

Generosity in the literal sense

By Len Garae

WHEN YOU LOOK AROUND YOU only to see all your years of hard work totally destroyed within a few hours by a category five cyclone, you either shed tears of hopelessness or reach down deep in your heart to summon the will through your faith, to thank God for the disaster.

For everything that God allows to be taken down, He will, without fail, replace with it a God quality one.

The son of a high chief, John Enoch of Mele Maat is a humble man in the way he walks and talks. But beneath the humility lies a fiery furnace of faith that even a category five cyclone could not put out with its all-consuming fury.

After the cyclone, John picked up his garden tools and started clearing what was left of the dream kindergarten he and his family had built to promote education to the children of the village.

Meanwhile no one knows what goes on in the minds of total strangers as well as familiar faces as they walk or drive past Mele Maat after

the cyclone. The 'tuturani, or pakeha or palangi' are (white) people who come in search of investment opportunities in an environment posed by minimum competition. Or they come in search of privacy to chill out, far away from their highly competitive, noise and air polluted cities.

In the same way that you can never tell how sweet the juice of a green coconut is without first tasting it, a smiling face or thoughtful look from an expatriate won't give away much until he or she reacts to confirm it.

On this breezy Sunday morning of July 12, as the sun quickly swallows the village and climbs the green slopes of Clems Hill, I am led by three Mele Maat tour guides – Christine and Denelly, 11, and Zebedee, 6, along the turn right turn left muddy passages until we arrive at a short bridge across a clear river to the venue of the celebration.

Someone has died. We have just passed a convoy of vehicles with a deceased for burial in the village cemetery.

Certainly across the bridge

there is no sorrow. Instead there is real reason for joy. The five or six expatriates in the middle of a Mele Maat crowd stand out. We shake hands and I recognise one or two of them.

The programme to open the beautiful kindergarten building which they funded, begins with a prayer by Efate District Pastor John Leeman. The expatriates also become silent.

After the prayer, I ask, "Are you of the church?"

"No, I am of the church of generosity", one of them says, smiling.

The big-hearted former strangers came and saw and acted to make sure the education of the children in the village is not disturbed. How much more caring can a person be beyond that? This is generosity in the literal sense of the word.

While they accept gifts of mats and calico from John Enoch and his wife Emily Enoch, not one of them attempts to say how much he or she has spent or contributed towards the 'miracle'. A brand new concrete kindergarten



Those behind funding the kindergarten

building has risen out of the debris of the cyclone. Morning and afternoon classes begin the next day.

Moving to one corner of the building, I scan the green vegetation of the mountain range that connects with Mount Paunapokasi faraway above the plain that connects with Port Vila Airport. The green blanket of natural environment is fast returning to normal. Then I hear a soft sound of water as if a tap has been left open and I look down at my feet. Amazing.

A tiny stream sings its way through the grass, down the slope to water the premises of the kindy before it pours into the nearby river from which, further up its winding path, tumbles the popular Mele Cascades.

The expatriates may not be Christian but God has heard John's prayers and worked through them to lend a helping hand to the Government and its donor partners, to contribute towards the reconstruction effort in Mele Maat Village, with a new

kindergarten building.

Undoubtedly the new achievement is the first in the country to be built and opened after the cyclone. The word 'thank you' or 'merci' is not enough for the village to say to the expatriates, as well as the boys from the village who volunteered to build the classroom.

The expatriates seem satisfied. They have other commitments and leave the delicious lunch served especially for them to be enjoyed by the villagers.