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Mr. James Berg  
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Office of Territorial Affairs  
United States Department of the Interior  
18th and "C" Streets  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Subject: Social Psychological Impact Assessment of Marshall  
Island Rehabilitation Process

Dear Mr. Berg:

As requested in our telephone conversation of June 30, 1977, I have enclosed two papers. The issues paper addresses forced migration as it relates to cultural groups. It's broad in scope but identifies potential problems occurring or about to occur. The brevity of the paper is deliberately restricted by publication space. The second, a concept paper, focuses on specific issues now occurring in the Marshall Island group. While the paper stresses ethics and values associated with rehabilitation of Enewetak and Bikini its real emphasis is on compiling case study data. Both papers are interrelated; the latter, however, proposes a more definitive assessment plan.

The processes and consequences of evacuation and removal of persons from their homelands have concerned me for some time. Invariably, the culture and life style of relocatees are dramatically altered. Home and work patterns must be adjusted to accommodate existing life styles in the new community. Often value conflicts emerge between residents and relocatees adding to the complications. Issues of this kind are complex, and frankly, not well understood by social scientists. The status of the Marshall Islanders appears to fit this pattern and I fully expect adjustment problems to occur.

Rehabilitation of Enewetak, Bikini, Japtan and some of the other atolls in the Marshall Island chain is unique since there are risks associated with the move. This risk introduces new considerations to the issue. Fortunately, for social science, there are some examples available that could provide some insight. One possibility is to consider why people would want to return to or rebuild in a high risk environment. Some examples of this follow:

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- o Californians continue to build homes on seismic faults or live in areas highly prone to floods and mudslides.
- o Residents in western Washington and central Colorado rebuilt their homes on flood plains.
- o Coal miners continue to work in mines that have a history of collapsing.
- o Kansans, Oklahomans, and Texans rebuild farms, and homes in areas frequently hit by tornados.

Floods, tornados, earthquakes and mine cave-ins are visible and real hazards. People can see the effects almost immediately after they occur. Radioactive contamination produces slow changes in metabolism, cell growth and respiratory areas of humans. There are exceptions to the nature of the effects, of course. Nevertheless, the Marshall Islanders, like many underdeveloped societies, need to experience and visualize a risk before norms and mores can be built into their culture. That hasn't happened and until effective procedures are developed to realistically communicate the risks, I anticipate communication and educational problems to persist.

In itself communicating technology to an underdeveloped cultural groups is a complicated and delicate process; perhaps more thought and planning should be devoted to communicating the nature of energy-related technologies to groups of this kind. In addition to this immediate problem, an assortment of related issues comes to mind as follows: potential conflicts and adjustment problems of inhabitants generated by the rehabilitation process; consequences of possible radioactive contamination; and agency commitment to monitor and assess rehabilitation.

The soil on Enewetak is low in nutrients making agriculture a nonviable form of subsistence. A return to fishing is almost a necessity. Yet, as pointed out below, few know or remember the skills required. The period of transition for the Enewetakese will indeed be troublesome. I think the Enewetakese and Bikinians know this and are somewhat confused about the consequences of their desire to return. I'm certain they have been told that they should reclaim their homeland from the federal government since it was theirs in the beginning.

The experiences of thirty years ago suggest some inconsistencies. For example, families who never experienced life on the atoll will experience similar kinds of adjustment problems as their parents

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did not so long ago. In fact, those adjustment problems are well known since the experiences have been passed on from one generation to the other. Moreover, many are still living who vividly recall the relocation and the problems they and others experienced. Hence, given the information, one would wonder why over 60 percent of the Enewetakese who never lived on the atoll would want to give up present life styles and attempt to return to a way of life long forgotten or never experienced.

The relocation of people to an area once used as a nuclear bomb test site has far-reaching implications. On the one hand, if the groups return and manage to survive the effects of contamination much can be said about the generalizability of this to future groups caught in similar circumstances. It suggests that people can be evacuated from an area where the danger of radiation contamination is high and then return thirty years later to resume daily living patterns. I understand that recently a few Bikinians ate fruit containing "cesium," a highly radioactive substance and became extremely ill.

I am aware of the current joint efforts of the Energy Research and Development Administration, the Department of Defense and the Department of the Interior as it pertains to the rehabilitation effort. My almost daily communication with residents of Enewetak and Majuro keep me informed of progress. Continued monitoring of radioactive levels is important as are continued efforts to communicate risks to the groups. However, I would propose that considerable effort be taken to systematically document and assess the full rehabilitation process over a two- to three-year period.

From my experience in working with American Indian groups involved in similar relocation efforts, I can assure you that the transition will not be a smooth one. The following questions are but a partial list of issues that could be addressed:

1. What steps will be taken to assist the islanders to eventually develop a self-supporting economy?
2. What relearning of former methods of subsistence will occur and what will be their effect on the quality of life?
3. What norms and sanctions will emerge that will prevent islanders from frequenting off-limit areas? How will they be enforced?
4. To what extent have western ways affected the culture of the people?

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5. Will adoption of western ways introduce forms of social deviancy, such as alcoholism, delinquency, unemployment, depression, etc.?
6. What prevention measures can be developed to reduce the possible emergence of social deviancy?
7. What adjustments will be made by islanders and how will they effect daily living patterns?
8. What does the future hold for an island group isolated from the main flow of economic activity?
9. What are the social, educational, employment needs, etc. of islanders?

Battelle Human Affairs Research Centers here in Seattle has competent staff sensitive to the issues just raised and can plan a long-term program to investigate a number of these issues. The tasks demand an interdisciplinary approach where staff scientists representing a broad range of social and behavioral science expertise function as a team.

Perhaps for the first time in history, science has an opportunity to systematically investigate the process associated with a society returning to their homeland where the risks are unusually high. The significance of findings can have long-term effects on understanding rehabilitation efforts.

I have a number of additional thoughts and ideas on the subject and would welcome the opportunity to discuss these with you in the immediate future. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Joseph E. Trimble, Ph.D.  
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Enclosure

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