

Summary of Rotuma Research, 1987–1991: Report to the Rotuma Council and Others Who Assisted

Submitted by Jan Rensel and Alan Howard
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The island of Rotuma is relatively remote, located 465 kilometres north of the northernmost island in the Fiji group, and only slightly closer to Futuna, its nearest neighbour. Rotuma has been politically affiliated with Fiji for more than a century, first as a British colony and since 1970 as part of the independent nation. Rotuma's people are, however, culturally and linguistically distinct, having strong historic relationships with Tonga, Samoa, and other Polynesian islands to the east.

On their home island Rotumans enjoy a comfortable standard of living with plenty of food, adequate housing, and an ever-increasing number of motor vehicles and household appliances. Their lifestyle is supported by a combination of local production, earned income, and reciprocal exchange with other Rotumans, most of whom live elsewhere in Fiji. In contrast to many of the Pacific Islands economies, foreign aid plays only a small part in the economy of Rotuma. Furthermore, unlike Pacific Islands such as Western Samoa, which are strongly reliant on international links for migration and remittances, balance of trade problems and immigration restrictions are moot for Rotumans, who enjoy freedom of movement and commerce with the rest of Fiji. Political affiliation with Fiji has been central in facilitating Rotuma's economic well-being, not only in providing government jobs on the island, but also in allowing Rotumans in-country access to opportunities for education and employment, and ease of interaction between migrants and those on the home island.

This report draws on census and other public records, historical accounts, prior studies of Rotuman culture and migration, and 12 months of field research on Rotuma between 1987 and 1991. Of particular relevance are two studies conducted in 1989: a 13-week daily activity survey of 17 households in one village concerning household income, expenditure, production, and exchange practices; and a survey of 415 of the 489 of the households on the island (85 percent), which included questions about household members on Rotuma and off-island, employment, remittances, and household goods. A similar study of all island households, conducted by Alan Howard in 1960, is used for comparison.

Local Production: Food and Copra

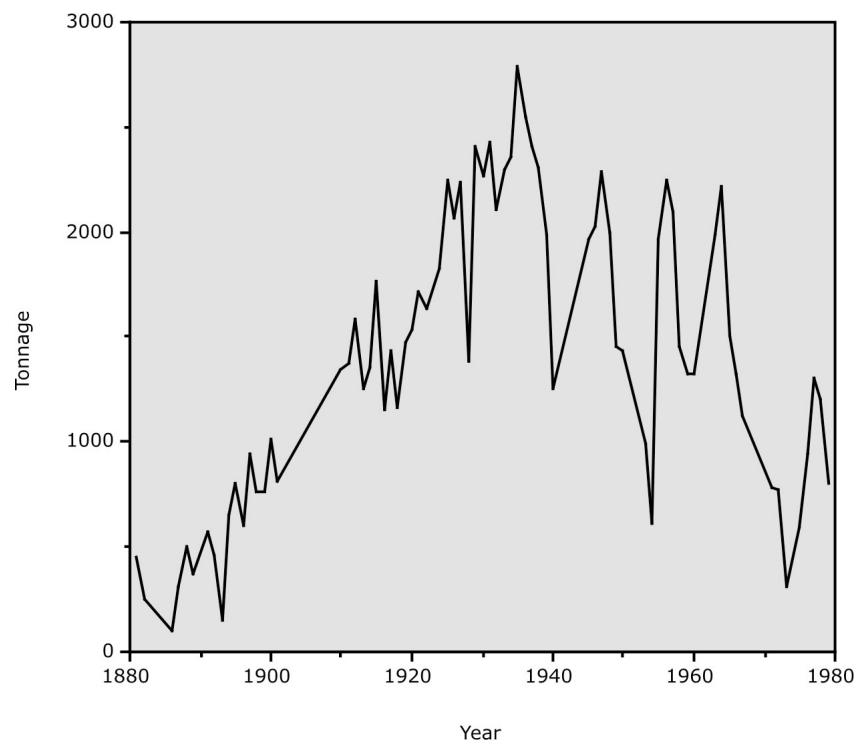
Local food production formed the basis for commerce with European ships in the nineteenth century, when the island was a favourite stopping place for whalers to reprovision. Rotuma also began a brisk trade in coconut oil, which gave way to copra in the 1870s. In addition to trading with passing ships, Rotuman men eagerly signed on as crew, and worked in the pearl fisheries in the Torres Straits, diving and managing boats. They earned both good wages and a reputation for competence and reliability.

After cession to the British Crown in 1881, Rotuma was incorporated into the Colony of Fiji and was closed as a port of entry. Rotumans continued to seek opportunities for earning and adventure on ships, though they had to go to Fiji to do so.

Copra, which became the island's primary cash crop, also had to be shipped through Fiji. Various firms handled the copra and sold imported foods and other goods on Rotuma, the most long-lived being Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp.

Environmental and local factors contributed to dramatic fluctuations in Rotuma's copra production over the past century (Figure 1). Hurricanes, for instance, led to lowered output in 1939, 1948, and 1972. The introduction of motorised transport in 1924 allowed increased output, but a lack of drying and storage facilities and inadequate shipping forced Rotumans to limit production in the 1940s and the late 1960s. Copra prices had an impact on the amount of copra Rotumans cut, though the result was not always consistent. In 1935 Rotumans produced a record amount of copra when the price was low. More often they responded to low prices by returning to food gardening. When increased demand for copra led to higher prices, as it did during World War II, Rotumans dropped everything and cut copra, so much so that the Rotuma Council had to limit the number of days Rotumans could cut copra in order to ensure they also worked in their gardens.

Figure 1
Rotuman Copra Production 1880–1980



Although world demand affected the overall price for copra, local prices paid on Rotuma reflected additional costs in bagging and shipping it to ports in Fiji such as Suva or Levuka. This price discrepancy, along with the price fluctuations, were of much concern to Rotumans, who suspected the firms handling copra sales of treating them unfairly. In 1926 Rotumans boycotted the firms for about six months, buying nothing from the shops and selling no copra. The tension between Rotumans and the firms ultimately led to the formation of the Rotuma Cooperative Association (RCA), which succeeded in taking over the copra trade and forcing the firms off the island by the late

1960s. RCA handled virtually all of Rotuma's copra and store sales from that time until recently, when another Rotuman cooperative, called Raho, mounted a successful challenge to RCA's dominance.

RCA turnover figures from 1957 to 1986 clearly show a progressive increase of imports over copra exports (Figure 2). Although store purchases closely paralleled copra earnings in the first decade of RCA's tenure, purchases began outstripping copra in the mid 1970s, and by 1986 the cash value of store sales was three times that of copra sold. Also over that period production of local food crops fell (Figure 3), and Rotuman diets included growing proportions of imported foods such as rice and noodles, tinned mackerel, and corned beef. Houses made from imported cement, wood and corrugated iron have all but replaced Rotuman-style thatched dwellings, and Western-style furnishings, household appliances and motor vehicles are increasingly common (Table 1). Despite evidence of growing consumer affluence on the island, no major resource-based industries other than copra have been developed. Sources of income originating outside Rotuma are obviously enhancing the standard of living on the island.

Figure 2
Copra Exports 1950–1990

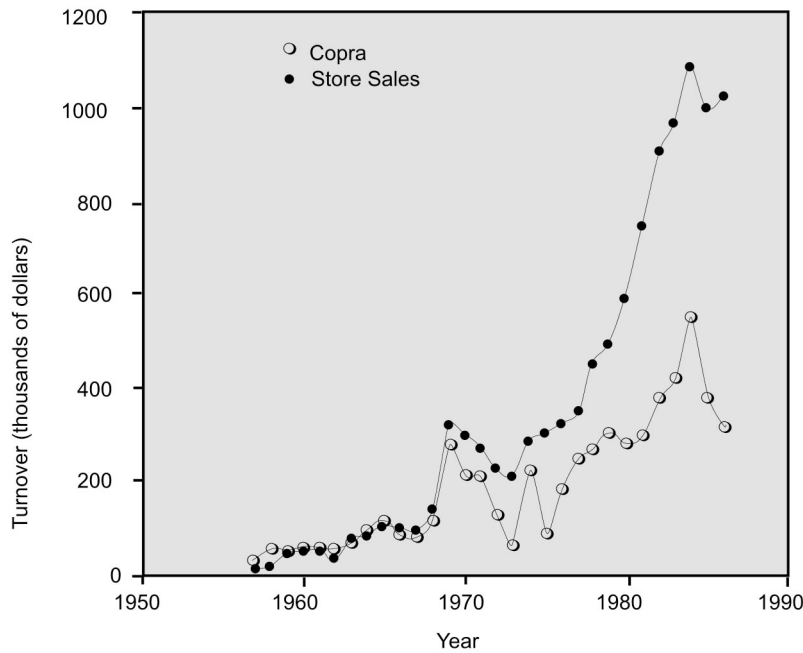


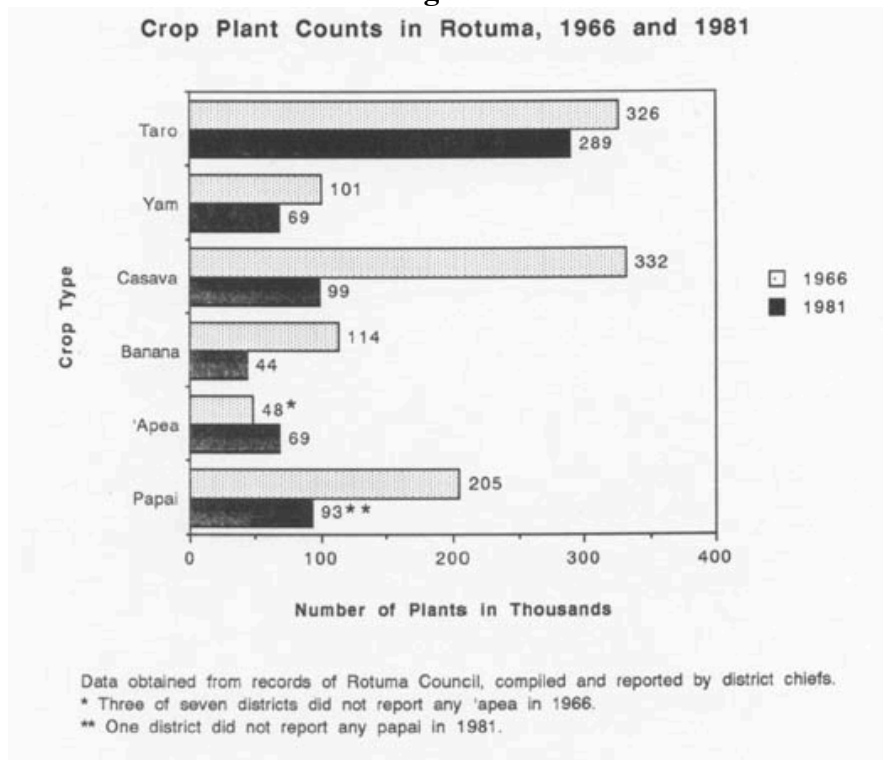
Table 1

Selected consumer goods on Rotuma by years obtained

ITEMS	no date pre-1970	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1984-89	Total Owned
Sewing machines	38	68	55	51	79	345
Refrigerators	6	8	8	18	43	121
Motorbikes	9	2	9	28	53	176
Lawnmowers	4	1	6	9	29	92
Bicycles	2	1	5	8	26	80
Freezers	3	1	0	5	8	37
Generators	1	1	2	1	8	39
Cars & Trucks	4	0	0	4	5	31
Videos	0	0	0	0	4	26
Washing machines	0	0	0	0	1	10

Source: 1989 survey of 415 households conducted by Jan Rensel and Alan Howard

Figure 3



Overseas Aid

Direct overseas aid has not played a large part in Rotuma's economy; rather, aid is funnelled through the Fiji government. After Hurricane Bebe in 1972, for instance, monetary aid from other countries allowed the Fiji government to provide the Rotuma Island Council a loan of \$F100,000 for rebuilding homes, most of which had been damaged or destroyed.

The Fiji government regularly provides personnel on Rotuma for health services, education, public works, communications, etc., continuing the priority given to public welfare by the British colonial administration. The Rotuma Island Council, comprised of district chiefs and elected representatives and charged with overseeing local affairs, receives a government subvention that has increased substantially in recent years, from \$F52,000 in 1984 to nearly \$F135,000 in 1992. In addition, the Fiji government contributed to the construction of district meeting halls and continues to support other self-help projects on Rotuma through annual grants; from 1989 to 1992 self-help grants amounted to \$F10,000 each year. Assistance for economic development, however, has been comparatively minor. Rotumans have sought foreign aid for development schemes, though on a small scale, such as \$F6,000 for fishing equipment for the women's groups, and grants of \$F,1500 to \$F7,000 for the Raho Cooperative's copra dryers and fuel dispensing facilities. Success depends largely on the assistance of people who know how to access funding sources.

Employment on Rotuma

The exodus of the firms from Rotuma in the late 1960s meant a loss of jobs at a time when wage-earning opportunities on the island were already scarce. In his 1960 study, Howard recorded 16 Rotumans working for Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp, not only as copra handlers but as clerks, storekeepers, carpenters, and other skilled labourers. The government employed 28 Rotumans, including 14 teachers, one nurse and three clerks. Twenty-three Rotumans worked for the RCA as storekeepers, secretaries, skilled workers, and other labourers. Three people were employed by private individuals and one, a minister, by the Methodist Church.

Although still limited, opportunities for employment on Rotuma have more than doubled in the past 30 years. In 1989, 174 individuals on the island reported earning wage income, and the numbers have grown since then. The Fiji government continues to be the largest source of jobs on the island. According to 1992 government figures, there were 37 school teachers and 69 other government employees. Retaining its position as the second-largest employer, the RCA listed a total of 79 workers in the same year. The Raho Cooperative grew from two employees in 1989 to more than 30 employees in 1992.

Other than working for the government or one of the cooperatives, wage-earning opportunities on Rotuma remain scarce. In 1989, a small number of Rotumans worked for the various religious denominations on the island, for the local branch of the National Bank of Fiji, or for Fiji Air, which served the island with weekly flights. Three people reported owning retail shops, and seven individuals were hiring themselves out as skilled or domestic workers. In addition, 15 retired government workers reported pension income. A total of 201 individuals between the ages of 16 and 76 were listed as earning income on the 1989 survey. This represents 16 percent of Rotuma residents between those ages, or one in six. Because 28 households included two, three, or even four persons earning income, only 40 percent (167) of the 415 households surveyed included wage, pension, or self-employed earners.

On Rotuma in 1992, the two cooperatives combined employed slightly more workers (109) than the government (106). But cooperative wages are much lower than government salaries; for instance, the average salary reported by schoolteachers in the 1989 survey was six times that of the average RCA worker (\$F200 per fortnight

compared to \$F35). Types of work also differ. About a third of co-op workers handle copra or drive trucks; another third are shopkeepers; only 33 percent of positions require special skills or training (e.g., carpentry, electrical, accounting, or administrative positions). In contrast, approximately two-thirds of government jobs on Rotuma require advanced education or training (e.g., schoolteacher, medical staff, agriculture officer, meteorologist, clerk, technician). Thus government employment on Rotuma provides not only a significant number of jobs, but also higher salary levels and greater opportunities for educated Rotumans. A limited number of Rotumans can return to the island and use their advanced education and training to make a living, but most continue to be drawn away by job opportunities in Fiji.

Other Income Sources

There are a variety of additional ways to make money on the island. Opportunities to generate large sums are few; income from most sources is small and sporadic. Some Rotumans seek earnings through casual labour, such as drying copra for one of the cooperatives, handling cargo from the boats that call at the island every few weeks, or working on occasional Public Works projects. Copra remains Rotuma's dominant crop export, but today copra cutting is pursued primarily by those with limited alternatives, or on occasion to raise cash for special purposes such as church fundraisers. During the 13-week village survey in 1989, only six of 17 households cut any copra.

A few people export crops such as yams, taro, cocoa, vanilla, or fish, lobster and other seafoods. Such enterprises are plagued with problems of storage, shipping, marketing, and management, and most have met with only small-scale, short-term success. In 1992 there were at least seven small retail shops selling imported food and goods. Recently many roadside stalls have sprung up to sell local produce, especially near the government station. While most of those who buy taro and yams are wage-earners, some are farmers whose own crops are not mature when needed. Rotumans also sell each other pigs, or occasionally butcher a cow to raise money. Those who are successful fishing, particularly the few with boats that can venture beyond the reef, find many on the island who are eager to buy their catch.

Rotumans with sufficient income may give others money as gifts for special occasions, and respond to pleas for financial assistance from relatives less well off. Some also give money in thanks for assistance with gardening, cooking, or laundry. While in the past Rotumans usually helped each other in reciprocal fashion without cash payments, in two areas it has become common to pay for services rendered. One is house construction, especially when skilled workers do plumbing, electrical wiring, and so on. The other is transportation. Increasing numbers of Rotumans who own trucks offer rides to individuals or groups at standard rates. Even relatives accept this practice, recognizing the costs of fuel and maintenance.

Of the various sources of income for households on the island, the most common is money remitted by Rotuman migrants. In 1989, 48 percent (201) of the 415 households surveyed indicated that they received cash remittances. Of these, 64 households (15 percent of all households surveyed) reported both wages and remittances. On the other hand, 111 households (27 percent) reportedly make do with neither, drawing instead on copra, on-island food sales, sporadic exports, and gifts of cash for services to others on the island. In fact, most Rotuman households rely on a combination of

strategies. Many income opportunities depend on the involvement of Rotuman migrants in Fiji.

Migration

Fiji census reports over the past several decades document a dramatic shift in the distribution of Rotumans, with an ever-increasing proportion recorded away from their home island (Table 2). While the total population of Rotumans in Fiji (including Rotuma) has almost quadrupled over the past 65 years to 8,652 in 1986, the population on Rotuma itself has been declining since 1966, dropping by 16 percent, to 2,707, in the decade 1966–1976 alone. According to the 1986 census, 70 percent of Rotumans lived elsewhere in Fiji, with 46 percent concentrated in the Suva area. Although official counts in other countries do not enumerate Rotumans separately, data about absentee household members collected from Rotuma residents in 1989 suggest that Rotumans who have migrated internationally number several hundred.

Around the turn of the century, colonial officials and Rotumans alike had worried about eventual depopulation of Rotuma, but these concerns have not been realised; in 1986 the number of Rotumans on the island was nearly the same as it had been 50 years earlier (2,554 compared to 2,543). Early on, young men were the most likely to emigrate, leaving a surplus of females in the 15–40 age group. In recent decades this imbalance has equalised, and in fact shifted slightly in the other direction. From 1956–1986, the male/female ratio for ages 15–39 on Rotuma increased steadily from 90/100 in 1956 to 117/100 in 1986.

On Rotuma the percentage of people over 60 years of age has more than doubled, from 4.3 percent (129 persons) in 1956 to 10 percent (258 persons) in 1986. By 1986, 50 percent of Rotumans age 60 and older (258 of 519) were on Rotuma, whereas only 30 percent of the total Rotuman population lived there. This may be due in part to the fact that, more so than urban Fiji, Rotuma provides an environment in which older people are valued for their knowledge, wisdom, and contributions to their households and communities.

Table 2
Distribution of Rotumans in Rotuma and Fiji, 1921–1986

Year	Rotuma			Fiji			Total	
	Number	Percent of Total	Percent Increase	Number	Percent of Total	Percent Increase	Number	Percent Increase
1921	2112	94%		123	6%		2235	
1936	2543	90%	+20%	273	10%	+122%	2816	+26%
1946	2744	83%	+8%	569	17%	+108%	3313	+18%
1956	2993	68%	+9%	1429	32%	+151%	4422	+33%
1966	3235	56%	+8%	2562	44%	+79%	5797	+31%
1976	2707	37%	-16%	4584	63%	+79%	7291	+26%
1986	2554	30%	-6%	6098	70%	+33%	8652	+19%
1996	2580	27%	+1%	7147	73%	+17%	9727	+12%

Source: Fiji Census Reports

Meanwhile, the proportion of children under age 10 on the island declined with each census, from 34.2 percent (1,024 of 2,993 total population) in 1956 to 27 percent (699 of 2,554) in 1986. Although the percentage of children age 10–14 fluctuated, there has been an overall decrease, such that the total proportion of children under age 15 dropped by nearly 10 percent (from 48.4 to 38.8 percent, or 1,449 to 1,004 in absolute numbers) over the thirty-year period. This change may be attributed at least in part to changing migration patterns. Whereas previously the Suva population of Rotumans included a higher proportion of pioneers, without spouses and children, they now establish families and keep their children with them. The population profile for Rotumans in Fiji therefore approaches that for the overall Rotuman population.

The high rate of emigration for Rotumans of working age is understandable. Fiji's diversified economy provides a broad base of employment. Rotumans in Fiji are employed not only by the government but by private organisations; according to the 1976 Fiji census, 583 Rotumans worked for the government while 1,042 held positions in the private sector. Rotumans are at no disadvantage for employment in Fiji; in contrast to Fijian Indians they are considered indigenous and most also belong to the same church, called (significantly) the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma.

After young Rotumans leave the island in search of further education and employment, many choose to stay away, to marry and establish families and residences of their own. Some go back to Rotuma to visit, take a job, find a spouse, or resettle. Whether or not they return, most Rotuman migrants maintain connections with their home island. Reciprocal visiting and sharing of resources are two ways of reaffirming ties, but there are other ways of equal and growing importance.

Reciprocal Visiting and Assistance

Rotumans on the island frequently host visiting relatives. Between 31 July and 29 October 1989, 13 of 17 households in the village study hosted visitors from Fiji for stays of a few days to over a month (see Table 3). In addition to short-term visitors, some Rotumans who settle in Fiji still send their children to the island to be brought up by grandparents. Children provide a focal point for Rotuman households, and are treasured and indulged. Older children help with chores before and after school. During the 1989 village study, four of the 17 households included as long-term members children of sons and daughters who lived off-island. Shortly afterwards, three additional village households arranged to bring infant grandchildren to stay with them.

Rotumans from the island go to stay with their families in Fiji or overseas, for months or even years at a time, while attending school, seeking employment, working, or simply on holiday. During the 13-week village study in 1989, members of 11 of the 17 households left to visit relatives in Fiji (Table 3). According to the island-wide study the same year, 953 of 999 adults on Rotuma over the age of 20 (over 95 percent of those for whom information was collected) had been away from the island at least once. Fifty-seven (6 percent) reported having travelled away from Rotuma more than ten times. One hundred sixty nine (17 percent) had been employed while away, and many of these had married and had children before returning with their families to live on Rotuma.

Lavenia Kaurasi's 1975 study of Rotumans in the Suva area offers a perspective from the migrant household. She found that 56 Rotuman families in the Raiwaqa community had a total of 80 relatives living with them. She interprets this as evidence

that "a Rotuman new to Fiji always has someone related to him who would give him a roof to sleep under until he settles down." Hosting visitors may expand to other kinds of assistance: at least 30 of the 50 employed Rotumans interviewed said that another Rotuman had helped them find their present jobs. Meanwhile, visitors to Fiji find ways to help their hosts, especially during weddings and funerals when their assistance in feast preparation and looking after additional guests is especially valued.

Table 3
Visits between households in Rotuma and Fiji

Village Household	Visit Fiji	Host Visitor
A	1	4
B		5
C	1	1
D	1	8
E	1	6
F		
G		
H		4
I	1	1
J	1	
K	1	6
L	1	3
M		
N		3
O	1	1
P	1	4
Q	1	3
Total Visits	11	49

Source: Survey conducted by Jan Rensel
July 31–October 29, 1989

Kinship and Reciprocity

As with many other Pacific Island groups, reciprocity is central to Rotuman culture. Being kainaga is a matter of both blood relationship and active demonstration of commitment through contributions of time, labour, and material resources. The level of interhousehold sharing demonstrated during the 1989 village study of daily activities bears witness to the importance of reciprocity: among 17 households during 13 weeks,

more than 2,000 exchanges took place in the form of food gifts, assistance, shared meals, and transportation.

For geographically extended families, reciprocal connections remain important. The visitors, gifts, and assistance flowing both ways between Fiji and Rotuma allow kainaga to maintain personal ties as well as access to valued resources. While the lifestyles of those on the home island benefit from gifts of cash and imported goods, the lives of migrants are enriched by culturally significant experiences, special foods, and island-made handicrafts.

Reciprocal Sharing of Resources

The sharing of material resources is another key means by which Rotumans, separated by distance, continue to demonstrate their attachment to each other. As indicated above, remittances are an important income source for island households. The easiest funds to track on a large scale come by way of telegraphic money order (TMO). In 1976 monthly totals sent to Rotuma by TMO ranged between \$F5000 and \$F6000. Although prices on Rotuma for some commonly purchased foodstuffs such as tinned corned beef have more than doubled in recent years, the flow of TMO funds has at least been keeping pace; monthly amounts for the years 1982–88 averaged over \$F10,000. In addition, cash and checks are mailed or brought by visitors, and a branch of the National Bank of Fiji opened on Rotuma in 1987, allowing even more convenient transfer of funds.

Respondents to the 1989 island-wide survey identified a total of 346 individuals living off-island sending cash remittances; some households listed as many as seven people sending financial support. Fifty-nine percent of those listed as remitters were grown children: sons (31 percent) or daughters (28 percent); the next largest group of remitters were siblings of the household head or spouse (brothers 15 percent, sisters 13 percent). Parents, spouses or in-laws each accounted for 1 percent or less of the total number of cash remitters, and more distant relations made up the remaining 10 percent. Most remitters were residing in Fiji (78 percent), with 60 percent in Suva alone (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Percent of Remitters by Location

Fiji total	75%
Suva	55
Lautoka	6
Other Fiji	14
Australia	8
New Zealand	4
Rotuma	3
Other Pacific Islands	2
United States	3
Europe	2
sailing	2
Middle East (military)	1

Source: 1989 Survey by Jan Rensel and Alan Howard

For 303 of the remitters, the amounts sent were reported; these ranged from \$F10 to \$F4000, with a median amount of \$F100. Cash was sent primarily for general support, that is, to be spent on food and other household needs. In addition, remitters sent money gifts to meet specific needs, such as school fees, or for special occasions, including Mother's and Father's Day, Christmas, birthdays, and funerals. These amounts tended to be small, though many indicated that remittances for general support were received fortnightly or monthly. Larger amounts were sent for church fund-raisers and for house improvement projects.

While money is appreciated, remittances in the form of goods are often preferred. For Rotumans, both on the island and away, material gifts represent time and effort and thus signify hanisi in tangible form. For migrants, Rotuman handicrafts, especially fine mats needed for ceremonies and the Rotuman pandanus to make them, are hard to come by. Gifts of produce from the island are highly valued in urban areas where garden space is scarce; and prepared Rotuman specialty foods are relished. Similarly, Rotumans on the island appreciate gifts of purchased goods. A great variety of desirable items are not widely available on the island and must be ordered from Fiji; the process takes time, know-how, and connections. The store-bought foods, household goods, building materials, appliances, and vehicles sent by relatives in Fiji concretely represent efforts expended on behalf of those on Rotuma, in terms of ordering and shipping as well as paying for the items. Material gifts flowing to and from Rotuma are thus doubly welcomed as signs of hanisi.

Fifteen of the 17 households in the village study exchanged gifts of money, food, and other goods with people living in Fiji (see Table 4). The intensity of interaction varied, as did the forms of reciprocity. Eleven households reported gifts of money, ranging from a few dollars to several hundreds. Fifteen households received food of various kinds (such as rice, flour, tinned or frozen meat) and eight were sent household goods or clothing.

The 1989 data show clearly that gifts also flowed out of Rotuma. Fourteen households shipped food to Fiji, and several did so repeatedly. Typical food gifts were baskets of taro, yams, and coconuts, as well as island fruits such as bananas, oranges, melon, pineapple, and papaya, or prepared foods. Six households gave Rotuman mats, fans, and a locally made broom.

Beyond Family Ties: Other Forms of Migrant Involvement

Migrant Rotumans have become involved with their home island in significant ways that go beyond kinship reciprocity, notably district-based fundraising, large group visits, and support in business enterprises. These forms of involvement serve the purpose of allowing migrants to remain connected with their home island, and directly or indirectly affect Rotuma's economic well-being.

Table 4
Exchanges between households in Rotuma and Fiji

Village Household	Received Money	Gave Money	Received Food	Gave Food	Received Goods	Gave Goods
A	2		1	1		
B	4		5	4	2	
C	2		1	1		
D	3		3	14	1	1
E		1	1	7		1
F						
G	1		2	2		
H			2			
I	4		1	3	1	1
J						
K			2	12	1	
L	1		3	2	1	1
M			1	1		
N	2		3	1	1	
O	9		1	4	1	2
P	11		4	3	2	1
Q	3		2	2		
Total Exchanges	42	1	32	57	10	7

Source: Survey conducted by Jan Rensel, July 31–October 29, 1989

Group Visitations and Fundraising

In addition to reciprocal visiting and remittances between family members, Rotumans in Fiji and overseas organise various activities, including fundraisers and visits to the island. Rotuman migrants in Suva have formed groups based on their home districts on Rotuma. These groups hold meetings, dances, bazaars, and other events both to interact with each other and to gather money for projects on Rotuma. For instance, the Oinafa district organisation contributed to the purchase of a diesel generator for their district; other groups have joined fund-raising competitions for improving the schools serving their home localities. In this way migrant contributions benefit each district as a whole rather than individual households.

District organisations also arrange group visits to Rotuma for Christmas and other special occasions. Group visits often involve hymn-singing and Rotuman dance

competitions, feasts, and other arranged events. Organised trips provide opportunities for Rotumans, especially those who may not have established or maintained close kin ties on the island, to share a short and activity-packed stay with other visitors with whom they are more familiar. The groups also mobilise large contributions of food and money for Rotuma residents. For example, the 1989 celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Methodist missionary arrival on Rotuma brought several hundred visitors to the island, preceded by substantial remittances of cash and goods to allow those in Oinafa district who were hosting events to make housing improvements and food preparations. For Christmas 1991, at least three separate Fiji-based Rotuman groups chartered ships to the island. International visits are much less frequent, but the New Zealand Rotuman community, including some 62 families as of 1991, hosted a visiting party of Rotumans in 1990 and made a return visit to the island at Christmastime in 1993.

Promotion of Business

More significant in terms of generating income is the involvement of migrants in collaborative business ventures on the island, especially the formation and management of cooperatives, the availability of bank loans, and attempts to initiate tourism.

(1) Rotuma Cooperatives

After the colonial administration passed an ordinance (No. 11 of 1947) establishing the position of Registrar of Cooperative Societies, several groups on Rotuma decided to form cooperatives, and eventually five "canteens" emerged around the island. They struggled to survive with little capital, no management or bookkeeping experience, and antagonism from the firms, who often refused to do business with the co-ops or any of their members.

In 1953 a Rotuman migrant named Wilson Inia returned to the island and helped to organise an association of local co-ops called the Rotuma Cooperative Association (RCA). A schoolteacher, Inia taught RCA workers bookkeeping, emphasising that accountability and regular audits were essential. Under Inia's guidance, RCA flourished at a time when cooperatives in Fiji were struggling. By 1961 the subscribed capital of RCA was approximately four times that of the combined Fijian societies for that year (£23,754 compared to £5,797), although the Rotuman membership (485) was less than half the number of Fijian cooperative members (1,293). RCA's share of the copra trade grew steadily, eventually forcing the firms to close up shop on the island by the end of 1968.

For the next 20 years RCA dominated copra trade and store sales on the island. After the death of Wilson Inia in 1983 the RCA continued to apply his principles of accounting, but a number of problems developed. Customers who desired better service and a wider range of products grew dissatisfied with RCA. Personal conflicts also contributed to attempts over the years to form rival co-ops, such as the Rotuman Planters' Association (1963–67) and the Rotuman Development Corporation (1975–79), but these efforts were short-lived. A Malhaha district group established a cooperative in the 1980s, not to handle copra but to manage the airport that opened in their district in 1981, and to start a fishing enterprise. With the help of Rotuman migrants they purchased a freezer and two boats, but conflicts within the group on Rotuma and between the Rotuma and Fiji contingents led to the demise of the fishing business in 1991.

The Raho Cooperative, begun in 1977, was reorganised in 1990 with help from Rotumans in Fiji with business experience, and from an American, John Bennett, who is married to a Rotuman. With the aid of several grants and a few bank loans Raho has expanded and improved its operations, including new copra dryers, fuel-dispensing facilities, and a walk-in freezer for frozen foodstuffs. By 1992 Raho reportedly was handling more copra than RCA and an ever-increasing share of store sales.

Raho is having a strong impact on Rotuma's economy. Besides providing additional wage positions, Raho raised the amount paid for copra. Raho has introduced a number of innovations including an experimental solar copra dryer and a computerised accounting system, which they hope to use for job training as well.

(2) Bank Loans

In 1987, a Rotuman migrant was appointed chief manager of the National Bank of Fiji (NBF). Following his directive, the Rotuma branch of the NBF began granting loans to individuals with wages or other demonstrable means of repayment. Loans were taken out for various business enterprises: to buy trucks for hauling copra, to stock a retail shop, to supply a bakery, to finance a yam export project, among others. From January 1988 to June 1990 more than 130 individuals were also granted personal loans for housing improvements or to purchase vehicles, household appliances, and furnishings. According to bank records, most loans were being repaid on schedule, but in a few cases relatives in Fiji or abroad had to contribute a significant share toward repayment.

(3) Tourism

To date Rotuma's tourism potential remains largely untapped. Differences of opinion on the issue, both as to potential benefits and drawbacks, and how income derived from it should be distributed, have slowed tourism's development. There have been some experiments. Visitors come to the island from time to time, having arranged accommodation with families, and generally reciprocate their hosts with gifts and/or money.

Rotumans in Fiji have assisted their kinsmen on Rotuma in starting a tourist industry. Despite divided opinion, they managed to arrange for a cruise liner to stop at the island and discharge a thousand or so passengers for one day, in 1986. This practice continued once or twice a year until, by 1989, Rotumans from around the island were taking advantage of the opportunity to sell food, souvenirs, and sightseeing trips. But disagreements over the distribution of landing fees resulted in the cancellation of two trips scheduled for 1990 and 1991. According to a March 1991 *Fiji Times* article, this resulted in a loss to Rotumans of some \$F20,000 per trip.

Cash Income

The standard of living on Rotuma cannot be represented only in terms of money. Most households continue to rely to some extent on garden production, fishing, and animal husbandry, not only for daily subsistence, but also for contributing to feasts and for sharing with kainaga near and far. But an analysis of cash income sources available to island households does provide insights into the state of Rotuma's economy. The

proportions of cash income from different sources recorded during the 13-week survey in 1989 are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Sources of Income

Household	Copra	Copra truck	Wages	Retirement	Tourist	Survey	Food sale	Driving	Service ^a	Gifts	Remittances	% of village income
A	√			√	√	√	√	√		√	√	7.7
B			√		√	√	√	√		√	√	4.2
C				√		√			√	√	√	1.2
D		√			√	√	√	√		√	√	18.9
E			√		√	√	√	√				8.2
F						√			√	√	√	0.5
G	√				√	√			√	√	√	1.5
H	√				√	√						0.5
I		√	√		√	√		√		√		28.6
J	√		√			√						1.7
K			√		√	√		√	√		√	8.3
L			√		√	√					√	3.8
M	√		√		√	√	√			√	√	3.0
N	√				√	√				√	√	1.9
O			√			√		√	√	√	√	6.3
P	√		√		√	√	√			√	√	1.6
Q			√			√					√	2.1
% of village income	1.4	31.4	23.1	5.2	6.9	3.2	2.1	3.0	4.9	4.8	14.0	100.0

^aService includes money received from other households in thanks for assistance; for Household K this includes money for hosting the anthropologist.

Source: Daily activity survey of 17 households in Oinafa village, July 31-October 29, 1989

It is important to note that opportunities to earn large amounts from any one source were limited. Every household in the study drew upon at least three income sources (including small payments for assisting with the village survey); the average number of income sources was five to six. Significantly, most sources can be traced to a Fiji connection. The government, bank, and church are all based in Fiji. The cooperatives were founded, and the tourist venture initiated, with the help of Rotuma migrants there. Most of the remittances come from kainaga in Fiji.

Conclusion

The many forms of interaction between Rotumans on their home island and elsewhere in Fiji have intensified dramatically since 1960. Two-way flows of information, cash, and goods, but most importantly people have increased to the extent that Rotumans on Rotuma and in Fiji form part of a single, multilocal community. Ties between Rotumans on the island and in Fiji go beyond kinship; migrant involvement on Rotuma not only enhances the standard of living enjoyed by individual households but also contributes to the well-being of whole districts. Forms of help include not only remittances and fundraising, but also the creation of new earning opportunities on the island. Thus political incorporation with Fiji has proven exceptionally beneficial to the economy of Rotuma. Through their own efforts, and with the help of kainaga at home and away, Rotumans have access to both cash and non-cash resources, and so are able respond flexibly to changing circumstances.