

'Last mile' humanitarian logistics on a goodwill shoestring – a follow-up

By Walter Glass



The devastation wreaked by Cyclone Pam upon Vanuatu is being compounded by a shortage of water and a drought brought on by El Nino

Photo by frankandpeggyphotography.com

In the first article (published in the Aug/Sept edition of FTD), the initial driver for telling this great story was to highlight the devastation caused in early 2015 to the remote outer islands of Vanuatu in the wake of Cyclone Pam. This follow-up article tells of the subsequent generosity of a multitude of parties who came together in an informal international collective to provide help to these extremely poor islanders.

From the luxury mega-yachts organised through YachtAid Global (YAG) that provided initial water and medical aid; LIFT Non-Profit Logistics (GotLift), Kestrel Shipping and Samaritan's Purse from the USA that provided equipment; Kaleva Yacht Services (KYS) who provided deliveries within Vanuatu; Swire Shipping who donated or discounted shipping costs for over 85 TEU containers to Vanuatu; and donors of goods, transport and project management skills such as Ardex, Toll and Corporate Logistics in New Zealand – each party played a selfless role and relied on others in the supply chain to deliver the next step. The exceptional photos that recorded the event are courtesy of frankandpeggy.com from New Zealand.

The show goes on

The media circus may have left town, but the show is not over. Born out of this disaster has been the ongoing need for aid in the more remote islands of Vanuatu, such as the Shepherd Islands, which lie between the larger islands of Epi and Éfaté.

While the main islands missed the worst of Cyclone Pam, these outer islands bore the brunt of it and suffered accordingly. It has been these islands that Sam and Jess Bell – of KYS and Wita Aid – have focused on, with their ongoing efforts to deliver food, water, building supplies and anything else required using their small barge. KYS continues to get support from GotLift and YAG. While the media focus has shifted to other disasters, like the Nepal earthquakes in April and May, these aid groups continue to work collectively in Vanuatu and are now on a project extension. A second, and potentially more serious, humanitarian disaster is looming, one that will develop slowly over the next six to eight months and will affect all the Vanuatu population.

It is the El Nino weather pattern and associated drought conditions that are already manifesting themselves in a dire lack of fresh water and local food in the wake of the cyclone damage. Obviously, once the drought breaks and rain arrives, then the repairs and recovery of water reservoirs can continue and crops will recover. However, it is expected that the

While it was of great personal satisfaction to help coordinate such an event first-hand and witness the professionalism of the impromptu international humanitarian supply chain which came together in such a very short time for a specific response, what has been equally satisfying is seeing the interest from logistics and supply chain people around the world which was stimulated by the first article.

The goodwill of industry people and corporates who wanted to contribute has been humbling. The article has been posted on numerous websites internationally and reprinted by the CLT UK in its internationally recognised Focus magazine.



The Wita Aid barge has been delivering food, water and building supplies to the Shepherd Islands since the cyclone struck

Photo courtesy of Wita Aid