



Report on impact of Cyclone Harold, Melsisi, Pentecost

On the evening of Monday 6th April 2020, Cyclone Harold struck Melsisi, central Pentecost, Vanuatu. The storm was the worst in living memory and caused widespread devastation. This report focuses on damage to the church mission at Melsisi; there were many other impacts on the local communities that are not detailed here.

Church buildings

The **church house** was severely damaged; its roof was completely destroyed. The church house is no longer useable. Services are now being held outdoors, but due to the destruction of trees, there is no sheltered location available.



Church house

The **presbytery** was severely damaged. The roof was destroyed and there was significant damage to the contents of the building, including the lower storey. Two of the least damaged rooms are now being used as a makeshift hospital. The priest is sleeping in the mission guesthouse.



The presbytery with mission vehicle outside

The **convent** was similarly damaged. The roof was destroyed and the contents of the rooms on the upper storey were damaged. This year no nuns were present but the house was being used to accommodate medical staff.



View of the guesthouse (blue) and convent (yellow)



Inside the convent.

The mission **vehicle** suffered a broken windscreen.

The **Salle Monnier** (a community hall) was destroyed. The cyclone not only took away the roof but caused the collapse of part of the concrete wall, fatally injuring a person who was sheltering inside during the storm.



Salle Monnier

Two **rental houses** belonging to the mission, one currently used by a nurse and the other by the secondary school principal, were rendered uninhabitable; their roofs and contents were destroyed.



Rental houses belonging to the mission

The **mission guesthouse** was severely damaged. One bedroom is still useable but in a bad condition; the rest of the building is uninhabitable.



Room in mission guesthouse

Two **workshops** belonging to the mission, one used as a repair garage for vehicles and the other for maintenance and tool storage, were utterly destroyed.



Remains of workshops

One of the two **warehouses** (docks) by the harbour was totally destroyed. The other lost its roof, rendering it unusable.



Warehouses by the harbour

Community and government buildings

The local NBV **bank** branch lost its roof and doors, rendering it unusable. Banking services have moved to Enaa, nearly 20 kilometres away by road.



Bank

The **market house** also lost its roof.



Market house

The **area council building** was severely damaged.



Area council building

Both **primary and secondary school** buildings suffered severe damage. Classrooms, staff houses, the dining hall, the bakery, the kitchen, the generator shed and the primary school office were all badly damaged. No students were present at the time of the cyclone as the school had already been closed due to the covid-19 state of emergency.



Primary and secondary school classrooms

The mission **mini-hospital**, which provides essential medical services to the whole of south-central Pentecost, was put completely out of use; its roof and most of its contents were destroyed. Nurses' accommodation was also rendered uninhabitable. Limited medical relief supplies have been received and a temporary clinic has been set up in the presbytery.



Mini hospital

Houses belonging to members of local communities around the mission were also destroyed. These houses were relied upon to accommodate school pupils and other users of the mission.



Views around the mission showing damage to houses

Infrastructure and services

The local **water supply** was cut off, as the pipe was broken in several places. Currently people on the mission are relying on a small number of rainwater tanks, but the water in these tanks is limited and is going bad. It cannot be refreshed because roofs and gutters for collecting water have been destroyed. For bathing and laundry, people are using the sea and the river.



Non-functional public water taps

All the bush **toilets** in the community were destroyed, and the community toilets were damaged. Some houses have private toilets, but there is no water to flush these, creating a sanitation issue.

All the **coconut trees** around the mission, which local people rely on as a source of nutritious food, were badly damaged. Some of these trees will probably never recover; others will take years to bear fruit again. The damage to coconuts at Melsisi was worse than in other parts on Pentecost. Elsewhere, coconut trees largely retained their leaves, but at Melsisi, little but tree trunks remain.



Damaged coconut trees across the river from the mission

Six **cattle** belonging to the mission also died in the cyclone.



Parts of the road between Melsisi and Lonorore Airport that were damaged by the sea

The **roads** around the mission were blocked everywhere by fallen trees. Communities are in the process of clearing these, but the road from Melsisi to the south and Lonorore airport was also badly damaged by the sea. There is minor damage between Melsisi and Vanrabibi and around Lalbetaes, and major damage near Vansep (between Ranmawot and Whitewater), where the road has completely washed away and will be very difficult to reinstate. The mission has no boat and people in the Melsisi area rely heavily on road transport.

Transport is also difficult because the newly-built Pacific Petroleum **fuel station** is out of action. Among other things, its diesel tank was blown over and its solar panels were destroyed, rendering the pumps inoperable.



Fuel station

There is currently no **mobile network** availability in Melsisi. The Digicel towers at Lesuube and Lalwori and the TVL/Vodafone tower at Ransuk were destroyed. A satellite Internet link has been set up at the school and mobile signal from more distant towers can be received from some hilltops, but most of the community is without communications.



Digicel tower at Lalwori

The Melsisi community and mission will need major assistance in rebuilding and recovering from this catastrophe. Any assistance that is available will be gratefully received.
