



Drought Relief for Kenya's Samburu People

Drought has struck the Horn of Africa once again. For the Samburu people in Kenya's remote north, conditions have been tenuous. Some had to walk up to 10 kilometers to the nearest water, and many men left their families to seek pastures for livestock. This was the area's fifth drought in ten years, placing communities on the brink of an emergency.

Stress upon water resources exacerbates the health crisis. Unprotected water sources become polluted with both human and animal feces, causing cholera and diarrhea, which are claiming lives in a population who often lack transportation or cannot afford treatment. Amoebiasis and serious infections are also common.

Even though rains have now begun, AMURT found only half those in need of emergency food and medical support are receiving services. At one medical camp, for example, AMURT doctors diagnosed 20% of the patients with trachoma, an eye disease caused by vitamin A deficiency.

The AMURT assessment team first visited three badly-affected Kenyan provinces in July, using questionnaires and focus group discussions with government representatives and the general population to gain a better picture of the extent of the crisis. In consultation with our funding partner, KNH, the team concluded that the problems faced by the people in Samburu East District merited both short and long-term interventions, and the Samburu Community Assistance Project (SCAP) was born.

Phase 1: Emergency relief

AMURT Kenya takes a participatory approach to emergency food distribution, making sure that everyone is consulted about the best methodology. In Samburu it was agreed that the most vulnerable beneficiaries would be selected in direct consultation with local relief committees. AMURT then super-



vised a supplementary food distribution program for 1,200 families in the most underserved areas of Samburu East. It was a collaborative effort, with the Samburu women's groups helping to pack the food, and village committee members providing security.

One night, two of AMURT's community mobilizers were hosted by a village family (Samburu people will accommodate anyone who asks for shelter). They were served a supper of plain beans, recently distributed by AMURT, and learned that this family was so short of food that they had been surviving on the food provided by AMURT for a week. The AMURT staff members were happy that their food had indeed reached people in need.

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AMURT's medical team has been working closely with the district health authorities to organize medical camps in remote areas. AMURT provides vehicles, supplies and per diem allowances, and the local hospital provides staff. In this way the team reaches over 800 patients monthly, and provides general health education to the local communities.

The third emergency intervention focuses on water. AMURT is coordinating with the District Public Health Officer and working through village relief committees to improve water availability and quality. Rain water collection units will be installed at 12 schools with 5000 students; 50 public water storage tanks will be chlorinated; 1200 households will be given purification tablets to prevent the spread of water-borne disease; and water sources will be protected.

The Samburu community has expressed its gratitude to AMURT in many ways. One mother attending AMURT's mobile clinic with her 4 week old baby was asked the child's name. "She doesn't have a name yet," the mother replied, and then promptly asked for the name of one of our program officers, who is called Susan. The mother proudly announced, "Her name is Susan".

Phase 2: Long-term capacity building

Five years ago some enterprising women organized themselves into the Samburu East Women Empowerment Forum (SEWEF). AMURT will support SEWEF in forming a consumers' cooperative to increase food security and incomes. Cooperative members will pool resources to create a capital fund to buy goods in bulk, and will receive discounts for personal consumption or resale.



Free medical camp in Swari, Samburu East, Kenya

"We want to create long term sustainability", says AMURT's Disaster Liaison Karl Anderson, "through income generation activities and community agriculture initiatives." AMURT will help 1500 families begin kitchen gardening, and will provide necessary agricultural inputs for women's groups interested in small-scale farming. "Small half-acre plots turn out food for families and something to sell", adds Karl. "It's worked elsewhere, so we expect some measurable success within six months."

AMURT is one of the only NGOs in the area that hires local staff, boasting 18 Samburu team members. "They feel empowered to be serving their own people", says Karl. "AMURT is also the first to deliver food at the village level." It costs more logistically, but it didn't seem right to oblige hungry people to walk up to 20 kilometers to fetch food supplies".

For more information on AMURT's work in Kenya please visit www.amurt.net



AMURT's Samburu team negotiating perilous roads to reach far-off villages.

AMURT & AMURTEL Responds to Tsunami Disaster in Japan



AMURT & AMURTEL started by cleaning the homes of elderly people.

On March 11, 2011 a powerful earthquake triggered a 10 meter tsunami that devastated Japan's northeast coastline, leaving some 15,000 dead and 300,000 displaced. The government responded immediately, mobilizing the Japan Defence Force and the Red Cross. Only a handful of international relief agencies were given permits to respond, including AMURT & AMURTEL.

Despite fears surrounding the unfolding nuclear emergency, AMURT assembled an assessment team that set off for Sendai, the capital of Miyagi Prefecture, on March 13. When they reached Sendai they found complete darkness. Everything was closed. There was no electricity even for traffic lights, and no one to notice. "People had just disappeared from the streets", recalls Dada Ganadevananda, AMURT Coordinator for Japan.

The next morning local government officials, seeing AMURT's relief credentials, secured scarce gasoline for our team. This was a great help as the few gasoline stations that were open had queues of up to 200 cars. We decided to focus our efforts in Shichigahama, a town on Miyagi prefecture's hard-hit coast.

Every morning government coordinators would assign jobs to the various volunteers, including AMURT & AMURTEL's. Given the youthful nature of our team, our first task was to clean the homes of elderly people. This physically demanding work was greatly appreciated, resulting in beaming smiles and warm hugs from the beneficiaries. Many families needed this assistance, so we extended our services to other areas.

We also identified other pressing needs in the community, notably the need to ease the anxiety of young children traumatized by events. One of our experts in early childhood programs, Didi Indumati, spent almost three months engaging children in numerous activities encouraging joyful socialization and playful expression. Children's programs became a regular feature at the Chuo Kominkan and International Village refugee centers and included English, music, cooperative games and yoga. The older boys benefited from daily sports activities with AMURT staff.

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AMURT & AMURTEL offered engaging activities for children in the shelters.



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Gifts can transform lives of desperation into lives of hope



Bicycle distribution and a repair service provided mobility for school children and the elderly.

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AMURT also provided psychosocial programs for local volunteers through evening yoga stretching and relaxation classes. Seeing the positive results of these sessions, the government volunteer coordinator asked for morning yoga sessions for 70 volunteers to prepare them for the day's work and, through the improved body awareness created by yoga, to help them avoid injuries.

Shichigahama's International Center manager invited the AMURT team to live in the shelter so we could offer services day and night to the residents. Soon our orange-clad team members became well-known to hundreds of refugees through counseling, emotional support, and yoga consultations for stress conditions or aches and pains.

Even though the government tried to supply all the survivors' needs, some items were lacking such as bicycles for school children and the elderly. For many school children the bicycle was the only means of transport to school. So AMURT made an announcement on the radio about our bicycle distribution program and received a huge response from affected families in Shichigahama and further north. NHK, Japan's national TV network, broadcast a five minute segment on AMURT's initiative, in part because it created cooperation amongst AMURT,

another NGO focused on bicycle repair and a transportation company. AMURT's work also featured on the tour of Miyagi's governor, Yoshihiro Murai.

AMURT & AMURTEL has now set up a mobile disaster unit that enables volunteers to continue monitoring tsunami survivors. The unit will also help us respond faster to future disasters in Japan.

In addition, we are liaising with local NGOs in Fukushima and scientists at the Institute of Experimental Botany in Prague, to research methods to help farmers decontaminate their soil from radioactive material. Efforts center upon phytoremediation, a new technology that uses specific plants to gradually absorb radioactivity.

"Japan is a rich country, but those who lost everything, or who worry about ongoing radioactive contamination, need more than just material support", concludes Dada. "The heartfelt services our AMURT & AMURTEL volunteers provide are a human gift that money can't buy".



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