



Australian High Commission
Vanuatu

Tuesday 13 October 2020

MEDIA RELEASE

International Disaster Risk Reduction Day, 13 October: Banban School Classroom used as an Evacuation Centre

The United Nations designated 13 October as International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction to promote a culture of disaster risk reduction and as an opportunity to acknowledge the progress made toward reducing disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health. Australia is proud to work with the government of Vanuatu to reduce the impact of disasters.

For example at Banban Primary School in Santo, new classrooms that were built to accommodate the increased number of children displaced by volcano eruptions on the island of Ambae, proved to be a lifesaver for over 20 people when tropical cyclone Harold hit the island on 6 April this year.

According to Banban School Principal, Annie Vanua, the group who sheltered in the school classrooms, which were also designated as a community cyclone shelter, included her own son as well as school students and their families. While at least four other classrooms in the school suffered catastrophic damage as a result of the eye of the cyclone passing almost directly over the Banban area, the Australian Government funded classrooms stood up to 230 km/h winds and torrential rain with remarkable resilience.

“After closing the reinforced wooden cyclone shutters and doors, very little wind and rain got in. There were only a few minor leaks through the roof. At one stage they looked outside and thought the clouds were falling out of the sky but they said the building stayed strong and they felt very safe,” said Vanua.

An inspection of the classroom after the cyclone revealed only minor damage to the wooden shutters and the loss of some external guttering. Deputy Principal Joshua Moveth said the additional tie downs and reinforcements in the internal roof structure played a major part in ensuring the classroom maintained its integrity during the height of the storm.

At least two student families, who lost their own homes, continued using the classroom as a temporary shelter in the weeks following the cyclone.

“This is a great example of Australia’s strong partnership with Vanuatu making sure we are building back better to withstand future disasters for greater community resilience. I am really pleased to hear that families were able to use the classrooms and shelter safely during tropical cyclone Harold,” said Australia’s High Commissioner to Vanuatu, Her Excellency Sarah deZoeten.



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The new Banban Primary School classrooms were part of Australia's over 855 million vatu response and recovery assistance package to Vanuatu, to support those affected by the Ambae volcanic activity.

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View of classrooms (Photo Credit: Alex Bortoli)





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Classrooms used during tropical cyclone Harold as evacuation centre with Principal and Deputy Principal of Banban School (Photo Credit: Alex Bortoli)

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