



Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team

PO BOX 328, Mamprobi, Accra, GHANA Tel: 233-21-666-746 / 233-24-518-9086
B.P. 3665, 01 Ouagadougou, BURKINA FASO Tel: 226-50343455 / 226-78 34 03 85
E-mail: amurt.gh@amurt.net or amurt.bf@amurt.net Web site: www.amurt.net/africa

Ghana and Burkina Faso News February 2009

12 February 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Trust that you are all well, and thanks for the support during the last six months.

In Burkina Faso, Dada Purusottama's arrival as regional secretary has injected fresh energy into the projects. The maternal health program is well established and the trained village midwives continue their work with pregnant women in all the villages Deou department. Slowly but surely the population are emerging from ignorance to a greater awareness, increased confidence and self sufficiency in the health sector. The 'theatre de sensibilisation' training for the youth in Deou is creating waves of enthusiasm, and we hope the new young troupe will get the chance to present in many communities this year. In the coming months AMURT Burkina Faso hopes to start working with water and agriculture for the first time in a decade. Construction on a new centre for Ananda Marga and AMURT has started in Ouagadougou.

The challenges at the Mafi-Zongo Water project continued during the six months. Most of the difficulties could be traced back to the filtration system, so we are excited that we have finally started the construction of a new larger filter with assistance of Engineers Without Borders. Five more communities have now access to piped potable water, all sponsored through AMURT Italy. We started to nurse tree seedlings to be planted around the dam and the catchment area. At Seva Clinic we are getting ready to install a laboratory. A two week homeopathic intensive was held in October. The training for the Kekeli TBA's was finished in September, and the health education with focus on maternal health and women's health is ongoing.

All of us in the AMURT team are excited about the progress in the projects and all the opportunities for progressive works. The challenges are considerable, but with patience and persistence we continue to get good results. The community development work is very concrete, and continue to provide real substance, inspiration and meaning to our mission work in West Africa. 2009 has started with a very positive flow, which we hope to sustain throughout the year.

Brotherly yours,

Dada Daneshananda
AMURT coordinator

BURKINA FASO

DEOU – SAFE MOTHERHOOD PROGRAM

Thirty-two AVs (village midwives) are active organizing the pregnant women and taking them for pre-natal consultations in the government clinics. They also do deliveries when the women can't get to the clinics and teach the women how to take care of themselves during pregnancy and how to better take care of their infants. For seven years now, the program has improved in the life of women in Déou department. The mortality of mothers and infants has decreased, though accurate numbers are still hard to obtain.

Seven ASVs – (village health agents, all men) that we trained in basic healing of the most common diseases - are working and helping the population to a great extent.

This year we give we prioritize training our AVs and ASVs to become the local teachers and leaders for the improvement of people's habits regarding hygiene, AIDS, education, etc. They are becoming the link between government health workers and the villagers so that the population understands well and puts into practice what they need. Each step takes time to achieve. It is such a difficult place to work because of the remoteness, the harsh desert environment and illiteracy of the population.

Not so long ago we were driving with a French visitor to some of the villages, so difficult to reach, where we have AVs working. He kept on saying: "How can people be in such places, how can they live here?!" Yes, it is an amazing place and people live in the extreme conditions: women have to walk as far as 45 Km to go to the closest health dispensary or to the market, there are no electricity, no roads and people eat mostly millet, milk and dry baobab leaves... But their smile is unique, and we learn so much from it!

In October AMURT Sweden collected money in one of their famous RAWA concerts, so we could get 2 more donkey-carts as ambulances for the AVs, and 4 tons of millet to give them as an incentive (1 bag of 100 Kg each AV and ASV) for the great service they render to the population. It was greatly appreciated! Last year the rain did not come much at all, hardly 200 mm, and the harvest was very bad. At the end of December 2008 the men had to leave their homes in search of some uncertain income in gold mines or in Ivory Coast, to provide food for their families.

In November we've got some donation from a French organisation, "Aile Universel". As a result, we could provide all our AV's with buckets (for cleaning dirty clothes) and oil lamps (for night births). We could offer two more donkey carts. We selected the more efficient AVs of the remotest villages to choose who will receive the donkey carts. The AVs where so happy to be taken care of and it was such a joyful celebration for those who received the donkey carts!



Distributing lamps and buckets



Donkey cart, full!

RAISING THE CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH THEATRE

Raising the consciousness is the most urgent, effective and durable service we can possibly offer. People of Déou area are still mostly uneducated (more than 90% are illiterate) and that is the main obstacle in bringing changes in their lifestyle. We decided that "theatre forum" was an appropriate strategy to achieve this. "Theatre forum" is a very innovative and humorous way to put into play day-to-day happenings in order to point out common misbehaviour. Right after the act the public is invited to respond (which they do wholeheartedly!) and comment on the play, and together (including government health officials) we try to find the best way to improve the situation. The play here would be acted in Fulfuldé, the main local language.

We contacted two experienced trainers specializing in "theatre forum" and scheduled the training of 10 local big boys and girls.

The first part of the project happened during the New Year's holidays and lasted for two weeks. In this short span of time the trainers did an incredible job. A theatre troupe was formed and they created a play later called "I want everything".

The actors were offered vegetarian collective lunch for the whole period and liked it very much. In a place when you can hardly find a vegetable that was in itself a small revolution! It was a wonderful experience: teenagers had such a great time by learning to play different roles, learning some songs and dances as well... learning about themselves! It became an attraction in whole Déou and many children and adults were daily coming to watch the teenagers being trained.

Finally, at the end of the training period we gave a presentation of our work to the parents and friends, health officials and government officials. By then our mini-actors were ready enough to play and the public did laugh a lot! The debate afterwards lasted for more than an hour. It was a success: the public learnt much and became surely more acquainted with AIDS, AIDS screening, clandestine drug sellers and sexually transmissible diseases. The same evening when we met one of the boys, with a broad smile he claimed (in French): "Aujourd'hui c'est aujourd'hui", literally: "Today is today", meaning today is a real day! All this was made possible through a donation from an Australian Think-tank, www.metafuture.org.

The troupe is now officially recognized by the authorities and will have the possibility to independently create and stage play. It's a great opportunity for these teenagers who may potentially get an income from it. At Easter time the play will be performed in the main villages within Déou area. One supervisor (who was previously the main trainer) will direct the troupe rehearsals. A list of questions will be prepared and given to the public in order to estimate their understanding of the issues involved and to evaluate the actual impact of the campaign. Then the troupe will remain available for AMURT or any other charitable organization for similar campaigns in the future. The need is so great in such remote areas.

We could not yet gather the total amount of the money required for it - though AMURT USA did give us a donation - but the health authorities here in Burkina are searching along with us for local partners.



The mini-actors!



Acting games...



The trainers



Educational games

THE BOULI PROJECT: A NEW DREAM

In Déou area there is water-shortage: it rains very little - 10 inches per year, on the average - and it is slowly but steadily decreasing. Over the last 20 years we've observed the underground water table getting lower and lower.

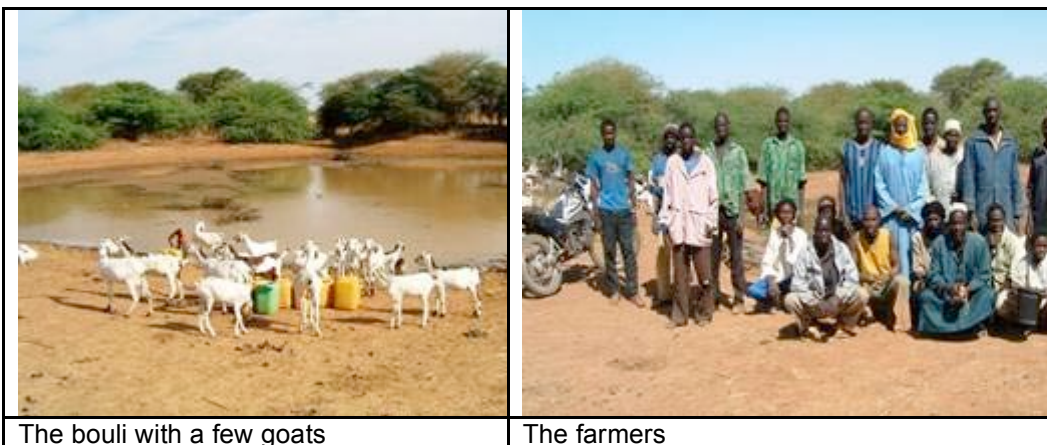
Because of such a scarcity of rain, the harvest (of their local cereal, a variety of millet) is bad, the price of it keeps getting higher and poverty is extreme. A characteristic of the Sahel is that rains come all at once, very violently. That water doesn't remain and permeate the soil - it flows straight towards the Niger River. In order to solve the problem we must collect the rain water before it flows away. A "bouli", a word currently used in Burkina to describe an artificial pond, is very appropriate for improving the situation.

It contributes to the storage of raining water: even if rain is rare, a single good rainfall is enough to fill it up! It allows the local ecosystem to be recreated through planting of trees; it regenerates the soil and flora at its perimeter and provides the underground water (instead of pumping it out through bore hole and endanger the whole ecosystem). It is an asset against desertification. It is a source of drinking water for the fauna; it makes possible the return and survival of the wild local animals. It is a means for cultivating vegetables during the dry season. It should make possible future food self-sufficiency in the area, and with the trade of vegetables farmers can hope for new earnings and improving their poor life standard. Women are very interested in the project because they will be selling the vegetables at the market and in this way earn some independency.

For all these reasons we came up with a project to rehabilitate an old bouli in Ayagorou, 4 km away from Déou village(dug by our late Ac. Rudreshvaranda Avt. in 1993!), which is at the moment obstructed by sands.

We also want to dig just nearby another pond, to provide the cattle with water during the long dry season. Providing the cattle with water means also providing the people with the opportunity to settle (part of the tribal people in Sahel just move along with the herds according to where the water is available). Settled population means having the children go to school the whole year and possibility of a steady local economy and organized community to develop.

The whole study of this big project (the digging involves renting a bulldozer) is now completed. The settings of the project are such that the local villagers will be most involved in making it happen and maintaining it independently in the long run. We are now knocking at the doors of the embassies looking for partner(s) for making the dream come true. "Inche Allah!" as say the people here - mostly Muslims - that is, "if God wants"...



A NEW AMURT CENTER IN OUAGADOUGOU



Construction underway on the new jagrti and AMURT center in Ouagadougou. Supervised by b traditional local materials. It will be an ecological building.

We thank our donors for Safe Motherhood and Health Education in Burkina Faso:

AMURT and AMURTEL Norway
AMURT and AMURTEL USA
AMURT and AMURTEL UK
AMURT and AMURTEL, SWEDEN
WWW.METAFUTURE.COM
Aile Universelle, France
Emanuele Antola Foundation Switzerland
AM Foundation, Taiwan
Private Donors

GHANA

MAFI-ZONGO WATER PROJECT

Construction of new roughing filter started

After many delays, the construction has finally started on the new roughing filter for the Mafi-Zongo Water Project. In 2006, Engineers Without Borders from Tucson, Arizona made two visits to assess the filtration system. The new filter is close to eight times larger than our current roughing filter. When completed in May this year, it will ensure a better water quality year round, and prevent the clogging of the filters that has made it difficult for the project to meet the high demand for water during the dry season.



Finishing the reinforcement mat



Starting the formwork after pouring foundation

The funding for the project has come from EWB, Rotary USA and the Lanesra Foundation. It has been a full time struggle since last summer to find the right valves, the best gravel for the filter media, and to bring the cost down to enable us to complete the construction with the limited funds available. At this time, we are very close to getting everything ready, and the work on site has started under the direction of local contractor Benjamin Amu, who constructed the water tower on Kpokope Hill for us in 2003. The original plan called for using excavators, but we found that the work could be accomplished more effectively and economically with manual labor. Two engineers from EWB in Tucson, Arizona have arrived to supervise the construction. We hope that the new filters will be operational before the heavy rains start in May.

Extending water to five more communities

The Mafi-Zongo Water Project was planned in three phases. The first phase gave water to ten communities in 2005. Thirteen more communities were connected in phase 2 in 2006. In September we connected three communities of phase 3, bringing the total number of communities served up to 26. The communities of Mankukope, Avlavikope and Avukope did all the hard labor of digging the trenches. AMURT Italy in Casalmaggiore raised the funds from local clubs and associations.

Since the beginning AMURT and the Mafi-Zongo Water Project has had a close working relationship with the Mafi-Kumase Water project. We connected Adalekpoe community in April 2008. In January this year Kpokukope was connected. Kpokukope set a wonderful example by completing all the trenches well in advance of the arrival of the pipes. The work at Kpevekor is still not completed, but we expect Kpevekor to be connected in February 2009.



First day of piped water at Avlavikope



First day of piped water at Mankukope

At Christmas, the plumbers, pump operators, revenue collectors, and zone chairmen to the Wli Waterfalls for a well deserved diversion from the hard work.

With the inspiration and guidance of volunteer Erin from New York City, a group of school children has started a tree nursery near the Zongo dam. We intend to plant 2-3000 seedlings around the catchment area to protect the dam and reduce silting.



Zongo Water Project staff singing a rousing gospel December



The children worked hard, and had a lot of fun, stuffing the polystyrene seeds of fast growing trees.

We thank our donors for the Mafi-Zongo Water Project

- Amici Nel Mondo, Postal, Italy
- AMURT-Italy
- Lanesra Foundation, Philippines
- AMURT UK
- AMURT USA
- Rotary USA
- Engineers Without Borders
- Neo Humanistic Barnebage, Oslo, Norway
- Individual donors

MAFI-SEVA COMMUNITY CLINIC

KEKELI PROGRAM – focus on maternal health

During the second half of 2008, the focus of our community health education work remained on maternal health. In September, twenty-five Traditional Birth Attendants trained by volunteer Lisa Dalporto graduated in a ceremony at the Seva Clinic. Four representatives from the District Health Department and six assembly men graced the occasion and inspired the TBA's in their work. The meetings between the health department and the TBA's were important to improve communication and clarify the expectations on each side. Twenty of the new TBA's received a delivery kit. The kit has supplies that help maintain the hygiene during deliveries and various tools and equipment that were previously unavailable to in the village, like disinfection eye drops, torches, clamps, forceps, scissors, fetal stethoscope etc. Reliable indicators are hard to get in rural Africa, but we are confident that our ongoing maternal health campaign will make a difference on maternal and infant health in the project area which extends to forty communities, and a population close to fifteen thousand.



District Health Department reps addressing the Kekeli



The Kekeli women and the TBA's meet together to o

The Kekeli women, women village health promoters, work closely with the TBA's and in many villages they had collective programs to educate the women, using drama and role play to teach.

In August, the Kekeli women and the Kekeli TBA's went on an excursion to Ada where the Volta River runs into the sea. More than forty-five women came along. All except a handful saw the sea for the first time in their lives, even though they live just an hour's drive from the shore.

During November, December and January, Erin Miksic, a volunteer from the US worked with the Kekeli women and the Kekeli TBA's. Many meetings were held in groups throughout the project area, with mostly 4 to 8 Kekeli women from nearby villages attending. We are trying to make the women work more independently of AMURT, Seva Clinic and overseas volunteers. We have started to create a structure among the women, and they are now expected to take the initiative for new activities. For the rest of the year, we will focus on strengthening their leadership and structure of the Kekeli women and the Kekeli TBA's.

Monday is the Mafi-Kumase Market day. Thousands of people from surrounding communities, including our project area come to stock up for the week and to meet people. Since November the Seva Clinic and the Kekeli women have a regular stand. They offer blood pressure test and distribute condoms and advice on family planning, etc. If things go well, the Kekeli health education and consultation service can grow and get a higher profile at the weekly market, for the benefit of the communities.

MAFI-SEVA CLINIC – news

In October, Sheila Ryan visited Seva Clinic for the third time, to lead a two week intensive homeopathic training for the staff. Experienced homeopaths visited on a monthly basis to assist, train and guide the integration of homeopathy into the services at Seva Clinic.

During November, Andree Bamforth from Canada returned to continue her training of the staff in basic nursing and clinic procedures. With her assistance, the clinic now has a closer relationship with the district health department.

Since November Malaria tests are available at the Seva clinic. Gideon from the staff is working as an intern trainee in the laboratory at Adidome Hospital. The plan is for a team from AMURT Italy to come and install the laboratory in March.

The number patients have increased over the last months to an average of 170 patients per month, including homeopathy patients.

We thank the donors for the Seva Clinic and Kekeli Program

AMURT Italy
Jolly Casa
AMURT and AMURTEL United Kingdom
AMURT and AMURTEL USA
Ghana Homeopathy Project, UK
Volunteers and their families
Individual donors

DONATIONS ARE VERY WELCOME!

AMURT

2502 Lindley Terrace

Rockville, MD 20850

301 738 7122

Or with credit card through PAYPAL at www.amurt.net/africa

Bank information

GHANA

Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team

Acct # 3702602

Barclays Bank, Makola Branch Accra, GHANA

Swift Code: BARCGHAC

BURKINA FASO

AMURT Acct# 11071808501

Banque International de Burkina, B.P. 362, Ouagadougou, BURKINA FASO

Swift Code: BIBUBFBF