

MIXING UP

Social Contact and Modernization in a Japanese Joint Venture in the Solomon Islands

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ABSTRACT: Increased interactions between groups of people through modernization may be embraced as mutually enriching or denounced as causing “negative social impacts.” This paper is predicated on the assumption that people’s perceptions of modernization projects influence their outcomes, because people resist rather than commit to negatively perceived projects. The nature of social contact brought about through modernization is a key factor in perceptions of modernization projects. Three types of social contact in a fishing joint venture between the Solomon Islands government and a Japanese company are explored in this paper: contact between men and women, between ethnic groups within Solomon Islands, and between Solomon Islanders and foreigners. Some of the criteria by which interviewees judged social contact included whether it was peaceful or caused friction, whether it caused cultural change, and whether it was hierarchical. The types of contact are discussed in terms of those criteria to reveal their varied effects on perceptions of modernization.

The opening up of economies and increasing contacts with the rest of the world are part of the constellation of processes we call modernization.¹ Opinions vary, however, about whether this opening up is good or bad. Neo-Marxist perspectives on dependency in the capitalist world system judge this contact to be unhealthy for former colonies. Neo-Marxist-oriented policy-makers thus restricted and closely managed contact with the world economy from the 1950s to the 1980s. In recent decades, however, others have contended that removing all barriers between local economies and the world economy is fundamentally