK from migrant parents are unable to read and write in the geez alphabet. Dedicated members of the Tigrayan community in the diaspora have to tried successfully to set up small projects of the Geez alphabet learning in 2010 with over 60 children attending classes. Despite a growing demand for the language learning, that project was suddenly interrupted due to lack of funding, space and other unforeseen circumstances. In 2012, WHEAT Mentor Support Trust has also helped to set up a Geez Alphabet group known as ABUGIDA (a name adopted from the teaching mechanism of the Geez alphabet). ABUGIDA is still stiving and has become more popular among migrant families who are interested in bringing their children for mother tongue learning in the London Borough of Newham.

The Geez Alphabet Project is therefore a direct continuation of the previous projects which created a great amount of interest and enthusiasm among children who were direct beneficiaries of the mother tongue learning as well as their parents/gurdians who also benefited from those projects directly and indirectly

1. **Rationale**

WHEAT Mentor Support Trust and The Haddis Agape Foundation formed a partnership to carry out the Geez Alphabet Project with a renewed spirit. Both WHEAT MST and HAF envisage job opportunities for young teachers, volunteers and those parents involved in this project. They will use their potential of the Geez alphabet and mother tongue (Tigrigna or Amharic) to develop and promote cultural activities such as traditional singing, dancing, and drama by using their language and cultural heritage. Here are some of the reasons why the provision of mother tongue learning and the Geez alphabet is so important.

2.1 Intergenerational misunderstanding is often created between the parent and the child due to language barriers i.e., the parent not being able to speak in English and the child unable to speak the mother tongue properly. Such misunderstanding leads into unnecessary conflict and family breakdown. Such confilct is prevalent in many households due to no fault of the parent or the child but simply due to lack of proper communitication within the family system. According to Okeworo (2014), mother tongue is instrumental for the parent-child healthy relationship. He said that effective communication channel between parents and children helps to establish harmonious relationship between them

2.2 The mother tongue enhances the child’s educational achievement. Okeworo in his article “Impact of the mother tongue on the academic achievement of the child”\* argues that a child who can read and write in his mother tongue has a better chance of excelling in other languages at school as his leaning experiences at home will be transferable into the school system. Okeworo has summarised his justifications as follows:

1. ...the child first learns names of objects and things within his environment through mother tongue. With this basic experience and knowledge, he is prepared for formal education.

1. It is also through mother tongue that the child acquires local knowledge of mathematics such as counting, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, measurements, telling the time as well as buying and selling activities. Later on when he goes to school, he transfers all these knowledge he has acquired in the local form to the learning of formal mathematics.

1. Mother tongue is used to teach the child folktales, riddles and proverbs at home. Through folktales, he learns figures of speech and other relevant expressions that will make him to develop interest in literature when he goes to school.
2. The child also hears elders and other members of the society telling stories, discussing matters and issuing words of advice in their dialect. The knowledge which the child acquires during such interactive forum equips him with experiences that help to facilitate his academic ability in the school.

1. The knowledge of mother tongue enables the child to understand the similarities or differences between synthetic structure of English language and mother tongue.

1. Knowledge of mother tongue aids children’s explanation or interpretation of difficult concepts during the teaching and learning of English language and other school subjects.

1. A child brought up in his mother tongue has better chances of writing his native or tribal language than one who is brought up in a different language.

* ***Knowledge Review, Volume 30 No. 1, May, 2014***

3.3. Parents or Guardians of the child who have been marginalised due to lack of English language skills will use their children’s mother tonge learning sessions to come together and network with fellow parents to exchange ideas and experiences. Side by side with the mother tongue learning, parents could also have ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes to improve their English language skills, and thereby, to improve communications with their chidren.

1. Overall Aims of The Project

GAP aims to create a diaspora community which is cohesive, confident, and harmoneous. Such a cohesive community can be integrated fully into the host society without compromising its own culture, tradition, and language. It can only contribute to the economic prosperity and cultural diversity of the host society .

The Geez Alphabet Project aims to caltivate children with higher level of congnitve, affective and psychomotor skills. Socially, culturally and psychologically empowered children and young people will eventually become responsible citizens and future community leaders.

1. Objectives
2. To provide basic and middle level of geez classes to different children of the diaspora community.
3. To side by side assist the parents or guardians of the children in their networking, socialising and ESOL learning activities
4. Target Groups:

Beneficiaries (service users

1. Children of different age brackets, sexes, reading and writing abilities/potentials of the geez alphabet
2. Parents – mother, father or both or guardian

Service providers

1. Volunteers – three volunteers will be recruited and vetted to work as project assistants and office workers to facilitate tthe project
2. Teachers – three teachers will be recruited who are paid on an hourly based to teach the geez alphabet and ESOL at different levels
3. Staff – two project managers will co-ordinate the entire project
4. There will be an opportunity of engaging the chidren and their parents in the project process involving them in some activities including decision making processes.

Requirements: All volunteers, teacher and staff are required to be DBS checked

1. Teaching Methods and Appoarches

A variety of teaching methods will be usilised depending on the size of the class, age brackets, gende, interests, and level of the children’s understanding:

* Traditional way of teaching/learning
* Internet based teaching: using audio, vedio and other materials
* Play scheme group exercise music, dance, drama etc

1. Output

By the end of the academic year, from the intake of 100 children

1. 50 children will have basic reading and writing skills of all the Geez alphabets
2. 30 childen will read and write basic words
3. 10 childen will, speak, read and write short phrases/sentences
4. 10 children may drop out of the project due to unforeseen circumstances
5. At lease 50 parents/gurdians will be enrolled in ESOL classes
6. At least 10 parents will be engaged in producing merchanises (eg. Handicrafts such hat, gloves scarfs through their work of embroidery
7. Outcomes
8. Improved and harmoneous intergenerational relationships between parent and child due to narrowing down the of the language gaps of the mother tongue
9. Increased self-esteem and self-confidence of the children as they learn their own tradition, culture along with language learning. They feel sense of belongingness which is vital to their identity.
10. Improved class performance in the children’s respective schools and work places as they grow up as they acquire transferable skills (research evidences)
11. Preservation of the Geez alphabet which is currently on the verge of extinction unless the young generation inherits it as much as the past generations. Nowadays native languages are written in English transliteration.
12. Impacts

Learning the Geez alphabet has social and psychological impacts. Improved parent-child relationship; creating highly disciplined and well mannered, child with high self-esteem and confidence; less crime; less unti-social behavior; greater chance of avoiding depression and inferiority complex, identity crisis.