

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

Development of the  
SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICE

in the  
BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS PROTECTORATE

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Initial Observations of

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The writer of this report is solely responsible for the views expressed in it. Copies of the report have been submitted to the Office of Technical Co-operation of the United Nations, which may, in due course, communicate its own assessments and recommendations to the Government.

(581/71)

## Introduction

The Adviser visited the British Solomon Islands Protectorate from the 25th through the 28th of April, 1971. Plans for a visit in early 1969 by the previous UN Social Welfare Adviser for the Pacific were cancelled when he became ill and left the region. Plans for an October, 1970 visit by a short-term training consultant from ECAFE had to be cancelled as the post of Senior Social Welfare Officer was vacant and the acting officer had other commitments at the time. The ECAFE consultant left the region before the arrival of the newly appointed Officer. The timing of the current visit resulted from the desire of the present Senior Social Welfare Officer for a review of his initial appraisal of the Protectorate's social welfare problems and needs and the measures being taken and being proposed to the Government for dealing with them.

This was the Adviser's first visit to the Solomon Islands. Because of time limitations (only three working days) and the restricted geographical area receiving social work services, the visit was confined to Honiara. Fortunately, useful background information had been available to the Adviser in advance of the visit, both through the resources of the South Pacific Commission and the co-operation of the Senior Social Welfare Officer.

The Adviser, in the company of the Officer, met with a number of government officials and a few religious leaders whose decisions and activities have a direct bearing on the future welfare of the Solomon Islanders. (See Annex 1). They were generous with their time and keenly interested in helping the Adviser get a picture of social conditions as they saw them and the solutions they believed to be feasible under existing policies and priorities of the Secretariat.

The Adviser also attended a meeting of a Kakamora Club Discussion Group and visited one of the satellite squatter settlements, a "labour lines" housing unit, the Central Hospital, the Central Prison, the Mental Hospital and the Community Centre. Special thanks go to the Senior Social Welfare Officer for valuable advance preparation, thoughtful scheduling of appointments and efficient handling of arrangements.

The following report is for the Government and is intended to have restricted use. Social welfare needs, existing programmes and services, available and potential social work manpower resources, and alternative programmes for preventing, reducing and/or alleviating social distress and breakdown -- presently in evidence and expected to increase -- are already set forth in documents in the hands of those who are shaping the future quality of life in the Solomon Islands. They need not be repeated here. The Government has had the good fortune of being able to draw on the advice of their own professionally qualified Senior Social Welfare Officers. The Adviser has been brought in to make a limited, individual assessment of the situation as described and to offer suggestions for further consideration by those who are making policies, preparing plans, setting priorities, administering programmes and rendering services to the public.

It should be borne in mind that statistical data, systematic field observations and social research relating to social breakdown in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate are limited and in some instances non-existent. Thus, allowances must be made for the difficulties the Government faces in assessing social conditions and trends.

The Social Situation

The following summarizes the situation as it appeared to the Adviser on the basis of written reports and statements of informants. While there is probably no new information for B.S.I.P. officials reading this report, it provides the reader with some of the context within which the Adviser arrived at the comments and suggestions made later on.

The People

There are about 161,000 persons (93% of whom are of Melanesian stock) unevenly scattered over at least 150 islands with a total land area of about 11,500 square miles. Most of these are living in a subsistence economy. The Melanesians, though they have a lingua franca in Pidgin, are divided by about 60 dialects which reflect the historical tribal ("one-talk") patterns that have developed strong local loyalties and aggressiveness towards neighbouring tribes. This pattern of tribal conflict persists today and comes to the surface in clashes between groups who have migrated and set up their settlements in Honiara. Nearly half the population is in the non-working age groups (under 15 and over 64) and the population of Honiara is almost half that of the entire island of Guadalcanal.

Approximately two-thirds of the children of primary school age are enrolled in nearly 400 schools, 94% of which are managed by 6 church groups. It is estimated that approximately 6,000 children, mostly in the senior primary grades, are in about 200 boarding schools because of the scattered population and difficulty with transport, and that many of these children spend three or more years away from their normal family and village life.

It was generally felt that with few exceptions the islands are not over-populated.

### Socio-Cultural Change

The Solomons are experiencing the tides of change that are sweeping across all the Pacific, though to a lesser degree than some areas. Traditional ways of life are changing under the influence of alien cultures as evidenced by the growing desire for imported goods and the increasing numbers who are attempting to get into the cash economy, part or full-time. This in turn has produced a greater movement of population to and from villages and town areas and a net migration to towns, particularly Honiara. Less obvious, and perhaps more serious, is the growing number of disillusioned village families coming to the Government's attention in which parents have arranged for their children to get schooling which was expected to open the door to employment and cash income for these families but has not.

There are other signs of socio-cultural change and conflict. There are two systems of dealing with anti-social behaviour, the "custom", or traditional way, and the system of government law enforcement. There is a widespread practice of dual names among those trying to bridge the cultures. More young people were reported to be questioning the authority of the older generation. For example, more young people are defying "custom" by making or trying to make their own choices of marriage partners. Others do not want to return to farming. As exposure to Europeans and to imported goods increases, it is predicted that the Islands can expect the socio-cultural changes to accelerate and the incidence of conflict, social unrest and social breakdown to mount.

Social Breakdown

Examples of conditions reflecting social breakdown most frequently mentioned were:

- (1) Divided families (with the wage earners living with other separated men for long periods of time away from their families and villages);
- (2) The rapidly increasing numbers of teen-agers (especially boys) who are completing Standard 7 in school, but can neither go on for secondary education, work for wages, nor go into commercial agriculture, yet do not want to return to subsistence farming;
- (3) The growth of "one-talk" squatters Settlements in and around Honiara with their sectionalism, sub-standard housing and lack of proper sanitation, water supplies and other amenities;
- (4) Rise in numbers of men who get drunk and make trouble;
- (5) The growing numbers of families and individuals who are unable to have their problems solved satisfactorily under "custom" or by the churches and thus come to the Government for help; and
- (6) The sub-standard nutrition (due to low protein diets) of many village children in the pre-school age group.

Developmental Planning

The Protectorate has embarked on a course of economic development by which it is hoped to transform the economy through:

- (1) Increased participation by the citizens in policy formation;

- (2) Major investments in agriculture, forestry and mining projects, and
- (3) Gearing of the educational system to manpower requirements of both the public and private sectors, including accelerated replacement of expatriates.

Thus, it is hoped to steadily reduce dependence on external aid (presently about 40% of the monetary GDP) and expatriate manpower (approximately 80% of post-secondary level positions as of 1969). The objective of the policies for manpower and education is "to develop indigenous human resources to achieve early localization of the direction and management of economic and social development and to achieve indigenous ownership in key sectors <sup>(1)</sup>". It is further intended that steps being taken will help meet "a social and political objective common to most less-developed countries [which] is to achieve a significant re-distribution of income, removing inequalities between social groups, or between urban and rural areas". <sup>(2)</sup>

#### Balanced Socio-Economic Planning

The above objectives are in line with the growing recognition that economic development schemes often fall short of their goals when they depend almost entirely on economic measures. This danger was recognised by the Fifth South Pacific Conference in a resolution adopted in July 1962 which reads in part:

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- (1) Draft Sixth Development Plan 1971-1973, Honiara, BSIP, 1971, para. 4.
  - (2) Ibid., para. 8.

"..... a proper balance between social progress and economic development must be achieved, ..... consequently every effort should be made to eliminate economic and social imbalance."

Slowly and painfully, economic planners throughout the world are coming to face realities and to recognize that planning must be "developmental" in the fullest sense of the word. It means not only developing the material but the human resources as well. It means not only having a plan that is workable in the minds of the Government administrators (and those whose careers are dependent on collaboration with them) but one that is workable in terms of motivating people to want to make the effort and the behavioral changes needed to insure the plan's success.

### Citizen Participation

The Adviser was informed that the present Developmental Plan is being "taken to the people" and that the District Advisory Teams will be able to set their own priorities in implementing projects locally. This would appear to be the best choice under present circumstances. As further planning is undertaken, the Government may wish to give serious consideration to involving local leaders in the planning process from its inception. As noted earlier, the Government plans to increase citizen participation in policy formulation. This, together with involving citizens at various levels in assessing their needs and resources and exposing them to alternate solutions to their problems, is likely to get a greater commitment to making such plans succeed.

In a free society in which people can decide for themselves whether they want to change their ways of doing things, direct participation in the planning and decision-making is a basic factor in the

developmental process. While money incentives can become an over-riding factor and induce change, such resources are usually limited and the workers are often not fully productive.

In view of the fact that the bulk of the Protectorate's working force is engaged in subsistence farming in the villages, it would appear that widespread citizen participation in any developmental effort to raise the level of living within the present decade would, of necessity, require involvement in village-level development projects.

#### Contributions of Social Welfare

Social welfare policies, plans and the implementation of social welfare services are almost universally accepted as an essential part of the total process of human resources development. These are used in both developed and developing nations to raise the level of social well-being of individuals, families, villages and neighbourhoods. Such services are part of the total social development effort which includes education, health and social activities of organized religious groups. Simply stated, social welfare services are those social activities which ordinarily fall outside the scope of education, health and religion. These services may take various forms, such as counselling individuals who are in conflict with their families or neighbours or with the law; inspiring and aiding villagers to improve rural life through self-help projects; protecting children against neglect and exploitation; stimulating persons to volunteer their services; conducting leisure-time programmes for youth; rehabilitating delinquents, adult offenders and physically handicapped persons; conducting social research and contributing to balanced socio-economic planning.

Government Social Welfare Services in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate

These services have been fully described in existing Government documents but are summarized in the current Draft Development Plan as "urban casework services in Honiara and the development of Women's Clubs in the villages". (1)

The Social Welfare Service

This agency, though small in size, has been delegated heavy responsibilities for the welfare of individuals and families in the Honiara area by virtue of the impact its decisions have on the course of the lives of the people receiving service. At the same time, this human services programme lacks the formal departmental status which has been granted Government programmes with responsibility for material things, where an error in judgement may mean a financial loss, for example, but certainly not an adverse change in the life of a human being. The Secretariat may want to review this matter. It would appear that such recognition of the nature of the function and of the degree of responsibility carried by the Social Welfare Service would be taking a step consistent with the declared policy of the Government, to develop the Protectorate's human indigenous resources.

In the course of reviewing the Draft Development Plan and discussing the provisions being made for social development, including the investment to be made in the social welfare sector, a question arose as to whether more should be invested in this sector to meet the objectives set forth in Chapter 1. It would appear that in order to achieve a better balance between social and economic development, the

(1)

Op. cit., page 176.

Protectorate would want to consider a greater investment in the development of its human resources. The investment planned in the Social Welfare Service, as described in Chapter 21, and the Recurrent Expenditure Projections, reflects almost no change from the limited programme which has been in operation, in varying degrees, since late 1967. In view of the growth of Honiara since 1967, the Social Welfare Service does not appear to have received even the support needed to maintain a constant ratio of services to population. Even an additional investment of this degree would amount to no more than maintaining the status quo.

The draft Plan makes the following projection for the expansion of the Social Welfare Service for the period 1971-73: "new attention [will be] paid to the treatment of juvenile offenders and attendant legislation, a probation service, and prison after-cares".<sup>(1)</sup> This would indicate that in planning for a slight expansion of the Social Welfare Service, higher priority is being given to treatment rather than prevention. In the interest of making an initial start towards strengthening the developmental contribution of social welfare to the Protectorate, it would seem advisable for the Government to expand the Social Welfare Service into areas of prevention as well as treatment. In terms of values, one would hope that the Government will wish to re-assess its priorities before finalizing the Development Plan. In view of the total 1972 recurrent expenditure projection for the Protectorate of \$A7,194,800, of which \$A23,000 (3/10 of 1 per cent) is for Social Welfare, a substantially greater effort toward raising the level of social well-being of the Solomon Islands' citizens by strengthening and expanding social welfare services appears to be financially feasible. It is more a question of priorities. The rate at which these vital services can be expanded would appear to depend more

(1)

Op. cit., page 176.

on the rate at which qualified manpower can be assigned to carry the work-load than on the availability of funds.

The success of the proposed probation service will depend largely on the calibre of the probation staff and the continuity of service provided, since supervision of probationers demands social work skills over an extended period of time. While volunteer services may need to be relied on pending recruitment of qualified paid staff, provision will need to be made for professional supervision and programme administration, including liaison with the courts and police and in-service training of any volunteers. This would be an unreasonable workload for the already burdened Social Welfare Service staff. Therefore, one would hope that an additional complement of staff will be provided.

An idea of the potential contribution social welfare services can make toward human resources development in the B.S.I.P. and, as a consequence, toward its economic and total development, has been outlined in your Government's November 1967 Report upon the Development of Social Welfare and Community Development Services in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. This is one "blueprint" which could probably serve as a starting point for building a more effective Service, but it may need revision. The Adviser is in no position to make recommendations on the details of such a plan. Fortunately, the Government has a qualified social welfare administrator as Senior Social Welfare Officer who can do this, and who has been giving serious attention to the widening gap between rising social problems and the resources to cope with them, as well as the futility of a programme which centers on treatment services at the cost of preventive services.

Because of the labour-intensive nature of Social Welfare Services, the return on the investment in this programme, depends primarily on the availability of qualified staff. In reviewing the

history of this Service since its inception in 1967, the Adviser was struck by the manpower handicaps under which this programme has functioned and, at times, has almost ceased to function, especially in the casework sector. The combination of an insufficient number of positions for the workload, unattractive salary scales, vacancies, and high turnover in staff have prevented the Service from demonstrating the real value of even the present limited type of social welfare programme. It is a credit to those who have stayed on under these trying circumstances that they have continued to keep the programme alive. While several factors, including manpower problems, have contributed to this unfortunate set-back in the Protectorate's initial effort in this field, it was the Adviser's impression that the primary factor has been an apparent uncertainty on the part of the Secretariat regarding the contribution social welfare services can make toward improving the quality of life of the people of the Solomon Islands.

#### Community Self-Development

The Adviser was impressed by the amount of attention which has been given to the question of "community development", as well as the number of ideas of what "community development" means in terms of a workable, developmental programme for the B.S.I.P. In view of the fact that proposals for implementation of such activities in the Protectorate have been well-documented and discussed by the administering authorities, there is no need to include a descriptive statement here. With such a large percentage of the available working force engaged in traditional, subsistence farming in scattered settlements, where they have deep cultural roots, one can understand why the unresolved question of a national community development programme keeps coming to the surface when there is talk of developmental planning. The need to fully re-examine this possible approach is accentuated by the fact that the citizens of

the Protectorate are already heavily dependent on external aid, and the British Administration is endeavouring to increase the capacity of the people to help themselves. The process of community self-development, by which people can be motivated to raise their level of living through a combination of increased effort and improved use of local resources (with a minimum of outside material aid), is one which relies on the development of indigenous leadership and respect for local decision-making, including priority setting. The contribution which can be made by qualified social welfare workers is their skill (based on training and experience) in assisting communities to mobilize and use their human and material resources more effectively with technical aids such as agriculture extension, women's interests programmes, adult education and engineering services, where there is a felt need for such help. It must be recognized that the design of such a programme is technical and complex as it must fit the peculiar circumstances of the locals. It is not something which can be borrowed intact from anywhere else. It should be built, in manageable stages, on a foundation of local knowledge, research and experimentation. Should the Government decide to experiment with a programme of community self-development, there are possibilities for external technical assistance which the Adviser will be glad to discuss.

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ANNEX 1Interviews and Visits

(in chronological order)

Mr Joseph E. Basker, Senior Social Welfare Officer

Mr Billy G. Gatu, Social Welfare Officer

Mr John F. Yaxley, Deputy Financial Secretary

Dr Rex D. Bailey, Acting Director of Medical Services

Central Hospital

Mental Hospital

Mr Francis Bugotu, Senior Education Officer

Kakamora Club Discussion Group

Fraternal Meeting of Ministers and Pastors

Father Probert, Anglican Diocese of Melanesia

Mr Donald S. Woolard, Architect/Manager, Housing Authority

Mr Les Peach, Officer-in-Charge, Police Department,

Central District

Mr J. Collis Kenworthy, Acting Chief of Police and

Superintendent of Prisons

Central Prison

Squatter Village of Matariu

"Labour Lines" housing at Kukum

Mr Philipp Hodgson, U.N.A. of U.K. Graduate Volunteer,

Director of Honiara Community Centre

Mr James L.O. Tedder, District Commissioner (Central)

Mr Hector Davidson, Deputy Director of Agriculture

Mr David Trotman, Agricultural Officer (Education and  
Training)

Mr Ben C. Wilmot, Commissioner of Labour

Mr Alan G.H. House, Director of Education

Mr Tony J. Child, Deputy Director of Education

Miss Jennie Down, Women's Interests Officer

Mr Martin J. Lewis, Senior Assistant Secretary for  
Education and Social Welfare

Hon. W. Betu, Chairman, Education and Social Welfare  
Committee, Governing Council, B.S.I.P.

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