



News from home & abroad

AMURTEL

JUNE 2017



SPIRULINA TO THE RESCUE IN KENYA



HAITI BIKE DRIVE IS A BIG HIT WITH ALL THE KIDS!



HAITI MICRO CREDIT UPDATE



MOTHER & CHILD TAKE REFUGE IN GREECE

AMURTEL Greece is providing antenatal and postnatal care programs for infant and young child feeding, and safe spaces for mothers and babies to gather at our Mothers and Babies Center in Athens, Greece.

Our teams have been present in Athens since September 2015, responding to the dire challenges so many women refugees were experiencing. Following our work based at the port of Piraeus and other camps, we now have a Mother-Baby Area in the hub of downtown Athens. More than 4,500 refugees currently live in urban settings, and with public transportation allowing access to downtown for those in the surrounding Athens camps, our center enables us to reach the greatest number of people.

Within the last 6 months, more than 1000 mothers from Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Iran, Algeria, Morocco, and Greece have come to our center, some pregnant and many with their infants, finding a warm, safe and friendly space. These women and children are vulnerable but seeing their strength and graciousness every day is beautiful to witness.



It is amazing how many mothers tell us that they are afraid their breast milk is not good because they eat so poorly, because the food in the camps lacks nutrition or because if they are in apartments, it's hard to have enough money to buy food.

We began our food distribution program last year when we were in the camp at the port. There was one woman I remember so well. She was almost crying when she first came because she felt weak all the time, thought her baby was not getting well-nourished through her breast milk and told us how fussy he was when he nursed and didn't seem to like her milk.

These are the common stories we hear continually from many. We had supplemental food from the UNHCR which we gave and she came regularly to receive it. I will never forget the day she came by when it was not so rushed and we had a Farsi translator to sit and talk a bit. Again she was almost crying but this time from joy. She could hardly contain herself when telling how strong she felt now and how good her breast milk was and how much her baby loved it...she

went on and on, even flexing her muscles while grinning and laughing. And she said it was all because of the food we gave!!

To be honest, it is not only the food. It is also that they know there is a group of women here who care about how they and their babies are during this very crucial period of pregnancy and infancy. They come to our center often just to be in a woman's space where they can sit and drink tea and visit with other women while the older children play. They miss very much the extended support they are used to of having mothers, sisters, and women friends around them all throughout pregnancy, birth and infancy.

From Pregnancy to Postpartum

One in five refugee women of childbearing age (15-45) is likely to be pregnant (United Nations Population Fund). Pregnant women and newborns are dispro-

It's so uplifting to meet with the women of the Amurtel Micro Credit (MC) and Self Help (SH) groups!

Amurtel is currently working in Haiti with 90 women in Port au Prince area, almost 900 women in Banaan in the southeast, and most recently with 80 women who lost their homes and livelihood after Hurricane Matthew slammed through their villages in Haiti's southwest corner of Les Caye.

The women in the SHG and MC groups meet together once a week, supporting each other as they face challenges and in their endeavor to develop financial security for themselves and their families. The women in the Port au Prince area have worked together now for more than 7 years, and are interested in creating joint cooperative ventures among 3 or 4 of the groups. This is exciting as it affords more jobs and provides an avenue for their daughters to move into leadership roles as they grow up. In Banaan, the women have been meeting together for more than 6 years. Here are some of their stories

Ilda, our coordinator, shares a most moving story: It came to one group's attention there was a woman being badly abused by her husband in an area outside their village. They went en masse to confront the man, calling him out on his violent behavior, and threatening him with dire consequences if he didn't stop beating his wife. He was shocked at the confrontation and agreed to their demands, which included signing a statement that he would no longer beat her. After the group left, he turned to his wife, who was not part of the Self Help program, and encouraged her to join. He said to her, "These women are so strong and so powerful now, even though you aren't part of their group, they came here and stood up for you. You too should join with them and fight for other women." She in turn was so shocked and encouraged by this turn around that she went down to the village and asked to join. She is now an active part of the program and reports there is no longer abuse in her home.

Virginie has been working with SHG and MC since they were first formed. She has gone from a shy woman who held back from participating in the meetings to being a very strong voice in a leadership position.



She reports: "Since starting in 2011, I really feel it improved my life. Life in my family, life in my community, the health of our economy. This group has given me more understanding and sensitivity to each other. One person's problem becomes everyone's problem. We have to have solidarity for this to work; there is no other alternative. Micro-credit loans have been very helpful, it gives some life to our activity. Our economic power is reinforced by the loans. The women are very happy with the program."

Iliana shares: "I am happy with the activities Amurtel brought us—business training, how to live together, how to get things done, how to get work. I see more needs in order to reach farther and faster, we need more training and knowledge. We each received 4000 Goudes and were able to improve a little, but with more money we will have more activity."

Rosanna adds: "I appreciate Ilda. We didn't have anything, but with micro credit we can start a little business. I make bread, little cakes and custard. It is going well."

Geralda, a group leader for several years, reports: "The first meetings, women didn't have much hope. Then, we see good things coming, things are changing. Micro credit helps them get started in business and helps to send their kids to school with food. We have a lot of activities with Ilda. Thank you for your courage and work."

When asked what kind of training Amurtel could offer, all agreed: "Business management skills and marketing. Crafts and skills to produce goods." It is obvious these women are hungry to learn, grow and develop.

As more funding comes in for Micro Credit, Amurtel will include more of the hundreds of women waiting to participate. And we will continue to celebrate this powerful grass-roots transformation, as women take on leadership in providing for their families and their own growth.

Deconstructing Racism in New Mexico

"Sometimes,
it's hard being a Chicana
Because Mexicanos
see that you're too white
and white people
see that you're too brown
You're always in a limbo
You might not come out
with bruises and broken teeth
from what people say
about your nationality and culture
but every part of you
is scratched up
You become shattered
and there's nothing
you can really do about it....."

--Sarita, 6th grade

This poem is the voice of a young Chicana girl and her experience of living in the United States.

As expressed through the entries to our **2017 Courageous Conversation Challenge**, racism affects and damages youth at every age.

The New Mexico Deconstructing Racism Committee, a diverse group of organizational representatives and individuals, is coordinating an 8-year action to educate, advocate and legislate to end institutional racism, which is defined as "actions that result in differential access to goods, services and opportunities of society due to the existence of institutional programs, policies and practices that intentionally or unintentionally place certain racial and ethnic groups at a disadvantage in relation to other groups."

Our approach includes developing curriculum for mid- and high school youth which explores various US cultures, their racial/ethnic privileges, creating opportunities for youth representatives from the Courageous Conversation to

present their spoken word and art work entries on the Senate floor and to the public, and pushing for legislation to correct the effects of exclusion and discrimination in employment decisions and practices.

We are fine tuning an **Anti-Racism Pledge** and requesting signatures/endorsements from legislators, organizations, and individuals. It contains a definition of racism and institutional racism asks for a pledge to work toward equity and diversity. It encourages signers to list personal action items and gives examples so that people can pledge to help with the change process in concrete ways that are unique and important to their own lives.

As part of our collective identity we need to begin looking at our individual perspectives, our organizations, our communities, our school curricula and policies, our laws and policies, to notice, in order to raise awareness and correct the effects institutional racism.

~Submitted by *Anita Harshman, of Albuquerque, NM, who is on the AmurteL Board of Directors and Co-chair of New Mexico Deconstructing Racism Committee.*

Anti-Racism Pledge

We understand that race is NOT biological, and that racism IS real.

We believe that actions, practices, policies, or structures are racist if they have the result of advantaging people of a certain race or ethnicity, or of oppressing people of a certain race or ethnicity.

We believe that actions, practices, policies, and structures are racist if they have racist results, no matter whether the intentions behind them were friendly or hurtful.

We commit to examine our own actions, and to seek with humility to correct our own actions that are racist.

We commit to examine policies, practices, and structures for racism, and to use our own power to improve them however we can.

We commit to listen to those who have different heritage, culture, and experiences from our own with open hearts and open minds, and to learn from them what actions, practices, policies, or structures they experience as racist.

We commit to cultivate human potential by increasing racial equity; creating diversity-oriented educational, employment, and business opportunities; and investing equitably in our communities.

We commit ourselves to learn the history of New Mexico and the United States through a multicultural lens; to celebrate the triumphs, grieve the tragedies, and learn from the mistakes of the past; and to remember that our past is also our present, no further away than a memory.

With this pledge, we commit ourselves to honor and embrace diversity, and to stand against racism wherever it appears.

portionately harmed by disasters, with more miscarriages, premature births, low birth weight infants, and birth complications than an average population.

Lack of adequately nutritious food, a scarcity of drinking water, fragmented or no health care, unfamiliar surroundings, and the often unending psychological stress put pregnant women and infants at great risk.

At our Mothers and Babies Center we are able to provide prenatal and postnatal exams by licensed midwives, birth preparation and assistance at births whenever possible, postpartum care of mother and infant, supplemental food and water during pregnancy and lactation in order to help cover nutritional needs and prevent dehydration.

We also offer infant feeding assessments for mothers with children under 2 years of age, and help for mothers to increase their milk supply and relactate if possible.

Safe Spaces

Mother-baby areas provide safety, reassurance and resources for mothers to feel supported and access information, particularly in relation to infant feeding. These spaces evolve from the needs and skills of the mothers themselves, and AMURTEL is there to help with all the resources can provide.



Chul's mother died a month after giving birth to his little brother, from complications of malnutrition. When Chul and his older brother T'Will were brought to our home in Port au Prince, no one knew exactly how old he was—maybe three?

Needless to say, when Chul arrived he was quite traumatized. He had just lost his mother, hadn't had a good meal in forever, and felt lost and scared. He kept to himself and wouldn't play with the other children.

There was a small tricycle on the terrace that he began to ride, slowly peddling back and forth for an hour at a time. Didi began to notice that after riding, Chul seemed calmer. It became clear the rhythmic riding of the bike was extremely therapeutic for Chul, and thus was born the 'Bikes for Haiti' project.

Stephanie Walker and Chris Jones, Vermont volunteers extraordinaire, jumped in and began sending out requests for donations and were also able to get complimentary baggage allowance from Jetblue, with the result that we brought 9 bikes with us on our February trip!

The smiles, excitement and absolute pure joy was contagious! And as per their usual style, the kids were as excited to share this surprise with the other children in the area as they were to get to ride the new bikes.

And when we got to meet Chul, it was beautiful to see how, over the past 4 months, this little boy was able to find healing in the love, good food, companionship of the other children, and of course, his bike therapy. He is now a talkative, outgoing little guy, who is happiest when he is surrounded by the other children in his new Amurtel family.



BIKES FOR HAITI

FAMINE RELIEF: SPIRULINA

Responding to Famine in the Horn of Africa with the Tana River Spirulina Project

In the summer of 2011, the UN identified severe drought in the Horn of Africa. Affected countries in this East African region include Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan. Considered the worst in 60 years, the drought caused a severe food crisis across the region, affecting close to 10 million people.

Amurtel held an emergency meeting to explore ways we could help and sent a team to Kenya to research options within our capacity. After visiting refugee camps, talking with other NGOs and doing a needs assessment, it was decided to grow Spirulina and distribute it to the most vulnerable children. Spirulina is a super-green algae grown in fresh water ponds. It is an extremely rich source of protein and contains B1, B2, B3, zinc, magnesium, potassium, manganese and calcium. It contains amino acids—almost all the ones we need! One teaspoon has the nutritional value of several servings of common vegetables and provides a strong overall boost to the immune system.

Spirulina was declared the best food of the future by the United Nations World Food Conference of 1974, who, along with the World Health Organization, encourages Spirulina for children with malnutrition.



Spirulina is a good solution to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger because this blue-green algae is:

- **AFFORDABLE:** many feeding solutions are more costly and less sustainable.
- **EFFECTIVE:** one gram per day is enough to correct severe malnutrition in a child in a few weeks. New studies suggest that Spirulina improves not only a child's physical development but also cognitive performance.
- **A LOCAL BUSINESS:** Spirulina production can be organized as a decentralized rural industry and can involve local people. It is thus a sustainable long-term solution.

Two months after our first meeting, construction began on our Spirulina farm in Wote, Makeni, about 3 hours outside of Nairobi. Working in partnership with Abha Light Foundation (ALF), Amurtel created three ponds for growing Spirulina, with the finished product given to children and pregnant and nursing mothers facing malnutrition.

Fast forward to the beginning of 2017, when the UN announced that drought and famine are again ravaging this part of the world. The lack of rainfall caused herds to die, crops to fail, and prices of what food there is to skyrocket: now millions of families are facing starvation. The number of people in crisis now stands at more than 11 million, and is expected to increase.



Recent reports show nearly 40 percent of Kenyan children are experiencing stunted growth as a result of malnutrition.

In mid-March, Amurtel members from the US and Ireland met with staff from ALF in Nairobi, exploring ways to increase our response to this overwhelming disaster.

During our meeting, we received a direct appeal from a community in Tana River County, northeast Kenya, requesting assistance for the many people facing severe water shortages and subsequent hunger. ALF worked in this area three years ago when the community leaders became familiar with our style of grass-roots aid and appreciated the Spirulina distribution during the Free Children's Clinics (FCC).

After talking with those familiar with the situation in Tana River, the team decided to double the production of Spirulina and distribute it to vulnerable children and mothers experiencing extreme malnutrition in this region. As lives were literally at stake, we started immediately, and are now distributing Spirulina nutritional food to almost 200 families. Once more funds are raised and the additional Spirulina ponds built, we will be able to increase the number

"For WHO, Spirulina represents an interesting food for multiple reasons, rich in iron and protein, and is able to be administered to children without any risk. We at WHO consider it a very suitable food." -

-United Nations World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva, Switzerland June 8, 1993.

of families receiving Spirulina.

It is frustrating and painful to see how many we are not able to help, how many are experiencing the brutal and

dehumanizing effects of hunger. Yet seeing the hope on the faces of those we can help, seeing the data showing what a difference even a teaspoon of Spirulina a day can make for a child's development, reminds us of that adage: *"It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."*

If you wish to help us reach more families facing hunger, please make a donation at amurtel.org and be sure to indicate that your donation is for Kenya. This is a daunting challenge, but your support will inspire and support our teams at Amurtel to do what we can to meet it.

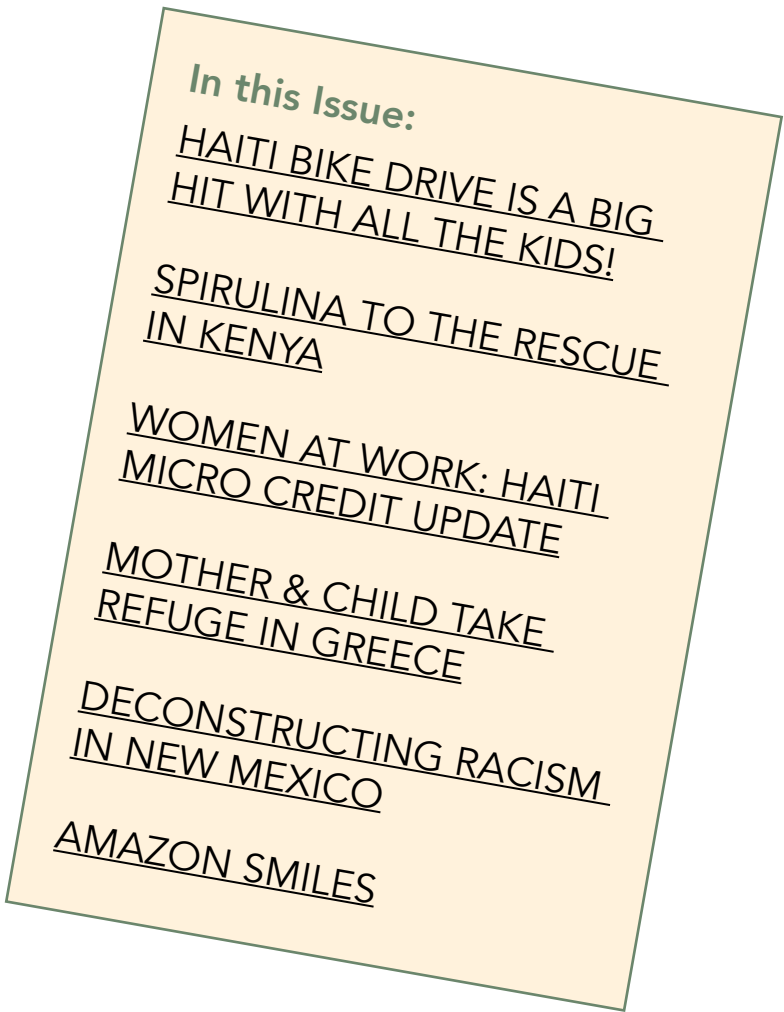




AMURTEL works with women and families in need to become self-sufficient.

Our work is global in scope, individual in practice, with a belief that all have an equal right to the basic necessities of life, provided in a manner that conveys sincerity and respect.

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June 2017: This past year has been busy for AMURTEL! We hope you enjoy reading highlights of our programs in Kenya, Greece, Haiti, and the US. Amurtel is making a difference every day, due to your informed and generous support. We cannot do it without you!

We invite you to join us!

Volunteering: If you have the time, we have the work! Tasks range from admin help (such as sending this newsletter to you or researching grants), to disaster relief in far-away lands and helping out in our projects. A donation of skills, resources and time often maximizes our ability to help.

Donations: Thank you for your continued support of Amurtel. Our staff are volunteers so your funds go directly to those most in need. Recurring donations provide support without straining your memory or cash flow, and help us plan our budget. In-kind donations such as laptops also work!

Smile.Amazon.com: Help Amazon help Amurtel. It's as easy as:

- 1: Go to smile.amazon.com
- 2: Choose Amurtel;
- 3: Shop as usual (your settings are preserved);
- 4: Amazon donates 1/2% of your cart total!!
- 5: Always log into smile.amazon.com to shop!

Inspired to Help? Thanks! You can mail a check the old-fashioned way, go online, or email us to discuss giving and volunteering options that work for you.

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