

Report on the impact of Cyclone Gezani on the Churches in Tamatave

A week has passed since Cyclone Gezani tore through Tamatave on Tuesday 10th February with a fury this city had not witnessed in at least 40 years. Madagascar's main port — the economic heartbeat of the nation — has been brought to its knees.



Approaching the city from the air, the devastation is evident. Villages on the outskirts appear flattened. Entire clusters of homes look as though they have simply been pressed into the earth. Many trees lie on their side, their trunks snapped or uprooted entirely by the winds.



On the ground, the scale becomes more personal.



Walk through almost any neighbourhood and you see the same scene repeated: houses stripped bare, roofs torn away partially or completely, leaving families exposed to the elements. Walls have collapsed inward. Belongings lie soaked and scattered. Tarpaulins and salvaged sheets of corrugated metal now serve as makeshift shelters, tied down with rope and stones.

The trees themselves tell the story. Many stands splintered and naked, completely stripped of their leaves, their branches torn and twisted. They give the city an almost post-apocalyptic feel.

Tamatave's famous avenue of palm trees — some well over a hundred years old — now lies broken. Great trunks stretch across the roads. Others lean at impossible angles, roots exposed.



Photo : Devastated Palm trees in the avenue

The city remains without reliable water or electricity. As we walked through the streets, we stepped over thick power lines criss-crossing our path — some with shredded ends dangling into standing water. The infrastructure damage is extensive, and officials are warning that it may be weeks before essential services are fully restored. In the tropical heat, the absence of running water has become a daily crisis. Nights fall into complete darkness.

From Friday to Sunday, a small team travelled to Tamatave, drawn from several organisations in Madagascar.

The team included Pastor Mamy (Director of SIM Madagascar), Pastor Faly (a member of both the hospital board and the Bible Baptist Church board), Antsa (from MAF — Mission Aviation Fellowship), and Dr Tefy (one of our surgical residents).



Photo – Mamy, Tefy, Ted, Vanessa, Antsa, Faly

We went at the invitation of the Bible Baptist churches of Tamatave, whose buildings have been substantially or completely destroyed by Cyclone Gezani. Our aim was simple: to understand the situation better and to listen carefully to what the needs actually are.

Impact in the Baptist Churches

What we discovered was sobering.

All four FBBM churches in Tamatave have had their buildings substantially or entirely destroyed. Many church members have also lost the roofs from their homes. All are living without power, without running water, in a city that is barely functioning — with healthcare systems severely compromised, schools and universities out of action, and thousands of people who have lost homes and livelihoods.



Photo: Ambolomadinika Church

At Ambolomadinika Church, we met Pastor Miarana. He has only recently completed his theological training and taken on responsibility for the church. His own home has been severely affected. His children are currently sleeping in their beds with umbrellas propped open above them so that, if it rains during the night, they do not get wet.

And yet, as we sat together, his primary concern was not his own family but his congregation. “We must help them first,” he said.



Photo – Salazamay Church

At Salazamay, we met Pastor Euphrase. The church building there, constructed in the 1980s with substantial sections of wall made from flattened oil drums, did not withstand the cyclone. It has been completely obliterated. His home has gone too, along with much of his family's possessions.



Photo: Salazamay church

Across the four churches, approximately 111 households have lost roofs — and in some cases walls, furniture and belongings.

In discussion with the church leaders, four clear areas of need were identified:

1. Immediate practical assistance for church members — rice, charcoal, thermoses for boiling and safely storing water. Funding for this first emergency phase has already been received from international partners.
2. Reconstruction of the four church buildings. The current working estimate for rebuilding is in the region of 200 million Ariary in total. Detailed costings are now being refined.
3. Assistance for church families who have lost roofs — and in some cases walls, furniture and possessions.
4. Compassionate support for those living in the immediate Fokontany surrounding each church. The intention is not to attempt to meet the needs of the entire city — that would be overwhelming — but the churches carry a deep burden to show practical love in their immediate neighbourhoods.



Photos: Sunday Morning at Amolomadinika Church

On Sunday morning, the four Baptist churches gathered together for a joint service in the shell of the Ambolomadinika building.



It was a blisteringly hot Toamasina morning. Not a cloud in the sky. As we sheltered beneath a tarp stretched across broken wooden beams, Psalm 91 was read:

“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

The choir sang, “Yes, You, Jesus, are Lord of all things.”

The church buildings have fallen. Many in the congregation had come from homes without roofs. But there is a far greater shelter to be found — a far greater dwelling that is promised — in the shadow of the Almighty.

There was heartfelt thanksgiving that none of the congregation had died in the storm. And there was quiet but unmistakable confidence that the Lord remains Lord, even when so much feels unstable and uncertain.

From myself, as SIM Madagascar representative

What was witnessed in those four Baptist churches is only a glimpse of a much deeper reality—one that echoes across many churches and communities throughout Toamasina. These few cases stand as living testimonies, chosen as references to help reveal the magnitude of the struggles and the urgent need for support. It is heartbreaking to note that nearly 80% of the local churches lie in ruins—some up to 90% destroyed, or even worse.

Although the invitation came from the Biblical Baptist Church, the visit became a precious opportunity to reconnect with many others, thanks to SIM Madagascar’s close partnership with various congregations. Through these encounters, SIM Madagascar continues to stand alongside them—sharing in their struggles, their hopes, and their faith—doing all that can be done to bring mutual encouragement and support.

After prayerful consideration, SIM Madagascar is launching a Cyclone Church Relief Fund focused on meeting the needs identified above, as reference.

All financial support should be directed to the MERSI Ministry Account: M00045800. For other forms of support (such as material donations...), please feel free to contact us directly for coordination.

Would you consider helping us meet this need?

Please also join us in prayer for the people of Toamasina and for the churches as they seek to rebuild.

Pray:

- For those who have lost homes or livelihoods.
- For the restoration of running water and electricity as soon as possible.
- For endurance and wisdom for pastors and church leaders
- That Christ would be honoured in the midst of loss and devastation, and that the witness of the Church will shine brightly in the darkness.

Toamasina will rebuild. It will take time. But the Church there is standing — not because its walls are intact, but because its foundation is secure. Thank you for standing with them.