



# THE CHALLENGE

JUNE 2020

## CYCLONE IN VANUATU: A NiVan Girl's Story of Survival



▲ Above: Before and after images, depicting the cyclone's destruction.

The NiVan people of Vanuatu were devastated by the effects of Category-5 Cyclone Harold in early April.

We are so grateful to each of you who prayed and gave to FIA's Where Needed Most fund to ensure we received the \$10,000 match offered by local Christian businesses.

Although there is much work left to be done, the first installment of food and recovery bundles were distributed.

We are grateful to Lydia Meade and her husband Matthew for being FIA's hands and feet on the ground. They shared the story on the next few pages with us, which graphically depicts the impact that the storm and your giving had on one NiVan girl's life.

Please continue to pray over these precious people who continue to experience dire circumstances.

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APRIL 5, 2020

It's been a steady grey drizzle all day. The missionary says there is a cyclone coming. But I know the old witchdoctor in Vemele village will stop the storm. In all my 16 years I've never seen him fail. He's very powerful and controls all the cyclones that come to the island of Santo.

At first, it seems like any other cyclone. Trees dancing in the wind. Sheets of relentless rain. My uncle goes down to check on the missionaries. I watch him as he fights to walk against the frenzy of the storm, his red loincloth flapping in the wind as he dodges falling branches. We are not afraid of storms.

It's late morning when things start to change. The fury of the storm grows into a ruthless beast thrashing everything in its path. Entire trees are crashing down now. Patches of the roof are being ripped open. Branches strike the house with alarming force. When the kitchen starts to collapse, we run to another house. Nearly 30 people are taking refuge in the small dark room. Despite being wall to wall with people, I'm still shivering from the cold, wet wind. The rain continues to pour in unhindered by the bamboo walls.

One of the matriarchs arrives crying hysterically. She's incredibly old. Her white hair contrasting with her dark skin and deep wrinkles. Her house just fell down around her. She's weeping because she's lost everything. The old woman can't stop shaking from both cold and fear. She keeps saying she is going to die. She says in all her life, she's never seen a storm like this.

She is the oldest person I know. I'm scared now.

While we women and children hide inside, the men stand outside holding down the roof and dodging flying

debris. Pieces of corrugated iron and branches the size of grown men sail through the air with deadly speed. My father and uncles keep adding branches, stones, and anything else they can find to the roof to try and weigh it down. A couple of the men climb up and lie on the roof desperately trying to hold it together.



Suddenly, the storm stops. It's oddly abrupt but the clouds have parted, and a patch of sun is shining. My cousin comes running up the hill. The missionary sent him with a message. He says the storm isn't over yet. We hastily grab a few bundles of belongings and head for a nearby cave.

It's hard for me to imagine the storm could get any worse. Surely, it's over.

But then it hits. Without any warning or build up the cyclone slams back into us with inconsolable wrath. I shudder. We only just made it to the caves in time. Its dark, muddy, and smells like bat dung, but at least we are safe.

My father doesn't believe in God, but even he is praying.

APRIL 6, 2020

Hours pass as we huddle in the darkness. Waiting. Finally, in the late afternoon, the wind gradually lessens in severity. I step out of the cave into a different world. I don't recognize anything. The devastation is breathtaking. The few surviving trees look strange with barren branches stretching up at the sky like angry claws.

A sickly green light fills the sky as we climb over the fallen trees and try to find our way back to the village. When we reach our home, I feel numb. Most of the village has been flattened. Only a few houses are left standing and their thatched roofs are in disarray.

**My feet carry me to the spot where my house once stood. A broken pile of bamboo and debris remains.**

My feet carry me to the spot where my house once stood. A broken pile of bamboo and debris remains. I recognize my blanket, schoolbooks, and Bible lying half-buried. Everything is soaked and ruined. Some of my clothes are strewn across the ground halfway to my uncle's house. My foam mattress sits like a floating sponge in a pool of murky water.





I look around for anything that might make sleeping in the cave more comfortable. Everything is too wet. So much destruction. It feels like everything is lost. I dig out some plantain from the wreckage of the kitchen and look for a pan. I don't know how we will start a fire tonight. The matches are all wet and the smoke will make the cave life impossible.

My cousin is complaining that her cloth diapers all blew away and the baby has already soiled the only dry blanket. We patched up my uncle's house so we could all sleep in it. It's crowded but it smells better than the caves.

### APRIL 8, 2020

I saw one of my friends returning from their garden today. We haven't had the chance to check on ours yet. She was carrying a stalk of bananas that were half smashed.

"How are the gardens?" I asked.

She snorted, "What gardens? There's nothing left. Even the taro got uprooted."

Our food is limited, and it will run out soon. The fallen fruit trees and citrus rotting on the ground will be gone soon. I don't know what we are going to do.

The water in the rain tanks smells like rotting leaves. We can cook with it, but we can't drink it anymore.

### APRIL 22, 2020

Another long week of hard work and uncomfortably cramped sleeping quarters. Rebuilding all the houses is going to take a while. So much of the bamboo and thatch leaves have been ruined.

The missionary came back today with a truckload of rice and other food. We had a big plate of rice and tuna for dinner tonight to celebrate. The food won't last long but it's enough for now.

Despite the food, my father and uncles are angry. There is a lot of arguing tonight. They are upset about the location of the food drop. That village is always causing

trouble. They don't deserve rice.

My uncle thinks the church should only give help to people who attend the church. The missionary disagreed and said it was for everyone. I'm glad because my family doesn't go to church.

I'm sick of all the jealousy and fighting. Everyone is tired.

### MAY 10, 2020

It's been 5 weeks since the cyclone.

As I sit in church listening to the missionary teach, I can hear a helicopter flying nearby. We haven't received any supplies from the government yet, but the missionary continues to bring food, blankets, building materials, etc. He says Christians from around the world have sent money to buy the things for us. I don't know who these people are but I'm grateful.

The skyline is completely changed since the storm, but the jungle is once again turning green as fresh buds form on the branches and new sprouts are pushing up. We won't have any produce from the garden for at least another two months, but still, it gives me hope. I don't know how we are going to get food until then, but we haven't gone hungry yet. Every week God sends food.

Life is hard, but we are alive. I don't know what the future holds, but I know God is real. I want to know more about Him. Maybe one day my parents will come and listen too.

I pull my wandering thoughts back in to hear what the missionary is saying. He says God is faithful and He loves us. Even though Satan tries to destroy us, God wants to save us. God is good.

I look back at the green regrowth and I know it's true.



**We won't have any produce from the garden for at least another two months... Every week God sends food.**

## You can help!

Give to provide food bundles or recovery bundles.

Visit [FIaintl.org/vanuatu-relief-effort](https://FIaintl.org/vanuatu-relief-effort)



## Dominic Learns about Construction & Christ



**I** grew up in a village house that was elevated off the ground and was built from split poles tied together with vines. The walls were woven bamboo and the roof was made from leaves. We had one big room for sleeping. We peeled the bark of a type of palm tree called Limboom to make the floor. I grew up there with my four brothers and one sister.

I did grade one to grade six at school, but then stayed back at my village to tend the garden for my family.



### Early Experiences with Church

Growing up, I knew a little about God and sometimes went to church, but I didn't really understand what they were teaching. Some of the churches say you have to do good works to get to God. Some say that our ancestral beliefs and avoiding evil spirits is what

religion is all about. Some villagers are even sorcerers and say they have the power to heal and curse others. Many people do what they want and think God doesn't really care. It was all very confusing.



### Vocational School

When I got older, I went to a vocational school for two years to learn carpentry. A friend of mine who worked with FIA told me that I could get work there too. It's been 20 years since that day!



### Working with Friends in Action

When I started at FIA, I only knew a little carpentry, but since then I've learned all kinds of other work like joinery, painting, working with cement, steelwork, building kitchen cupboards, and plenty of other things.

FIA's field leader Mike would be doing machinery or construction work to help other missionaries serving in remote bush locations. He would show us how to do what he was doing, and then he would let us take over some of the tasks in time.

We would do small welding jobs at first, but now we change the oil on the truck, sawmill, and generators. We service the lawnmower and sharpen blades for that, the sawmill, and the planer. I even learned how to laminate timber together with glue and clamps to make countertops and kitchen panels.

Sometimes we make trips to the bush to see our work making a difference to the missionaries and villagers. I feel proud to be an example to the youth in our village. They see that one of their own can learn skills and make a difference to others.



## Coming to Christ

In addition to the construction skills I've learned, Mike always has devotions with us workers every day. I finally understood how Jesus is different from the works and fear-based religions I heard about when I was young. I've learned that Jesus died for me and I knew I needed to give my full life to Him. Then I started to go to church regularly, and I started to know more about God. I learned about all He had done for me, and I wanted to follow Him and worship Him.

I work with FIA and I've learned a lot of skills but I've learned a lot about Christ too, so when I go back to my place I'm able to share with those who live close to me and even help with physical work. People say, "Oh this man has come from FIA and he's bringing good help and good thinking too." They also say, "Oh this man just comes in free and helps. It's a big thing." I sometimes go to the jail to share God's word and help with that ministry too.



## A Huge Thank You

I want to say thank you very much to Friends in Action for their help with so many things, the school fees for my kids, and other needs I have that you help with. It's a big thing for me and my family and we want to say thank you.

With Gratitude in Him,

## Dominic

National Worker in Papua New Guinea





# Rich in Christ: Giving to Expand God's Kingdom



## DONOR SPOTLIGHT: CLIFF HARRO

**F**rom humble beginnings as the grandson of farmers to dropping out of college and bouncing around jobs for two decades, Cliff Harro's current financial success is something he terms "what the Lord brought together." Now he uses his financial security to impact the world for Christ through Friends In Action's ministry to the Rama Cay people of Nicaragua.

"I spent a lot of years in arrogance trying to earn money for myself. I felt that I needed to prove I could do it, that I could have the big houses, big bank account, and the latest sports car," shared Harro. For many years, Cliff made just enough to support his family (wife Jodi and three children).

It wasn't until Harro adopted a different mindset that he became a successful independent retirement planner at his own company Harro Associates headquartered in Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

### Looking Back on His Career

Looking back on his career, Harro acknowledges God's hand in using his failures and set-backs as essential to position him for his current success. "Since I was paying my way through school, I dropped out of college with one semester to go. I was young. I just didn't think the degree was that necessary," Cliff explained. But that decision closed many doors over the years for Harro who was denied supervisory positions without a degree.

**Harro acknowledges God's hand in using his failures and set-backs as essential to position him for his current success.**

To provide for his family, Harro tried car sales, insulation sales, and even selling life insurance (which he deemed as a business failure). By the time he was 35, he was selling cars full-time during the day and working weekends loading freight to make ends meet. Exhausted and with no time to spend with his family, Jodi suggested Cliff give financial investment sales another try.

### Cancer and a Change in Perspective

"It wasn't that I was any better at it than when I originally failed. My outlook had changed though, and I could see it was the Lord's doing," shared Harro. After battling bladder cancer through eight reoccurrences since the age of 25, Cliff no longer viewed life from a temporal standpoint.

"The Bible tells us that in the end our works will either be burned away, or they will be refined into jewels to lay at the feet of Christ. I want to hear 'well done' at the end of my life."

Cliff gives glory to God for using the circumstances in his life to orchestrate his financial success.

Not receiving supervisory positions pushed him to start his own business, and the time he spent loading freight allowed him to forge relationships with a teamster union who later became the bulk of his current clientele.

"What I thought were setbacks were really catapults," shared Cliff.

## Success in Retirement Planning

**God helped Harro build a million-dollar-a-year company currently servicing over 400 clients through retirement planning.**

He is passionate about helping others transition from work to retirement believing that he is in the business of "selling dreams" with the greatest degree of safety without sacrificing return. "My job is to turn your pension into an income stream that will either sustain or enhance your current standard of living so efficiently that you have something to give to others," assured Harro.

**Cliff's services target those five years away from retirement, those in retirement, or part of the over 50 club.** (He welcomes interested readers to contact him at [cliff.harro@jwcemail.com](mailto:cliff.harro@jwcemail.com) or on his cell at 717.991.1133)

## Giving to Friends in Action

Harro's investment savvy has enabled him to give to the ministries of Friends In Action over the years.

**Most recently, Cliff donated funds to help a Rama Cay family in Nicaragua build their own hurricane-resistant home.** FIA has worked alongside 1,400 Rama villagers to resolve overcrowding and sanitation issues caused by 3-4 families living in wood huts susceptible to rot and storm damage.



**"I am so thankful to receive this help. We are grateful to you, even though we never met you."**

**– RAMA VILLAGER**  
*Benefitted from the life-skills and biblical training offered during home construction.*

Since 2004, FIA has helped the Rama people develop a new village on the nearby mainland, providing a healthy, safe place where their children and grandchildren can remain in the local community.

Meeting their critical housing needs has opened their hearts and lives to the Good News of Jesus! After more than 12 years of teaching and discipling, the first Rama leaders are now sharing the Gospel with their own families and in neighboring villages.

When asked why Harro champions the Rama's cause, he points to stewardship and the Great Commission as his motivators.

"I work hard and I want to give my money to others who do the same. I know that FIA has the right heart and will stretch my dollars to make life-changing

impacts. I may never be able to travel to remote places, but my money can. That enables me to have a part in something that matters here on earth and will certainly see a return in heaven.”

## Future Work with the Rama Cay



### 6 NEW HOMES EACH YEAR

Friends in Action is working towards a goal of six new homes each year, as well as completion of a Laundry/Shower house to remediate improper drainage and stagnant water conditions caused by outdoor showering and laundering.



### SCHOOL AND CLINIC CONSTRUCTION

FIA is also praying and planning for the future construction of a school and clinic for the Rama.



### BIBLE TRAINING & VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

Barring travel restrictions, FIA will host volunteer travel teams in July to conduct adult Bible training sessions and a Vacation Bible School for the Rama children. Attendance has grown exponentially each year, with close to 200 children and over 85 adults eager to dig deeper into God’s Word.

## You Can Get Involved

Harro is so excited about what God is doing among the Rama, both spiritually and through construction, that he plans to partner with FIA to fund at least one house a year.

“I would encourage anyone to get involved with FIA. Some things in life go unnoticed here, but nothing goes unnoticed in heaven. Nothing done with the right heart is overlooked by God. Giving does matter.”

**PLEASE VISIT**  
**[FIaintl.org/donate](http://FIaintl.org/donate)**

OR MAIL YOUR GIFT TO THE APPROPRIATE ADDRESS BELOW ↴



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# “Thus saith the Lord:



Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”

—JEREMIAH 9:23-24



[FIaintl.org](http://FIaintl.org)