



THE CHALLENGE

March 2021

From Dreams to Drilling: FIA in West Africa



“I could not see the face of the Man in my dream. When I looked, it was only light. Light so bright that my eyes could not see. The Man said to me, ‘Come with Me. You are tired. You need rest. Leave the people who are beating you behind. I will be your Friend and care for you.’ I did not know who this was, but the dream continued every night for several months,” relayed Mansoor, a West African villager.

We met Mansoor last month when the first volunteer work team since COVID-19 restrictions were put into place in March of 2020 landed in a new, unreached region of Africa. Joe, a missionary in the area, introduced him. “Mansoor and I are brothers. We may not look like it at all, but we are! We’ve

been going to the same church and we’ve been working together since 2015 in many ways.”

The majority of the people in this region of Africa speak French and are considered Muslims but many of them are animists as well. Growing up, Mansoor fasted and prayed as a Muslim, but was also in charge of the family idol and was sent for training to serve the idol which involved wearing *gris-gris* (talismans) to protect and bless his family members. When a friend told him of some Americans nearby, Mansoor wanted to meet them to practice English. The Americans heartily welcomed him but said they teach language skills through reading the Bible. “This was not good I thought. I want no part of this,” Mansoor remembered.

Touching or reading a Bible is considered “haram” or strictly taboo. He left but bumped into the Americans weeks later on

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the road. When invited again, Mansoor listened as they read the Bible. That night and every night after for several months, Mansoor had a dream about a Man with a face of light who called him to cross over a river which led into a peaceful garden away from people who were trying to harm him. Eventually, Mansoor realized this Man was Jesus and began to study God’s Word for himself. Mansoor’s dream ultimately led him to another kind of dream.

A New Dream

Joe and Mansoor have a dream to make Jesus known in an area in which 94% of the population has never heard of Christ!



To begin to make this dream a reality, Joe and Mansoor put their money together 5 years ago to buy a piece of land which they call “Bethlehem Land.” Their dream is one of restoration—restoring the land, restoring relationships, helping people be restored to God, and the restoration of individual’s identities to become the people God intends each of us to be.

“Many people here do not know of Jesus, yet my country needs Jesus. I asked myself what can I do? We need a way for the people to see and experience Jesus. We need a way to touch the community so they will have an interest in the things of God and sense the Holy Spirit,” shared Mansoor.



Joe and Mansoor felt God leading them towards a holistic approach that would allow villagers to experience Christ physically, educationally, through working with their hands in the land and farming, as well as through the church and spiritual aspects.

Although it is legal to become a Christian, Joe and Mansoor explained that the people won’t just listen to preaching. “With my people, you must do life. Live life with them. They want to see who you are. Relationships are the first priority. You have to earn the right to tell the Truth. Every time someone meets up with you, they are looking to know who you are and what you are really about.”

Joe and Mansoor’s dream is to build a house and garden for Mansoor, his wife, and three daughters, a clinic, and a school on the Bethlehem land.

“The people will look at my family and see how we live. Because I am a nurse, I can bless people with my hands and they will feel the power of God through treatments. And we will build a school to train children from the bottom up. We will teach the Gospel and chapter and verse. If they don’t become Christian, they can at least learn to respect and live with Christians in peace,” Mansoor told us.



Water of Life Well-Drilling

Joe and Mansoor’s dream aligns with our dream at Friends In Action—to see every tribe, tongue, people, and nation declare Jesus as Lord! In six remote locations across the globe, we use practical service and infrastructure projects as a platform to assist missionaries who are sharing the Gospel with unreached people groups.

In West Africa, that mission gets accomplished through our Water of Life well-drilling ministry and partnering with missionaries like Joe and Mansoor.

We were overjoyed to drill our first successful well in this new region during last month’s work trip! The team also completed repairs on essential equipment and constructed trusses for a hangar that will house critical machinery for the work that lies ahead.

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Describing the team’s progress, Joe commented, “We are so grateful to Friends In Action for their work. We’ve seen that the Spirit is working in this region. Mansoor grew up here. He understands the people. We’ve seen his connection with them, and God working through him. We’re grateful to FRIENDS for helping us show them Jesus through this long-term, holistic approach in their midst.”

FIA’s team leader to Africa, Jeremy clarified, “We realize that by assisting with the Bethlehem Land projects, we can fulfill our long-term goal of seeing Mansoor’s people come to Christ. We are committed to helping make Joe and Mansoor’s dream come true.” ■

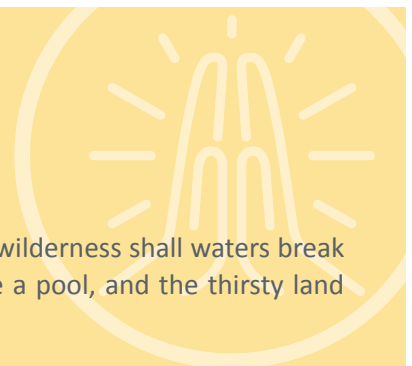


PRAY:

Please pray Isaiah 35:6b-7a over our ministries in Africa: “...for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water...”

- Ask the Lord for opportunities to build strong relationships with missionaries, national pastors, and the people groups in West Africa.
- Pray for funding for infrastructure development, missionary housing, and equipment purchases.

Thank you for praying with us!



Building Homes and Hearts for Christ: Cristina's Story



The 20-minute boat ride from Bluefields, Nicaragua to the Rama Cay Island can be deceptive. A sweet breeze blows across the blue depths of the sea teeming with all kinds of fish and ocean life. Beautiful birds dip and dive into the water and flutter around in the salt air. It's humid and warm, providing a tropical vibe to the scene. From a distance, the island appears green and lush. Palm trees sway in the breeze as Rama men busy themselves in their dugout canoes fishing. This seems like an idyllic setting for a tropical vacation, not a place in need of intervention...until you take a closer look.

A view from the shore of the island makes it clear why Friends In Action is at work with the Rama Cay people.

The water is peppered with all manner of pollutants—plastics, jungle debris, rotten food scraps, strips of clothing, and shells float in and lie around the periphery of the island. The tiny, thatched huts that look so quaint in the distance reek of rotting wood and the sanitation issues of far too many people trying to occupy a small space. There are dozens of houses in a maze, some even on stilts built over the water. The homes and byways are crowded with people. Six to eight people pile into their doorways to view arriving visitors. All generations are under one roof and contained in one room.

Such was the plight of Cristina, a Rama Cay woman who turned to Friends In Action for help with her deplorable housing situation.





Crowded and Unsanitary

I lived on the island since I was married. For many, many years we all lived here with our four children and everyone, but it was very difficult. The houses are very small and close. There was no patio, no place to put washed clothes, no space for the children to play, no place to plant fruit or staple items like yucca, bananas, or breadfruit. There was a lot of conflict and problems between neighbors because there were just so many people. We all had to drink water from a single well. In the summer, the water would dry and it would be very salty, and by summer's end it would dry up and there was no clean water. It was terrible.



Hope After the Hurricane

In 2005, Friends In Action came to us. It was not long after a hurricane ruined what little we had. There was no food. The housing was all damaged. It was a real mess. FRIENDS started helping us by providing food and seeds for planting. We then asked them to help us build a new community. Because there was no room to expand on the island, the plan was to build on the mainland across from our island in Bluefields. That way we could spread out with enough room for everyone. That way our children would not have to move away from us.

Working Together to Rebuild

The FIA volunteers worked alongside us. They taught us construction skills and showed us how to build. Instead of using jungle debris to build, we learned how to make concrete blocks and build houses that will be able to stand through the storms. Anyone who worked 400 hours or more to clear and clean the land then earned the right to build a house in the new village first. I was so excited to get to build a house! FIA provided all the supplies and taught us everything



*we needed to know. They helped us from start to finish. **Now, there are 22 homes completed!***

Our Renewed Community

It is much different in the new village. It is calmer and cleaner. We can grow crops for food in our gardens. We can have hens, chickens, and eggs for food. There are fewer problems with the neighbors. Our children play on the playground they built for us. They have plans for a laundry/shower house, a school, and a clinic!

We call it "Spring of Living Water" here. Not only because we have a source of good, clean water, but also because of the Bible teaching that is provided. When FRIENDS comes to do construction projects, they invite people to come to meetings to hear the Word of God. I went to these meetings starting in 2007. I came to truly understand God's way to heaven (there is only one way).

I received Jesus Christ in my heart and now I continue to study with the new believers and spiritual teachers. I am praying that all my family will also come to know Jesus Christ, I beg your prayers for them as well. ■

Construction and Teaching Continue

Although COVID-19 restrictions have recently prohibited work teams from traveling to Nicaragua, the construction and teaching continue! Villagers pass their construction knowledge to their neighbors and use materials FIA supplies (\$5,800/house) as homes continue to be built. Last year, four more were completed and we are praying for six additional homes this year. Rama leaders are carrying on the Bible teaching sessions in their own language as well! They are discipling fellow villagers to take the Gospel into eight unreached neighboring areas.

From Chief's Son to Pastor:

Partnering with Gaby

For close to 25 years, Friends In Action has drilled wells, built airstrips, homes, churches, roads, schools, riverboats, sawmills, solar projects, and medical clinics. We have sent food, medicine, equipment, vehicles, generators, backhoes, excavators, and tools—not to mention hundreds of skilled and unskilled laborers into the far-flung regions of the world. Each and every time, our goal is the same.

We are there to **support** Great Commission work. We are there as a **partner** to a missionary or national leader impassioned to take the Gospel to an unreached people group. Pastor Gaby is one such friend of Friends In Action.

Pastor Gaby's Story

Born in a small village in Vanuatu, Gaby was the son of the village chief. He was very respected in his community and viewed as next in line to take over the leadership of the village.

At age 14, Gaby and his father were led to Christ through an Australian missionary. As Gaby was disciplined over the years by the missionary, he felt a call to preach. The villagers had other plans for his life and put their money together to send him to college to become a mechanic.

"I didn't want that. The truth of Jesus had changed my life, and I wanted to share that with others. I knew that's what I needed to do," remembers Gaby.

He courageously walked away from both the opportunity to become the next chief and to go to college. Instead, he attended Bible school. He returned to start the church he now pastors and created a Bible training camp in Mataloi to teach other NiVan men to become pastors.

Ministry and Outreach in Vanuatu

When describing his ministry, Pastor Gaby shared, "The village of Mataloi has a good church where we've seen great change because of the Gospel, **but many of the other villages are unreached.**"

Some villagers still hold to the traditional, fear-based custom beliefs taught by the local witchdoctors. They fear that the spirits that reside in the Nabunga trees and the dark will cause them physical harm or curse them. They consult the witchdoctor and engage in strict rituals to bring healing and protect themselves (like wearing feathers or leaves anointed by the witchdoctor or carrying around water they think has magical powers).



“The villagers often apply the same mindset of appeasing spirits to their comprehension of the Gospel thinking that going to church or giving offerings is the way to gain God’s favor. They have difficulty understanding grace,” reported Gaby.

Pastor Gaby and his church members are regularly making outreaches to other villages. They hike out to

the target village and Pastor Gaby will preach in the morning and evening. In between, the congregants will go from hut to hut to talk and pray with people. Gaby explains, “I am looking and praying for a man in each village that I can train at the Mataloi Bible School to go back to reach his own village.”

THANK YOU!

Your Generosity Made a Huge Impact in the Aftermath of Cyclone Harold

In April of 2020, Cyclone Harold caused massive destruction to the ministry area of Friends In Action:



Leveled more than **90% of the structures.**



Tore out most of the **gardens & vegetation** on the island, destroying many banana trees (one of the main food sources).



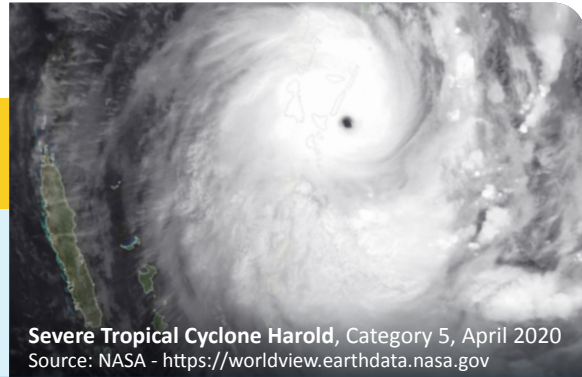
Ripped the roof off of **Pastor Gaby’s house.**



Severely damaged the **Bible School** and dorms.



Demolished more than **75% of FIA’s basecamp of operations.**



Severe Tropical Cyclone Harold, Category 5, April 2020
Source: NASA - <https://worldview.earthdata.nasa.gov>

Thanks to generous FIA donors, food and construction bundles were provided to Pastor Gaby to support his outreach efforts.



“Thanks to the supplies, I was able to personally visit every house in the village of Mataloi and also every family in the village of Valui. We shared rice with each household in these two villages. With the other villages farther away, I shared the supplies with the church leaders and chiefs who then fairly distributed the resources. In this way, we made sure that everyone in the village communities received some help.”

Pastor Gaby reported that the **Christians in the villages were encouraged** to receive proof that brothers and sisters around the world were praying and caring for them and God’s work.

To the unbelievers, the relief aid demonstrated the church’s heart and desire to help. “It proved that we are more than just talk at church, but we are actually showing God’s love.”

A Pipeline to Salvation

Friends In Action is also supporting Pastor Gaby's evangelical efforts through a water project he requested. "In the dry season our rain tanks are empty, and we spend a lot more time carrying water. We have to walk about 35 minutes to reach the water source and carry the water back. Before we didn't use as much water, but now we have learned about hygiene and we need water to wash our plates and our hands more. This means we need more water and I have to make at least 2 or 3 trips each day to carry the 20-liter drum. For me, this takes a lot of time and energy away from ministry work and the people have less time to listen to the teachings," explained Gaby.



FIA is fundraising and planning to run a 16-mile gravity-fed water piping system from a mountain source to 30 villages below.

"This will be a pipeline to salvation," Pastor Gaby said with a smile. "One of the custom chiefs William John Dee who signed up for the water project asked me to preach in his village next week!"

Pastor Gaby believes the water will show the people the love of God. "God loves all the people not just one village or one church. We want to show them the love of God so they will ask why we are helping them. **Then we have the open door to explain the Gospel clearly to them.**"

Friends In Action's field managers Levi and Jenn Pitman agree with Pastor Gaby's assessment about the importance of the project. "Pastor Gaby knows the people and has built relationships with them. He understands what will touch their hearts to bring a fuller understanding of Jesus to them."

If past practice is indicative of future impacts, hundreds of villagers stand ready to come to Christ. In 2011, **over 250 villagers were saved** when Pastor Gaby asked FIA to complete a road construction project in another area of the islands. "The road was important to connect the villagers to the school and clinic, but it was a living

picture that there is a path to God found only in Jesus," explained Gaby. **Pastor Gaby feels certain that God will similarly use the water project.**

Bringing villagers water will have impacts on every other segment of their community with educational, hygiene, nutritional, health, safety, and social transformations. But more than that, **Friends In Action's partnership with Pastor Gaby means the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ will be shared with 30 more villages or 3,500 people.**

As Jesus says, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." John 4:14 ■

3 Ways You Can Help:

PRAY

Ask God to open the hearts of the NiVan people to the Gospel—especially the chiefs and witchdoctors.

GO

Interested in meeting Pastor Gaby and supporting the water project effort by traveling with us to Vanuatu? Keep checking our short-term trip openings at fiaintl.org/get-involved/trips.

GIVE

The huge impact of the water project also makes it one of the largest in scope to date. Help us raise \$100,000 towards materials to build a supply road to the water source and 16-miles of pipeline!



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