**Making Comparisons**

1. Find the island of Nauru on a world map. It is located just south of the equator at approximately, 0° 167° E. At the scale of a world map, Nauru is a small speck located just south of the equator.
2. Based its location what do you think would be some economic activities on this Pacific Island? What do you think the per capita GDP is?
3. Read the word description of the island. Draw a rough sketch map of the island.
4. How does your map compare with the one projected by your teacher?

> Phosphate mining on the central plateau leaves a barren terrain of jagged coral pinnacles up to 49 feet high. A century of mining has stripped four-fifths of the total land area. The island is surrounded by a coral reef, exposed at low tide. The reef is bounded seaward by deep water and inside by a sandy beach. Landward from the beach lies a wide fertile coastal strip. Coral cliffs surround the central plateau. The highest point of the plateau is 213 feet above sea level.
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> The only fertile areas are the narrow coastal belt, where there are coconut palms. Bananas, pineapples, and some vegetables are grown on the land surrounding the Buada lagoon.

The island country of Nauru provides a case study in the consequences of human environmental interaction. In the late 1980s Nauru was listed among the top ten of the highest per capita GDPs in the world. As Nauru's chief export of phosphates dwindles, per capita GDP and the survivability of the island decline. In this learning activity you will compare accounts of life in Nauru during two separate time periods and make predictions for its future.

**1980 Account of Nauru**

Nauru, an island in the Pacific, is the smallest independent country in the world, 8.2 square miles. The 6,000 people on Nauru also have the world's highest per capita income, about $25,000 per year. The money comes from the sale of phosphates, which are mined by laborers imported from other parts of the Pacific. At its peak the Nauruan per capita GDP was second to the world at $50,000. Most Nauruans spend their time enjoying the luxuries that their only natural resource will buy. Though there are only two roads, the islanders own 2,000 cars. Almost everybody owns a video recorder and dines on imported processed food.

The change in lifestyle has brought many problems for the Nauruans. First, the phosphates are expected to be mined out by 1995, leaving Nauru, once a beautiful tropical island, looking like the cratered surface of the moon. Meanwhile, the high sugar and salt content of imported processed foods have created widespread and serious health problems. Obesity and high blood pressure are common. Over 42 percent of the islanders over 20 years of age have high blood pressure.

- What is the geographic error in the first paragraph?
- Why is the prosperity of the island not expected to last?
- How has prosperity caused problems for the islanders?

**Nauru in 2000**

Nauru, an island in the Pacific Ocean, is one of the smallest independent countries in the world. Only 8.1 square miles in size, Nauru received its independence from Australia in 1968

Nauru has a population of approximately 9,300 people, about half of whom are natives of Nauru and the other half laborers from the surrounding islands. For years the primary economic activity on Nauru has been the mining of huge

amounts of phosphates, which are used as fertilizers. The phosphates were created by guano that was deposited over centuries on the cratered center of the island.

Phosphate mining once gave the native Nauruans one of the highest per capita incomes of any nation on earth. The current per capita GDP is $10,000 and declining. In the past, income from phosphates has allowed the government of Nauru to provide free education and health services to all its citizens at no tax burden to the people. That's right – a country with no income taxes! Sounds like a great place to live – a tropical environment and lots of money.

However, the future for Nauru is not that bright. The supply of phosphates is coming to an end. The interior of the island has been mined literally to within an inch of its life. Remember, this is a coral atoll, and after all the phosphates have been taken out, only the jagged coral remains. Mining has stripped 4/5 of the total land area.

At its highest elevation, Nauru is 213 feet above sea level. Global warming trends could spell disaster as rising ocean levels bring the risk of tidal surges and flooding. The nearest place to call for help is 300 miles away.

Additionally, Nauruans adoption of a "westernized" life style replete with modern conveniences has also generated the health concerns that accompany that life style – diabetes, obesity, cancer, and high blood pressure.

The twelve-mile long road that circles the island is frequently gridlocked, since almost every Nauruan owns a car. The traffic jams rival the gridlock on I-64 at the Hampton Roads tunnel even though the speed limit is only 30 mph.

**Nauru Today**

After over a century of intensive phosphate mining most of Nauru is a wasteland. Cadmium residue, phosphate dust, and other contaminants have caused air and water pollution. Eighty percent of the island is uninhabitable. The phosphate resources are almost totally depleted. The image to the right shows the landscape resulting from phosphate mining.

The population depends on three desalination plants and rainwater collection for its supply of fresh water. with negative impacts on health; climate change has brought on rising sea levels and fresh water shortages on Nauru. The major economic activities include coconut production, phosphate mining, and off shore banking. Currently the island's GDP comes from the following sectors: agriculture (6.1%); Industry (33%), and Services (50%).

Obesity rates have fluctuated from a high of 71.1% of the population in 2008 to 45.1% in 2014 with an increase 61% in 2016. During the boom years a fund with profits from phosphate mining was established, but mismanagement and bad investments have considerably decreased those funds. In fact, Nauru had 17 governments between1989 and 2003. The table below shows change in economic and demographic indicators over time.

| Indicator | 1993 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Per capita GDP | 10,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 | | 14,800 | 12,200 |
| Total Population | | 11,845 | 13,048 | | | 11,359 |
| Life Expectancy | | 61.2 | 62.7 | 64.9 | | 67.4 |

How did Nauru change over time?
How did the physical geography of Nauru affect its development in the past and in the present?
How did human action change the environment of Nauru?

Take a moment and think of some possible actions the government of Nauru should take to ensure their survival as an independent country. What new economic activities should they consider in order to maintain their economic viability? Be ready to present the pros and cons for each of the suggestions.