

# Lessons In Resilience From The Eye Of A Hurricane

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I was twelve when Hurricane Gilbert hit Jamaica with a 19ft storm surge, 32.4 inches of rain resulting in island-wide flooding. Crops, buildings were destroyed, power lines knocked down and trees uprooted. The hit song "wild gilbert" by Lloyd Lovindeer described in humour the experience of many Jamaicans. Gilbert created havoc in the Cayman Islands, Mexico, Haiti, and Dominican Republic becoming one of the largest Atlantic storms in our times. With all the damage that occurred in its wake, Hurricane Gilbert was my first lesson in resilience. Our house survived and we became a shelter to many families in our community whose houses were badly damaged and untenable. It was uncomfortable times as we squeezed on beds with each other as we shared our space with strangers. The situation was made worse as we lost electricity, vehicles couldn't move, and I experienced food scarcity for the first time in my life. I remember staying up late and making up songs about the storm with the other children – "uncle gilbert, uncle gilbert, go back home, go back home, the children are crying, the children are crying, go back home." The songs lifted our spirits and made the discomforts bearable.

Resilience is a process of moving through difficult or traumatic experiences and adapting and growing. It makes the difference in how quickly we bounce back to normalcy in difficult situations. June marks the beginning of the hurricane season which lasts for six whole up to November 30 known officially as the Atlantic Hurricane Season. After Hurricane Gilbert, Jamaica through the aid of the International Red Cross and its local body, the Jamaica Red Cross developed a Disaster Management programme resulting in the formation of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management. The ODPEM is vested in ensuring that Jamaica is disaster resilient and does so through a coordinated public education programmes on hurricanes and other natural disasters. The country has never experienced the extent of damages caused by Hurricane Gilbert from any other hurricane that has hit the island since. This has been so because of a concerted effort to build Jamaica's disaster resilience from building standards to community disaster sensitisation and preparedness.

What are some of the lessons we can learn from hurricanes about resilience and surviving through storms?

## **Preparedness**

At the start of the hurricane season, we are reminded to trim trees, ensure our roofs are in good and stable condition and that we stock up on hurricane supplies such as candles, batteries, canned foods, and medication for family members who may be ill. Putting the necessary things in place for the safety and security of your loved one as the season opens is no different from how we approach our financial security. From a simple savings account to the more sophisticated investments portfolios, our family's financial resilience is shaped by the extent to which we prepare ourselves for the stormy times. For some, the covid-19 pandemic disrupted our security net but made us more conscious of the need to build a resilient financial structure for our families.

## **Recovery**

Another lesson from hurricanes, is our ability to recover from situations of discomfort, stress and even devastation. After any devastating disaster, the authorities main aim is to recover as quickly as possible and to restore spaces to a condition equal to, or better than they were before. The human experience is no different, our ability to recover from trauma, disappointments and unexpected circumstances is a test of our resilience. Our recovery time is often

dependent on the plans we made, how prepared we were for the storm in the first place, how willing we are to adjust our mindset to changes and how quickly we begin the recovery process.

Our resilience is the ability to handle pressure, to respond to pressure with confidence and flexibility, the ability to bounce back, the ability to smile in the midst of the storm.

How resilient are you?

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