

Team



Talk

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Building Back Better: AMURT's One Year Post-Yolanda Report



November 2013 – November 2014

Over one year has passed since 200 mph winds wreaked havoc on the coastal belt of East Samar in the Philippines. From the beginning, AMURT has worked in close collaboration with government authorities and the people themselves to play its part in rebuilding shattered lives.

Back to school

AMURT's reconstruction teams, under the capable leadership of local civil engineers, have built 39 new classrooms and repaired 189 classrooms in 108 schools, making it an important implementing organization in East Samar. AMURT's efficiency and excellence have attracted visits from high ranking officials. Both the president of the Philippines and the secretary general of education have visited our project to witness the achievements and offer their appreciation for the way AMURT prioritized the need to get children back to school.

AMURT has adopted the motto, popularized after the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, of "building back better." So, not only did AMURT rebuild and repair, but it upgraded entire school

campuses, replacing all termite-infested wooden structures, for example, and even repainting the flagpoles.

In addition, AMURT has renovated or constructed 23 daycare centers, transforming dark and cramped facilities into cheerful, light-filled centers of learning.

Home sweet home

AMURT construction teams have been rebuilding individual homes in the barangays of Agnaya and Asgad. A total of 116 homes are being rebuilt and 59 homes are being repaired. 60% of the beneficiaries, selected through a lottery system, have started moving into these permanent structures that are built to resist powerful storms.

AMURT offered the beneficiaries design choices, to give their homes a personalized feel. Hence, people could opt for terraces, or bigger living spaces, or more windows. In this way AMURT accommodated individual needs, providing people with a sense control over rebuilding their lives.

This reconstruction project was made possible through the tireless endeavor of the mayor of Salcedo to secure suitable land for the houses. Many of the beneficiaries lived too close to the ocean, in what has now been declared a “no build zone,” and had no choice but to relocate.

AMURT has forged a highly productive relationship with the mayor and his team in what has become an exemplary private-public partnership. Right from the beginning, when AMURT was still mobilizing resources, the spirit of cooperation prevailed, with the mayor providing AMURT with vehicles and warehouse space.



The demonstration farm provides farmers with new technologies and new possibilities.



Safe new houses for typhoon-affected families.

Strengthening the base

An estimated 33 million coconut trees were destroyed, by Typhoon Yolanda, wiping out the livelihood of many already poor famers. Given that coconut trees take 6 – 9 years to grow to maturity, an alternative source of income is crucial. AMURT has been in a dialogue with the Department of Agriculture of Salcedo municipality, and the farmers themselves, to find alternative solutions.

AMURT rebuilt and improved the municipal demonstration farm, which serves as a source of seeds and organic fertilizers for local farmers (with the capacity to generate 20 tons of fertilizer each month). Moreover, the training facility built by AMURT will provide the farmers with new farming methods such as compost making and integrated pest management. AMURT sees the demonstration farm as a catalyst for sustainable agricultural development.

AMURT staff worked with local farmers to form 33 new farmers’ associations, and to unite all the associations into a farmers’ federation that serves 1900 farmers. The federation distributes essential farming inputs to the farmers, and purchases and markets their produce, thereby cutting out the middle men so more profits go to the farmers themselves. This was a crucial step as the Department of Agriculture will only fund farmers who organize themselves into a federation.

A little kindness goes a long way

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Lebanon: Creating safe spaces for children

Over 2 million Syrians fleeing the war have poured into Lebanon; more than to any other country. This generous nation of only four million people has limited capacity to deal with a refugee influx of this scale. Yet, as fighting in Syria intensifies, the number of innocent civilians affected continues to grow.



Since the early days of the Syrian crisis, AMURT Lebanon has been supporting refugees in the mountainous upper Chouf district with their basic needs; providing fuel, blankets and warm clothing to protect against the cold winters. AMURT's current focus is on the wellbeing of the refugee children.

The plight of Syrian children

Up to half the refugee children have no access to education for a variety of reasons; and many have not seen a school classroom for two years. Even refugee children in school face difficulties: one in three are unable to function properly due to the psychological scars left by the traumatizing experiences of war.

AMURT is one of several NGOs working to bring a sense of normalcy back to the lives of these children. Wherever possible, AMURT works

with parents and school directors to place Syrian children directly into local government schools, while also providing group or individual psychosocial therapy to help the children integrate into their new environment.

If school placements are unavailable, or if a child requires special preparation and psychosocial assistance before entering regular school life, then AMURT's Child Friendly Space model is the best option.



Group games help refugee children feel normal again

Child friendly spaces

Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) are safe, nurturing and stimulating environments, which provide young refugees the chance to rediscover their innate innocence and positivity. Children usually spend their first three months in the CFS free from educational targets, benefiting from a structured routine full of stimulating activities. This initial period helps them re-enter society and prepare for learning.

After this initial period, the children start a basic numeracy and literacy program, which not only stimulates their desire for learning, but provides AMURT staff with a way to measure whether they are ready to join the public school system. Once a child is ready, the next step is either to join the Back to School program, or a longer intensive learning course, such as the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), to quickly reach a suitable school entry level.

Psycho-social support

AMURT's psycho-social team supports children in both the CFS and public schools. They conduct observations and assessments, often working with groups or individual children referred by a teacher. The conditions most commonly observed in Syrian children include fear, trauma, ADHD, loneliness, low self-esteem and aggressiveness.



Everyone likes teacher approval!

The psychologists draw upon a variety of therapeutic approaches (cognitive, behavioral, and positive), as well as psychodrama and relaxation techniques; all aimed at helping children overcome psychological distress and restore their normal healthy outlook and behavior.

Every therapy session begins with psycho-education to help students better understand themselves. They discover that what they are going through is a normal and common response to intensely traumatic experiences.



Art therapy provides children with an outlet for their trauma so they can move into a better future.

In therapy sessions, children are often invited to relate their personal stories through art. Artwork is filed and, when combined with other assessments, helps in monitoring each child's progress over time.

Community Participation

When parents enroll their children, they are asked to volunteer at least once a week in the program, so now many mothers regularly support CFS activities, helping to build a sense of community.

Psychologists and outreach staff regularly work with parents on family issues. This brings many positive changes in parents' relations with their children, and further enhances Syrian community involvement with the project.



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