

MARSHALLS

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT BULLETIN



Twenty-nine tiny coral atolls and five coral islands scattered across nearly a million square miles of Pacific Ocean comprise the Micronesian grouping called the Marshall Islands. Long before Western man introduced the sextant, the people of these islands were skillfully piloting outrigger canoes across the vast waters using techniques passed on by master navigators to their apprentices. One such technique involved "reading" the patterns of the surface ocean waves by which the seafarers were able to judge the location and distance of the nearest island.

Today, the Marshallese still create the "stick charts" by which this knowledge once was taught, though much of the skill has been forgotten. Some of the charts resemble maps, such as this one which shows the two Marshallese island chains, Ralik and Ratik. Though often days and weeks apart by sea, the islanders developed a strong cultural identity, language and customs centered around care for the land, which totals about seventy-four square miles. The people of the Marshalls are seeking ways to revive the memory of the cultural heritage, which now only a very few of the old men and women can recall.

Because the atolls are so small and so isolated the early period of development of this island culture, which the Marshallese call the "first time" of their history, lasted until the mid-nineteenth century. The original settlers, perhaps of Malay ancestry, learned to harvest the common island crops of taro, breadfruit, coconut and pandanus. Their knowledge of the sea created a self-reliant society in a place nearly three thousand miles from any large land mass.

The Marshallese refer to the long period of foreign domination as the "second time" of their history. During the time of European global exploration, Spanish ships found Micronesia and sometimes stopped there with disastrous results for both the Spanish and the islanders. In the late 1800's, Germany annexed the Marshalls for its superior quality copra (dried coconut fruit) to provide an oil substitute for dairy fats. During World War I, Japan took over the island territory and continued to hold it until in 1947 the United Nations declared Micronesia a strategic trust territory to be administered by the United States. It was during World War II that several Marshallese atolls became familiar names, such as Eniwetok, Kwajalein, and Bikini.

Majuro Atoll, the present district center of the Marshalls, is an urbanized community which services the business and trade of all the atolls. The large lagoon in its center is one of only a few docks which can accommodate ocean-going vessels. The atoll also has a new international airstrip. Small businesses in the Marshalls have suffered not only from the depressed economic condition of Micronesia, but also from a lack of training in modern business methods. One company, with the help of a business consultant located by the Institute of Cultural Affairs, moved from near bankruptcy to a solvent condition within a year. This example prompted a request by the leadership of the Marshalls for a Human Development Consultation, held in Majuro in September, 1974.

The consultation designed sixteen programs of social and economic renewal in a week-long workshop session by local island leadership and outside consultants in thirty fields of expertise. The programs, focused on the key contradictions blocking Marshallese development, include efforts in economic services, industrial expansion, and development of both land and ocean resources. The social development programs emphasize formal and practical education for all ages, and social services such as transportation, health, and housing. The ICA sent staff to Majuro Atoll to assist in the beginning phase of the Marshalls Human Development Project.

During the summer months of 1975, Marshallese leaders conducted an "All-Island Survey Trip" by boat, during which all the twenty-six inhabited atolls and islands were visited. During the one and two-day events in each location, conversations and workshops collected data on copra harvesting facilities, school availability, and local business needs. The trip also provided an opportunity for people long separated to share stories of their heritage and history. More importantly, the Survey Trip sparked a new awareness of and commitment to the total development of the islands.

The people of the Marshalls discovered that they have many concerns in common. During the "second time" the people became dependent on outside supply sources as the development of local human and natural resources was neglected. One startling result is that today Micronesia imports nine times the dollar value of its exports. While copra has always

been the major export crop and provides the most concrete link between the Marshalls and the global economy, less than thirty per cent of the crop is being harvested due to a depressed world market, irregular shipping between the atolls, and inadequate storage facilities. The entire economy of the Marshalls is being improved through increased copra harvesting, regular shipping, central storage, training in copra production skills, and establishment of a coconut oil processing plant on Majuro.

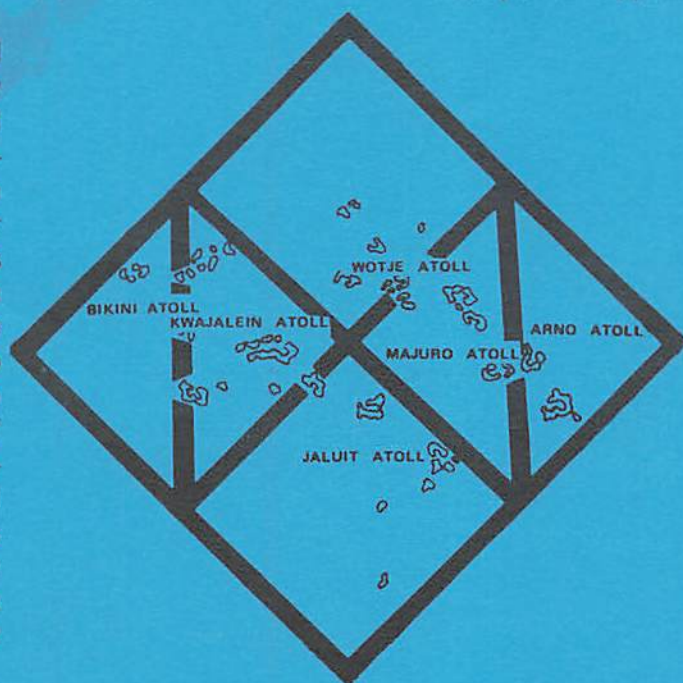
Other economic resources can also be developed, such as fishing, marine farming, coconut lumber and fiber, and tourism. Several new industries have begun since the initiation of the project: a chipper to produce taro, breadfruit, banana, and coconut chips; a craft-weaving shop called "hat and mat"; a tailor shop; a metal fabrication shop; a sawmill for coconut lumber; a carpentry shop for furniture and housing; and a shark and tuna fishing enterprise. A demonstration land farm is providing fresh vegetables to the local restaurant trade. A multi-purpose repair center supplies small parts for equipment which otherwise stands idle waiting for imported parts. The industries are co-ordinated under an umbrella organization called the Trans-Atoll Service Corporation (TASC) which provides business training, economic services such as accounting, and start-up capital for new industries. Cooperative buying by TASC has reduced some retail prices more than thirty percent.

In the social arena, the "old ways" have been nearly destroyed over the past several generations, resulting in a culture whose identity is in question. The youth, for whom a future in the islands has been uncertain, have been a focus of this concern. There has been limited access to basic services such as health and education due to a lack of transportation and communication between atolls. Central to all the social programs is the need for regular ferry service between the atolls, to allow expanded use of those services already available.

New forms of schooling are being invented, especially on-the-job training and apprenticeship in the unique skills needed for survival and growth of an island society. One such program, the Marshalls Training Corps, combines basic and functional education for island youth. While working with skilled adults to learn copra harvesting, the youth also have classes in basic literacy, economics, and other studies. The women have included language training and heritage recovery in their work-days in the handicrafts industries. Workers and apprentices from each new industry meet weekly to report on the economic progress of their enterprise and to plan and celebrate the future of the Marshall Islands.

Following the Survey Trip, a second consultation was held, attended by many leaders from the islands beyond Majuro. This consultation affirmed the relevance of the sixteen programs for all the islands, and initiated the second phase of the Marshalls Human Development Project. For example, the sawmill industry on Majuro has already reduced the cost of housing materials to over half that of imported lumber, while removing unproductive trees from the copra groves. This industry is now able to move to other atolls, expanding the use of locally produced materials to encourage the economy, and staffed by trained local workers.

A unique reality, known as the "Diamond of the Pacific," now exists in Micronesia. This chart of the area dramatizes the vital relationships within the whole island grouping. The people of the Marshall Islands are revitalizing their ancient heritage and once again becoming skilled navigators, not only of the sea, but of the journey into a future which they call the "third time." A new era of social self-reliance and economic self-sufficiency is transforming a few tiny spots of land into a center of rediscovered human and natural resources, a "diamond" of incalculable worth to the entire world.



THE SIXTEEN ACTUATING PROGRAMS

ONE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT				
TWO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT				SOCIETY E
EDUCATION A	SERVICES B	INDUSTRY C	RESOURCES D	
MARSHALLS TRAINING CORPS I	MULTI-PURPOSE REPAIR CENTER V	SMALL INDUSTRY PROGRAM VII	MARINE FARM DEMONSTRATION XI	INTER-ISLAND FERRY SYSTEM XIII
ALL ISLAND PRESCHOOL II		COPRA LAGOON SYSTEM VIII		HERITAGE TOURISM PROJECT XIV
INCLUSIVE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM III	MAJURO BUSINESS CENTER VI	OCEAN FISHING ENTERPRISE IX	DEMONSTRATION LAND FARM XII	DEMONSTRATION HOUSING PROJECT XV
ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM IV		COCONUT PROCESSING PLANT X		ALL-ISLANDS HEALTH SERVICE XVI

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