**Micronesia Today: An Overview**

Presentation to Catholic Church group, May 2004

Demographics

* After high population growth of 3% in the 1980s in FSM and RMI, growth is close to zero since the mid-1990s.
* Palau alone is showing population growth during this period (2% yearly), but this is because of Asian labor
* Natural growth rate in FSM and RMI seems to be about at or below 2% yearly, but the emigration drain off compensates for this increase.
* Estimated size of emigrant communities totals 40,000. One out of every five Micronesians now lives overseas.

[graphs on population and emigration from “Micronesian Milieu”]

Emigration

* Increased emigration rates since mid-1990s are due to the job shortage in FSM and RMI. Present emigration rate expected to continue through Compact 2. In Palau, there is no evidence of any large return of earlier emigrants.
* Issue #1: How can emigrants, especially the young, maintain a sense of cultural identity? (MicSem response: use of website to provide historical and cultural information, and offer them a voice for discussion of current issues)
* Issue #2: What rights will these emigrants be allowed to exercise in their homeland? Will they be obliged to surrender their former rights at home, or can they retain them even while living in the US? (eg, citizenship, the vote, land rights)
* Issue #3: What assistance is the church prepared to offer them, either through parish structure in the US (eg, Pohnpeians in Kansas City) or through regular visits by clergy in Micronesia (eg, Chuukese in Hawaii)?

[graph on employment in FSM and RMI]

Island Economy

* Comparative GDP rates tell much of the story: Palau $6,000; FSM $2,000; RMI $1900.
* Palau has a strong tourist sector that, even with its up and downs, seems to be thriving. Fishing and marine resources are negligible.
* FSM and RMI have no real industry of any significance; hopes are leaning toward tourism, with some hope for a small fishing industry.

[graph on visitor entries]

* Despite the problems in developing the economy, FSM and RMI are much better off than their neighbors in the South Pacific except for Fiji, thanks to Compact aid. GDP rates show this. (Samoa and Tonga $1400; Vanuatu and Kiribati $1100; Solomon Islands $600)
* Additional problem: need for a cash crop can put heavy pressure on the environment in years to come. (eg, Pohnpei watershed resulting from sakau planting; dynamiting fish in Chuuk; depletion of mangrove and offshore fish stock)

Government

* Governments celebrating 25 years of full self-government. There has been real but unequal progress made by the governments. They have achieved credibility and international status. But each of the governments faces its own difficulties.
* RMI: tension between RMI government and the Kwajalein landowners. Opposition party using this as a way of striking out at the government.
* FSM: continuing tension between the states and the national government for bigger share of the revenues and Compact funds. Criticism of the dominance of Congress over executive and judicial branch (eg, Amnesty Bill).
* Palau: rift in OEK over the refusal to seat Elias Chin in the Senate, and removal of the Speaker in the House.
* Common problem #1: “thinking small.” Decisions made to assist individuals, without an eye to the long-term consequences. The notable example is Chuuk, with its compassionate decisions that add up to bad long-term policy.
* Common problem #2: “learning to play with the big boys.” When an island group becomes a nation-state, it has to learn that the most inner government workings will be critiqued by the world community. Examples: Amnesty Bill in FSM, settlement of the criminal case against Ibedul for assault; ban of offshore banking in Palau.

Living under Compact 2

* FSM and RMI have negotiated their aid packages with US. Palau will do the same in five more years.
* Features of Compact 2: gradual drop in funding for governmental operations, but with no steep drop-offs as in Compact 1; funding reserved for 6 sectors: education, health, public infrastructure, private sector development, environment, and capacity building.
* Trust Funds should be capable of generating enough to sustain funding level at the end of the 20 years ($55 million for FSM; $30 million for RMI)
* Strict management procedures established and overseen by DOI. JEMCO and JEMFAC assume control over the budget that was unimaginable during Compact 1.
* Unresolved issues for RMI: continuation of 177 health program for irradiated islands; extension of coverage to additional islands possibly affected; “changed circumstances” offering more compensation; extension of Kwajalein lease to US after 2016.
* Problems for FSM: single national infrastructure plan demanded by US for release of funding; compliance with “capacity building” sector requirements

Social Services

* Critical areas for delivery of services: education, health, and transportation to outer islands. Development of populations depends especially on these.
* Education: Governments are trying to improve, but education needs a big boost. Efforts must begin with elementary schools, rather than tacking on supplementary programs at the end of educational ladder. Progress is uneven (as results of XHS and PATS entrance tests clearly show).
* Education: Church-run schools were the standard of excellence against which public schools measured themselves. Is this still true? (Probably for Assumption ES, St. Mary School. What about St. Cecilia, PCS, Maris Stella, St. Julia?)
* Education: Future funding squeeze for college students. Although Pell Grants are guaranteed, SEOG and Work Study funds for Micronesians not written into the Compact.
* Health: Three tasks must be managed simultaneously. Upgrade the level of care at hospitals (adequate med supplies, good staff). Insure that dispensaries function effectively (problems in RMI, FSM and Palau). Encourage growth of private medical practice (insurance problems in FSM).
* Transportation: Services to the outer islands have deteriorated everywhere because of the poor condition of the field trip ships. Without regular ship service, health care and education will suffer, and economic activities (eg copra) will be stifled.

Social Problems

* Many of the problems result from structural changes in social order (eg, wife beating). These are part and parcel of modernization. The problems should be understood before we rush to solutions (MicSem social analysis).
* Breakdown of extended family is not only cause of social problems, but it seems a decisive element in many. Eg, suicide, child abuse, spouse abuse.
* Child-rearing is more difficult today since there are fewer older people in family to provide care and parents themselves have less time with work. Results: “lost children” resulting in young teen pregnancies and male behavioral problems. Need for help in adjusting to new parenting style.
* Conflict resolution is more of a problem, within the family and between families. Older family heads and chiefs not available to settle these problems today. More people turning to modern justice system–but that provides punishment, not reconciliation.
* “Custom” is frozen, with its forms rather than functions being honored. eg, funerals, first birthdays, traditional exchanges (eg Palau). Additional burden on small families, increased tension between obligations to their children and to broader family network.
* In all, there is more strain on the government system to care for social problems that would have been handled by family and community in the past. Can the government system do it?

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