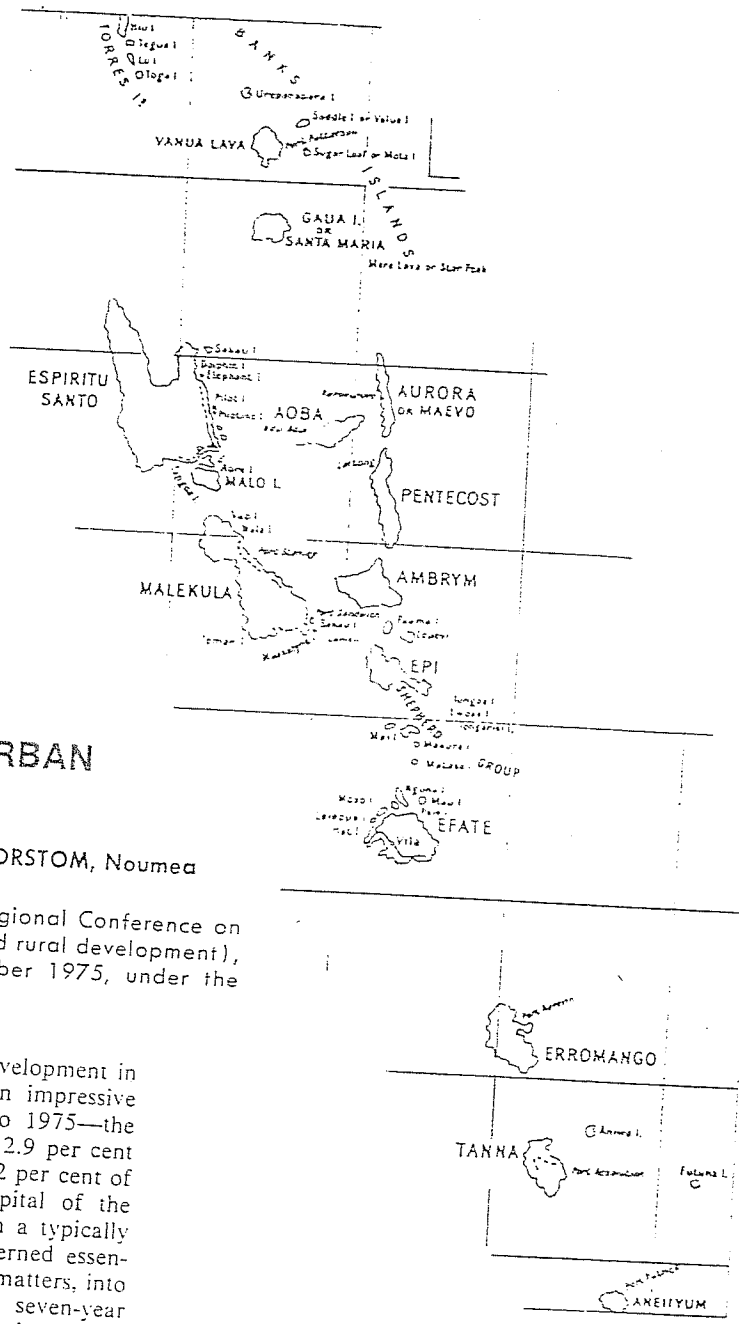


Circular Migration and Uncontrolled Migration in the New Hebrides



PROPOSALS FOR AN EFFECTIVE URBAN MIGRATION POLICY

By JOEL BONNEMAISON, Geographer, Research Officer ORSTOM, Noumea

This article was presented by the author at the Regional Conference on Population Problems (urbanization, resettlement and rural development), which was held at Suva (Fiji), from 1-5 December 1975, under the direction of Dr Frank Mahony.

Over the past few years, urban development in the New Hebrides has moved at an impressive pace. In one decade—from 1965 to 1975—the urban population rose from 9,938 (12.9 per cent of the total population) to 21,558 (22 per cent of the total population). Vila, the capital of the Condominium, turned overnight from a typically drowsy little colonial township, concerned essentially with trading and administrative matters, into a swiftly expanding city. Over the seven-year period from 1965 to 1972, the population of the city doubled. This upswing was to a large extent caused by the increase in the Melanesian population, as the following table shows.

ETHNIC BREAKDOWN OF THE POPULATION INCREASE AT VILA

Year	New Hebrideans		Europeans		Asians		Other Pacific Islanders		Miscellaneous		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1965	4,593	70.9	746	11.5	319	4.9	306	4.7	514	4.9	6,478	100
1967	5,398	69.8	945	12.2	346	4.5	402	5.2	647	8.3	7,738	100
1972	8,336	66.5	1,929	15.3	451	3.6	974	7.8	851	6.8	12,541	100



Vila harbour.

This phenomenon can in turn be traced back to a sharp acceleration of the rural-urban drift. From 1967 to 1972 the number of rural migrants in Vila coming from outside the Island of Efate rose from 2,673 to 4,228. This corresponds to an average annual increase of 11.6 per cent; if it were to continue at the same rate, the number of Melanesians living in Vila would double once more by 1980.¹

The wave of rural migrants, suddenly emerged in an unfamiliar urban environment, inevitably created a number of serious problems both cultural and social: in particular, large-scale unemployment and the proliferation of ramshackle and insanitary housing. The Condominium does not have a monopoly in this respect: the drift from country to town has also taken on alarming proportions in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji.

Improvised housing belts—which are no more than shanty-towns—are appearing beyond the former administrative and residential districts. Each of the countries concerned is attempting to face up to the situation. Emergency measures have been taken, and in many areas there has emerged a policy of assistance in the construction of low-cost housing.² Studies have been made in an attempt to come to terms with the movement, and gain deeper understanding of it.³

(1) However, the inflow of migrants appears to have levelled off in 1975, as a result of widespread unemployment following a slow-down in building activities.

(2) Cf. 'Papouasie Nouvelle-Guinée: l'expérience de l'Office du Logement à Port Moresby' (Experience of the Port Moresby Housing Office) in *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, No. 48, September 1975. (J. Bonnemaïson.)

(3) In particular—on the New Hebrides—by Bedford (1972), Vienne (1972) and Bonnemaïson (1974 and 1975).

However, the issue remains as difficult as ever, and is certainly far from being overcome. Migration to cities seems to be an established and irreversible fact. The point is whether we should consider it as a normal outgrowth of the onward movement of Pacific societies and economies; or, alternatively, and in a more negative light, as the symptom of a fundamental imbalance, which, sooner or later, must generate new difficulties. Logically, what form of migrant policy should be devised? Should policy be aimed at achieving permanent migrant integration in the urban environment, or at encouraging migrants to return, occasionally or once and for all, to their home areas?

Although the following considerations apply specifically to the situation in the New Hebrides, it is hoped that they may find wider relevance. The islands which comprise the New Hebrides make up a microcosm of the problems which beset the whole of the Melanesian world. There is a striking contrast between the rural sector, which bears to this day the distinctive marks of its traditions maintaining to a large extent a subsistence economy, and swiftly expanding towns, with the glittering fascination of their lights. And there are vast discrepancies between islands, in terms of the inroads made by the economic principles and models of the outside world. Despite encouraging improvements in the frequency of air services, communication within and between islands is still far from adequate, and, to make matters worse, many of the small craft which in the past sailed regularly from island to island have disappeared.

The very real problems of the isolation of some areas and the varying degrees of social and economic progress are compounded by the extraordinary linguistic and cultural diversity of the islands. Within the group, more than 100 languages are spoken, some of them by only a handful of villages. While there is obvious consistency in New Hebridean civilization and culture, the individualistic leanings of a given island—or even part of an island—are often very marked. While recent religious schisms, and the legal status of the Condominium, with its French and British authorities, emphasize rather than dispel division.

Rather than describe the phenomenon of migration in this setting so unlike any other, I shall try to delineate its development over the course of time, and thereby infer a number of proposals relevant to urban migration policy. An examination of migration to urban areas will show that there are, in fact, two distinct migratory patterns. Each was predominant at a certain stage, and today the two co-exist in varying proportions according to the island in which the migrants originated.

The first of these two patterns to appear was that of *circular migration*, which has already been studied in detail by R. D. Bedford. Migrants of

this type belong to an organized community structure, and return periodically to their home islands.

The second movement is more recent; it dates back to the boom which occurred in Vila in 1970. Today it shows a tendency to become predominant in some islands, in particular those most influenced by the modern world. This second migratory pattern is more individualistic, and corresponds less to a given structure, than the first. It is in some respects—though obviously on a much lesser scale—not unlike the rural-urban migration which can today be observed in third world countries in Africa and Asia. To distinguish this form from circular migration, I shall refer to it as uncontrolled, or "one-way" migration.

1. Traditional circular migration

Until fairly recently, migration to the cities followed a circular pattern. The result was a relatively regular cycle between the village and the town, the former being considered as a permanent residence, whereas the latter was a place where wages could be earned for a limited period. Circular migrants did not move to the towns for the sake of leaving their villages, but with the intention of returning once they had earned enough money to enhance their standard of living in the village by building a durable house, for example, or buying sheet-metal, livestock, transistors, or perhaps even a car or a boat. Thus, the stay in town was of short duration. Migrants would leave their island for anything from one month to one year, the average being six months. The majority of them would always arrange their homecoming to coincide with the preparation of the vegetable gardens in July or August, and with the village festivities during the Christmas period.

Thus, the timing of the circular movements was determined by the requirements of rural life. In the circular migrant, shifting regularly from village to town and back again, the islander prevailed. Indeed, his main characteristic was the strength of the ties which united him with his homeland: he would remain loyal to his traditions, steeped in his original culture, and dependent on the bonds—whether handed down through the family or arising from ethnic solidarity—which governed his life on the island.

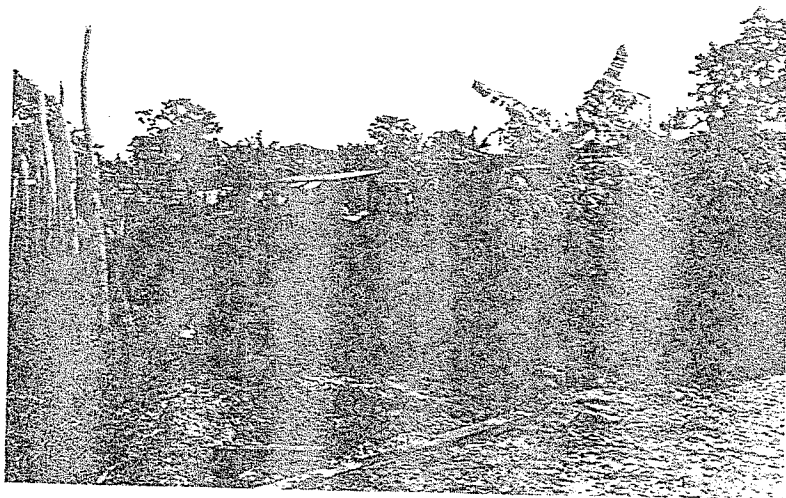
On reaching the town, migrants continue to behave in accordance with their attachment to home. The migrant reacts to a world in which he considers himself an outsider by seeking out those akin to him and reconstituting in the urban setting the ties and relations to which he is accustomed in his village. Thus, circular migration leads to the forming, in towns, of 'companies' and communities based on family ties and the traditional authority of the chiefs.

The communities maintain, as far as possible, the village spirit and the custom of mutual support. Thus, the group provides migrants with a feeling of security, while actively sustaining their

attachment to their native homeland and community.

Inhabitants of a village, or occasionally of a whole island, often pool their resources, forming a 'company', to purchase a plot of land to be used as a mustering point for migrants. There are many examples of these collective purchases of land, the best known being that of Sea Side, Vila, where the inhabitants of the island of Tongoa bought three plots in an estate on the outskirts of the town, subsequently dividing them amongst the main villages which had had a share in the operation. The villages, which could not be housed in the restricted area available at Sea Side, later grouped together to buy land in other housing areas (Tagabé, Namburu). The shanty town of Sarakata in Luganville was also acquired jointly: it is owned by a group made up of several villages from the Central Pentecost area (Melsissi).

In addition to these relatively large communities, a few extended families—brothers, cousins and brothers-in-law—have formed smaller 'companies' for the joint purchase of land on which



Rented shanties at Sea Side. The migrants group themselves in accordance with traditional ties in their home islands.

they build their houses. This is done with whatever comes to hand, waste material mostly. Community acquisitions of this type often lead to misunderstanding in the minds of uninitiated observers, who tend to consider the co-existence of several migrant families or groups on the same piece of land as a form of sponging.

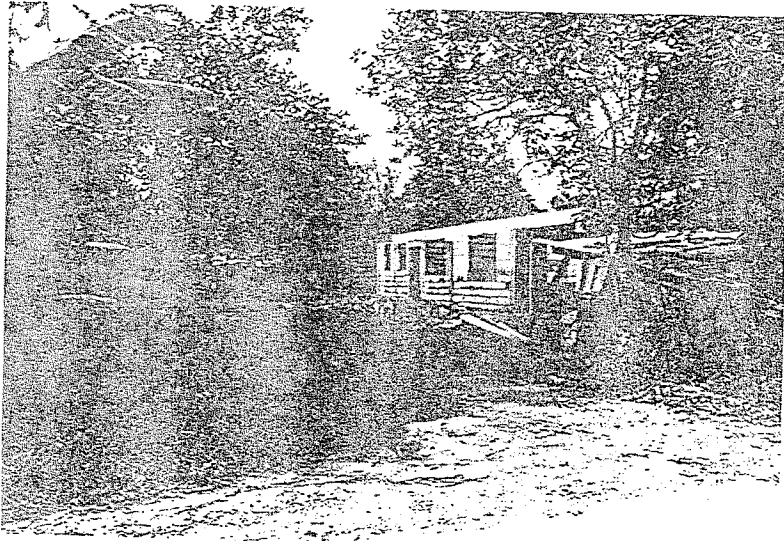
Migrants also tend to form family or village groups for the purpose of renting a room or a hut. The same community pattern comes into play for employment; residential groups often organize themselves within city-based companies, forging, by summary co-optation, a monopoly on recruitment for their members. Many examples could be quoted; the Vila Electric Company is a

closed shop run by people of Tanna, groups from Paama and the banks have a hold on certain commercial concerns.

The consequence of circular migration, then, is the emergence in the urban setting of large or small communities which materialize on both the place of residence and the place of work. Until recent years, these somewhat unstable communities formed the backbone of the societal structure of the urbanized Melanesian population in Vila and in Luganville. The phenomenon has, as we shall see, both advantages and drawbacks.

For the admittedly small number of those who acquire occupational skills or qualifications and settle permanently in town, the community system may well develop into a hindrance; in the course of time the process of intra-community aid stands to become embarrassing. A further point is that the community and the little 'companies' revitalize and sustain local idiosyncrasies which some observers consider as a potential danger to the political future of the New Hebrides.

Community living as such does, however, correspond to a definite need. It provides effective



Construction of a house in permanent materials at Vila. Building costs are so high that without some outside help migrants have to wait several years before building is completed.

assistance: through it, the migrant knows that he can make contact with members of his family or village, find a place to live, and very often a job. It confers a sense of belonging, thus helping to overcome the feeling of foreignness, and strengthens the ties with the original community. A migrant living in town with his own group will never entirely sever his attachment to his homeland. News and messages from the island are passed around the group.

It is normal practice for the migrant to return to his village periodically, either for festivities or

when a close member of his family falls ill. To a certain extent, these regular homecomings protect the urban migrant against the risk of proletarianization, and at the same time run counter to the process of acculturation. Socially speaking, they form a natural safety valve in occurrences such as unemployment or economic slowdown. To the extent that the spirit and traditions of the village maintain their vitality within urban communities, subsequent resettlement of the migrant in his original environment is facilitated.

Until 1971, a little over two-thirds of all urban migrants who came to work in Vila and Luganville were of the circular type. Circular migration is characterized by a small number of old hands who became relatively well established in the place of immigration, thus forming a solid nucleus⁴ around which the changing and unstable migrant mass temporarily gravitates.

This well-organized migration, reflecting traditional and family home structures, began to weaken and disappear around 1971.

2. Uncontrolled migration

The new type of migration proceeded from several different events. In 1971, a series of cyclones caused serious damage to coconut groves in small and middle-sized islands with a high population density (Banks and Shepherd Islands). During the same year the bottom suddenly fell out of the world copra market; prices fell drastically from NHF10,000 per tonne to NHF2,000 or NHF3,000.⁵ For the islands in which copra is the only exportable commodity, the crisis caused a serious shortfall in earnings. Simultaneously, Vila experienced a boom, the result of which was a heavy demand for labour, particularly in the building sector.⁶

This sudden growth of Vila, essentially the outcome of outside investments, coincided with the aftermath of the rural crisis: the sudden releasing of that part of the labour force which was made redundant by the fall in copra prices. At the same time, the initial effects of intensive schooling appeared. A considerable number of young country-dwellers, whose education had familiarized them with the modern world, headed for the cities

(4) The mean period of residence in Vila for 50% of workers employed on building sites is eight months. However, the next 25% have an average of only four months, while the remaining 25%, the most permanent and generally the most highly qualified, stay two years. Thus, there is simultaneously a highly mobile majority and a durable, stable nucleus which forms the backbone of the migrant communities. Cf. *Migration et création urbaine à Port-Vila* (Migration and urban development in Vila), J. Bonnemaïson, 1974.

(5) The copra market did not begin to recover until mid-1973. In 1975 prices again fell, and are still very low (4,000 NHF/tonne).

(6) A 1973 survey showed that the 30 building companies—of varying sizes—in Vila employed nearly 1,000 persons, two-thirds of whom were labourers.

where they hoped to find work. School-leavers who remain on their island are a minority; they see the city as the obvious next stop along a road which in any case, and from the outset, can only lead them away from their rural and traditional background.

The combined result of these factors—both structural and cyclical—was to trigger off a new wave of migration. Planters driven away from their islands by the copra slump joined young school-leavers attracted by the city in the rush to Vila. Their motives were the same: they felt that their life had become impossible, and that the only alternative was to make for the city.

Unlike the other, this movement was neither temporary, nor organized from home, nor strongly influenced by community structures. Migrants abandoned their village alone or in small groups, and with no plans as to the date of their homecoming. Ties with the home environment were virtually non-existent, or in any case far less explicit than was the case with circular migration.

The outcome was a new approach to traditional community structures. Rather than try to join a 'company', the new migrants tried their luck individually, getting by as best they could, and living alone or in small groups based on the nuclear family. Thus, there emerged a mass of unattached individuals, each of whom would remain in town as long as he could.

Links with the village ways disappeared, as did regular contact with the home community. Messages and news from the villages petered out, and 'companies' no longer exerted control over migrants. Those who had remained behind often knew neither the address of the migrant nor where he worked; indeed, they generally had no idea whether he would one day return. This type of migration is an irretrievable loss to the community. Once the migrant has disappeared into the anonymous depths of the city, he practically no longer belongs to his community, and whether he will return is anyone's guess.

The migratory movement became uncontrolled, or anarchic, when it no longer reflected structures, means of control, and connecting links with the home environment. No one can say how it will develop. But it is already causing serious difficulty in urban areas.

Surveys in 1973 and 1974 showed that a number of the new urban migrants had succeeded individually. For the most part, these were young school-leavers who had obtained qualified posts in the administration, the main commercial concerns, and the building sector. The embryo of a Melanesian middle class is taking shape.⁷ However, the group concerned is of necessity a minority; the bulk of 'uncontrolled' migrants remains an unskilled and vulnerable labour force. Cut off from the backing of their community structures,

(7) Cf. *Migration et création urbaine à Port-Vila*, op. cit.

they show an increasing tendency to form a predominantly young and male urban proletariat, going through a rapid process of acculturation.

More than half of the 7,500-odd Melanesians currently living in urban areas may be considered as migrants of the uncontrolled type. The new pattern of migration now outweighs the former, but has not entirely supplanted it. Both in Vila and Luganville, traditional community structures are still very much alive, even though they are less and less able to keep their migrants—particularly the younger ones—in check.

3. Proposals for an effective urban migration policy

In an attempt to alleviate the problems raised by large-scale urban migration, the Condominium authorities have for some years been seeking to develop a policy of low-cost housing. A hundred-hectare plot on the outskirts of Vila (formerly the Demant estate) has been purchased. The urban development plan stipulates that it is to be divided into approximately 100 sections of 500m², each of which can contain a detached, durable house for a nuclear family. Adjoining the estate will be a gardening area, together with a shopping centre and a hostel for single people which will be run by the New Hebridean Council of Churches. The *Caisse Centrale de Coopération* is studying the most appropriate form of construction, and at the same time seeking to secure long-term loan facilities to make house ownership possible for members of low-income groups.

While the basic principles underlying the project are commendable, the observations in the preceding study of migratory patterns could, if taken into account, contribute to improving its sociological aspect. It would be tempting, but most inadvisable, to apply a single, generalized policy to all new housing areas. Such a policy may well be technically adequate, but by ignoring the migrants' widely varying backgrounds it would of necessity involve a number of risks:

transforming circular migrants with no intention of settling in the city into permanent migrants;

misunderstanding one of the vital features of the migrant population; the fact that it is organized in communities and 'companies', for which no provision is made in new housing developments;

catering only for the marginal few who have been successfully integrated into the urban environment, thereby ignoring the enormous majority of unskilled circular migrants.

In some instances, failure to take community structures into account is deliberate. Some officials consider that a city should be a melting pot in which structures reflecting the home community are to be dissolved and eliminated. Undue vaunting of the merits of migrant communities and companies would admittedly be dangerous, but at

the same time their usefulness in the present context must be acknowledged (mutual support, a focal point for human and cultural relations, etc.). Just as the cohesion which has developed in some of them, in particular those of Tanna and Tongoa, should not be underestimated. Communities are likely to ignore and by-pass housing settlements which make no provision for them.

Thus, the project should be twofold: its two parts are related, and must be undertaken simultaneously. Firstly, a series of individual sections should be provided, as planned, for the benefit of the minority group of migrants who remain unattached to communities: young school-leavers, well-integrated families intending to settle permanently in the urban area, migrants of the uncontrolled type, etc.

Secondly, such settlements should feature community facilities, interspersed with individual sections, allowing group activities in line with the requirements of circular migrants. An objective such as this can scarcely be reached without very broad co-operation between the administrative, political and religious authorities, and of course the migrants themselves.

The overriding aim is, in fact, to restore to the migrant communities the space, or rather the territory, they need in order to continue functioning. This does not mean building districts corresponding to geographical or religious background: it is rather intended to reflect the need for atmosphere and community spirit in housing settlements which, by their very nature, tend to be anonymous and soulless. This implies the meeting of several conditions, which could well be the subject for future discussions.

When individual sections are offered for sale, groups of purchasers who so desire should be allowed to acquire neighbouring or adjoining sections, but large or compact units should be avoided: for example, ten to 15 adjoining sections would be a satisfactory upper limit.

Several 'community spaces' should be provided for the activities of the main communities. These should be laid out amongst the individual sections, and would combine the functions of cultural centre, social centre and the traditional *nakamal*. A true *nakamal*, or village meeting house, built by traditional standards and with traditional materials, and adjoining an open space similar to the *nassarah*, or dancing place, in the island villages would provide both a meeting place and a club. Although the *nakamal* would initially be the outgrowth of the traditions of a specific island, it should very quickly turn into a cultural and social focal point for the whole of the little village surrounding it.

In addition to this, hostels for single people, run either by local or town councils from the islands, or by the migrant communities concerned, or by both jointly, should be provided. The

guiding principle should be to avoid separating single people from well-established families (with whom in point of fact they are often related). By providing housing facilities, adapted to this particular type of migrant, the danger of turning temporary city-dwellers, who are often *de facto* bachelors, into parasites would be avoided. Contact between the two groups can in any case only benefit from the building of community *nakamals*, and from the interspersing of hostels, which obviously must not be too large, with family and individual housing units.

The purpose of these three proposals is to allow community structures to survive, and to adapt the principles governing housing settlements to a migratory pattern of which the main characteristics are mobility, the predominance of single men, and community living and organization. However, a number of other conditions must also be fulfilled.

The first concerns the size of the future settlements. A gigantic array of identical boxes must at all costs be avoided, as this would result in migrant ghettos. In other words, rather than lumping together the whole of the population to be resettled in a single estate, the housing project should comprise several medium-sized units scattered over the urban area. Within these new housing districts, the watchword should be 'quality of life', which in this context can only mean an authentically Melanesian life style. This in turn implies two further prerequisites.

Firstly, gardening space must be available with each individual section, for a very low additional price. Specific legislation should be devised to ban any form of construction on such land. Melanesian gardens are important not only as a source of food, but also because of their cultural and aesthetic role,⁸ and for the growing of traditional medicinal plants. A suburban garden in Vila is therefore the answer to a vital need of the migrants, and to their desire to reconstitute in their new environment a life style as close as possible to that of their original villages.

Secondly, the houses in the new settlements should be true to the Melanesian model, and not merely simplified copies of European dwellings. Several studies on this subject have been published;⁹ their results are now well known, and a number of projects due for the most part to the efforts of the *Caisse Centrale* and the Condominium Architects, have been completed.

Thus, there is good reason to hope that concrete rabbit warrens will be mercifully absent from the

(8) On the part played by urban gardening, see R. Thaman, 'Urban Root Crop Production in the South-West Pacific'—SPC Root Crops W.P. 11 Suva 1975.

(9) The reader might usefully refer to B. Vienne, *L'habitat social dans les agglomérations de Port Vila et de Luganville*.

Vila: the Boulevard Higginson, the main road bordering the sea-front.

new housing settlements and that their place will be taken by genuinely Melanesian models. In this respect, the types of housing which were spontaneously developed by migrants in the open 'garden settlements' opened in Luganville by the *Société Française des Nouvelles-Hébrides* speak for themselves.

Conclusion

In making these observations, I have attempted to broaden the whole issue of migration and low-cost housing. This inevitably involves demonstrating that there is not just one, but at least two categories of migrants, and that they differ drastically in their motivations, their wishes, and their form of insertion into an urban environment. It is most important that the facilities offered to migrants be adapted to their requirements; in other words, providing individual sections for those who are able and willing to settle permanently in the city, while at the same time making available to temporary city-dwellers facilities adapted to their circular form of mobility, and to the community structure and rules to which they are accustomed.

Making and applying this distinction is the only remedy to urban migration, a problem which will otherwise have disastrous effects on the countries and regions of the Pacific. Failure to do so would be failure to strike an equitable balance between town and country, thus precluding any chance of successful development.

Original text: French.

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF ESCAP VISITS SPC HQ

Drs. J. B. P. Maramis, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, paid a brief visit to SPC Headquarters at the end of August. Drs. Maramis, who was accompanied by Mr R. Gontha, his Special Assistant, had a distinguished career in the Indonesian Diplomatic Service before being appointed to his present post in 1973.

During his visit to Noumea, Drs. Maramis had discussions with the Secretary-General and the Programme Directors on collaboration between ESCAP and SPC in the Pacific islands.

Drs. Maramis and the Secretary-General had already met earlier this year when Dr Salato attended the Thirty-Second Session of ESCAP, which was chaired by President Hammer DeRoburt of Nauru. Drs. Maramis had an opportunity to meet SPC's professional staff and to describe to them ESCAP's work programme and plans for the future. He also called on the French High Commissioner and the Indonesian, Australian and New Zealand Consuls, and attended the opening of ORSTOM's new building.



From right: The SPC Secretary-General, Dr E. Macu Salato; the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Drs. J. B. P. Maramis; and Mr R. Gontha, Special Assistant to the Executive Secretary.