

Micronesians' Contributions and Challenges in Hawai'i

Micronesian Voices in Hawai'i Conference
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“Ij Iakwe Lok”

- ▶ Ij iakwe lok aeloñ eo ao; ijo iar lotak ie;
I remember my beloved island; where I was born;
- ▶ Melan ko ie, im ial ko ie; im iaeo ko ie;
The surroundings; pathways and byways;
and treasured interactions;
- ▶ Ijamin ilok jen e; bwe ijo jiku emool;
I will never leave it; for it is my true home;
- ▶ Im ao lamoren in dreo; eman ‘laññe inaj mij
ie.

And my ancestral home forever; I would
rather die there.

Overview

- ▶ Background
- ▶ Migration Trends
- ▶ A Common Story
- ▶ Challenges
- ▶ Hawai'i's Response
- ▶ Contributions
- ▶ Questions for Reflections
- ▶ Long Term Impacts of Migration
- ▶ General Recommendations

Acronyms Used in Presentation

- ▶ COFA – Compact of Free Association
- ▶ TT – Trust Territory
- ▶ FAS – Freely Associated States
- ▶ TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- ▶ RIF – Reduction in Force
- ▶ MU – Micronesian United
- ▶ MCN – Micronesian Community Network
- ▶ MCAP – Micronesian Cultural Awareness Project

Background

- ▶ Micronesians have always been voyagers & great navigators who go on “trips.”
- ▶ The “trip” was often made in search of new land, to acquire new lands, search for disease-free sites, wives, trading goods, etc.
- ▶ Long voyages between islands were made to visit and strengthen relationships with relatives.



Background

- ▶ The increasing importance of money, through wage economy, as well as the policy of universal education created “needs” for jobs.
- ▶ Internal migration – rural to urban – began during TT time & continues today.
- ▶ The compacts opened opportunities to meet “needs.”
- ▶ U.S. policies in Micronesia, including the nuclear legacy in the Marshall Islands that displaced many islanders, are integral to the story of COFA migration.

Migration Trends

- ▶ Migration trends parallel major economic trends at home*.
- ▶ Economic conditions (e.g. RIF) back home create the “push” factor*.
- ▶ The military “buildup” anticipated for Guam, yet another policy encouraging migration.

	Home Population (2000)	1997	2003	2008 (est.)
RMI	50,840	2,472	2,931 (25%)	3,600/4000
FSM	107,008	3,686	5,092 (36%)	6,925/7434
ROP	19,129	486	334 (-31%)	372**

Sources: *Graham, B. 2006. Marshallese Out-Migration Intensifies; **Tia Belau Editorial (March 21, 2008) “Dire economic conditions have Palauans out-migrating at an alarming rate.”

Migration Trends

- ▶ 12,000 – 15,000 migrants (2007 est.) in Hawai'i.
- ▶ Most of the Micronesians are in Honolulu County (73%); Big Island (15%), Maui (11%) and Kauai (1%).
- ▶ More families are moving out from urban Honolulu to rural areas (Ewa, Waipahu, Wahiawa).

Reasons for Migration

As of 2003:

- ▶ Employment – 19%
- ▶ Dependents of employed persons – 19%
- ▶ Medical reasons – 10%
- ▶ Other (education?) – 46%

- ▶ Source: Hammond & Filibert (2007). A study of Individual & Families in Hawaii From the FAS, RMI and other Northern Pacific Islands. Honolulu: PREL.

A Common Story...

- ▶ Migrated with 2 children and a teenage cousin in 1995;
 - 509 RMI migrants that year;
- ▶ Had a job secured before leaving;
- ▶ Viewed resettlement as temporary -- education;
- ▶ In 11 years, sponsored 6 nieces and nephews;
- ▶ Hosted numerous relatives on medical care and transient family members going to, and/or coming back from the mainland;
- ▶ Introduced to the “Micronesian problem”
- ▶ Supported by a strong network of family/friends in Honolulu;
- ▶ Returned to Marshall Islands in 2006;

Challenges for COFA Migrants

- ▶ Individual challenges – what migrants bring with them (health & education level; economic participation level; family size; network) determine type and level of challenge they face in new land.
- ▶ Societal challenges – societal response to migrants based on media coverage, stereotypes; lack of awareness; limited experiences with group members.

Challenges for COFA Migrants

- ▶ Hawaii's cost of living is getting out of reach for most migrants.
- ▶ Self-sufficiency standards for Hawaii is much higher than other locations where COFA migrants have settled (e.g Arkansas, Washington State).
- ▶ Family of 4 needs at least \$45,000 to live comfortably in Honolulu County.
- ▶ Families are forced to supplement income with welfare, food stamp or both.

Challenges for COFA Migrants

1. Education
2. Affordable Housing/Homelessness
3. Economic/Employment
4. Health Care
5. Legal Issues
6. Acculturation process/culture shock
7. Awareness level of service providers

Challenge: EDUCATION

- ▶ Familiarity with school system expectations.
- ▶ Cultural mismatch.
- ▶ Native language skills are weak.
- ▶ English language skills limit success in other subject areas.

	FSM		RMI		ROP	
	1997	2003	1997	2003	1997	2003
English only at home	24.5%	8.3%	17.8	7%	29.8	34.4%
Speak another language more frequently	50%	71.3%	73.9	84.6%	46.8	49.5%

Source: Hammond & Filibert (2007). A study of Individual & Families in Hawaii From the FAS, RMI and other Northern Pacific Islands. Honolulu: PREL; Source: Levin, M. (2003) . The Status of Micronesian Migrants in the Early 21st Century. Cambridge: Harvard University, p. 46.

Challenge: EDUCATION

- ▶ Academic gap → high school and college completion rate still low among COFA migrants.

	FSM		RMI		ROP	
	1997	2003	1997	2003	1997	2003
HS Enrollment	202	194	217	218	30	13
College Enrollment	347	330	115	118	25	68
HS Graduate (25 + yrs)	60.7	55.3	43.1	46.0	57.6	86.7
College Graduate (25+ yrs.)	1.6	2.9	0.5	1.3	0.0	16.9

- Information & opportunities for technical training still lacking.

Challenge: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Of 12,000 pending applications for low cost housing, about 50% are from COFA migrants.

	FSM		RMI		ROP	
	1997	2003	1997	2003	1997	2003
Person per housing unit	3.32	4.6	4.79	5.32	2.17	2.11

Over-crowding is a challenge; mismatch between cultural obligations of taking care of family members and housing regulations.

Lack of affordable housing for large families has created a problem of homelessness. With entry level jobs, income often inadequate to pay high rents in Hawaii. s

Challenge: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

	FSM		RMI		ROP	
	1997	2003	1997	2003	1997	2003
Own	2.5	2.6	13.7	4.5	11.1	7.2
Rent	85.9	89.7	69.4	83.4	63.9	67.5
Other	11.5	7.8	16.9	12.1	25	25.3

Over eighty percent of FSM & RMI migrants live in rentals. Home owners decreased for all COFA migrants in 2003.

Source: Levin, M. (2003). The Status of Micronesian Migrants in the Early 21st Century. Harvard University.

Challenge: EMPLOYMENT

	FSM		RMI		ROP	
	1997	2003	1997	2003	1997	2003
Labor Force Participation Rate (16 + yrs)	52	48.9	29.9	32.9	48.2	60.1
Unemployed	12.8	11.2	28.0	12.2	30.2	4.7

- Of COFA migrants who are employed, around 50% hold entry level jobs in service occupations, clerical and sales.
- The labor force participation rate of COFA migrants is lower than the average rate in Hawaii for other ethnic groups.

Source: Edwin M. (2003). The Status of Micronesian Migrants in the Early 21st Century. Population and Development Studies Center. Cambridge: Harvard University.

Challenge: INCOME LEVEL

- ▶ Many COFA migrant families are living below the poverty line.

	Micronesia n Total	FSM	RMI	ROP
Median Household Income		\$23,089	\$19,095	\$18,547
Families in poverty	1464	930	474	60
No. of Families below poverty level	616	363	235	18
% of families below poverty line	42.1	39	49.6	30

Source: Hammond & Filibert (2007). A study of Individual & Families in Hawaii From the FAS, RMI and other Northern Pacific Islands. Honolulu: PREL

Challenge: INCOME LEVEL

- ▶ 40% covered by MedQUEST (Medicaid)
- ▶ 10% TANF
- ▶ 16% Food Stamps
- ▶ 60% reported did not receive public assistance;

Pobutsky, A. (2006) "Micronesian Migrants in Hawaii: Conducting a Rapid Health and Language Assessment using Community Networks." Hawaii.

Challenge: HEALTH

- ▶ Medical insurance & finding sources for care still problematic (\$10.5 million in compact impact used for medical care).
- ▶ Attitudes and cultural barriers to effective health care such as routine check ups (74% women 40+ had mammogram vs. 90% state average), nutrition and others.
- ▶ Increase use of medical facilities (400% increase at Kalihi–Palama in 2006).

Source: Hammond & Filibert (2007). A study of Individual & Families in Hawaii From the FAS, RMI and other Northern Pacific Islands. Honolulu: PREL

Challenge: HEALTH

- ▶ Rates of communicable diseases such as TB and other infection diseases are above national average (10% of new TB cases in Hawaii come from Micronesia).
- ▶ Living with more stressors (unfamiliar environment; unpaid bills, job's that don't pay enough, unsafe living conditions, lack of control over work and schedule, worries over children – and fewest resources to help them cope) contribute to bad health.
- ▶ Opportunities for good health is limited – (Is housing policy a health policy?).

Source: [Unnatural Causes: Is inequality Making us Sick?](#) California Newsreel, 2008.

Challenge: LEGAL ISSUES

- ▶ Conflicting information & lack of uniformity about COFA migrants eligibility for state/ federal services.
- ▶ Legal maze – awareness about state laws, legal requirements; rights and responsibilities.
- ▶ Translation issues relative to documents and court cases.
- ▶ Eligibility for legal aid assistance recently restored.

Challenge: ACCULTURATION

- ▶ Limited English language skills.
- ▶ Strange & new environment/expectations.
- ▶ Social networks assist with acculturation process and cultural shock.
- ▶ Also help maintain cultural identity & tend to slow down the acculturation process.

Hawai'i's Response

- ▶ Service providers & NGO's increasingly take initiatives to learn about Micronesian cultures; hire more speakers of Micronesian languages.
- ▶ Governor's COFA Task Force.
- ▶ Bills in Hawaii Legislature – many are killed – but effort is a start.
- ▶ Advocacy groups (MU) more organized; effectively lobbied for increased services to Micronesians (legal services; housing issues)
- ▶ Micronesian groups have also organized to assist themselves and fellow newcomers (MCN, Micronesians United (MU); Lejmaanjuri; M-CAP)

Contributions

- ▶ Nuclear testing grounds.
- ▶ Strategic denial rights in COFA Agreements.
- ▶ FAS young people serve in the U.S. military.

Contributions

COFA migrants contribute over \$50 million annually to Hawaii's economy.

Annual income (1,518 households x \$26,712 mean annual income)	\$41 million
Annual state income tax (@ 6% x \$26,712 x 1,518 households)	\$2 million
Expenditures were higher than income (1997) at 1.46 for every \$1.00 in income*	\$2 – 3 million
Compact Impact Assistance	\$10 million
90% of income is spent in state on rent, utilities, vehicles, food, clothing, etc.	\$36.9 million

*Source: Levin, M. (2003). The Status of Micronesian Migrants in the Early 21st Century. Population and

Contributions

- ▶ Laborers/workers – take up menial jobs most don't want – coffee & sugar cane (Maui); macadamia (Big Island).
- ▶ Trade between COFA nations and Hawaii.
- ▶ Remittances sent home from Hawaii in 1997 – \$500,000*; another estimate – \$15 – 20 million sent annually to FSM** from overseas migrants, including Hawaii.

Contributions

- ▶ Cultural Values
 - Interdependence – strong family support – social security system
 - Exposed Hawaii to unfamiliar Pacific cultures
 - Reciprocity & respect
 - Friendly
- ▶ Language – at least 8 different languages have been added to the mix of languages in the state.

Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Who should be held accountable for the COFA migrants “problem”?
- ▶ Are there alternatives to open migration?
- ▶ What happens to the way of life as we know of as Marshallese, Chuukese, Kosraen, Yapese or Pohnpean? Could these cultures or way of life survive without stewards?
- ▶ Could we be satisfied with “symbolic homelands” – ones we recreate in our imagination or rituals we perform as overseas residents?
- ▶ Who is responsible for nation building?

Long Term Impacts of Migration

Social Effects of Migration on 2nd Generation Migrants

- Culture & language loss
 - Loss of traditional skills (navigational; canoe building; food preparation skills) and crafts (weaving, etc.)
 - Changes in values, outlook
 - ▶ Economic Effects of Migration on Sending Countries
 - Loss of productive citizens
 - Potential “brain drain”
- Asian take-over

General Recommendations

- ▶ Migrant kids as “military kids” for federal assistance purposes (idea from late Rep. Patsy Mink).
- ▶ Consider a form of “managed” migration.
- ▶ Orientation Program in sending countries.
- ▶ One Stop Centers for migrants in receiving state/territory.
- ▶ Consulates (Hawai’i) restructure to respond to needs of migrants in Hawai’i.
- ▶ Consistent message & implementation of compacts’ provisions across states.
- ▶ Census that count FAS separately from other PI groups.

Kommol
Tata