



PACIFIC CHOICE

Responding to the Youth Crisis

Asian Development Bank

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Developing Capacity to Improve Youth Services:
A Case Study from the Marshall Islands

By Benjamin Graham

Asian Development Bank

Capacity Development Series

This sub-series is published by the Asian Development Bank to provide the governments of its Pacific developing member countries (PDMCs) with analyses and insights on key issues and lessons learned with respect to capacity development. Cases studied highlight a range of experiences throughout the region by sector, theme and source of external support, revealing approaches to capacity development that work best and the conditions that have been conducive to their success. They also explore the unique challenges faced by PDMCs in addressing capacity constraints as well as some of the opportunities facing governments and the people in the Pacific islands. Among other things, the case studies underline the importance of PDMC leadership, engagement of local partners, strategic attention to long-term capacity issues and effective use of external resources. It is our hope that the findings in these reports will help to guide future capacity building efforts in the Pacific.

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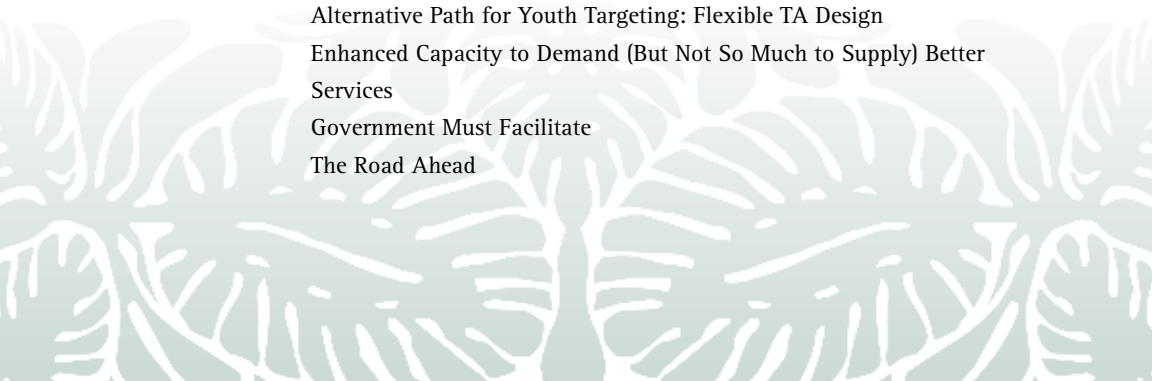
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FOREWORD

Despite 50 years of aid in the Pacific region, including some S\$17 billion invested over the past 25 years, overall results in terms of sustainable improvements in capacity have been mixed, at best. This raises questions, not only in the Pacific but also throughout the developing world, about approaches to capacity development—what works, what doesn't, and why? The Asian Development Bank (ADB) recognizes the importance of capacity development, having officially embraced it as a thematic priority in 2004. ADB's commitment is consistent with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Pacific Principles on Aid Effectiveness. The programs of a number of other funding agencies, including the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), New Zealand's Agency for International Development (NZAID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank also embrace the importance of more effective capacity development.

Increased interest in capacity development in recent years reflects an acknowledgment of the shortcomings in development assistance over the past 50 years. This has led to calls for approaches that are more systematic and integrated, and which focus more on developing country ownership and achievement of sustainable results. Capacity amounts to the policy, procedures, personnel, organizations, institutions, and supporting environment required to effectively deliver development outcomes. In particular, ADB has focused on the ability of public sector capacity to deliver essential services, thereby strengthening the compact between government, civil society, and the private sector. Capacity development is much more than just training or skills transfer. It is really about effective organizations and institutions, a sound unpoliticized policy environment, accountability systems, effective relationships, and appropriate incentives. And as noted in this study, capacity development should be firmly rooted in a country's political economy.

To gain a better understanding of what works in terms of approaches to capacity development, ADB's Pacific Department (PARD) commissioned a regional study in 2007. The study was rooted in 20 case studies from 11 countries across the region, prepared mainly by Pacific islands consultants. The case studies covered a range of programming experiences—from economic planning, to infrastructure development, health and legal sector reform, and civil society enhancement, as well as different modalities for supporting capacity development. ADB's intent in commissioning the overall study was to draw upon the individual findings and recommendations to help guide future capacity building efforts in the Pacific, including institutionalizing a more focused and effective approach to capacity development in ADB's country programs and operations.

The case studies in this series and the overall study report are the result of collaboration among a number of consultants working with ADB under the direction of Steve Pollard, Principal Economist, PARD. The team leader for the overall study was Joe Bolger, and the authors of the studies were Helio Augusto, Kevin Balm, Brian Bell, Ron Duncan, Ben Graham, Ueantabo Mackenzie, James McMaster, Samson Rihuoha, Cedric Saldanha, Tom Seta, Paulina Siop, Esekia Solofa, Kaveinga Tu'itahi, Henry Vira, and Vaine Wickman. The study also benefited from the input of a number of resource persons, including Tony Hughes (Solomon Islands), Lynn Pieper (Timor-Leste), Tim O'Meara (Samoa), and Patricia Lyon, Senior Capacity Development Specialist, AusAID. The case studies represent the situation at the time of writing in 2007.

In conclusion, this report seeks to enhance understanding and dialogue on capacity development and its potential for contributing to poverty reduction and improvements in the quality of life of all Pacific islanders. I trust that you will find it both thought-provoking and practically helpful in advancing our collective commitment to development in the Pacific.



Philip Brquinga
Director General
Pacific Department

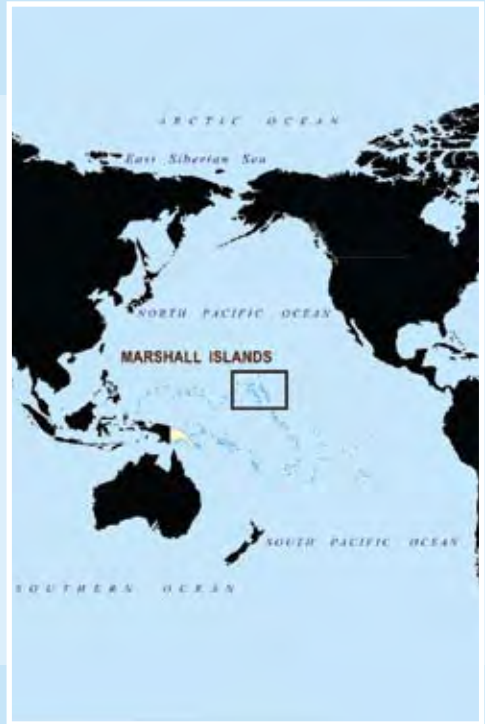


The Pacific Choice

Marshall Islands Facts

Population:	57,000 (estimate)
Political status:	Self-governing constitutional democracy since 1986; former US Trust Territory, now in free association with the US
Capital:	Majuro Atoll
Geography:	Central-Northern Pacific, exclusive economic zone of 750,000 square miles; total land area of 70 square miles
Real gross domestic product per capita	\$2,515 (2007)
Median age:	18 years

Source: Marshall Islands Visitors Authority.



BACKGROUND

A Young Nation

With only 20 years of independence, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is a relatively new nation. It is also a nation of young people. While most Pacific Island nations have similar population structures, the RMI is especially youthful, with half of its population under the age of 18.

During the 1980s, fertility and population growth rates in the RMI were among the highest in the world. While fertility rates have since fallen, the pace of the decline has been slow—from a total fertility rate of 7.2 in 1980 to 5.7 in 1999. Emigration to the United States (US) has intensified over the last decade and, coupled with falling fertility, has dampened overall population growth, which dropped from an annual rate of about 4–5% in the 1980s to just under 2% in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Nevertheless, official forecasts predict continued growth in the proportion of youth well into the foreseeable future. The average woman in the RMI still bears around five children in her lifetime and, every year, another 1,600 births are registered.¹¹ As of the last census (in 1999), the under-15 population stood at nearly 22,000 (representing some 43% of the population), and this age group is estimated to grow to more than 26,000 by 2014.

No Child Left Behind?

One would assume that with such a young population, the country's public services and programs would be strongly oriented toward and influenced by youth. One would assume that the education, training, health care, legal, and other systems and institutions sufficiently cater to young people. One would assume that the decision-making processes and governance mechanisms that support political, economic, human, and social development

1 Many births, perhaps up to several hundred every year, are not formally registered.

strongly reflect the needs and interests of youth. But most of these assumptions would be wrong. None of these systems have kept up with the rapidly growing youth population.

A number of studies^[2] have shown that for a long time now, young people in the RMI are facing increasingly difficult circumstances. The development process has generally been slow and sporadic (stemming from poor planning, weak governance, limited development opportunities, and other factors) and has, by and large, neglected the youth of the nation. Human development indicators irrefutably demonstrate this neglect and signal a growing crisis—a ticking demographic “time bomb,” as some have called it.

Many young people in the RMI now face challenges at all levels of growth and development—from prenatal care to early childhood development, primary and secondary education, as well as training, employment, and economic and political participation. The indicators argue very convincingly that many Marshallese children are simply being left behind.

Issues and Indicators: From Birth to Working Age

Many young Marshallese face challenges from birth. Many births still occur at home and do not benefit from adequate medical care. The 2006 community survey^[3] found that 13% of births (among the women covered in the survey) were at home (the majority being in the outer islands where only simple medical facilities exist). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, 12–24% of infants had low birth weight. This declined to less than 10% in 2005 and 2006.^[4]

Every year around 300 teenage girls become pregnant, giving the RMI the highest teen fertility rate in the Pacific. The teenage-

2 For example, Asian Development Bank. 2003. *Priorities of the People: Hardship in the Marshall Islands*. Manila; and Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and UNICEF. 2003. *A Situation Analysis of Children, Youth and Women*. Suva: UNICEF.

3 The 2006 RMI Community Survey, administered by the Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office.

4 The average for 2005 in East Asia and the Pacific was 7%; for the world as a whole, 15%. (United Nations Children's Fund. 2006. *The State of the World's Children 2007. Executive Summary*. New York. [www.unicef.org])

specific fertility rate (for ages 15–19) is just under 100 (number of live births per 1,000 teen women in a given year). Between 18–20% of total births every year are to teen mothers, and this range has remained virtually unchanged since the early 1990s.

It is commonly known that many pregnant mothers, especially teenagers, do not take full advantage of the basic prenatal services available in the main hospitals on Majuro and Ebeye (the two urban centers, where two thirds of the population resides). This is likely a main cause of the high prevalence of low birth weights.

Immunization coverage is another challenge. Nearly 30% of the RMI's 2-year-olds are not fully immunized.^[5]

A major consequence is a high infant mortality rate (IMR). IMR has ranged from the mid-20s to the low 30s^[6] since 2000, which is higher than in most other Pacific Island nations.

Attendance among school beginner ages remains low. In the 1999 census, one quarter (25.3%) of all 6-year-olds were not attending school. The 2006 community survey showed similar results: of the 259 6-year-olds covered in the survey, 24.3% were not in school.

Undernutrition^[7] has been a long-standing problem. School nutrition surveys in 1999 and 2006 yielded the same results: well over half of the surveyed public schoolchildren had moderate, mild, or severe undernutrition (far higher than the rates among private schoolchildren). In the 2006 nutrition survey, which covered 205 fourth graders in seven primary schools across Majuro Atoll, 68% of the public school students surveyed had some level of undernutrition and nearly 30% had moderate to severe height-for-age and weight-for-age undernutrition.

Among those children who attend school, many end up dropping out or being pushed out. About 30% of the students entering

5 The 2006 Ministry of Health Annual Report states: "Based on the 2003 cohort, the complete immunization coverage rate for the RMI for two year olds is at 72%."

6 Deaths per 1,000 live births (infants under 1 year of age).

7 UNICEF describes undernutrition as the outcome of insufficient food intake. "When individuals are undernourished, they can no longer maintain natural bodily capacities, such as growth, resisting infections and recovering from disease, learning and physical work, and pregnancy and lactation in women." (UNICEF web site)

Grade 1 will drop out of school before completing Grade 8. Of those who do complete Grade 8 (about 1,300 every year), some 300–400 are denied entry into high school simply because of space limitations; they are effectively pushed out of the education system because the RMI has failed to provide adequate classroom space. Private and church-affiliated schools have done a great deal to accommodate students, but they receive little support from the government and most of them struggle to maintain academic integrity.

These dropouts and pushouts lead to one of the lowest overall primary-through-secondary school completion rates in the Pacific: only about one third of all Grade 1 students finish Grade 12 (and this is a long-standing trend). Every year, about 1,000 students from Grades 1 through 12 drop out or are pushed out of school.⁸ Some students do return to school (it is not clear how many) but the majority never return.

With so many children leaving the formal education system every year (or never even starting school), one would expect to see a strong offering of alternative education and training programs designed to catch them and help them get back on track. Sadly, this is not the case. The scale and scope of the technical/vocational education and training system in the RMI is grossly inadequate, given the magnitude of the dropout and youth unemployment situation.

Completing the full cycle of primary and secondary schooling does not guarantee that a student will be adequately equipped for the transition to higher education or gainful employment. For the roughly 500 students who do complete the full cycle of schooling and who graduate from high school every year, the vast majority are ill prepared for college, as evidenced by college entrance test scores.

By the time they reach working age, Marshallese youth, both dropouts and graduates, face a whole new set of challenges. The lack of employable skills (especially for dropouts), coupled with a very slow-growing job market, leads to alarming youth (ages 15–24) unemployment rates—a staggering 63% in 1999,

8 The average number of students who dropped or were pushed out of the school system in the 6-year period between school years 1998/1999 and 2003/2004 was 1,005, according to data from the Ministry of Education.

higher than in all other Pacific Island nations. In 1999, more than 1,000 males aged 15–29 on Majuro and Ebeye—the so-called “lost boys”—were neither in school nor working. Many of these “lost boys” live nocturnal lifestyles (see box).

Every year, hundreds of young Marshallese migrate to the US in search of better opportunities. But because of the poor basic education and training system back home, the vast majority of these youth migrants end up struggling in school or in low-paying employment.

Substance abuse, suicide, crime, and sexually transmitted infections are also high or rising among adolescents, especially in the urban areas of Majuro and Ebeye.

The challenges faced by RMI youth bring real hardship and poverty and deny many of them the ability to reach their full potential. As a result, many are falling through the cracks. The RMI’s capacity to catch them has remained fundamentally weak.

Box: A Day in the Life of an Out-of-School Boy in Ebeye

AM	Hour	PM
Gather with friends, maybe get into fights	1	Sleep
Go to people’s places and steal things to get money	2	Sleep
Get things from people and beat them up	3	Sleep
Go to people’s places and ask for food	4	Sleep
Go to other houses and ask for money for coffee and food	5	Get ready to play basketball
Sleep	6	Go home and shower
Sleep	7	Eat dinner
Sleep	8	Watch TV
Sleep	9	Get ready to go to bar
Sleep	10	Some go to bar, others sleep
Sleep	11	Sleep
Sleep	12	Sleep



WITHOUT CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

THE CASE: ASSESSING AND ADDRESSING THE CRISIS

By the late 1990s, it had become glaringly obvious to many, both inside and outside the government, that the youth situation had reached critical levels and that greater government intervention was needed. Something had to be done, and soon.

But as with so many other social problems in the RMI, the way forward was not so clear. One thing was certain: the nation's capacity to plan and implement actions to deal with complex issues was limited. Recognizing this, the government formally requested assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2000 to help improve its ability to assess, analyze, and take action on the mounting issues affecting its young people.

Technical Assistance: Dealing with the Problem in Phases

By 2003, an ADB technical assistance (TA) program was drawn up and approved. The TA⁹ was intended to (1) strengthen and refocus public sector policies, management, and expenditures on priority issues affecting the youth in a participatory manner; and (2) assess the feasibility of and prepare a youth social services project (to be considered for ADB loan funding) to address these priorities.

The main objective was to reduce poverty among the youth by encouraging the demand for and development of youth-specific services and facilities by nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and the government, and by improving the relevance and effectiveness of these services.

9 TA 4219-RMI: Preparing the Youth Social Services Project.

The TA design explicitly sought to address both organizational and institutional concerns through two phases. Phase 1, prioritization of public expenditure for the youth, had the following main activities:

- Stakeholder and needs analysis for youth services;
- Selection of areas of policy and institutional focus and strategic interventions, based on the needs analysis, institutional analysis, and government priorities;
- Formulation of a medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF) for youth-oriented services, using a participatory approach involving NGOs and civil society groups; and
- Establishment of a consensus on youth and social issues in both government and nongovernment sectors.

Phase 2, preparation of the investment component, entailed:

- Estimation and prioritization of the needs for additional investments to develop youth services and facilities in the MTEF;
- Preparation of policy recommendations to enhance social services for youth;
- Design of an effective delivery system for social services to youth, through participation of communities;
- Identification of project components for possible ADB financing;
- Identification of the direct support to be provided to the government and NGOs to help implement the MTEF; and
- Detailed costing of the activities and investments required.

International Consultants

A team of three Pacific-experienced consultants was selected to carry out the TA work. The team consisted of a public expenditure management and budgets specialist/team leader, social development/community participation specialist, and youth policy specialist. The consultants worked in the RMI on an intermittent basis from October 2004 to October 2005.

Role of Ministry of Internal Affairs and Other Partner Organizations

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) has the mandate to oversee youth affairs in the RMI Government, so it was designated as the executing agency for the project. The Youth Services Bureau (YSB) in the MIA took direct responsibility for supporting the project. The YSB staff worked closely with the international consultants and partner organizations on the TA.

The TA took on a highly consultative and participatory approach, engaging a wide spectrum of Marshallese society. The National Youth Congress (a nongovernment association of youth); the Marshall Islands Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (MICNGOs); and the Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office were among the important partnering organizations. The Chamber of Commerce and Cabinet were also consulted on the TA and its progress.

A project steering committee (with a cross section of representatives) was established to provide guidance on the TA implementation; one Cabinet member sat on this committee. Also, a Youth Advisory Committee was formed to work with the project steering committee and consultants.

A 2006 ADB summary review of the project found that “Stakeholder participation was extensive and this led to ownership by all relevant participants”, and that “The participatory manner in which the TA was conducted helped affirm country ownership for appropriate assistance.”

Colleen Peacock-Taylor, one of the international consultants, recalled that, “The holistic nature of the proposed project required high-level programming and administrative collaboration with a range of state and nonstate agencies. These relationships were not in place and, as a result, a primary focus of the Youth Social Service Project (YSSP) was building collaboration among agencies responsible for youth development.”

TA Implementation: Activities and Achievements

The major TA tasks under the YSSP were to assess youth issues and needs, identify policy and strategic interventions, formulate forward-looking budgets, and prepare proposals for further investments in youth programs and services.

With support from MIA staff and 11 community facilitators (recruited from local NGOs), more than 1,300 persons, mostly youth, were consulted. The consultations drew input from people in all sectors and in both urban and rural areas.

The participatory approach was used throughout the TA, from the early identification of youth issues and problems to analysis of root causes and consequences, prioritization of problems, and ultimate drawing up of plans and ideas to address and resolve problems. The consultative process used had never really been seen in previous TA projects in the RMI. Stewart Hadfield, who led the international consultant team, described what he saw as some of the most useful aspects of the TA. Hadfield found the involvement of the NGO community to be a critical element of success in terms of gaining community buy-in:

Through the MICNGOs, we engaged and trained 11 NGO community facilitators (7 women and 4 men) to jointly conduct participatory stakeholder consultations throughout the country. From the perspective of all parties, this engagement was highly successful in that it produced high-quality information, increased the existing skill and confidence levels of NGO workers, expanded organizational networks (especially in the outer islands) and, subsequently, resulted in the NGOs' becoming a driving force for recommendations of the TA.

A large part of the TA was spent on the initial situational analysis. This analysis brought together a substantial amount of information related to youth issues, and the research was enhanced by information collected through the participatory workshops.

Marie Maddison, who worked for the largest women’s NGO in the RMI during the TA, and who now serves as director of the National Training Council, had similar thoughts on the value of the consultative approach: “One of the good points about this TA project was the consultative exchanges with the youth and community members. Problem assessment techniques and planning exercises provided for real people (particularly youth) participation.”

Proposed Project Components

The consultations led to recommendations for a range of preventative and remedial interventions, which were subsequently grouped into two main project components: a stream of directed project assistance and a stream consisting of proposals to develop an enabling environment, including institutional strengthening and capacity-building initiatives. The proposed project components are summarized in the table below.

Table: Components of Proposed Youth Social Services Project

Stream 1 Development of Youth	Stream 2 Development of Enabling Environment
Improve school retention rate	Develop and endorse a National Youth Policy
Expand opportunities in nonformal and vocational education	Strengthen the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Focal Point Agency for Youth
Improve and expand delivery of health and social services	Strengthen the Marshall Islands Youth Congress
Enhance family and community support for youth at risk	Strengthen coordination and delivery of vocational and nonformal education
Expand opportunities in sport, leisure, and creative arts	Strengthen the juvenile justice system
Enhance engagement of youth in civic affairs	Build capacity of state and nonstate delivery agencies
	Increase cross-sectoral collaboration
	Strengthen youth information management systems

Note: Each of the major components includes detailed steps and actions that, for conciseness, are excluded here.

Government Leadership Key

As indicated in the above table, the TA called for a comprehensive, sector-wide approach that involved different stakeholders and agencies. It was recognized that because the government alone could not successfully address all youth issues, NGOs and other nonstate actors would need to be engaged and take on a greater part in the process.

However, an important onus was put on the government to take the lead and be the facilitator. One of the key enabling environment recommendations called for upgrading the YSB into an autonomous agency under the Office of the President. This recommendation was made to foster more strategic cross-sectoral work and to create an entity that would implement the National Youth Policy, source external funds, and outsource service delivery to nonstate agencies (among other responsibilities).

Priorities of the People... and Their Potential Costs

During the project consultations, different prospective programs were evaluated and ranked by stakeholders. Out of this process came a set of priorities. Stakeholders gave the highest rankings to programs that support teenage mothers, expand sports facilities and competitions, provide after-school educational support, and develop life skills. Moreover, and importantly, most communities throughout the RMI (both urban and rural) placed high priority on programs that would improve livelihood prospects for unemployed youth through vocational training and work experience programs.

Drawing on these priorities, the consultants developed a 5-year framework of proposed interventions and investments that would require approximately \$20 million in funding. An ADB loan would be one of the considerations for financing these projects.

However, it was emphasized that each proposed investment would require closer cost-benefit analysis prior to design and implementation. Pointing to the absence of monitoring and evaluation systems for existing youth programs and services,

the consultants indicated that this made it difficult to assess accurately the benefits of existing programs or proposed new programs.

Lastly, a Proposed Action Plan¹⁰ that brought together the project components and the priorities of the people was developed. The action plan identified recommended actions, the agency or agencies responsible for each action, and general time targets.

Where to Now? The Government's Response

By late 2005, the TA had delivered what the government requested. The key issues affecting youth—and their causes and consequences—were clearly identified. Proposed interventions (programs, services, investments, etc.) to address these issues were identified, prioritized, and roughly costed. Some additional follow-up studies and analyses were identified. A step-by-step plan of action was proposed. Issues, options, interventions, and actions were delivered. The ball was in the government's court.

Which interventions should be pursued first? Which ones could the RMI realistically accomplish? Which actions would have the highest leverage and reach? These were the types of questions facing the RMI's decision makers. The government had already shown its concern by requesting the TA in the first place, supporting its consultative and participatory processes, and accepting its outcomes. But moving from ideas to implementation would prove to be the most difficult step.

Unfortunately, these questions remain open today. Many of the TA project's recommendations and proposed actions have yet to see any tangible implementation. There are no new sports facilities. Support and outreach programs for teenage mothers have barely increased (if at all). There remain almost no after-school support programs. The Marshall Islands Youth Congress (the national umbrella NGO for youth affairs) is even weaker today than it was before the TA. The draft National Youth Policy remains just that—a draft that has yet to be endorsed.

Despite the lack of progress on many recommendations, the government did openly accept and support the facts and

10 Recommendations of Youth Social Services Project Design: Proposed Action Plan.

principles brought forth by the TA. Moreover, the TA findings (and the highly consultative process by which these findings were reached) generated a sense of urgency within the government and prompted some offices to begin considering realistic options and opportunities.

The Amended Compact: A Timely Opportunity

The RMI and the US concluded negotiations in 2003, amending the Compact of Free Association between them. Under the amended Compact, in lieu of changes made to the RMI's eligibility for other US federal education programs and assistance, the US Government authorized the appropriation of (by its Secretary of Education) what are called supplemental education grants (SEGs). The RMI was eligible for these grants beginning in fiscal year (FY) 2005, and the first year's amount was \$6.1 million.

The SEG money provided a timely opportunity to channel more resources to at-risk youth, and the government seized this opportunity. ADB's 2006 review of the TA summarized the government's course of action:

The Government, most especially the Office of the Chief Secretary, fully embraced the findings and recommendations of the TA. So concerned was the Government in response to the TA findings that they determined the best course of action would be to forgo the proposed ADB loan and to use Government funds to immediately implement the proposed project activities.

The government decided to identify one of its existing agencies as a conduit through which SEG (and other funds, as available) could be channeled toward youth programs and services. The idea was to have this agency outsource these services to civil society organizations (CSOs). A handful of CSOs were already providing services to assist at-risk youth and the intent was to partner with them more effectively via this government agency and with greater resources. The National Training Council (NTC) was chosen as the designated agency.

“The idea was to designate NTC as kind of the proxy entity to carry on some of the youth-targeted work,” stated Peacock-Taylor.

The National Training Council – A New Strategic Direction

Originally established by the Industries Development Act of 1981, the NTC is responsible for policy, planning, coordination, and regulation of technical, vocational education and training. As stated in the legislation, the NTC’s mandate is “to provide vocational and other training programs for Marshallese citizens and expand human resource development in the Republic.”

The NTC had limited success over the last two decades in carrying out its mandate as a facilitator, funder, regulator, and overall champion of vocational education. The government recognized this and, beginning in 2005, took action to reorganize the NTC, including a revision of its legislation to clarify its role and responsibilities, new appointments to the board of directors, hiring of a new director, and ongoing TA and organizational strengthening (supported by ADB).

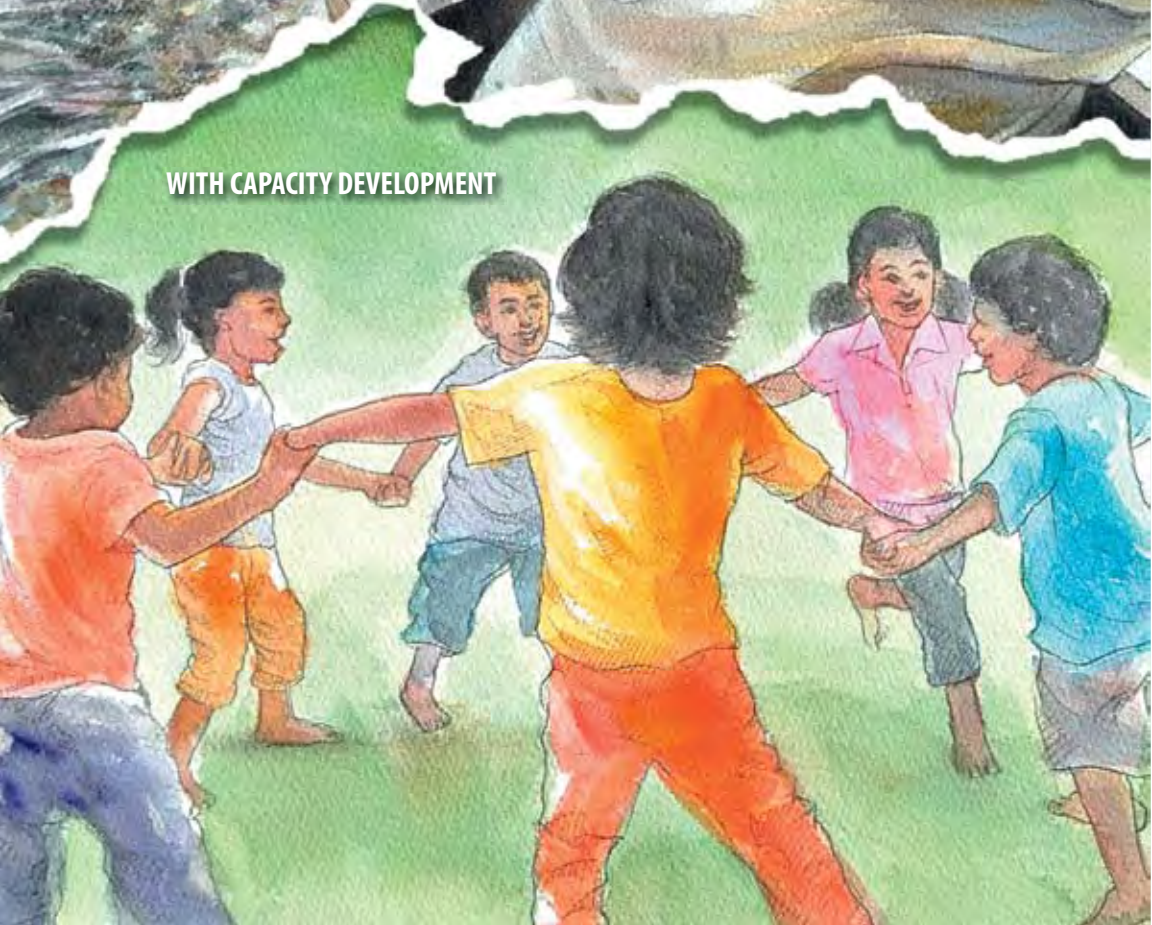
In 2007, the NTC completed a new strategic plan and signaled its intention to continue organizational and individual strengthening—all of this to help ensure that the NTC is as effective a conduit as possible to facilitate youth-targeted services and programs.

The NTC received about \$450,000 in SEG funds in FY2005 to begin the youth-targeted programs.¹¹ With these funds, the NTC funded youth-targeted projects, activities, and training offered through various CSOs and private companies.

11 In fiscal year (FY) 2006 and FY2007, NTC received \$325,000 and approximately \$500,000, respectively (although the FY2007 funds had not been received as of May 2007). A follow up TA from ADB, *Pilot Collaborative Public Service Delivery*, also supported NTC to take on a new role in outsourcing some youth welfare services.



WITHOUT CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT



WITH CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

RESULTS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

NTC Moving Ahead, MIA Still Challenged

While there was general agreement that the NTC would provide youth-targeted training and livelihood services and that the MIA would oversee implementation of the other components of the TA (including those related to family support, psychosocial services, and cultural and recreational programs), continued challenges facing the MIA have resulted in little progress thus far. The NTC, on the other hand, continues to sharpen its strategy and has made tangible progress in improving training opportunities for youth.

The MIA continues to face challenges that prevent it from fulfilling its youth-related responsibilities. The key constraints include leadership issues, financial and human resource deficiencies, lack of focus and direction, disempowered staff, lack of awareness on and advocacy for the needs of youth, and ineffective cooperation and coordination with other public organizations and NGOs.

To be fair, these constraints plague most of the government's organizations, not only the MIA. For the MIA specifically, the challenges stem largely from the fact that it has a very wide (some argue too wide) range of responsibilities, but is not given adequate financial and human resources to carry out these responsibilities. Under the public sector reform program in the late 1990s, the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Interior and Outer Island Affairs were combined and renamed the Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, this amalgamation was not accompanied by a commensurate increase in resources and, as a result, the MIA productivity has continued to suffer, especially in such critical areas as youth services.

In addition to handling youth affairs, the MIA is also mandated to oversee local government issues; elections and referenda; historic preservation (including the Alele Museum); lands and surveys; registration of persons (births, deaths, and marriage certificates); national identification cards; broadcasting (including the government radio station and gazette) and printing; community development (women, youth, population, and family life); the National Youth Congress; adoptions; and sports and recreation.

With such a vast mandate, coupled with limited resources and leadership, it is not hard to understand why youth-targeted programs and services have continued to suffer and why many of the TA's components recommended for the MIA implementation have never progressed satisfactorily.

Other Issues Influencing RMI Capacity and Performance

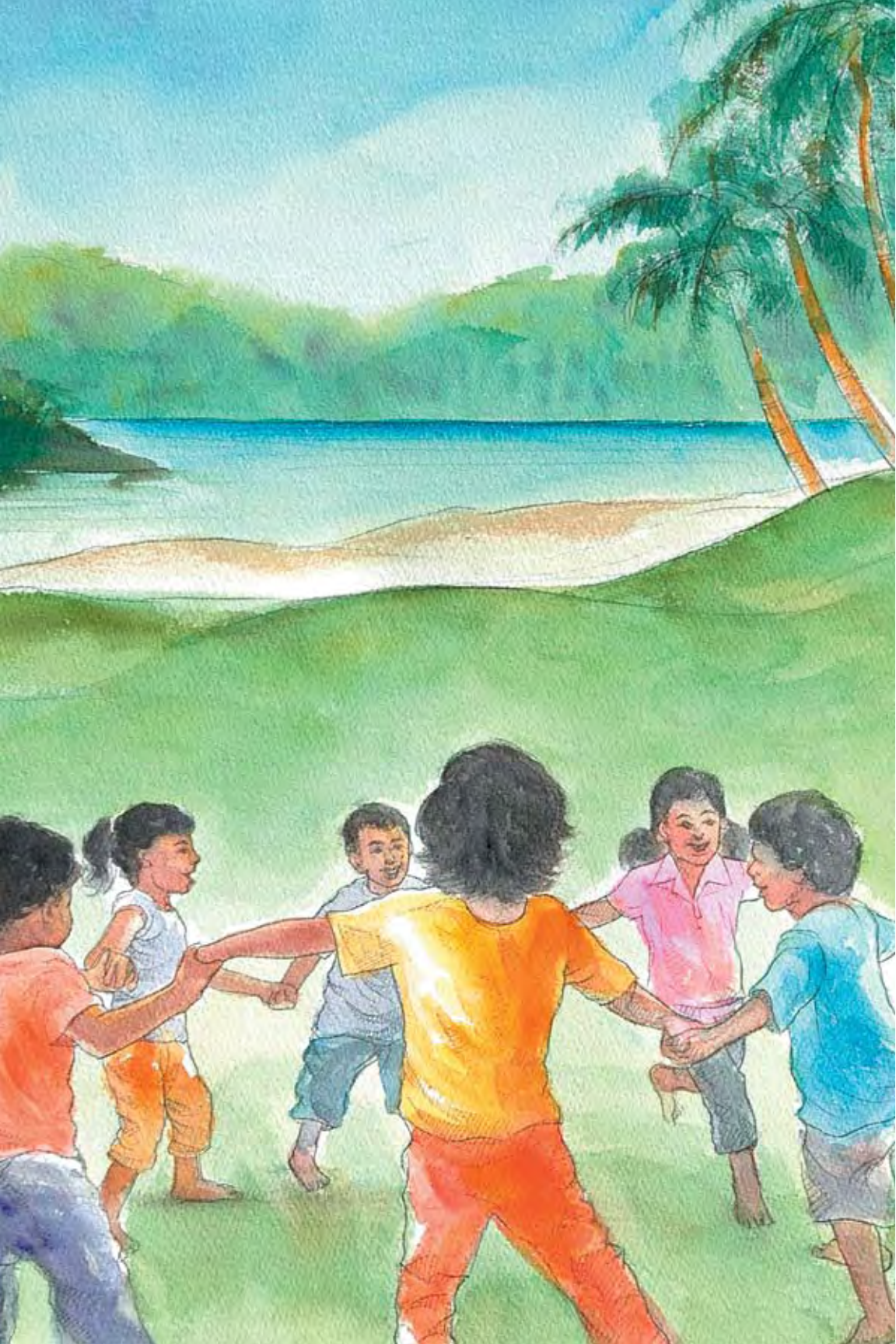
The government has yet to clarify its position on and plans for youth issues. This would have been accomplished via the National Youth Policy but, as mentioned, such a policy has yet to be formally adopted, despite being one of the strongest recommendations of the TA.

Realistically, some recommendations will probably never be implemented because of budgetary and other constraints. For example, the government did not accept the suggestion to upgrade the YSB into a new autonomous agency given mounting fiscal pressures.

The NTC-SEG initiative is the only tangible government response to the TA thus far. But it is a very important response that has the potential to make a significant contribution (to youth and the nation) given that its main target, the out-of-school and unemployed youth, represents a large part of the RMI population—several thousand people. During the community consultations, one of the strongest priorities that stakeholders identified was to expand programs that could help improve livelihoods of unemployed youth via vocational training and work experience programs. The NTC initiative is an effort to do exactly this.

Whereas many important TA recommendations remain idle, the TA process itself helped instill a sense of urgency and the government's NTC-SEG intervention decision has the potential to make a real difference among many youth, particularly in terms of training and employment.

Still, much more can and should be done, as many more issues beyond training and employment affect RMI youth. A whole-of-government approach to improving youth-targeted services is perhaps what should be crafted and implemented. This approach should also incorporate NGOs and encourage them to drive the progress. But even with this type of approach a central facilitator is needed—and that is what is missing in the RMI.



REFLECTIONS: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Systems Approach and Collaboration

The design of the TA embraced a 'systems approach' taking into account policy, institutional, and organizational issues affecting youth. Moreover, the TA set a precedent in the RMI in terms of taking a highly collaborative and consultative approach to assessing problems and coming up with policy recommendations for how to deal with them. The consultative process touched a number of organizations, including several important NGOs, and helped them refocus their strategies on youth. In a sense, therefore, capacity to analyze and focus on youth issues was enhanced in these organizations as a result of the approach taken. The systems and consultative approaches used also did much to instill a sense of ownership in the project and youth reforms.

Leadership Really Matters

This case provides an opportunity to discuss a very real and important issue that often does not get dealt with openly and honestly in the Pacific—the quality and commitment of political leadership.

At some point, it became obvious to both the consultants and some government officials (outside the MIA) that the MIA would not be able to take an effective lead on youth issues and carry forward the recommendations of the TA. It also became clear that despite its mandated responsibilities, the MIA could not serve as a true champion for youth. The consultants suggested that further reform and capacity development at the MIA would help address some of its constraints. The consultants went so far as to develop draft recommendations on what sort of capacity development would most benefit the MIA. It was not explicitly

stated in any of the TA reports, but as many people associated with this TA have suggested, the real constraint at the MIA lay in its political leadership.

The MIA's challenges stem from different factors (as already mentioned), including the fact that its mandate is too wide and its resource base is too narrow. But perhaps the biggest constraint is MIA senior leadership. Much of the stagnation in youth affairs stems from the fact that the MIA's leadership does not work well with others; it has an antipathy toward NGOs and gives the strong impression (through its continued inaction on so many youth-related recommendations and initiatives) that it does not view youth development and welfare as a very high priority. An NGO representative who actively participated in the TA stated:

We all know that the Ministry is the one authorized and responsible for youth welfare and youth development. We all know that it has not been acting responsibly in ensuring that essential national policies are in place and that they are implemented equitably and effectively. The draft National Youth Policy is not the only policy floating around, not being rooted. The National Women's Policy has been outdated for many years. The implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and now the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is barely in existence. It is no secret that that ministry's leadership is not doing its job, and that this prevents the ministry staff from doing theirs.

Thus, this case shows how capacity-development efforts—even the very best planned and most effectively implemented efforts—are likely to fall short unless there is true political support and backing.

Alternative Path for Youth Targeting: Flexible TA Design

Because of the challenges faced at the MIA, an alternative route to providing assistance to youth was chosen, via the NTC. The NTC was where the energy existed and the SEG funding provided a means to back this decision, which was generally seen as a wise

move. The NTC's continued strengthening and the enhancement of training opportunities for youth are expected to continue to bear this out. This illustrates the reality that despite its many shortcomings, the government could succeed in channeling at least some energy and resources toward youth programs and services as a result of and in response to the TA. Moreover, this approach could help ensure that NGOs, which, perhaps more than any other type of organization, have demonstrated passion for and commitment to youth issues, will be provided some resources to further this cause.

This case also illustrates the virtues of having flexibility in the design of TA projects. As it became clear that the MIA was not where the energy was, the TA allowed for a slight change in course. This change in course was facilitated by having flexible terms of reference that allowed the consultants and their counterparts to make stepwise decisions as they moved forward.

Enhanced Capacity to Demand (But Not So Much to Supply) Better Services

This case exposes an interesting perspective on the issue of capacity for supply and demand of public services. The TA improved the ability of NGOs, civil society, and youth themselves to articulate and voice their desire for better youth programs and services. Thus, RMI society's overall capacity to demand better services was greatly enhanced. However, the RMI's capacity to supply (or at least facilitate) better programs and services for youth remains limited. This has created a situation wherein capacity to demand exceeds capacity to supply, resulting in continued frustration among youth and organizations that work with them.

The RMI Government is often expected to provide all public goods and services. Clearly, the government (especially MIA) can do much more to enhance youth services. However, as this case suggests, it would be unrealistic to expect an organization like MIA (or another public entity) to carry out all the recommendations of the TA. It is simply not possible. Many of these services cannot and should not be done by the government. But the government itself often does not recognize this and does not establish the right kinds of relationships with nongovernment actors to better

enable them to carry out public services. As the saying goes: “you don’t need to own the cow to have milk.” In other words, governments that want certain public services to be delivered need not necessarily own the means of delivery.

Government Must Facilitate

Where it cannot provide all the required services or provide them best, the government can still take steps to facilitate service provision by other parties, especially CSOs. This case demonstrates that a number of NGOs have the passion, will, and competency to provide services for the youth. There remains, however, a clear and continued need for the government to coordinate and encourage existing and potential national capacity to respond to the youth crisis, and this responsibility falls most heavily on the MIA. Channeling resources to the NTC is a good start, but much more could be done through other channels.

However, without high-level commitment to and leadership on youth welfare, progress will be slow. Peacock-Taylor brought this point home: “The primary issue was, and still is, who and what holds it all together?” This, sadly, remains the key question with respect to the RMI’s capacity to respond to its growing youth crisis.

The Road Ahead

Two years have passed since this important TA took place and, sadly, because the question of “who and what holds it all together?” remains unanswered, the quantity and quality of youth services remain extremely limited. Nevertheless, the results of the TA (including the situational analysis and the many policy recommendations) remain available and can still be used to plan the way forward.

As mentioned, perhaps the best way forward is to craft and implement a whole-of-government approach to improving youth-targeted services that incorporates the work of NGOs. The demographic and economic forecasts do not paint a very promising picture for the youth of this nation, so there is a certain time bomb element to the situation. More must be done to enhance the RMI’s capacity to respond to its growing youth crisis.

Responding to the Youth Crisis

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is a relatively new nation, with half of its population under the age of 18 years. *Responding to the Youth Crisis* tells the story of how the RMI government, with assistance from ADB, set out to strengthen domestic capacity to improve services for youth in the Marshalls. The case highlights the importance of participatory processes and describes how an innovative approach to outsourcing youth welfare services to civil service providers was introduced. It also underscores some of the challenges of sustaining reforms with weak institutions and leadership.

This sub-series is published by the Asian Development Bank to provide the governments of its Pacific developing member countries (PDMCs) with analyses and insights on key issues and lessons learned with respect to capacity development. Cases studied highlight a range of experiences throughout the region by sector, theme and source of external support, revealing approaches to capacity development that work best and the conditions that have been conducive to their success. They also explore the unique challenges faced by PDMCs in addressing capacity constraints as well as some of the opportunities facing governments and the people in the Pacific islands. Among other things, the case studies underline the importance of PDMC leadership, engagement of local partners, strategic attention to long-term capacity issues and effective use of external resources. It is our hope that the findings in these reports will help to guide future capacity building efforts in the Pacific.

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