

“MIGRATING WITH DIGNITY”:  
A STUDY OF THE KIRIBATI-AUSTRALIA  
NURSING INITIATIVE (KANI)

By

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## ABSTRACT

Due to the effects of extreme climate change and overcrowding, it has been predicted that the Republic of Kiribati, a small island nation in the Pacific, could become completely uninhabitable by 2050. With the country's long-term sustainability and survival under threat, President Anote Tong has proposed the "migrating with dignity" strategy to collaborate with developed countries and create educational training programs in hopes that more I-Kiribati will be able to gain employment and move overseas. My thesis examines this relocation strategy with a particular focus on the Kiribati Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI) at Griffith University in Brisbane. Using an in-depth qualitative approach, my study focuses on the KANI students' motivations for leaving Kiribati, their personal experiences with the program, and its impact on their lives. My results hope to provide insight into the importance of this and other migration policies to Kiribati and other atoll nations of the Pacific region.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Rising sea levels and other effects of climate change are threatening the long-term survival of the Republic of Kiribati and other low-lying small-island nations in the Pacific Ocean. In addition to increased climatic variability, however, Kiribati already faces some of the most extreme social, economic, and environmental challenges in the world, including high rates of overcrowding, poverty, and youth unemployment. The purpose of this thesis is to examine one possible solution to help address these issues, the “migrating with dignity” strategy recently introduced by the President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, with particular focus on the pilot Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI) program at Griffith University in Australia.

Using a qualitative approach involving extensive interviews with currently enrolled I-Kiribati students, this study aims to gain an understanding of the students’ personal experiences with the program and how it could potentially influence future migration and relocation strategies and policy. I hope to contribute to the current research concerning the “migrating with dignity” strategy and the significant political, economic, and cultural implications it could have for Kiribati, Australia, New Zealand, and other small-island nations dealing with similar climatic, economic, and social pressures.

#### **Research Approach**

After reading about the KANI program for the first time in an article on the National Public Radio website titled, “Preparing for Sea Level Rise, Islanders Leave Home,” by Brian Reed (2011), I was instantly captivated. I wanted to learn more about the program and the reasons behind its creation, including the potential impact of climate change in the islands and the socio-economic challenges influencing migration and relocation. I also wanted to know more about the individual students taking part in the program. What were their personal motivations



for enrolling? What were their experiences like living and working in Australia? What would earning a nursing degree from this program mean to them and to their families? What did they hope to do after graduation? Would they go back to their home islands in Kiribati or would they stay in Australia? What were the different push and pull factors behind this decision? With the goal of hopefully discovering the answers to these questions and more, I chose to conduct a qualitative research study focusing on the KANI program and the personal narratives of the I-Kiribati students enrolled.

### **Research Questions**

Based on this approach, I formulated three main research questions to guide my thesis work and frame all of my data collection and analysis activities:

1. What were the push and pull factors (social, economic, environmental) that motivated the I-Kiribati students to apply for the KANI program and move to Australia?
2. What were the personal experiences of the KANI students both before and after they were accepted into the program?
3. What impact has this program had on the students' present and future lives and what significance does it have for their families and communities back in Kiribati?

### **Migration and Policy in the Pacific**

While the Pacific region has a long history of both economic and environmental migration, it is predicted to occur on an unprecedented scale in the upcoming decades when entire nations might be forced to permanently relocate due to the effects of climate change (Barnett, 2001; Barnett & Campbell, 2010). In order to minimize the impacts of such large scale relocation, new national, regional, and international policies need to be designed and

implemented to provide the most vulnerable island nations, including Kiribati, adequate time to adapt and establish communities abroad (Locke, 2009).

Even with current policy efforts, there are still significant barriers to migration that exist in the Pacific region today. For example, the cost of travel, limited language proficiency, lack of job skills, limited entry into developed countries, and the difficulty of acquiring housing, services, and employment once in a new country greatly hinder population resettlement (Barnett & Campbell, 2010). The people of Kiribati, known as I-Kiribati, are one such population encountering these obstacles while at the same time experiencing a variety of push and pull factors to leave their home country.

### **Republic of Kiribati**

Comprised of 32 small, low-lying atolls and one raised coral island, the Republic of Kiribati (Appendix A. Fig. 1) stretches across more than three and a half million square kilometers of the central Pacific and is considered to be one of the most vulnerable nations in the world to environmental change (Adger, 2011; Barnett, 2003, Locke, 2008, White et al., 2008). With a total land area of only approximately 810 square kilometers, an average island width of less than 1,000 meters, and only a few locations over two meters above sea level, Kiribati is particularly susceptible to the effects of increased climatic variability, including rising sea levels and increased coastal erosion, flooding from storm and tidal surges, drought, and contamination and depletion of the limited fresh water supply (Barnett, 2001; Campbell, 2010; Locke, 2009).

The islands of Kiribati are also facing great environmental, social, and economic degradation due to overpopulation and overcrowding. Although the nation encompasses three different island groups, the Gilbert, the Phoenix, and Line Islands (Appendix A. Fig. 2), the vast majority of the nation's population of more than 103,000 is found within the 16 atolls of the

Gilbert island chain (Appendix A. Fig.3). Around half of the population lives on just one atoll, Tarawa, the location of the nation's capital, South Tarawa, the main political, economic, and urban center (Appendix A. Fig.4) (CIA, 2013; Pretes, 2008; White et al., 2008).

As the outer atolls beyond Tarawa become increasingly unsustainable, the number of people choosing to move to the small islets of South Tarawa in search of assistance from the government and family relations, as well as possible economic and educational opportunities, continues to grow. This increased rural to urban migration has led to many serious issues in the capital and the population has overwhelmed the environment, the government, the economy, and the infrastructure of the capital. As the long-term survival of Kiribati becomes increasingly threatened, President Tong acknowledges that even with the development and implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation projects, relocation might be unavoidable.

### **“Migrating with Dignity”**

To prepare for a possible future in which his people may be forced to relocate and leave their ancestral lands, the President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, has called on the international community to provide the aid and support needed to help his country. President Tong has also proposed a migration policy that he calls “migrating with dignity.” In order to minimize the impact permanent relocation will have for his nation and his people, this strategy proposes the creation of more programs to provide the education and training needed for the population of Kiribati to be able to take advantage of more economic opportunities overseas in developed nations, such as Australia and New Zealand.

By facilitating labor migration and helping more I-Kiribati, particularly the younger generation, to migrate abroad, this strategy will help address issues such as overcrowding, high youth unemployment, and diminishing resources in the capital. These early migrants will also be

able to aid their family and their nation through remittances and will ultimately be able to help other family members migrate later on while keeping their community, identity, culture, and dignity in tact as much as possible in the process. The Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI), a pilot program at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, is one of the first such training programs to be developed as part of the “migrating with dignity” strategy.

### **Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI)**

Sponsored by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), KANI is a unique scholarship program offered through Griffith University in Brisbane. Scheduled to run from 2007 to 2013, KANI is a pilot program aimed at helping I-Kiribati students gain valued skills and experience in nursing. With this training, graduating students will hopefully be able to find future employment in Australia or elsewhere overseas, helping to alleviate immediate social, economic, and population pressures in Kiribati. It is also hoped that these students will also provide the essential foundation, network, and support system required to absorb greater numbers of migrants in the future.

### **Structure of Thesis**

This thesis first provides background information with sections on the history of Kiribati and the modern challenges currently faced by the population. The next section details the methods used to collect the qualitative data that serve as the basis for this research. Following that is a synthesis of the data and analysis of findings focused on the social, economic, and environmental challenges that influenced the migration of the participants as well as their specific experiences within the KANI program by looking at the past, the present, and the future influence of the program on their lives. Finally, the conclusion section summarizes the main themes and makes recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### History and Culture of the Islands

From the very earliest settlement around 4-5,000 years ago, the society and culture of the Indigenous inhabitants of Kiribati have had to continually adapt in order to survive in these remote, harsh, and vulnerable islands (MacDonald, 2001). While the Republic of Kiribati currently includes three different island groups, the Gilbert, Phoenix, and Line Islands, it was known solely as the Gilbert Islands from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century through the colonial era and was comprised primarily of the 16 islands in this one group (Pretes, 2008). Learning to live within the limits of their extreme environment, the early Islanders, referred to as the Gilbertese prior to independence, developed a rich culture influenced by migrations of both Micronesian and Polynesian settlers, which emphasized the most valued aspects of society: family and land (Howe et al., 1994; MacDonald, 2001; Rennie, 1989).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the islands were discovered and increasingly frequented by Westerners, the delicate relationship between society and nature began to change. Early contact and trade with foreigners soon brought the islands to the attention of the Western world, including labor recruiters, missionaries, and colonial authorities. All of these changes proved to be profoundly influential in transforming the traditional culture and society of the islands. Even though European and Western influences have been significant, elements of the old traditions and customs continue to survive and flourish. Consequently, in order to understand the current social, political, and economic situation the I-Kiribati are experiencing and who they are as a people, it is essential to first understand the historical context of the islands.

## **First Inhabitants**

Although much of the early history of the Pacific region remains highly speculative, genetic and archaeological evidence suggests that early human migration and settlement first occurred at least 50,000 years ago in parts of Australia, New Guinea, and Melanesia (MacDonald, 2001). Approximately 8,000 years ago, a second wave of migrants possessing highly sophisticated sailing vessels and navigational skills gradually started to spread from Southeast Asia into other areas of Melanesia and Micronesia (Howe, 2007; MacDonald, 2001; Scarr, 2001; Talu, 1979). Due to their small land mass and their extreme remoteness, the Gilbert Islands were to be settled much later by Micronesians, probably from the Caroline and Marshall Islands, some 4-5,000 years ago (Howe et al., 1994; MacDonald, 2001; Scarr, 2001).

Until they were able to successfully adapt to the harsh landscape and climate in which they found themselves, the first peoples to settle in the Gilberts faced a difficult existence. One of the biggest challenges was finding enough fresh water on these extremely small, arid, and low-lying atolls and the only potable water available was collected either from the rain or from wells that were dug to access the atolls' shallow "freshwater lens" a few meters below the surface (Bedford, 1980). Rainfall varies considerably through the island chain, ranging from higher amounts in the northernmost islands, around 3125 mm annually, to very low and infrequent amounts in the south, around 1240 mm annually (Aregheore, 2009). As such, the freshwater lenses, which are formed when rain "soaks through the porous surface soil creating a lens of often slightly brackish freshwater, hydrostatically floating on higher density saltwater beneath it," were to be the main source of water for the Islanders (Thomas, 2002, p.164).

In addition to the lack of fresh water, the early islanders, although highly dependent on the wide variety of fish and other resources found on or near the reefs and within the lagoons and

the surrounding sea, struggled with the extremely limited amount of vegetation and food resources available on land (Geddes, 1982; MacDonald, 2001). The islands were so sandy, arid, and barren that the “range of plant species that can survive is severely restricted” and many of the usual staple crops found elsewhere in the Pacific, such as taro, bananas, pawpaw (papaya), sweet potatoes, and yams, simply could not grow (Bedford, 1980, p. 206). The only crops the early Gilbertese were able to successfully introduce and cultivate were pandanus, *babai*, and coconuts (MacDonald, 2001).

The pandanus tree was by far the most important crop for the earliest inhabitants as it was the first plant to take hold and survive in the arid soils (Grimble, 1972; Uriam, 2011). Hundreds of different varieties were grown and cultivated and they were used primarily for building shelters as well as making items such as mats, baskets, ceremonial costumes, and medicine (MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979). The pandanus fruit was also harvested and consumed and was a significant source of energy and essential vitamins (Grimble, 1972). *Babai*, a plant similar to taro, was also discovered to grow on the atolls, however, it had to be completely submerged in water within deep dugout pits and took so much care and time to fully grow that it was typically only used for special ceremonies and events (Bataua, 1985; MacDonald, 2001).

The most crucial and essential crop on the islands was to become, and still remains, the coconut palm. Introduced a little later to the islands than the pandanus, the coconut palm came to dominate the island landscape and “provided almost every need” from building materials to clothing and the coconut flesh, water, and milk were all consumed and constituted a significant part of the Islanders’ diet (Talu, 1979, p. 30). The palm sap was also collected and made into a drink called “sweet toddy,” which was of such high nutritional value that it could “be substitute for breast milk and was commonly used as a drink by people of all ages” (Talu, 1979, p. 30).

Even though pandanus, *babai*, and coconut were being successfully grown and harvested, with such limited fertile land available, food production remained severely limited especially in the southernmost islands where “famine often plagued the islands owing to long periods of drought” (Bataua, 1985, p. 2). As such, the earliest inhabitants had to find ways to adapt to their environment and find a sustainable balance between population and resources. Consequently, over thousands of years of settlement, the traditional social and political systems that developed within the Gilbert Islands were directly shaped by the limitations of the extreme atoll environment as well as the practices and beliefs brought by the earliest settlers and the later migrants who came to inhabit the islands.

### **Early Society and Culture**

The earliest form of society and culture in the islands was comprised of small, autonomous clan groups and was similar to what was found in other areas of Micronesia at the time (Howe et al., 1994). This form of society changed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, however, when subsequent migrations from Samoa introduced a far more complex social and political system common to Polynesia that was based on a strict hierarchy of “chiefs, nobles, freemen, and slaves” (MacDonald, 2001, p.16). As a result, Gilbertese society gradually developed its own unique customs and traditions based on a rich and diverse blend of both Micronesian and Polynesian cultures (Geddes, 1982; Howe et al., 1994).

Land was the means of subsistence and survival on the islands and was considered to be the most valuable resource by the inhabitants. Available land was consolidated into villages and districts that were inhabited by large extended families, or kin groups, called *kaaingas*, and was ruled over by a single head chief and an aristocracy (MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979). As it was so limited, ownership of land, especially fertile land, indicated wealth, power, and social status



directly influenced every aspect of social and political life (Talu, 1979). Consequently, as land and resources became unequally distributed amongst families and individuals, brutal conflicts and war soon became frequent and widespread as different groups vied for more power and control, and continued until the colonial period (MacDonald, 2001).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century a new social and political system was established in the south that differed dramatically from the chiefdoms in the north. In the southern islands, the atoll environment was so harsh, dry, and barren that survival depended on the cooperation and support of the family and community in order to cultivate the land and gather and share the limited resources (MacDonald, 1998). The needs of the family and community were therefore placed above those of the individual (MacDonald, 1998). Furthermore, land was still divided into *kaaingas*, villages, and districts; however, they were controlled not by individual chiefs but largely egalitarian and democratic councils of male elders, known as *unimane* (Geddes, 1982; MacDonald, 2001; Rennie, 1989; Talu, 1979).

**Communal Society.** *Kaaingas* resided within their own separate areas of the village and were largely self-sufficient as each nuclear family contributed to the larger group by fishing, planting *babai*, harvesting coconuts, making “sweet toddy,” cooking meals, weaving mats, and other necessary activities (MacDonald, 2001). The term for the land that the extended family owned was also known as *kaainga*, further reflecting the deeply held belief that family and land were intimately linked and were the most important aspects of island life (Bataua, 1985). Each *kaainga* was also assigned their own seating place, or *boti*, within their village *maneaba*, a large meeting house that served as the cultural and political center for the community (Bataua, 1985; MacDonald, 2001; Rennie, 1989; Talu, 1979). As the center of traditional Gilbertese society and government in both the north and the south, all important events, gatherings, ceremonies,

discussions, and decisions involving the village and its inhabitants took place within the *maneaba* (Bataua, 1985).

**Patriarchal Structure.** Influenced by the Polynesian culture of Samoa, the Gilbertese also developed a patriarchal society in which the *unimane*, the eldest men, held the most power and authority within the family and the community (Bataua, 1985). In the south, the oldest man from each *kaainga* represented his family in the *maneaba* and also took a place in the council of elders, or *unimane*, who ruled over all aspects of village life (Geddes, 1982; MacDonald, 2001; Rennie, 1989). While most issues were dealt with privately within the family, if any serious argument or conflict arose within a village or between multiple villages, representatives from all of the *kaaingas* would gather in the *maneaba* to discuss the issue and try to find a solution to the problem (Geddes, 1982; Lundsgaarde, 1968). If a disagreement between different *kaaingas* or villages could not be settled by the *unimane*, it could ultimately lead to violence and war (Lundsgaarde, 1968).

The amount of land a *kaainga* controlled had a direct correlation to how much power and influence they had within the community, the *maneaba*, and the council (MacDonald, 2001; Rennie, 1989). Land holdings could be “as large as several hectares or only a few square metres,” or, in some cases, even less (MacDonald, 1998, p. 14). With little or no land, a *kaainga* would have been shamed, pitied, and ostracized as they would have had no status within the *maneaba* or the community (Rennie, 1989). Generally, however, the *maneaba* system in the south strongly emphasized equality, cooperation, and unity in and among the various kin groups in the village and around the island (Geddes, 1982; MacDonald, 2001).

**Land Ownership.** Land was divided amongst and individually owned by the various members of a *kaainga* and usually stayed within the family as it was acquired primarily through inheritance (Talu, 1979). Sons and daughters could inherit land from each of their parents; however, the best land typically went to the eldest son as the patrilineal lineage was considered the most important in Gilbertese society and women were also expected to move into their husband's *kaainga* after marriage (MacDonald, 2001; Rennie, 1989; Talu, 1979). In addition to inheritance, land could also be given away either as a gift or as payment for a great service that was provided, such as healing a serious illness or injury (MacDonald, 2001).

Just as land could be given away, it could also be taken away. Traditionally, the severest of crimes, which included rape, incest, theft, and murder, were punishable by death, banishment, and the compensation of land for "serious insults or offenses could only be settled by blood or with land" (MacDonald, 2001, p. 10; Neemia, 1980; Rennie, 1989; Talu, 1979). Land would be taken, usually the most prized from both of the accused's parents, for it would "deprive the offender of something he valued highly and depended on for his livelihood" (Neemia, 1980, p. 43). This loss of land would have brought great shame, disgrace, and dishonor to both the transgressor and their family as they would all feel the effects of the punishment (Neemia, 1980).

Highly desired land could also be acquired through force and violence and war was a fairly common occurrence in and among the various islands and villages as different *kaaingas* frequently fought for more land, power, and resources (MacDonald, 2001; Scarr, 2001). While war was fairly prevalent, it typically involved "few combatants and usually resulted in little loss of life" (Talu, 1979, p. 65). If land was forcibly taken, the conquering group also had the rights to their enemy's *boti* and therefore gained their power and social status within the *maneaba* (Maude, 1963). It was, therefore, of the utmost necessity to maintain a strong, close, well

connected family in order to both protect and keep control of the land and power they already had and also fight to gain more if necessary (Rennie, 1989).

**Gender Roles.** As family and land were of the highest importance and were to be protected and defended by any means necessary, men were brought up to become the main provider for the family, a leader, and a warrior and, starting “after his first birthday, he was trained in ways that would make him strong and brave” (Talu, 1979, p. 24). In addition to being able to courageously honor and protect their family and land, all adult men were responsible for taking care of their family by cultivating *babai*, fishing, cutting toddy, building shelters and canoes, and gathering coconuts and other resources from the land and sea.

Women married very young, and as virginity was expected of all new brides, there was “considerable control over the social behavior of young women” with sisters and daughters kept under strict supervision at all times by their family (Bedford, 1980, p. 207). If it was discovered that a new bride was not a virgin, the marriage, typically arranged by both sets of parents, could be called off, bringing great shame and embarrassment to the girl’s family (Bataua, 1985; Talu, 1979). Moreover, “the girl would be marked for life” and would be shunned by her family and community, for she would forever be known as a *nikiranroro*, “a woman who was divorced, bore illegitimate children or flaunted community norms” (Bataua, 1985, p. 6; MacDonald, 1998, p. 14-15).

Upon marriage, the young woman moved into her husband’s *kaainga* and was expected to raise children, maintain the household, and perform all of the daily chores such as cleaning, cooking, making toddy, and weaving mats and baskets, all while under the close watch of her husband and his family (Bataua, 1985; MacDonald, 2001). As such, all Gilbertese women were expected to obey their elder brothers, fathers, and husbands, and “would have been permitted

only limited contact outside of her and her husband's immediate family" (Bataua, 1985; MacDonald, 2001). Consequently, men held the power and authority in society while women had an extremely restricted role with little to no say in family or community affairs (Bataua, 1985).

It was also the responsibility of all Gilbertese to take care of and show respect for elders, especially the older men in their family (Bataua, 1985). If an old man was not properly looked after by his family and was not able to properly present himself with pride and honor in the village *maneaba*, it would have been evident to the entire community that he was being neglected. This would have brought great shame to the family and would have a highly damaging effect on the whole family's reputation as they, and their descendants, would be forever marked and disgraced (Bataua, 1985).

**Population Control.** As resources were so limited, it was extremely important to maintain a relatively stable population and various methods were used to both control and redistribute the population throughout the island chain. Traditional *kaaingas* could have as many as 20 to 100 people and when it became too large, a smaller group would break off to establish its own *kaalinga* nearby (Talu, 1979). Warfare and banishment also helped to redistribute the population as those who were defeated were forced to leave their lands (Bedford, 1980). The Gilbertese were also renowned sailors and navigators and they continued to frequently move and travel between the different islands in the Gilbert chain as well as other parts of the Pacific Ocean (Bedford, 1980; Grimble, 1972). Furthermore, by saving and conserving whatever resources they could to use in times of drought and also by using other population control methods, such as abortion and infanticide, the earliest inhabitants were able to find a sustainable balance between available resources and population size, which was estimated to be between 30,000-35,000 prior to European contact in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bedford, 1980; MacDonald, 2001).

## **Traditional Beliefs**

In addition to influencing the social and political structure of the islands, the migrations from Samoa in the 14<sup>th</sup> century also had a profound impact on the religion, mythology, and traditional beliefs of the Gilbertese. Although the creation and origin stories vary slightly throughout the islands, it is generally believed that the god Nareau was the creator of the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, the weather, and all life (Talu, 1979). In addition to creating the Gilberts, Nareau planted a tree in Samoa, known as the Tree of Samoa, which was the home of the spirits of gods and goddesses, known as *anti*, who came to be the first inhabitants of the islands (Talu, 1979).

The creation stories of the Gilbertese heavily emphasize the migrations from Samoa and many believe that they and their ancestors are the direct descendants of these original spirits (Bataua, 1985; Talu, 1979). Genealogies on the islands can therefore be traced back to the very first ancestors, “who had traveled from Samoa to the Gilberts some twenty-five to thirty generations before” (Grimble, 1972, p. 31). Reciting one’s genealogy back to the very beginning was a skill that was passed on from grandfather to grandson and was of the greatest importance to every Gilbertese. One’s lineage was their identity, their source of pride and honor, and it also had direct influence over one’s ownership of land and fishing rights as well as their position and status within society (Grimble, 1972).

Knowing one’s genealogy was also essential as it was believed that land belonged to both the family and their ancestors, who remained ever-present in all aspects of life in the islands and “the dimensions of time were lost as the past was always there in the ancestors who watched, praised, and cursed their descendants where they failed or shamed the [family] and themselves” (Uriam, 1995, p.13). Each *kaainga* therefore had a unique *anti*, a common ancestor, to whom it

was essential to bring pride and honor and also show reverence and respect through worship and the giving of offerings, such as food or tobacco, at the family shrine (Bataua, 1985; Grimble, 1972; Uriam, 1995). Through worship, prayer, and offerings, *kaaingas* also hoped to gain assistance, support, and protection from their ancestors, especially in times of great crisis or danger, as it was believed that the *anti* were the source and providers of everything in life including creativity, bravery, wisdom, and strength (Grimble, 1972; Rennie, 1989; Uriam, 1995).

In instances when a family or an individual could not obtain the support they needed from the *anti*, they turned to the use of magic (Talu, 1979). There were spells and charms for peace, fertility, love, and wisdom as well as those for the protection of family and land, good harvests, safe ocean voyages, and bravery and strength in battle (Grimble, 1972; Rennie, 1989; Uriam, 1995). There were also curses and evil spells to cause illness, “chaos, disorder, and death” for one’s enemies (Uriam, 1995, p. 27). Furthermore, every skill from composing songs or dances to fishing could be enhanced by a magical incantation or spell and these skills were closely guarded by each family (Talu, 1979). Consequently, “to the Gilbertese Islander, magic and magical presences, benign or evil, were a part of life. Every aspect of his daily existence, every object, wish, thought, condition, action and purpose, good or bad, was governed by its own set of charms and spells” (Talu, 1979, p. 29).

### **Early European Contact**

With the dawn of the Age of Exploration in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans set off to discover and map uncharted lands and seas in their search for new territories, alternative trade routes, and more riches and resources to claim in the name of God and country (Thomas, 1993). While immense areas of land from Asia and Africa to the Americas were being mapped, conquered, and exploited, the vast region of the Pacific, which stretches over nearly 65 million

square miles and covers about one-third of the earth's surface, remained largely unknown (MacDonald, 2001; McKnight, 1995).

After Captain James Cook's famous voyages in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, during which he made contact with the Hawaiian Islands as well as Australia and New Zealand, British interest in the region soon diminished for most of the lands were found to be small, remote islands with little to no resources to exploit and very little economic or strategic significance to the Empire (Morrell, 1960). Once the British chose Botany Bay in New South Wales, Australia, to be the location of a new penal colony in 1786, knowledge of the central Pacific greatly increased as more islands were discovered due to increased traffic to and from this new settlement. The southern Gilbert Islands were some of these islands, first sighted in 1788 by Thomas Gilbert and John Marshall, two captains from the first fleet of convict ships. It was not until the 1820s, however, that all of the Gilbert Islands were sighted and mapped by Europeans (MacDonald, 2001).

Between 1820 and 1870, at least a thousand whaling ships passed through the southern Gilbert Islands, as they were located near a main whaling route (MacDonald, 2001). For these whalers, their primary desire in making contact with the islands and the islanders was to satisfy their need for "fresh food, new faces, alcohol, and sex" (Howe et al., 1994, p. 20). As such, they traded whatever goods they had on the ship in exchange for coconuts, women, new recruits, and "sour toddy," a strong, inebriating beverage made from the boiled and fermented "sweet toddy," a process introduced by a European living in the islands in the 1830s (MacDonald, 2001).

From the beginning of this early contact, the Islanders were eager to trade and acquire new goods as the early whalers were credited with the introduction of iron tools, tobacco, alcohol, and Western weapons, all of which had a profound influence on the lives of the Gilbertese (MacDonald, 2001; Thomas, 1993). For example, with the use of newly acquired iron



tools, the large amount of time and energy the Islanders had previously spent completing labor-intensive work, such as fishing, clearing land, and building houses, *maneabas*, and canoes was greatly reduced (MacDonald, 2001; Scarr, 2001). This allowed more free time with which to spend on other activities, including making more items, such as traditional mats, spears, and baskets, to trade as souvenirs for additional Western goods (MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979).

Although iron was highly prized and sought after by the Islanders, tobacco was by far the most demanded item for trade and by the late 1850s almost every man, woman, and child had become highly addicted (MacDonald, 2001; Scarr, 2001). As demand for tobacco quickly grew, the Gilbertese increasingly traded everything they could, including mats, coconuts, and even women, typically *nikiranroro* or slaves from the northern islands, in order to obtain more (Grimble, 1972; MacDonald, 2001; Scarr, 2001). By the 1860s, one mate of a Sydney Schooner was credited as saying “a stick of tobacco will buy any common man’s life, or half a dozen women” (Scarr, 2001, p.139)

With the increasing practice of prostitution in the Gilberts, the whalers and other early Americans and Europeans also introduced venereal diseases to the islands in addition to other diseases, such as dysentery and influenza; however, “there is no oral or written record of a great population decline as a result” (Bedford, 1980, p. 209; see also MacDonald, 2001). Furthermore, as alcohol and weapons, such as axes, guns, and even cannons were brought by these early traders, drunkenness and violence quickly spread across the islands and greatly increased both the frequency and scale at which conflict and warfare occurred (MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979).

In the 1850s, the trade of coconut oil brought even more traders and it was estimated that “by the 1860s, the European population in the Gilberts had increased to about fifty” (Talu, 1979, p. 50). In the 1870s, coconut oil was replaced by copra, which was far easier to store and

transport (MacDonald, 2001). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, trade with Westerners had rapidly become part of island life and “every Gilbertese household was selling its surplus goods in a westernized market” (MacDonald, 2001, p. 30). This increased trade led to further adaptation and modification of traditional customs and was to have a significant and lasting impact on island culture and society (MacDonald, 2001; Thomas, 1993).

Another result of this growing trade was that the traditional practice of saving surplus food, for use in ceremonies or in times of drought, was greatly decreased as Islanders increasingly sold and traded whatever they had for tobacco and other Western goods (MacDonald, 2001). Their already limited resources were further depleted with the introduction of pigs, poultry, and dogs, which required feeding and consumed even more of the Islanders’ precious food stores (MacDonald, 2001). These changes in the traditional lifestyle had devastating consequences, for when the southern islands experienced a severe drought in the 1870s, many of the Islanders had little or no stored food upon which they could depend for survival (MacDonald, 2001).

While Western whalers and early traders introduced new goods, tools, and ideas to the Gilberts, they also brought stories and news about the world that lay beyond the islands. Some of these early whalers also recruited some of the Gilbertese, and a hundred or so men joined them onboard the whaling ships (Talu, 1979). They would work for a season, and when they returned home, “they were a major source of information about the outside world” (Talu, 1979, p. 50). Just as the Islanders were starting to learn more about the outside world, the outside world was also beginning to learn about the islands. These outsiders included foreign missionaries, labor recruiters, and eventually colonial powers, all of which came to dramatically change and transform island life (MacDonald, 2001).

## **Influence of Missions**

Starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic and Protestant missionaries expanded across the Pacific, spreading Western religion, language, and ideologies throughout the islands (Hassall, 2006). Once again, due to their small size and extreme remoteness, the Gilbert Islands went largely unnoticed until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when Hiram Bingham II, a Protestant missionary with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, first arrived in the northern Gilberts (MacDonald, 2001). Although Bingham was the first, other Christian missionaries soon followed and they had a profound and lasting influence over every aspect of Gilbertese life.

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was first established in Massachusetts in 1810, and by 1819 the first American Board mission had started in Hawaii to great success (MacDonald, 2001). During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the American Board began to expand further into the Pacific, and in 1856 Hiram Bingham II was the first missionary to arrive in the Gilbert Islands (MacDonald, 2001). While Bingham is credited with the creation of the written Gilbertese language, which he used for the primary purpose of translating both the Old and New Testaments along with various hymns and other religious works for the local population, his mission actually had very little impact in the islands (MacDonald, 2001).

Bingham's attempt to spread Protestantism throughout the islands ultimately failed, for the lifestyle he sought to impose, which included the ban of traditional songs and dance along with alcohol and tobacco, held little attraction or interest for the Gilbertese (MacDonald, 2001). At this time, increasing drunkenness, violence, and warfare on the islands were also of far greater relevance and concern to the Islanders than Bingham and his religious teachings (MacDonald, 2001; Rennie, 1989). By the 1890s, however, the northern islands had fallen under the control of the far more aggressive, powerful, and less austere Roman Catholic Sacred Heart Mission

(MSH), and by 1917 the American Board had been forced to leave the islands in disgrace (MacDonald, 2001).

For the islands further to the south, the Protestant London Missionary Society (LMS), led by Samoan pastors, were the first to establish missions in 1875 (MacDonald, 2001). Although there was some resistance, the LMS made far more rapid progress and success than what had been experienced in the north and they quickly became a dominating presence in the lives of the southern Gilbertese. Furthermore, unlike Bingham and the American Board, they were also able to withstand the far-reaching power of the Roman Catholic Church and the MSH and successfully maintained control of the south (MacDonald, 2001).

Although there were great differences as well as a bitter rivalry between the Catholic MSH in the north and the Protestant LMS in the south, both missions aggressively set out to spread religious doctrine, build churches and schools, and improve literacy and education in the islands (Dodge, 1976; Talu, 1979). The missions also sought to impose “proper” and “civilized” Christian and Western laws and behavior throughout the Gilberts, including mandatory Sabbath observance and church attendance as well as the adoption of Western style clothing (MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979). To implement these new changes, the missionaries introduced standardized rules and laws to the islands that covered both traditional offenses such as murder, theft, adultery, and incest, along with new laws that banned everything from fighting to traditional singing and dancing (MacDonald, 2001). Traditional forms of punishment, including execution and exile, were also outlawed as well as the population control methods of infanticide and abortion (MacDonald, 2001).

Even as the missionaries attempted to enforce these new rules and regulations with flogging or large fines, the vast majority of Islanders continued to adhere to the authority of the

*unimane*, who remained extremely conservative and unyielding to these new changes (MacDonald, 2001). Consequently, “many of the traditional customs and beliefs survived as many conformed only in terms of outward behavior” (Bataua, 1985, p. 79). Furthermore, most also continued to worship their traditional ancestral spirits and magic still “ruled the lives of everyone, from highest to lowest, Christian or pagan, ruler or ruled” (Grimble, 1972, p. 30).

### **Labor Recruiting**

Although Western missionaries ended up indelibly shaping Gilbertese life, migration and labor recruiting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had an even more profound and significant impact in the islands. During the 1860s, the development of European-owned plantations, farms, and mines throughout the Pacific created a large and growing demand for labor (MacDonald, 2001; Munro, 1990; Munro & Firth, 1990). The Gilberts thus became a “significant labor reserve within the region and served the needs of British planters in Fiji and Queensland, German planters in Samoa, and predominantly French planters in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and New Caledonia” (Munro & Firth, 1990, p. 85-86). The Gilbertese were also used for labor in Tahiti and even as far away as Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru (MacDonald, 2001).

From the 1860s to the 1890s, most of the labor recruitment in the Gilberts took place in the southern islands “where population density was greater and the problem of drought prevailed” (Talu, 1979, p. 52). Recruitment rates were directly tied to periods of drought as many used labor migration as a way to escape from the overwhelming challenges and hardships they were experiencing (Bedford, 1980; MacDonald, 2001). For example, in 1872, a missionary working with the LMS found that many Islanders in the south were starving due to the extreme drought and famine at the time and “hundreds had left with slavers being told that there was plenty to eat in Fiji and no work” (MacDonald, 2001, p. 58). In the 1880s, when the drought had

finally come to an end, the recruitment rates dramatically fell only to increase once again when another drought occurred in the 1890s (MacDonald, 2001).

Prior to 1870, labor recruitment was highly unregulated and, although there were some volunteers, every conceivable method, including kidnapping, violence, and murder, was used to obtain the required labor (MacDonald, 2001; Scarr, 1968). Kidnapping, referred to as “blackbirding,” was by far the most common practice, and night raids and ambushes were frequent occurrences (Howe, 1984; Scarr, 1968). For example, during one night raid, a recruiter was able to kidnap 87 men and women and, in another instance, 90 Islanders were captured when their “canoes were run down or smashed by dropping pig iron on them, and their occupants were plucked from the water and stowed below deck” (Dodge, 1976, p. 161).

With such brutal violence and deplorable conditions aboard these ships, including diseases such as dysentery and tuberculosis, many Islanders died even before reaching the plantations (Dodge, 1976). The mortality rates were so high that the British government was eventually forced to intervene, and in the 1870s they officially regulated the practice of labor recruitment (Dodge, 1976; Howe, 1984). In 1872, the *Pacific Islanders Protection Act* was passed, which “required all ships to be licensed, kidnapping outlawed, and for the first time allowed natives to testify in court” (Dodge, 1976, p. 161).

Once it had become more regulated, labor migration was to become an essential part of Gilbertese life as it was viewed as a way to gain highly valued experience, work, goods, and wages and was also seen as a way to escape from the harsh environment, the frequent droughts, and the limited resources and opportunities available on the islands (MacDonald, 2001). Therefore, many Islanders, including both individuals and entire families, were now willing and eager to sign up for work overseas, and it was estimated that between 1860 and 1900, more than

10,500 Gilbertese men, women, and children had worked outside of the islands (Bedford, 1980; MacDonald, 2001). Attachment to family and land, however, remained strong, and migration was rarely permanent as it followed a more circular pattern with most laborers working abroad for short periods of time and then returning home, bringing with them wages, goods, ideas, and news to share from their work and travels (MacDonald, 2001).

### **Sphere of Influence to British Colony**

With the growing labor trade and the expansion of European development in the Pacific, the British government was eventually forced to take more control in the region (MacDonald, 2001). Under pressure from the German government, which was looking to gain more territory and power, Britain reluctantly signed an agreement with Germany in 1886 “to carve the Western Pacific into respective spheres of influence” (Samson, 2003, p. 235). As a result, British control was extended to include both the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, a group of nine small atolls to the south, which, although differing vastly in regards to their history, society, and culture, were viewed as one group by the British (Appendix A. Fig.5) (Samson, 2003). The two countries had differing points of view on how to manage the region, however, as “Germany regarded the accord as a means by which to annex the islands falling under their sphere, while Britain saw it as a way to ignore her side without fear of German intrusion” (Samson, 2003, p. 235). As such, the islands remained largely neglected and ignored by the British.

In 1891, Germany once again started to pressure the British to take more interest and have more influence in the Pacific, for a growing American presence in the region was beginning to threaten German territory, resources, and labor supplies (MacDonald, 2001). The British colonies of Australia and New Zealand were also trying to expand their territory at the time and were becoming increasingly worried about the spread of German control (Samson, 2003).

Subsequently, in order to maintain the 1886 agreement, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were declared an official Protectorate in 1892, and “this was the only occasion Britain extended the borders of her colonial empire at the behest of another power” (Samson, 2003, p. 235-236).

Once it was declared a Protectorate, the British were forced to take a more active, albeit still very limited, role in the Gilbert Islands. With the appointment of the first Resident Commissioner in 1893, the British administration began to lay the foundation of colonial rule in the islands (MacDonald, 2001). While a standard code of law, based on existing traditional and missionary rules and customs, was developed in addition to a system for tax collection, the traditional governments retained a great deal of autonomy early on and were “allowed to function with as little interference as possible” (MacDonald, 2001, p. 76). It quickly became evident; however, that the Protectorate needed to have a more formalized and centralized government (MacDonald, 2001).

At the turn of the century, more extensive changes were made to the traditional life and practices of the Islanders as the British began to intervene more directly and aggressively in island affairs (MacDonald, 2001). With the goal of bringing civilization, order, and law to this remote outpost of the Empire, the islands were dramatically transformed as the administration was determined to tame, order, and regulate every aspect of the Islanders’ lives (Lundsgaarde, 1968; MacDonald, 2001; Neemia, 1980). According to the British colonial attitude and policy of the time, it was believed that creating a clean and highly uniform landscape and infrastructure in the islands improved the health and wellbeing of the Indigenous population in addition to making them more easily governed and controlled (MacDonald, 2001; Morrell, 1960). Consequently, the administration took possession of land throughout the island chain and began to consolidate all of the smaller *kaaingas* into larger, more well-defined villages (MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979).



All houses, *maneabas*, and churches were thus rebuilt to a new standard, uniform design and roads, wells, latrines, cemeteries, and prisons were also constructed to improve cleanliness and sanitation and allow further ease of management, organization, and control (Bataua, 1985; MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979).

During this time, a new standard set of laws was also created as the administration attempted to control and modify the daily life and behavior of the Islanders (MacDonald, 2001). For the most part, these new rules and laws were simply a continuation or slight modification of those already set in place, but with many additional restrictions. For example, the implementation of a nine o'clock curfew was established and greater regulation of inter-island travel and migration took place as “people could not leave their home island without permission” (MacDonald, 2001, p. 87). Those who failed to comply with these new laws were fined, flogged, or imprisoned (MacDonald, 2001; Neemia, 1980).

In order to implement and enforce these laws and regulations and to make the power of the administration more absolute, a centralized government was developed based on “a strict hierarchy in which [the Commissioner] and his agents [were] at the top, then Magistrates and Chiefs, then police, and then the people” (MacDonald, 2001, p.86). Determined to remove all of the traditional leaders from power, a “Chief” and a Magistrate were installed to act as the government representatives and enforcers of British law on each of the islands, and it ultimately was the Magistrates who came to have the highest position of power within the island governments (MacDonald, 2001).

While those elite few chosen to serve as the “Chiefs” and Magistrates were taught the English language as well as the ways of British rule, “the vast majority were schooled in the vernacular and village knowledges out of a fear of potential political unrest and a challenge to

colonial power” (Burnett, 2007, p. 265). For the most part, all matters of literacy and education were left to the missionaries, and it was only much later in the colonial period that facilities for education, health care, and other services were developed by the British government (Talu, 1979).

All of these social and political changes drastically transformed and reshaped island life. By consolidating *kaaingas* into larger villages and restricting inter-island travel, the strength and connectedness of the large extended families and their traditional communities was weakened. Furthermore, while the establishment of a new political and legal system did reduce violence, conflict, and war throughout the islands, it also eroded the role and power of the traditional *maneaba* and the *unimane* (MacDonald, 2001).

At the turn of the century, large phosphate deposits were discovered on Banaba, also known as Ocean Island, a small raised coral island to the west of the Gilberts (Appendix A. Fig. 5) (MacDonald, 2001). Suddenly the British Empire took a much greater interest in the islands and, with the start of significant mining and development, Banaba was quickly annexed and incorporated into the Gilbert and Ellice Island Protectorate in 1900 (King, 1981). In 1916, to further protect the phosphate mines and the profits it generated, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were proclaimed an official Crown Colony (MacDonald, 2001).

With all of the attention now focused on the exploitation of the phosphate deposits in Banaba, the rest of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were once again largely ignored. Banaba was chosen as the capital of the Colony and, while some of the revenue that was generated from the phosphate mines was used for development, primarily in the capital, most of the profit went to the British government and large mining companies (MacDonald, 2001). Consequently, the rest of the islands were to receive minimal investment and support from the colonial administration

and there was little additional development of infrastructure, government, or services (MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979).

Although it was now officially part of the British Empire, little changed as the laws already set in place remained through the 1930s (MacDonald, 2001). The extreme authoritarian style of rule continued as the administration enforced even more rules and regulations concerning life in the islands. These were eventually consolidated into one code of law and published in 1930 with the title, *Regulations for the Good Order and Cleanliness of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands* (Howe, 1984). However, although this was one of the most authoritative administrations of the colonial era, there were no protests or rebellions by the Islanders against the British rule or law as it was “less oppressive in practice than on paper” (Howe, 1984, p. 81). Furthermore, British policy at the time also demanded that all of their colonies be able to support and sustain themselves financially, as such, with the extremely limited resources and income available, there was very little development in the islands (MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979). This lack of development and investment kept the Islanders impoverished and isolated from the outside world, however, it also had the benefit of assisting “[in] the preservation of the cultural identity of Gilbert Islanders” (Howe, 1984, p. 88).

While the British administration sought to completely transform island life and impose Christian and Western laws, values, and rules of behavior, “there was a general adherence to a deeply-rooted body of custom upon which alien laws and religious beliefs had made only a superficial impact” (MacDonald, 2001, p. 129). Consequently, while some aspects of colonial and missionary rule were adopted, in general, the Islanders continued their traditional customs and practices and still adhered to traditional law and authority as the *unimane* still had the final say in family and community affairs (MacDonald, 2001).

In the 1920s, a cash economy had begun to emerge due to the increased availability of wage employment in Banaba (Talu, 1979). With access to more capital, the Islanders were also able to purchase more Western goods, including tobacco, lanterns, knives, fish hooks, and cooking utensils, which were rapidly becoming essential items for all Gilbertese (Talu, 1979). While tobacco remained by far the most sought after trade item, demand was also increasing for Western textiles and clothing, a reflection of the increasing influence of the missionaries in the islands. Imported foods, such as flour, canned meat, rice, salt, and sugar, were also becoming popular additions to the Islanders' diet (Talu, 1979).

Starting in the 1930s, the British administration changed dramatically as new leadership sought to reestablish traditional leaders and customs and implement a new system of governance that recognized more of the traditional laws and practices (MacDonald, 2001). At this time, the government also had to deal with the increasingly problematic issue of population growth. In 1931, the first census for the Colony was conducted and it showed that while there had been a slight decline during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries due to famine, drought, disease, conflict, and labor recruitment, the population of the Gilberts had steadily increased to approximately 29,750 (MacDonald, 2001; Uriam, 2011). This population growth was a result of improved health, hygiene, and sanitation as well as the decreased practice of traditional population control methods, such as warfare, infanticide, and abortion (Denoon, 2004; MacDonald, 2001).

With the growing population, there was also an increased demand for land and resources and it was believed that "for families with little or no land, the only dignified future lay in resettlement" (MacDonald, 2001, p. 141). Subsequently, the Phoenix Island Resettlement Plan was developed as a possible solution. Three of the uninhabited Phoenix Islands were annexed in

1937 and between 1938 and 1940, an estimated 700 Gilbertese from some of the more crowded southern islands were resettled to these remote atolls (MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979). This resettlement scheme, however, came to an end in 1963 as it was largely considered a failure due to a combination of administrative, financial, social, and environmental factors (Denoon, 2004; MacDonald, 2001; Talu, 1979). Mostly the challenges of resettlement included a severe lack of fresh water and food resources as well as a greater feeling of isolation among the settlers who were far removed from their family, their ancestral land, and trade routes and had limited means of communication with the other islands (Talu, 1979).

Although many improvements, amendments, and reforms were initiated in the 1930s, such as the establishment of co-operative trading societies, many were not implemented until after 1945 and the end of WWII (MacDonald, 2001). Some of the basic assumptions influencing policies before WWII were that the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were expected to remain impoverished and isolated, and “that while phosphate deposits might provide some revenue, development should be circumscribed, aspirations should not be raised, and education should have no greater purpose than to make its graduates better citizens in a limited atoll environment” (MacDonald, 2001, p. 125). Thus it also was not until the end of the war and the beginning of the decolonization process that any “serious attention was paid to national development and the building of a foundation for self-rule” (MacDonald, 2001, p. 142).

### **World War II to Independence**

With the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the islands of the Pacific suddenly found themselves at the frontline of WWII as Japanese and American forces battled for control across the region, which included the remote Gilbert and Ellice Islands (Howe et al., 1994; MacDonald, 2001). In 1942, after almost all of the British and other foreigners had evacuated the

islands, “leaving the Islanders confused and bewildered as to what was happening,” the Japanese arrived in the Gilbert Islands (MacDonald, 2001, p. 143). Although the Islanders were used for hard labor under Japanese rule, the conditions, with the exception of those living in Banaba, were not overly harsh, brutal, or oppressive when compared to other occupied territories (MacDonald, 2001).

After defeating the Japanese in late 1943 in the Battle of Tarawa, one of the bloodiest battles of the war in the Pacific, the American forces came to occupy the islands and during that brief time they exposed the Islanders to American goods, customs, and culture (MacDonald, 2001). When the war ended in 1945, the American forces returned home, leaving the Islanders once again under British rule. Although many areas had been left devastated from the war, reconstruction was extremely limited for the continued policy of the British administration was “to maintain only a very basic level of service” in the islands (Talu, 1979, p. 146). Furthermore, while there was some growing opposition to British governance in the islands, “there was no demand for self-rule, no rejection of colonial authority, only a general relief that calm had once again settled on the islands” (MacDonald, 2001, p. 143). For some Islanders, however, it was difficult to return to the old ways after being exposed to other cultures and ideas and learning more about life outside of the islands (Talu, 1979).

After the end of WWII, the British Empire, faced with growing discontent and increasing resistance throughout their many colonies, began the process of decolonization. The British administration thus started the process to eventual self-determination and self-rule in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands by focusing on strengthening the central government as well as Indigenous leadership and control. In 1947, Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands was made the official capital of the Colony due to its central location and previous development by the British administration (Talu,

1979). Starting in the 1950s, more investment was made to develop the government, economy, social services, education, and infrastructure in the islands (MacDonald, 2001).

Development, however, was highly unequal as most everything was centered within the capital of South Tarawa (MacDonald, 2001). With all of the rapid modernization and urbanization taking place within the capital, South Tarawa experienced a dramatic rise in population as ever-increasing numbers of young Gilbertese were choosing to migrate there for better schools, jobs, services, and opportunities that were unavailable on the lesser developed outer islands (MacDonald, 2001). Furthermore, with the introduction of the radio in the 1930s, more people started to learn about life outside of the islands, which deepened their curiosity and “their wish to know more grew so that many of the younger [population] became dissatisfied with life on the outer islands and began moving to the capital,” preferring a more urban, Western lifestyle (Bataua, 1985, p. 63). Consequently, in 1963, the Gilberts had a total population of around 36,500 and between 1963 and 1968, the population of South Tarawa increased from an estimated 6,100 to 10,600. By 1973, approximately a quarter of the population was living within the small, narrow islets of the capital (MacDonald, 2001).

At the time, the economy of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands was still heavily dependent on phosphate deposits from Banaba, which accounted for at least half of the entire Colony’s revenue, and little was done by the colonial administration to develop an alternative income source besides fishing and copra (MacDonald, 2001). Although life in the outer islands remained largely based on subsistence, with all of the development and expansion of services taking place in the capital, the cost of living was steadily rising and increasing numbers of Islanders found themselves dependent on cash remittances sent home from family members working overseas (MacDonald, 2001).

In the mid-1960s, with growing tension between the Ellice and Gilbert Islands due to the great cultural differences between the two populations and the increasing resentment caused by unequal representation within the colonial government, demands for secession, separation, and self-government were made by the inhabitants of the Ellice Islands (Howe et al., 1994; MacDonald, 2001). In January 1976, they officially separated from the Gilberts and became the British colony of Tuvalu (MacDonald, 2001). In 1978, Tuvalu gained independence and on July 10, 1979, the Gilbert Islands also became an independent Commonwealth nation, renamed the Republic of Kiribati (MacDonald, 1975). Later that same year, on September 20, 1979, Kiribati signed a treaty of friendship with the United States, the Treaty of Tarawa, in which they gained official sovereignty over the fourteen islands of the Phoenix and Line Islands that had previously been under US control, and this agreement has been maintained into the present day (Treaty of Friendship and Territorial Sovereignty, 1979; US Department of State, 2012).

### **Summary**

Since the 1820s, the culture and customs of the Indigenous inhabitants of the Gilbert Islands have had to be adapted and modified to deal with the extreme environment and limited resources of the islands as well as by foreign contact, trade, religion, and colonization. Even with the previous contact from whalers, early traders, missionaries, and labor recruiters, the structure of island society and culture actually changed very little as “innovations were always accepted in such a way that they might be blended with traditional practices” (Bedford, 1980, p. 212). However, a few major influences that still dominate the islands today are the spread of Christianity, education, and literacy across the islands by missionaries, and the strong divide between Protestantism in the south and Catholicism in the north (Bataua, 1985; MacDonald, 2001).



Although European and other Western contact has undoubtedly influenced and shaped parts of island life and culture, many aspects of the traditional values and customs have survived and continue to define I-Kiribati identity (MacDonald, 2001). For instance, the *maneaba* remains central to island society, elder men are still considered the head of their family and community, and land and family remain the most important aspects of life and culture (MacDonald, 1998). Furthermore, even with the pervasiveness of Christianity, the traditional worship of ancestral spirits and the use of magic are still practiced in their own way (Sofield, 2002; Talu, 1979). In this sense, “the cultural change which has taken place over a period of up to 200 years has been a phenomenon of adaptation rather than a case of loss and replacement” (Campbell, 1996, p. 226). It is this history and continuation of traditions that provide the foundation for the modern way of life for the population, and this underscores all of their actions and decisions as they struggle to deal with the effects of climate change and the very real possibility of losing their entire nation.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Current Conditions and Migration Policies

Once generally unknown or ignored by most of the modern world, Kiribati has gained a great deal of international attention over the past few years as one of the primary examples of a nation and people battling for survival on the frontline of climate change. Frequently described in the popular media as a “sinking island” or a “drowning nation,” Kiribati is widely considered to be one of the most vulnerable nations in the world to rising sea levels. However, while climate change is a serious threat to the nation, it is also exacerbating the existing socioeconomic challenges affecting the country, including limited land and resources, high unemployment, overpopulation, and poor health conditions and services (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2006). Added to that are the severe environmental challenges related to diminishing subsistence crops and marine resources, contamination and depletion of an already extremely limited freshwater supply, and poor waste management in the capital (Barnett, 2001; Campbell, 2010; Locke, 2009; White et al., 2008).

Due to the effects of extreme climate change and social, economic, and environmental degradation, the sustainability and habitability of the nation is threatened. With limited means of mitigation and adaptation, migration and relocation might be the only means of ensuring long-term survival for the population. Consequently, the government of Kiribati has repeatedly asked for more international aid and assistance to help the nation find possible solutions to current issues as well as prepare for a possible time when relocation might be necessary. As such, Australia and New Zealand have begun to work with Kiribati in order to develop various pilot programs that aim to address current issues as well as long-term climate change by facilitating labor migration. This includes the Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI) in Australia.

## **Socioeconomic Challenges**

**Limited Economic Growth.** When the phosphate deposits on Banaba finally ran out in 1979, the country lost its most significant source of revenue, and with no other alternative resources to export besides copra, fish, and seaweed, the national GDP fell dramatically (US Department of State, 2007). In 2012, the Republic of Kiribati was estimated to have a total GDP of US\$173 million and a per capita GDP of only US\$1,650 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT], 2013). As such, Kiribati has one of the lowest GDPs and per capita incomes in the region and is considered to be one of the most impoverished and least developed nations in the world (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2013; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade [MFAT], 2013).

Due to the many limitations and constraints of its atoll environment, including limited natural resources, small size, and geographical remoteness, it is exceedingly difficult for Kiribati to participate in both regional and international markets, resulting in little opportunity for economic growth or development (CIA, 2013; International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2011; MacDonald, 1998; Uriam, 2011). Economic growth is further hindered by a lack of infrastructure, reliable transportation, telecommunication, manufacturing capability, and skilled workers and, with the exception of the capital, the country remains largely undeveloped and subsistence based (CIA, 2013; MFAT, 2013; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2010).

With minimal income from exports, Kiribati is heavily dependent on revenues gained from external sources, including fishing licenses, remittances, foreign aid, and limited tourism, mostly to Kiritimati (Christmas Island) in the northern Line Islands (DFAT, 2013; MFAT, 2013). Almost half of all national revenue comes from selling fishing license fees to international fishing fleets, while remittances from I-Kiribati working overseas are estimated to be around 12

to 15 percent of the national income, approximately \$13 million Australian dollars annually (Borovnik, 2007; ILO, 2010; IMF, 2011).

While these are significant sources of income for Kiribati, the country is also directly dependent on foreign aid, mostly from Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, and the World Bank making up about 20 to 25 percent of the nation's GDP (CIA, 2013; MFAT, 2013; United Nations Statistics Division [UN], 2013). As resources are so limited, Kiribati is also highly dependent on international imports of food and other goods. In 2011, the nation spent US\$91.7 million on imports, mostly from Australia, Singapore, and Fiji, while the total revenue for exports was only US\$8.6 million (DFAT, 2013). This makes Kiribati "one of the largest recipients of foreign aid [and imports] in the world relative to recipient country GDP" (MFAT, 2013).

**Unemployment.** Due to the lack of development in the outer islands, many young I-Kiribati are choosing to migrate from their home islands to the urban capital where there are more opportunities for cash employment (CIA, 2013; ILO, 2010; MFAT, 2013). Kiribati also has an extremely young population as the average age is 23 and 53.5 percent are below the age of 24 (CIA, 2013). Jobs in the capital are therefore highly limited as there are not enough positions to "absorb a growing number of young people, many of whom lack the appropriate training, education, or experience" (Thomas, 2002, p. 167). Consequently, unemployment is extremely high with only approximately 30 percent of the population able to find work, mostly in the government or public sector (ADB, 2009; AusAID, 2012). With such limited available job positions in the capital, increasing numbers of I-Kiribati are looking overseas for employment in order to support themselves and their families through remittances, however, opportunities for overseas work also remain limited (Borovnik, 2006; Borovnik, 2007).

**Poverty and Crime.** Due to the high rates of unemployment and poor economic growth, Kiribati has one of the worst living standards in the Pacific and it is estimated that at least 51 percent of the population lives below the poverty line (ILO, 2010; MacDonald, 1998). The highest rates of poverty are found within the capital for those in the outer islands are able to maintain a predominantly subsistence-based lifestyle with limited income from fishing, copra, and remittances (Ministry of Environment, 2007). As family and community still remain strong in the outer islands, the traditional system of *bubuti*, in which members of an extended family are obligated to share any surplus among the family group, also remains an important way to redistribute needed resources (ILO, 2010; Ministry of Environment, 2007).

In the capital, issues such as increased poverty, competition for limited resources, loss of strong ties to extended family and community due to increased rural-to-urban migration, and high rates of youth unemployment have also led to a rise in other serious social problems among the population, including alcoholism and crime. Domestic violence has also increased throughout the islands and it has been estimated that about 70 percent of the female population has experienced some form of abuse from a partner or family member (New Zealand Aid Programme [NZAID], 2011).

**Overpopulation.** In addition to unemployment, more people from the outer islands are also choosing to move to the capital for education, medical treatment, entertainment, and other services and opportunities that remain unavailable or severely limited elsewhere in the country. Overcrowding has, therefore, become one of the most serious challenges affecting the capital as almost half of the country's population of over 103,000 now resides in the small islets of South Tarawa (CIA, 2013; MFAT, 2013; White et al., 2008).

According to the 2010 census, South Tarawa had a population of 50,010, an increase of 24 percent from 40,311 in 2005 (CIA, 2013; UN, 2013; Uriam, 2011). While the national rate of population growth is around 1.21 percent annually, the growth rate in South Tarawa is currently 5.2 percent, directly reflecting the increased rural-to-urban migration and high birth rates in the capital (CIA, 2013). This growth is only expected to increase, with the population in the capital predicted to double within the next two decades and the total population of the country could reach an estimated 140,400 by 2025 (Logan, 2013a; World Bank, 2011).

With a total land area of less than 16 square kilometers, South Tarawa already has one of the highest population densities in the world, with some areas having as many as 15,000 people per square kilometer, almost three times that of Tokyo (Lagan 2013b; Moglia et al., 2008; Storey & Hunter, 2010; White et al., 2008). As the population in the capital continues to grow, increased pressure is being placed on the limited available services and resources, including schools, jobs, hospitals and clinics as well as land, food, and fresh water (ADB, 2006; WHO and Ministry of Health and Medical Services[WHO], 2012; World Bank, 2007).

**Health and Services.** Linked to the extreme population growth and overcrowding, the lack of adequate sanitation, hygiene, and waste disposal, as well as contamination of the freshwater supply have all led to serious health issues for the population in the nation's capital. I-Kiribati in the capital are especially vulnerable to contagious respiratory, water, food, and vector-borne diseases, including tuberculosis, pneumonia, hepatitis A and B, typhoid, diarrhea, cholera, giardia, and dengue fever (Government of Kiribati, 2013; Ministry of Environment 2007; NZAID, 2011). Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, are also notably on the rise in Tarawa (ADB, 2006; WHO, 2012).

While the government and various foreign aid organizations have worked to improve the overall health of the population, the health conditions and living standards are among the worst in the region (Kiribati National Statistics Office, 2010; Locke, 2009). Kiribati also has the highest rate of infant and child mortality in the Pacific, with the under-five mortality rate at 69 deaths per 1000 live births, compared to only 7 deaths per 1000 live births in the United States (NZAID, 2011; World Bank, 2013). Furthermore, life expectancy at birth is estimated at only 62.7 for males and 67.6 for females, the lowest in the Pacific region (CIA, 2013).

It is predicted that climate change will also have a profound impact on health, especially in the densely populated areas of the capital. For instance, increased temperatures and humidity as well as changes in rainfall patterns and sea level rise will cause an increase in vector-borne diseases such as dengue fever (Ministry of Environment, 2007). Increased drought, water pollution, and diminishing resources will also cause a rise in the number of cases of water-borne illnesses such as diarrhea, typhoid, dysentery, and cholera as well as heat and food related illnesses like heat stroke, dehydration, malnutrition, and ciguatera poisoning from toxic fish consumption (Barnett, 2005; Government of Kiribati, 2013). As the population continues to increase in the capital, even more disease and illness will be spread and the already severely limited and overwhelmed hospitals and clinics will be unable to handle the increasing number of patients seeking treatment as these illnesses become even more prevalent (Barnett, 2005; Locke, 2009).

### **Environmental Challenges**

**Loss of Crops and Food Insecurity.** The amount of arable land as well as the productivity of vital subsistence crops on the islands have been dramatically reduced due to the increased sea level, coastal erosion, drought, saltwater intrusion of the land and water, hotter temperatures, and

more frequent flooding (Barnett, 2005; Connell, 2003; Gordon-Clark, 2012; Ministry of Environment, 2007). The capital has also experienced a significant loss of agricultural land and crops due to the growing population and increased demand for food as well as from environmental degradation. With crop productivity and yields decreasing, more people in Kiribati are becoming increasingly dependent on imported food as well as remittances to supplement their diets and their income (ADB, 2006). Increased Westernization and wage employment have also contributed to a rapid change in diet as traditional foods are being replaced by popular imports, such as tinned meats, bread, rice, and soft drinks that are highly processed, low in nutrition, and high in sugar (Thomas, 2002).

This increased dependence on imported food has led to a rapid decline in health standards in the nation, especially in the capital. For example, Kiribati now has one of the highest obesity rates in the world, with as much as 80 percent of the population considered to be overweight and at least 50 percent obese (“Kiribati Diet,” 2010). A change in diet has also led to increased cases of diabetes and other diseases related to malnutrition and vitamin and mineral deficiency, such as gout, hypertension, heart disease, and stroke (Kiribati National Statistics Office, 2010; Locke, 2009; Thomas, 2002). Cases of malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies are especially prevalent among the very young, affecting three out of five children below the age of ten in Kiribati (Ministry of Environment, 2007).

**Contamination and Depletion of the Water Supply.** With drought continuing to be a frequent occurrence in the islands, especially in the south, most of the population still depends entirely on the water from the atolls’ limited freshwater lenses (Thomas, 2002). Freshwater lenses are essential for the survival of the island inhabitants as well as subsistence agriculture, however they are extremely vulnerable to overconsumption, contamination, and environmental



degradation (Moglia et al., 2008; Ministry of Public Works [MPW], 2008; White et al., 2008; Storey & Hunter, 2010). This is particularly true in the capital where the growing population is already using the water supply at an increasingly unsustainable rate. Water security, especially in South Tarawa, is the most serious issue facing the country and the effects of climate change are predicted to have a severe impact on the quality and quantity of the national water supply (Ministry of Environment, 2007; Storey & Hunter, 2010).

As sea levels continue to rise, the freshwater lenses will become increasingly brackish and, as their size depends on both levels of rain and land area, they will diminish in capacity due to coastal erosion and lack of rain (Connell, 2003; Lagan, 2013b; Storey & Hunter, 2010, Thomas, 2002). Although periods of drought have always been an issue in the islands, they are now becoming longer and more frequent, particularly during the drier La Niña periods of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) climate pattern (White et al., 2008). Consequently, it has been predicted that due to decreased rainfall and rising seas, the freshwater supply in the capital could decrease by as much 65 percent by 2050 (Gordon-Clark, 2012; Lagan, 2013b; World Bank, 2003). This could even be considered an underestimate given that the atoll’s limited freshwater lens is already severely limited, highly contaminated, and rapidly dwindling due to over consumption (Barnett, 2005; Ministry of Environment, 2007; World Bank, 2011).

Another severe threat to the water supply is from storm surges and king tides (especially strong tidal surges) which have increased from about one or two a year to around five to eight a year, with each one causing devastating flooding and damage (Bettencourt et al., 2006; Choi, 2012; Locke, 2009). For instance, two king tides occurred in the capital in 2004 and 2005, one of which reached a height of 2.87 meters, which resulted in significant flooding, coastal erosion, saltwater contamination of the water supply, loss of agricultural land, and extensive damage to

infrastructure, including sea walls, roads, causeways, homes, and the main hospital (Choi, 2012). The amount of flooding and damage that occurs is also influenced by the continued coastal development in the capital, which involves the building of causeways and seawalls for land reclamation and protection as well as the mining of sand and coral from the beaches and reefs to use for construction. All of these development activities increase the coastlines' vulnerability to extreme tides, storm surges, and erosion (Choi, 2012).

Furthermore, with such limited land available for housing in the capital, the growing population has been forced to live in densely crowded, unplanned squatter settlements that have been erected in whatever space was available, including directly over the freshwater lens (Storey & Hunter 2010). As the soil is highly permeable and most lenses lie less than two meters below the surface, the water supply has become highly contaminated due to inadequate sanitation and waste management (Moglia et al., 2008; Thomas, 2002).

**Waste Management.** With the increased importation of foods and other goods and resources, the amount of waste in the capital has rapidly accumulated and has led to significant health and environmental issues. Lacking an effective system for waste disposal, hazardous and non-hazardous waste ends up strewn and discarded in open areas, including the roads, the beaches, and in the lagoon or ocean (Sikabongo & Storey, 2003). This solid waste pollution is a serious health issue as it causes extreme contamination of both the land and water and also provides additional breeding grounds for mosquitoes, rats, and flies, primary carriers of vector-borne diseases (Government of Kiribati, 2013; Storey & Hunter, 2010).

In addition to solid waste, increased pollution from human and animal waste has contributed to the serious degradation of the water supply and the health and living standards among the inhabitants of the capital. Some saltwater flushing systems have been introduced in

areas of South Tarawa; however, most of the population continues to practice the traditional method of open defecation in the bush, on the beach, or in the lagoon (Storey & Hunter, 2010). While this might be sufficient in low density areas of the country, this is causing severe health issues in the overcrowded capital. In addition, more people are raising dogs and pigs on the islands, which create additional animal waste on the land and in the water. Finally, with limited land available, people tend to bury their deceased relatives next to their homes and wells (Lagan, 2013b; ADB, 2006; Locke 2009; White et al., 2008). All of these practices directly add to the contamination of the freshwater supply and the spread of illness and disease.

While the government does provide some households in the capital with access to treated water, heavily contaminated water continues to be used due to the fact that many lack access to or are unable to afford the cost of the clean, potable water (MPW, 2008; Storey & Hunter, 2010). Consequently, with greater consumption and contamination of the capital's water through poor hygiene and lack of waste and sanitation management, incidences of water and fecal-borne diseases, such as diarrhea, giardia, and hepatitis A, are widespread with the highest rates in the Pacific (MPW, 2008; Storey & Hunter, 2010; White et al., 2008; World Bank, 2011).

### **Global Climate Change and Sea Level Rise**

Over the past few decades, the issue of climate change has been the subject of extensive research, speculation, and debate. In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its Fourth Assessment Report in which it was stated that the “warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level.” Largely attributed to the burning of fossil fuels and the release of large concentrations of so-called greenhouse gases (such as carbon dioxide and methane) into the

atmosphere, it has been estimated that the global surface air temperature increased by about 0.6 degrees Celsius over the past century and is predicted to increase an additional 1.1 to 6.4 degrees during the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Gordon-Clark, 2012; IPCC, 2007). Such a dramatic increase in temperature will have devastating consequences for the entire planet, including an increase in extreme weather and natural disasters like floods, hurricanes, and droughts, as well as a dramatic rise in sea level (IPCC, 2007).

The IPCC estimated that as a result of the effects of climate change with increased temperatures, thermal expansion of the oceans, and the melting of glaciers and sea ice, the global average sea level increased from an average of 1.8 mm a year between 1961 and 1993 to 3.1 mm a year (IPCC, 2007). In the same report, the IPCC predicted that sea levels will continue to increase and could rise a further .18 to .59 meters by the end of the century (IPCC, 2007). A number of climate scientists now believe that the IPCC has greatly underestimated the rate of sea level rise, and it is actually occurring much faster than previously predicted due to unprecedented sea ice melt in the Arctic (Gordon-Clark, 2012).

During the summer of 2012, the Arctic ice cap melted to below four million square kilometers, the smallest extent on record (University of Calgary, 2012). Given this trend is expected to continue, the Arctic could experience a complete loss of sea ice within the next couple of decades (University of Calgary, 2012). It is still highly uncertain just how much this melting of the polar ice sheet will impact sea level rise, but recent studies and models project sea levels rising by one to two meters or perhaps much higher by 2100 (Gordon-Clark, 2012; Zecca & Chiari, 2012). It is clear from the growing body of evidence that “no region of the world is expected to be affected more by climate change than Asia and the Pacific” (Hugo, 2012, p. 17; IPCC, 2007). Such an extreme rise in the average sea level will affect millions of people living in

coastal areas around the world and will be particularly catastrophic for the inhabitants of small, low-lying islands, including that of Kiribati (McAdam, 2012).

### **Impacts of Climate Change on Kiribati**

Already facing some of the most extreme social, economic, developmental, and environmental challenges in the world, Kiribati is also considered one of the most vulnerable nations to the effects of climate change and sea level rise (IPCC, 2007). It is predicted that because of rising sea level and increased flooding from storm surges and king tides, up to 54 percent of the capital could be inundated and submerged by 2050 and 80 percent by 2100 (Bettencourt et al., 2006; Campbell, 2000; Gordon-Clark, 2012; Storey & Hunter, 2010). As the rest of the nation's atolls are expected to experience similar rates of sea level rise, it is predicted that most of the country will be uninhabitable due to seawater inundation within the century (Choi, 2012).

While there is no doubt that long-term sea level rise will be devastating, there are other more immediate direct and indirect climate change impacts that are also threatening the islands' sustainability and habitability (Gordon-Clark, 2012). These include further loss and contamination of the nation's water supply, subsistence crops, and fish stocks as well as increased degradation from coastal erosion, changes in rainfall patterns, longer periods of drought, more frequent and intense flooding from storm surges and king tides, and substantial damage to infrastructure, particularly in the more developed capital (Locke, 2009).

Climate change will also lead to a greater decline in health and living standards, and even greater population growth and overcrowding in the capital as people migrate from the outer islands when they become unsustainable (Barnett, 2001; Locke, 2009; Ministry of Environment, 2007; Storey & Hunter, 2010). All of these impacts will further exacerbate the country's already

overwhelming social, economic, and environmental problems, threatening the future survival of the population and the nation. As President Tong stated, "The issue of climate change must be addressed very, very soon...as far as Kiribati and a number of countries are concerned, it is an event and a catastrophe that is actually happening now" (Dorney, 2013).

### **Motivations for Migration**

While climate change is a serious threat to the long-term future of the country, it is only one of many push and pull factors to influence future migration: "Environmental change is usually not the only – or even the most important – cause of migration in Asia and Pacific nations. It usually interacts with a range of other economic, social, and demographic factors" (Hugo, 2012, p. 10; see also Moore & Smith, 1995). The Kiribati government also has had to address the immediate challenges facing the nation, particularly those related to dwindling resources, rapid population growth, poverty, decline in health and living standards, and lack of job opportunities for I-Kiribati youth (Hugo, 2012; McAdam, 2012). All of these challenges act as strong push factors, while the hope of education, employment, and a better life overseas serve as strong pull factors (Burson, 2010; Locke 2009; Moore & Smith, 1995). It is, however, often extremely difficult to delineate between these different factors as they are all related to and influence each other (Locke, 2009).

**Education.** Even given all of the challenges that the islands currently face, education "is considered by many I-Kiribati as the most important change in the island life. They are ready to achieve the means for a better life by giving their children a good education" (Bataua, 1985, p. 84). Education is free and compulsory for ages 6 to 14, but senior secondary education is optional and mostly church-run on the capital island. While the overall quality of education remains low, especially in the outer islands, literacy rates are high and are estimated to be around

91 percent (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013; WHO, 2012). I-Kiribati recognize the importance of improving education for their children, as it is the first important step for them to gain the skills and experience they will need to work overseas. For most of the population, “Education is now seen as a source of money-earning jobs. Parents are eager for their children to be educated, not for what it will do to them, but because it will enable them to obtain jobs which bring home money” (Talu, 1979, p. 163).

**Overseas Employment.** Many I-Kiribati, typically young unmarried men, have traveled overseas for temporary work, mostly as seafarers on merchant and fishing vessels, in order to earn money and help support their families as well as have a chance to see the world (Borovnik, 2007). As the population grows in the capital and the effects of climate change increase, more I-Kiribati will begin to look for work overseas and more temporary migrants might decide to stay permanently in their new countries (Barnett & Webber, 2012; Hugo 2012). However, most I-Kiribati emigrants maintain strong ties with their land and families and often make return trips to visit (Barnett, 2001; Campbell, 2012). Furthermore, as island resources continue to diminish, families might decide to send one or two of their children to work overseas in order to relieve the stress on the household as well as help supplement the family income (Hugo, 2012).

Increased labor migration can greatly benefit those who migrate as well as their family and communities back in the islands. As more young I-Kiribati migrate overseas, they send remittances that can provide aid and support for their families as well as help aid the national economy (Burson, 2010). Already a significant portion of the national GDP, remittances are essential for helping many I-Kiribati families by providing them the means with which to pay for food, goods, and other services, further aiding their ability to adapt and survive (Burson, 2010).

**Migrant Communities.** In addition to remittances, initial migrants to new countries can also help those back in the islands by reducing population growth and pressure on resources, services, and employment. This would help reduce the vulnerability of the remaining population and would hopefully help them have a better chance to adapt to the increased effects of social, economic, and environmental change (Barnett & Webber, 2012; Hugo, 2012). Migrants can also be valuable sources of knowledge and awareness as they can inform their families and communities about the potential risks associated with climate change as well as providing essential information to help any relatives or friends who might decide to migrate in the future (Burson, 2010).

Those early migrants can also provide the vital support network to help other I-Kiribati migrate in the future. In the Asia-Pacific region, multiple studies have shown that the majority of migrants move to where family and friends have already moved and settled (Hugo, 2012). As such, those who do migrate are often reliant at first on previous family and friends who have already relocated overseas and can aid in settlement and adjustment (Barnett, 2012; Hugo, 2012).

**Climate Change.** As the direct and indirect effects of climate change worsen, larger numbers of the population “may be more likely to migrate to places that they perceive to offer a better life” (Barnett, 2012, p. 40). As sea-level rise is considered a long-term threat, “a slow-onset disaster,” current migration will be voluntary at first as individuals will have the choice of whether or not to move and they will be motivated more by employment and labor rather than climate change (Hugo, 2012). Although climate change is important, the immediacy of the threat does not seem to have a large impact on the current population’s decisions to leave the islands, although this is expected to have increasing significance in the upcoming decades (Hugo, 2012; McAdam, 2012). Consequently, I-Kiribati are experiencing a combination of many different push and pull



factors, including environmental and social degradation on the islands and the prospect of better economic and educational opportunities overseas, that must all be considered when discussing motivations for current and future migration.

**Barriers to Migration.** While there are a growing number of I-Kiribati looking to live and work overseas, there are still a significant number of barriers to migration that exist. These include limited language skills, poverty, lack of skills, illness, difficulty obtaining visas to live and work in another country, and the challenge of acquiring housing, services, employment, and adjusting and adapting to a new environment (Barnett & Campbell, 2010; Barnett & Webber, 2012). It will be mostly young adults who will relocate as they will have the easiest time moving, obtaining employment, and adjusting to life overseas (Barnett & Webber, 2012; Hugo, 2012). Furthermore, not everyone will want to migrate as the vast majority of I-Kiribati will remain in the islands, either by choice or as they are unable to migrate due to age, illness, poverty, etc. (Barnett, 2012, p. 40). Therefore it is predicted that in the near future, most of the population will not move or migrate, but will instead attempt to adapt while remaining in the islands (Hugo, 2012).

While there are some positives to permanent relocation, it does come with a great cost. Some younger I-Kiribati may benefit from more employment and educational opportunities overseas, but many older I-Kiribati will be unwilling to leave the islands. Land is an essential element in the cultural and spiritual life of Pacific Islanders, and “the relationship between people and land is often so strong that the two are considered inseparable” (Campbell, 2010, p. 35). Therefore many of the youth must leave behind their elders who “are reluctant to move from the islands that sustain their material cultures, lifestyles, and identities” (Barnett, 2012, p. 53).

If forced to migrate away from their ancestral land, many older I-Kiribati would likely experience great physical, mental, and emotional stress as they might have difficulty adapting to

a new lifestyle and a loss of cultural identity (Campbell, 2012; Locke, 2009; Moore & Smith, 1995). Also of note is that it would be impossible to relocate the entire population to just one area. Therefore individuals or family groups may have to migrate to multiple destinations, which would further weaken the community and extended family ties. Consequently, the Kiribati government recognizes that “forced resettlement must be seen as a last resort after all other adaptation strategies have failed and resilience has been eroded” (Hugo, 2012, p. 10).

### **Migration Policies and Programs**

**Government Response to Climate Change.** Since his first election in 2003, Anote Tong, the president of Kiribati, has been a tireless advocate for climate change mitigation and adaptation. At the 60<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly in 2005, President Tong warned that if greenhouse gas emissions were allowed to remain unchecked and unaddressed, that the resulting climate change and environmental degradation would most likely make his entire nation completely uninhabitable by 2050 or sooner (Government of Kiribati, 2013). As the long-term survival of his country and his people becomes increasingly threatened, Tong acknowledged that even with the development and implementation of climate change adaptation programs, such as the building of seawalls, planting of mangroves, and harvesting of rainwater, permanent relocation may be inevitable (Government of Kiribati, 2013).

For Kiribati, the nation already experiences the worst social, economic, and environmental challenges in the region. With the government’s limited financial ability to address the increasing impacts of extreme climate change, it has been estimated that by 2050, the government of Kiribati could be spending the equivalent of 13.2 to 18 percent of its GDP annually to address these problems (Storey & Hunter, 2010; World Bank, 2013). Consequently, although their means are limited, the government has pledged to do everything possible to

protect the islands and the population. As part of their action plan, several different programs and projects have been implemented with varied degrees of success.

**Kiribati Adaptation Program (KAP).** In order to raise awareness and potentially mitigate the effects of climate change, the Government of Kiribati is currently implementing a US \$5.5 million adaptation strategy known as the Kiribati Adaptation Program (KAP) (Government of Kiribati, 2013; Hogan, 2008). Aided by the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), AusAID, NZAID, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), KAP was developed as a way to reduce the environmental, social, political, and economic impacts of climate change in Kiribati, particularly in the high density areas of the capital (Hogan, 2008). Designed to be completed in three separate phases from 2003 to 2015, KAP currently carries out projects that include raising community awareness of climate change, monitoring and improving the nation's water supply, and reducing coastal erosion (Government of Kiribati, 2013; Hogan, 2008).

During their initial assessment of attitudes about climate change, KAP revealed that, even though I-Kiribati are more aware that changes are occurring, there is a general lack of knowledge and awareness about the causes and the effects on the population (Beca, 2010). According to the KAP-funded Baseline Survey conducted in 2008, 87% of I-Kiribati surveyed had heard about climate change, but few truly understood its effects or why it was occurring (Hogan, 2008). For example, the results showed that less than one third knew that climate change was caused by the burning of fossil fuels or that the sea level is expected to rise as a result (Hogan, 2008). Another 43% stated that they did not know why climate change was happening, while 26% believed it was due to "other" reasons including that "it was God's decision," "it was caused by the bombing of the ocean," or that "it was caused by the movement of the moon" (Beca, 2010, Hogan, 2008). Furthermore, when asked, "Is living for today more important than worrying

about the effects of climate change in 50 years' time?" almost 46% agreed (Hogan, 2008). It was evident from this survey that the majority of the population, especially those in the outer islands, lacked awareness and understanding about climate change (Hogan, 2008).

The first phase, KAP I, was completed from 2003 to 2005, and involved national consultations and workshops with I-Kiribati communities in order to develop and design projects to address such key issues as climate change awareness, coastal erosion, availability of fresh water, and rising sea levels (Beca, 2010; Government of Kiribati, 2013). The second phase, KAP II, completed from 2006 to 2010, focused on the implementation of these various projects, including the planting of mangrove trees to improve shoreline protection against erosion, the expansion of rainwater harvesting in the capital to increase water sustainability, and increased workshops throughout the islands to help raise awareness ("37,000 Mangroves," 2011; White, 2011). Another KAP project was aimed at protecting the main airport for the country, Bonriki Airport in the capital, from severe coastal erosion (Dorney, 2011; "New Shoreline Protection," 2010). As the coast had eroded almost to the edge of the runway, a project was started to construct a large seawall to prevent any further damage. Unfortunately, the funding ran out before it could be completed and it ended up being 50 meters short of its intended total length of 150 meters (Dorney, 2011).

The last phase of the program, KAP III, scheduled to run from 2010 to 2015, is focused on expanding the existent projects, particularly those related to awareness, coastal erosion, and water security, in order to help enable the country to successfully adapt to current and future impacts of climate change and sea level rise (Government of Kiribati, 2013; White, 2011). While there are still a couple of years before the program will be completed, recent evaluations have shown that KAP has so far been largely unsuccessful as many of the projects, such as the one to

build the protective seawall for the airport, have failed due to “a lack of human and financial resources” (Storey& Hunter, 2010, p. 176; see also Dorney, 2011).

Furthermore, even though climate awareness workshops and programs have increased throughout the nation, they are still hindered by limited and unreliable transportation and telecommunication, and the great difficulty, time, and expense required when traveling between the different islands and island groups (Beca, 2010). Consequently, the majority of the population, especially those in the outer islands, still lack the financial, technical, and human resources needed to adequately understand and address climate change mitigation and adaption (Hogan, 2008; Ministry of Environment, 2007).

**International Aid.** At the 67<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly in 2012, President Tong delivered another impassioned speech that again called for all nations of the world to start taking immediate action to help mitigate the effects of climate change, including that of rising sea level (“At UN Debate,” 2012). Claiming that “climate change remains the greatest moral challenge of our time,” Tong expressed his immense frustration and disappointment that so little had been done by developed nations to curb greenhouse gas emissions and to protect the sustainability and survival of those countries and peoples most vulnerable to climate change, including the four atoll nations of Kiribati, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands (“At UN Debate,” 2012; Government of Kiribati, 2013).

As his nation is already feeling the effects of extreme environmental change, Tong also entreated the international community to provide additional aid and support to help his country and his people adapt to the current as well as future impacts of climate change. For instance, in order to minimize the immense political, economic, and social impacts of possible relocation, Tong expressed the great need for the development of regional and international policies to aid

this process, including increased labor migration to Australia and New Zealand (Barnett & Campbell, 2010; Locke, 2009). By creating more employment opportunities for I-Kiribati overseas, it could help address immediate and long-term challenges facing the nation as this would increase labor mobility, improve the nation's economy through the sending of remittances, and would also lessen population pressure on land and resources back in the islands (MFAT, 2011). The government of Kiribati will, however, require help from the governments of Australia and New Zealand to provide the education and training for I-Kiribati to gain the skills needed to find employment overseas.

**Resettlement Plans.** President Tong has stated that the government of Kiribati will do whatever possible to try to adapt and avoid relocation; however, the time might come when the islands are no longer sustainable and migration will be the only feasible remaining solution (“At UN Debate,” 2012). It has been estimated that, as a result of the direct and indirect effects of climate change, “between 200 million and 1 billion people will be forced to migrate and relocate by 2050” (Barnett & Campbell, 2010, p. 51). As Kiribati and the three other Pacific atoll nations are considered the most vulnerable, they are predicted to become the first nations in which the population might be forced to relocate because of the unprecedented and overwhelming rate and magnitude of environmental change (Barnett, 2001; Barnett & Campbell, 2010). However, as Tong stated in early 2013, “We have accepted that we can’t keep everyone in Kiribati, some will have to relocate. Relocating the whole country is our last option” (Marau, 2013).

While no country has yet to offer land overseas for I-Kiribati to use for relocation, a few different internal resettlement schemes have been suggested in order to reduce the growing population's pressure on land and resources. Such plans include relocating I-Kiribati from the overcrowded capital of Tarawa to three largely undeveloped and sparsely populated atolls in the

Line Islands chain (ADB, 2006; Locke, 2009; Uriam, 2011). This includes the proposed relocation of approximately 30,000 I-Kiribati to the much larger Kiritimati, or Christmas Island (ADB, 2006; Locke, 2009). All of these schemes, however, face the same challenges that doomed the earlier Phoenix Island Resettlement Scheme in the 1930s, including the fact that these other atolls are far more remote and isolated, and also lack the resources, services, and infrastructure required to support large populations. So while a few will decide to move and resettle in the Line Islands, most will remain in the Gilberts.

**“Migrating with Dignity”.** In order to prepare for a possible future in which his people may be forced to relocate and leave their ancestral lands as a result of extreme climate change and environmental social, and economic degradation, President Anote Tong has proposed an adaptation strategy he refers to as “migrating with dignity” (Risse, 2009). According to President Tong, “migrating with dignity” means “we don’t just pack up our people from the villages and transport them to one center in Australia and say ‘Ok, there you are’” (Reed, 2011, para. 13). Instead, this strategy proposes that gradual, planned migration based on “merit and dignity” can be possible with the development of training programs that provide more employment opportunities overseas (Risse, 2009, p. 281).

With the “migrating with dignity” strategy, it is hoped that if large-scale migration has to occur, it should happen in such a way as to minimize “community fragmentation, social disintegration, and the loss of culture” (Campbell, 2010, p. 33). As President Tong stated, "Either we can wait for the time when we have to move people en masse or we can prepare them – beginning from now" (Lagan, 2013a). While young, unemployed I-Kiribati will benefit the most from increased opportunity, freedom, education, and employment overseas, the older generation will have a harder time and possibly “experience psychological trauma and perhaps suffer from a

sense of cultural crisis, and they may have difficulty adapting to modern Western market-based culture” (Locke, 2009, p. 178).

It is also hoped that this strategy will help to ease some of the various barriers to migration. The “migrating with dignity” strategy will most likely only benefit a few people early as most of the population will not be able to take advantage of the educational and employment opportunities offered. This will be due to the fact that significant migration barriers still remain and while some younger I-Kiribati want to travel and work overseas, the vast majority have shown they want to remain in the islands (Smith, 2013). Furthermore, with the state of the current global economy, it might prove difficult for I-Kiribati to find employment in other nations that are also experiencing issues with their own economy (Smith, 2013).

As human migration is caused by a combination of many different factors, it is exceedingly difficult to narrow the cause of migration down to only that of climate change, and it is rarely the only causal factor (Bailey, 2011; McAdam, 2012). Consequently, no official definition has yet been given for a person or a people who have been displaced by climate change and no country has officially recognized the status of “environmental” or “climate change” refugees, as one I-Kiribati man recently discovered when he was refused climate change refugee status in New Zealand (“Kiribati Man’s Claim,” 2013; Lagan, 2013a; McAdam, 2012).

By enabling I-Kiribati to seek skilled jobs abroad and thereby having the choice to move voluntarily, Tong hopes that his people can avoid becoming refugees and instead be able to keep their pride and dignity by becoming valuable contributing members of their host communities (Barnett, 2012). As President Tong stated: “I-Kiribati migrants should be sought after by the countries to which they wish to relocate. For this to happen our people must be in a position to



provide the skills that are needed in the receiving countries. This creates a 'win-win' situation, where both Kiribati and the receiving country benefit” (Government of Kiribati, 2013).

Recognizing the great political, economic, and social challenges of this looming crisis, the governments of New Zealand and Australia have recently started to work with the government of Kiribati to help develop possible solutions. Some of these strategies have included providing more training programs to help young I-Kiribati find work as seafarers, seasonal workers, and develop other skills to help I-Kiribati gain work in such fields as nursing (Maclellan, 2012). While neither country has made a commitment to relocate I-Kiribati on a large-scale, they are both working with Kiribati to develop a few different labor migration policies and initiatives to address unemployment as well as potentially aid in long-term relocation (Maclellan, 2012; Smith, 2013). For instance, New Zealand currently accepts up to 75 I-Kiribati annually through the Pacific Access Category policy, and also allows a few I-Kiribati to participate in the Recognized Seasonal Employer Scheme each year (Bedford, 2010; <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/>; Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment, 2013).

Although the Australian government has a stricter immigration policy, it has also started to work more closely with Kiribati over the last few years and has developed some small trial projects and programs in order to see how successful they would be before applying them on a larger scale. For instance, Kiribati has recently been able to join Australia’s Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme, which allows some I-Kiribati to qualify for temporary work visas. Only a small number have been able to participate in these small pilot programs, however, and there are still many existing barriers that prevent migration, such as high travel costs (Maclellan, 2012).

As it is still difficult for most I-Kiribati to gain work visas in Australia and elsewhere overseas, it is necessary to raise the skill level of the population in order to make them more

eligible to gain entry and employment in a developed nation (Dorney, 2013). This includes the training provided by the Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI), one of the first pilot programs offered in Australia (AusAID, 2006; Bedford, 2010; Campbell, 2010).

### **Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI)**

One of the Government of Kiribati's top priorities is the creation of employment opportunities and a skilled workforce that can access the national and international labor market (MFAT, 2011). Sponsored by AusAID, the Australian government's foreign aid organization, KANI is a unique scholarship program offered through Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. Scheduled to run from June 2007 to December 2013, KANI is a small pilot program aimed at helping I-Kiribati students gain valued skills and experience in nursing (Considine, 2009). By enabling young I-Kiribati to attain Australian nursing qualifications, it is hoped that graduating students will be able to find future employment overseas and in turn help improve the economy of Kiribati by sending remittances back to their relatives in the islands. In addition, by providing training and skills for jobs like nursing that are frequently in demand, it would also be a benefit to the host nation in which they are employed.

**Program Goals.** According to AusAID's 2006 Final Draft Design Report for KANI and Mark Sayers, the Development Program Specialist for the Australian Agency for International Development in Kiribati, the initiative was created as a strategy to help I-Kiribati develop skills and training in order to gain employment overseas and improve opportunities for labor migration. As such, the official goal of the KANI program is to "Contribute to the Government of Kiribati's efforts to address rapid population growth, urbanization and youth unemployment through emigration of skilled labor and the advancement of nursing care services." To achieve this goal, the KANI program provides funds for three main components: scholarships to students

interested in nursing certification in Australia, professional development opportunities for existing nurses registered in Kiribati, and program support for the Kiribati School of Nursing to provide a higher standard of education (AusAID, 2006; M. Sayer, personal communication, July 12, 2012).

While the primary goal of the KANI program is to address immediate issues of high population growth and youth unemployment, this program and others similar to it could also help with longer-term migration. If participating students are able to find employment in Australia, they will hopefully be able to provide the essential foundation, network, and support system required to absorb greater numbers of migrants in the future. Therefore, while the stated goal of the KANI program is to help provide employment opportunities for I-Kiribati youth, it also has a larger significance in terms of the “migrating with dignity” strategy as it could allow more I-Kiribati to have adequate time to build new communities overseas and to be able to protect and preserve their dignity, identity, and culture in the process.

**Course of Study.** The first component of the KANI program, regarding the provision of scholarships for I-Kiribati to study nursing in Australia, the primary focus of my research, was started in 2007 and has been carried out at the Griffith University, Logan Campus in Brisbane. After eligible I-Kiribati were selected through a rigorous application and examination process, the selected students would then complete a four month long Academic Preparation Program in Kiribati and a four month Nursing Diploma Preparation Program at Griffith University in Australia before beginning the 18 month long Diploma of Nursing program. After earning their diplomas, students could then choose to enter the Bachelor of Nursing program, which takes approximately 24 months. Students also had the choice to “register with the Australian Health

Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and seek employment in the Australian nursing sector” (M. Sayer, personal communication, July 12, 2012).

**Participants.** All of the students who were selected to participate in the KANI program were young I-Kiribati who had recently left secondary school with no prior training in nursing. This population was targeted “in recognition that the capacity of Kiribati’s health system to deliver health care services should not be undermined, and that addressing the needs of school leavers with low employment opportunities is of immediate concern and priority to the Government of Kiribati” (AusAID, 2006, p. v). Since the program began in 2007, three different cohorts of students have participated in the KANI program. The first cohort started with a total of 29 students, the second had 32 students who started in 2008, and the third had 26 students in 2009, for a total of 87 participating students. It is students from these three cohorts from which I took my sample for the data analysis section of this report.

As of July 2012, nine students had graduated with a Bachelor of Nursing degree and had registered with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Of those students, six had found part-time employment in Australia and two returned to Kiribati. Thirteen students exited the program with a Certificate III in Aged Care or a Diploma of Nursing. Furthermore, six students had left the program without any qualification, leaving 59 students still enrolled in the program (M. Sayer, personal communication, July 12, 2012). Although this was a pilot program with a small sample, it is proving to be successful and it is predicted that most of the currently enrolled students will eventually graduate with some sort of degree or certification. Hopefully the governments of Kiribati and Australia can learn from the structure and supports provided within the KANI program to develop similar programs for I-Kiribati students in other areas of interest.

## Summary

As the population continues to grow, there are inadequate resources available to deal with the ever-increasing demand for food, water, housing, employment, services, and land. Consequently, the government and the infrastructure of South Tarawa are completely overwhelmed and unable to address the serious challenges related to overcrowding, high unemployment, degradation of health and living standards, inadequate sanitation and waste disposal, and the depletion and contamination of the food and water supply (ADB, 2006; CIA, 2013; Locke, 2009; MFAT, 2013). All of these issues are further exacerbated by the increasing impacts of extreme climate change that threaten the sustainability, habitability, and long-term survival of the entire country. Researchers have noted that “People whose livelihoods depend most heavily on natural capital and who have the least financial resources are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, especially if they live in an environment already degraded” (Barnett, 2012, p. 39).

With the nation becoming increasingly vulnerable and unable to address the current social, economic, and environmental issues on top of those associated with slow-onset climate change, relocation might be the only solution for future survival. As such, President Tong has the overwhelming challenge of trying to find an adaptation strategy that will address both immediate and long-term needs. One such solution has been the proposed migration policy, “migrating with dignity,” which focuses on enhancing education and skills training for young I-Kiribati in order to help them find employment overseas. The KANI program in Australia is one such initiative that hopes to successfully facilitate labor migration for qualified I-Kiribati youth. This program hopes to help address some of the pressing issues of overpopulation, poverty, and lack of employment, in addition to possibly assisting migration and relocation in the future.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Methodology

For four days between April 30<sup>th</sup> and May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012, I had the opportunity to visit the main office of the Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI) program at the Griffith University, Logan Campus in Brisbane, Australia. During that short time, I was able to conduct in-depth individual interviews with ten of the I-Kiribati students currently enrolled in the program. While on the campus, I was also fortunate to meet and talk with several of the KANI staff and attend a meeting with the newly appointed Australian High Commissioner to Kiribati, who also happened to be visiting the KANI offices at the same time. By generously volunteering to share their time and their personal experiences and perspectives with me, the students and staff provided invaluable information and insight into the KANI program and its significance for the individual students, their families, and their country.

#### **Research Design**

To ultimately provide greater awareness and understanding of the KANI program through the collection and analysis of the unique stories and perspectives of the students involved, I decided to use a purely qualitative approach for my research. Using this method, I hoped to effectively design and implement a study comprised of either focus groups and/or individual interviews with the KANI students, depending on how many were interested in participating. By meeting and talking with the students, my goal was to be able to record and transcribe in-depth and detailed accounts of their individual experiences with the program including their personal feelings, motivations, and opinions. Such highly subjective data, which forms the very foundation of qualitative research, cannot be easily quantified, standardized, or generalized for statistical analysis or comparison. Instead, through careful, inductive analysis of the students' observations and personal narratives, I hoped to discern predominant patterns and

themes with which to make tentative hypotheses and conclusions regarding this unique, pilot program and its potential impact for the students and future migration strategies for other I-Kiribati.

Conversations that involve the sharing of personal stories and experiences require time, patience, and flexibility in order to let them unfold as fully and naturally as possible. With this in mind, a semi-structured approach was the best way in which to design and conduct the focus groups and interviews. According to Kevin Dunn, a professor in human geography and urban studies at the University of Western Sydney, “the semi-structured interview is organized around ordered but flexible questioning” (Hay, 2010, p. 110). This method would ideally give me the freedom to adjust and adapt my questions for each individual student while also providing enough structure to allow for the analysis of overall patterns and themes. I also hoped that by using this approach the discussions would take on a more relaxed, conversational tone and ultimately lead to more natural, open, and in-depth responses from the participants.

Although there were many topics and issues I wished to discuss with the students, I eventually decided on a list of 20 broad, open-ended questions (Appendix C) with which to facilitate and guide the semi-structured focus groups and interviews. The questions I chose also followed a natural, chronological order as a way to further aid the flow of the conversations. For example, the initial questions focused on the students’ past history with the program, including when and how they had first heard about KANI and why they had decided to apply. The students’ responses would hopefully provide me with essential information regarding their personal backgrounds, including where they were from within Kiribati, either the capital or one of the outer islands. Learning about their personal motivations for joining the program would also tell me a great deal about the current situation in Kiribati and the challenges that the I-

Kiribati youth are facing. I also wanted to learn what role, if any, the threat of climate change had had on their decision to apply and move overseas. Furthermore, by asking how they had first heard about the program, I wanted to gain a better understanding of the general awareness and interest in the program and how information and knowledge is spread and disseminated throughout the islands of Kiribati.

Continuing with this line of questioning, I then asked what their impressions and experiences were like when first arriving in Australia and beginning the program. I wanted to know how they felt moving to an entirely new country, culture, and environment. Were they prepared at all for the culture shock? What were the biggest challenges that they experienced? Had the KANI program helped to ease their transition? Their responses would tell me more about what difficulties they had personally experienced and provide an idea of what it would be like for other I-Kiribati who would decide to leave the islands and move to Australia.

Next, I inquired about their current social situations. This included questions regarding how they were adapting or assimilating to the Australian culture and lifestyle and what I-Kiribati customs they were still practicing and continuing, if any. I also wanted to know if there was already an established I-Kiribati community in Brisbane and if the students were involved. This provided me with a better understanding of how the students were adjusting to their new life and what customs and traditions were being saved (or lost) in the process. I also inquired about the various skills and training the students were gaining from the KANI program and if the students felt that these skills would be useful in obtaining future employment in Australia or elsewhere overseas.

Finally, I asked about their future goals and aspirations. In particular, I wanted to know where they would like to live and work after graduating from the KANI program. Did they want



to stay in Brisbane, move elsewhere within Australia, go further overseas, or move back to Kiribati? Depending on their responses, I also wanted to know if they would like to permanently move and relocate overseas and if the rest of their family would like to eventually join them. What did the students consider to be the main push and pull factors influencing their decision to move away or stay in the islands? Were they the same factors for their peers, their parents, and their elders? By asking these questions, I hoped to gain valuable insight into I-Kiribati life and culture as well as the challenges the students, and other I-Kiribati, face both at home in the islands as well as when attempting to relocate overseas.

### **Research Documents**

In order to gain the necessary approval to begin my research, I first had to put together all of the forms and documents that I needed to conduct my study. This included a Consent and Authorization Form (Appendix B), a list of questions for the interviews and focus groups (Appendix C), and a recruitment email for the KANI students (Appendix D). All of these documents were used to provide any interested parties with important information regarding the nature of my qualitative research study, including how those involved might benefit from participating.

Firstly, in order to participate in the study, the students were required to read, sign, and submit a copy of the Consent and Authorization Form. This form contained a brief description of my research as well as what was expected of the students if they chose to participate in the interviews and/or focus groups. The possible risks and benefits for the participants were also discussed. By signing this form, the students gave their consent to participate in the interviews and/or focus groups and to have their personal stories, opinions, and perspectives recorded, analyzed, documented, and eventually published.

Through the Consent and Authorization Form, the students were also informed that this study was completely voluntary. They could, therefore, choose not to participate altogether or, if they did decide to take part, they could choose not to answer any or all of the questions that I might ask. I also mentioned that, with the students' permission, I would use a digital voice recorder during the sessions in order to ensure the most accurate and reliable data collection and analysis. These recordings, along with any additional information provided by the students, would be kept strictly confidential. Furthermore, to ensure the privacy and safety of the students, all recordings and notes from the interviews and/or focus groups would be erased and destroyed once they had been fully transcribed. All completed transcripts were kept securely on my own personal computer, and I also assigned a study number for each of the participants to ensure their anonymity and protect their individual identities.

In the Consent and Authorization Form, I also explained some of the possible risks and benefits for those who chose to participate in the study. I wanted the students to be aware that potentially sensitive and distressing issues involving climate change, migration, and relocation, as well as family, culture, and money, as it relates to income and remittances, could arise during the course of the discussions. Having mentioned this, I wanted the students to understand that by sharing their stories and experiences, they could greatly increase the knowledge and awareness of the KANI program as well as further the study of economic and environmental migration and climate change adaptation strategies for the nation of Kiribati. I also included the offer of a small incentive, such as a gift certificate to a local fast-food restaurant, as a way to show my appreciation for those students who chose to volunteer their time and participate in the study.

My contact information, as well as my advisor's, was provided on this form in case any prospective students had any questions or concerns regarding the study. After reading through all

of the information, any interested students then indicated on the form whether they wanted to participate in an interview and/or focus group and if they were agreeable to answering any potential follow-up questions that I might have. The students then signed and dated the form and either turned it into the KANI office or waited to give it to me in person during my visit.

In addition to the Consent and Authorization Form, I also composed a recruitment email that was sent to the KANI students as a way to advertise my research and hopefully attract more participants for my study. In the email, I briefly introduced myself and described a little about the research that I hoped to conduct. I also mentioned the importance of the research and the significant contribution the students' stories would make to the overall understanding of the KANI program and its role in I-Kiribati strategies for migration and adaptation. This email also mentioned that I would offer a small incentive for any student who participated in the research.

### **Research Approval**

Once I had all of these documents in order, it was necessary to have my research proposal approved by my thesis committee and the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL) at the University of Kansas. Furthermore, I had to gain additional approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at Griffith University in Australia to conduct external human research with students on their campus. To receive the necessary ethical clearance from the HREC, I had to have prior approval and authorization from AusAID, the Head of the School of Nursing at Griffith University, and the Griffith International Business Development Unit.

As part of the ethical clearance from the HREC, I had agreed that I would not contact any of the KANI students directly. Instead, all emails and correspondence concerning my research with the KANI program went through the Griffith International Business Development Unit

Staff, including the Deputy International Director, the International Project Manager, and the Student Contact Officer. Only after all of the documents were approved by the KANI staff, were they then shared with the students. This included those documents previously mentioned, as well as an additional recruitment email for the students (Appendix D) and an Interview/Focus Group Availability Form (Appendix E). The latter was created as an attempt to help the KANI Student Contact Officer schedule the individual interview sessions and/or focus groups with the students prior to my arrival in Brisbane.

### **Data Collection**

After successfully receiving authorization and approval from all of the organizations and agencies involved, I was able to start preparing to carry out my fieldwork at the Griffith University, Logan Campus. Unfortunately, due to limited time and money, I was only able to stay in Brisbane for a few days, arriving early on Monday, April 30<sup>th</sup>, and leaving late on the morning of Thursday, May 5<sup>th</sup>. Upon my arrival, the KANI Student Contact officer informed me that she had arranged for me to meet and talk with eleven students from the program over a period of two days, May 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>.

With only eleven students participating, I felt that focus groups would be unnecessary and decided to conduct only individual interviews during my time on the campus. This allowed me to spend more time with each student and gain a deeper insight into their personal perspectives of the program. One-on-one interviews also helped avoid any potential conflicts or negative issues that could arise in a group setting due to differences in age, gender, personality, or background. Subsequently, once the Student Contact Officer was informed of my decision, a small conference room on the Logan campus was reserved and it was arranged for me to conduct individual sessions with the students.

The students were personally selected by the Student Contact Officer based on both their availability and their interest in my research. She also believed that these particular students would provide a good sample of the population as they represented a wide range of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. Although I was originally scheduled to talk with eleven students, one was unfortunately unable to attend the interview session. Of the ten that did participate, six were female and four were male. Two were from the first cohort of KANI students, four were from the second cohort, and four were from the third cohort. Furthermore, one of the students from the first cohort had actually switched programs to complete a degree in social work instead. During the interviews, I did not directly ask the students their age; however, as most of the students had begun the program soon after graduating from secondary school around the age of 18, I assumed the ages of the students ranged between 22 and 25, with some outliers. Some of the students were originally from the capital, Tarawa, while most were from the outer islands. Many of the students were also married with children at the time of the interviews. All of these differences in the students' backgrounds influenced the stories and experiences they would share with me.

The Student Contact Officer had also arranged for me to meet and conduct interviews with the female students once and the male students twice due to the students' availability over the two days. These interviews were also scheduled to take place during thirty minute sessions. When conducting the interviews, I tried to adhere to the scheduled time limit, but found this to be a little difficult considering the flexible, semi-structured nature of the conversations. Consequently, most of the interviews ended up lasting closer to 45 minutes, while a few went much longer, including one interview which was approximately two hours.

During the interview process, I found the students to be very friendly and open. Most of the conversations flowed easily and they shared their personal perspectives on the program as well as their individual experiences in both Australia and Kiribati. By traveling to the campus and talking face-to-face with the students, I was also able to use their body language, non-verbal cues, and more subtle nuances to better frame and adapt my questions during the interview. Each participant had unique ideas and stories to add and contribute to the study, but I found that during the conversations I recognized similar responses and experiences being repeated by the different students. Later, through the analysis of the interview transcripts, these themes and patterns became even more evident. Therefore, even though I had talked with only ten students out of the approximately 58 students enrolled at the time, I felt that they had provided me with such rich, detailed descriptions that I had achieved a high enough degree of data saturation to enable a thorough analysis of the program.

### **Data Analysis**

After returning to the United States, I carefully transcribed all of the data that I had collected during the interviews. Once I was finished, all of the voice recordings were then erased and all transcripts and data relating to the discussions were then kept on a personal computer to which only I, the researcher, had access. Furthermore, during the process of typing the transcripts, I also assigned a study number from one to ten for each of the students in order to protect their identity and ensure complete confidentiality. All comments and information gathered during this study have, therefore, remained secure and strictly confidential for the protection of the students.

Instead of relying on a statistical analysis to examine the data collected from the individual students, I used an inductive approach. This involved a thorough review of the

students' responses to see what patterns, themes, and trends could be inferred from the data - "The rule of thumb is that hearing a statement from just one participant is an anecdote; from two, a coincidence; and hearing it from three makes it a trend" (Madrigal & McClain, 2012, para. 13). As such, I tried to identify similar responses, experiences, and opinions that were being repeated by multiple students. I went through and organized the individual responses based around the questions that I asked as well as the general themes that arose during the interviews. I then looked for common patterns and experiences that I could use to better understand the KANI program and the role it plays in the students' lives.

### **Limitations**

I have to acknowledge that, like many researchers, I had several limitations that undoubtedly affected the outcome of my study, the most restrictive of which was time and money. At the time that I conducted my fieldwork, my resources were extremely limited and only permitted me a few days in which to travel and conduct all of the necessary interviews. Had this not been the case, I would have arranged to spend more time in Australia. This would have given me the opportunity to talk to more of the KANI students, including those who had already graduated, offering me additional perspectives on the program.

Likewise, I would have also chosen to extend the length of the interviews, ideally talking with each of the students for at least one to two hours as this would have allowed the interviews to unfold at a more natural pace and with greater depth and detail. With even more funds at my disposal, I also could have had the opportunity to travel to Kiribati and talk with the families of each of the students. This could have greatly added to my understanding of the students' backgrounds as well as helped me gain insight into what the program means to them, their elders, parents, siblings, and communities.

Another limitation that I had to overcome was that prior to completing my fieldwork in Brisbane, I had had no experience conducting formal interviews. Consequently, in order to best prepare for my research, I consulted with my advisor, Jay T. Johnson, about interviewing techniques. With his considerable experience conducting interviews, particularly with Indigenous populations, he was able to provide some helpful advice. I also read various books and articles on how to successfully conduct interviews for qualitative research, including *Learning from Strangers: the Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (Weiss, 1994), and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2001). These sources provided useful information on everything from how to first approach the students to make them comfortable and build trust to helpful suggestions on how to best structure and phrase questions to elicit more honest and natural answers.

In addition to my lack of interview experience, other factors might have influenced the responses that I received. For example, the first time I met with the KANI students was at the time of the interview, and as such, there was not a lot of time to build trust between the students and myself. This inability to build trust could have influenced the students' responses and what they chose to withhold or share with me. Likewise, the fact that I used a digital voice recorder, even with their permission, might have caused some of the students to hold back and not answer questions as fully or as naturally as they would have otherwise. Furthermore, even though the students had good English language skills, it was their second language and this might have caused them some difficulty in expressing their thoughts as fully as they might have if the interviews had been conducted in their native language or if an interpreter had been present.

Furthermore, as a non-Indigenous researcher preparing to talk with a group of Indigenous Pacific Island students, I relied on these sources to provide suggestions on how to conduct the



interviews in a respectful manner, hopefully avoiding any instances of unintentional miscommunication or misunderstanding. It should be noted that I-Kiribati culture is a very traditional patriarchal society with families and communities governed by the elder males. Therefore, the fact that I am a young, Caucasian female could have influenced the responses and interactions I had with the students as they might have treated me differently if I had been an older, Indigenous male. Similarly, the fact that I am American could have also played a part in influencing how the students interacted with me due to American history in Kiribati and the more recent influx of Western culture in the islands.

Furthermore, my past studies and interests have been primarily focused on cultural geography and how different cultures and communities interact with their environment, particularly in relation to adaptation to extreme climate change impacts. While I tried to keep as open a mind as possible upon starting the interviews, I must admit that I began the study with the assumption that this program had been created primarily as a climate change adaptation strategy and this influenced some of the questions that I chose to ask and focus on during the interviews. After talking with the students and KANI staff, however, it became evident that, although climate change is significant, there were many other far more pressing issues facing the islands that led to both the creation of the KANI program and the students' desire to participate in it.

Even though I had travelled throughout New Zealand and Australia prior to graduate school, I did not have the opportunity to travel to Kiribati or any of the small-island nations in the Pacific. Consequently, the backgrounds of the students were so far removed and different from my own that it was difficult to fully understand and relate to their experiences at the time the interviews were conducted. Later that same year, however, in August 2012, I was able to travel to Kiribati and learn about island life and culture as well as see the effects of climate

change and other social, economic, and environmental challenges firsthand. This subsequent trip provided me a better understanding of the experiences and motivations of the KANI students and I believe this helped to shape and strengthen the results and analysis presented in my thesis.

### **Summary**

Even with the limitations to this study, using a purely qualitative approach helped me collect the type of data that would best answer my research questions. Without the constraints of trying to use a very small sample for a statistical analysis, I had the freedom and flexibility in my interviews to examine the issues in far greater depth and detail than I would have otherwise. This was particularly true when it came to inquiring about the students' personal perspectives and experiences with the KANI program and their life in both Australia and Kiribati.

Furthermore, although the quality of the interviews was highly dependent on my own individual skill level, personal biases, and background, I feel that the interviews went well and that the students were all friendly, open, and honest with me. Consequently, even though I only collected data from a few individuals and my findings cannot be readily generalized to a larger population, the ten students I talked to provided me with such rich, detailed, personal accounts that I feel confident the conclusions in this report are an accurate representation of the students' lives and experiences.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Data and Analysis: Motivations for Migration

To understand the motivations that influence I-Kiribati to leave the islands and migrate overseas, I discussed with the students about the various push and pull factors that affected their decision to apply to the KANI program in Australia. What were the current social and economic challenges they faced on the islands, and how were they and their families personally affected by these issues? During the interviews, I also specifically asked the students about what environmental changes they had noticed firsthand in the islands and how aware they thought other people on the islands were of climate change and global warming. Were the students aware of the concept of “migration with dignity” and the role KANI plays in this adaptation strategy? Did climate change play a large role in motivating the students to live and work abroad or were there other more significant motivations to migrate?

#### **Socio-Economic Factors**

**Uneven Development and Overcrowding.** While the outer islands have remained largely undeveloped and have very little access to electricity or other modern conveniences and amenities, Tarawa, the main island, has rapidly become by far the most urbanized, modernized, and developed island in the entire country. The capital, South Tarawa, is the center for everything from government and education to entertainment and thousands of I-Kiribati have travelled or relocated there for education as well as employment, health care, and many other services, resources, and opportunities that remain unavailable to them on the outer islands.

As one student stated, more people from the outer islands are choosing to migrate to the capital for “jobs, education, and a better life and wanting a better life for their children.” This included the students in the KANI program as many were originally from one of the outer islands

and all except one, had moved to Tarawa to attend secondary school. One student from an outer island mentioned, “[The capital is] where all of the education, work, and workshops are. You have to move to Tarawa. Most of the students are from different islands, but they live in Tarawa.”

Although many people, particularly young I-Kiribati, are moving to Tarawa in search of more opportunities and a better life, the rapid, uncontrolled population growth is putting great pressure on already extremely limited land and resources. The increased rural-to-urban migration has also led to great environmental, economic, and social challenges that are directly impacting the health, security, and quality of life for the population as well as the sustainability and future of the capital and the entire nation.

**Limited Resources.** With the extreme population growth in South Tarawa, the existing natural resources, including traditional subsistence crops as well as fish and other resources from the lagoon and the surrounding ocean, are quickly becoming exhausted due to increased demand and competition. One respondent described how difficult it has become to fish near the capital, “You go out fishing and it’s very hard to catch a fish because you are not the only one. Everybody is out there by the reef trying to catch a fish. You have to be kind of competing. You have to be the first one to the fish in that spot.”

The government of Kiribati has been forced to import increasing amounts of food from overseas in order to feed the overpopulated capital. Unlike the outer islands, most people in Tarawa now have no other option but to rely on whatever food and goods the few local shops might have in stock. One respondent noted, “In the outer island, they mostly depend on land resources and sea resources for food. Whereas in South Tarawa, they depend on shops for food.” Imported food and other goods can be extremely expensive and the cost of living on the main

island is rapidly increasing. Another student expressed his concern, saying “Things are very expensive, just they like here, and I always hear that salary is very low and it does not meet the cost of their food... I am worried for my family, they just get paid fortnightly and they just spend it on the food and nothing else. We can’t save for other expenses.”

**Unemployment.** With the cost of living on the rise, many in Tarawa are looking for a way to earn an income as it is becoming increasingly difficult for those in the capital to live without money with which to purchase the rice, flour, and other imported goods on which they now depend. The vast majority of the population in the capital, however, is young and of working age and there simply are not enough jobs and opportunities available and unemployment is high. Furthermore, as the previous student mentioned, for those who are fortunate enough to find a job, their salary is often so low that after spending what they have on food there is often little left for other expenses, such as health care and medicine. One student stated “Now that the population is starting to rise, the country can’t afford enough food for everyone. So, I guess the price of the food will be going up [and]...people will start looking for jobs, ‘cause there’s not enough jobs that the government can provide for the people.”

**Increased Dependence on Remittances.** As a result of the rising cost of living and high unemployment rates, more people in the capital, and increasingly those in the outer islands, are becoming dependent on remittances sent by family members working overseas. As such, increasing numbers of I-Kiribati youth are looking for employment abroad in order to provide a comfortable living for themselves while also having the ability to send money back to help support their families. One student stated “Life is starting to get a bit harder, but I guess with programs like [KANI] where the youths are being allocated somewhere to study and even some

people migrating to other countries to work, it kind of help in a way when they send money back and that kind of makes it easier for their family back home. It supports them in a way.”

All of the KANI students mentioned that being able to send money and provide financial support to their families back in Kiribati was extremely important to them. For example, one student stated that while she sends money once a month, “[My family and I] just made an agreement like, ‘When you need some money, just say that and then I will do it.’” Another student mentioned that although she would like to send all of the money she had to help her family, she was also having a difficult time trying to make a living and pay all of her own expenses while in Australia, especially on a student budget. She could, therefore, only afford to send money if it was for something that their family truly needed, like medicine or health care:

I [send money], but not all the time...I don’t want them to depend. I want them to work and to know that life is very different [in Australia]. I’m struggling as a student at the moment... ‘cause I’m renting and other things, it’s very expensive. So I send [money] like maybe for medication, you know, for health ...and things that are necessary for them, not just spending.

**Loss of Traditional Skills.** With more of the population now reliant on remittances and cash wages to buy the food and goods they need, many no longer need to practice traditional skills, such as planting *babai*, and fishing, in order to survive. As one student stated, “People are starting to rely on money and are not using their skills to survive. It’s hard too ‘cause their skills are dying at the same time. So, I don’t know how they could survive if they don’t have the skills to go out fishing, cut toddy for the drinks, agriculture and stuff like that.”

Furthermore, with increasing numbers of I-Kiribati youth now focusing on obtaining work overseas, tasks like building traditional houses and canoes, which involve much skill and require years of practice and training, are not being continued or passed on and many elders are deeply concerned that they will eventually disappear altogether. As one student stated, although he

learned a lot from his elders, he stopped practicing traditional skills as he focused more on his studies, “[Traditional skills are] something that you grow up with and it’s just around you ... all around you. You see it from the elders, so you do it, and it’s something that you get taught. But when I started high school, my mom just said, ‘No more cutting toddies. School is more important!’” As this last student mentioned, there is now more emphasis and importance placed on gaining an education rather than learning traditional skills as education is seen as the best way for the youth to gain employment overseas and earn an income to help support their families by sending remittances.

**Weakened Family and Community.** Overall, as increasing numbers of people from the outer islands move to the capital, once strong and unified families and communities are being separated and broken apart. Consequently, unlike the outer islands where the communities and traditional *maneaba* system remains strong, this is not the case in Tarawa. As one student mentioned:

On an outer island, you do have that [sense of] community ‘cause everyone knows everyone and most people are related, while here in the main island, not everyone is related and it’s very hard to get people together with all of the different religions and stuff. We don’t really have the community spirit, ‘cause everyone is different [and] they come from different areas.

This weakened sense of community has made it extremely difficult to bring all of the families together in order to address the various social, economic, and environmental issues affecting the nation.

**Increased Modernization and Westernization.** Traditional island life and culture is also changing as a result of the rapid modernization and increased Westernization in the capital. Compared to the outer islands, the population living in Tarawa has far more access, albeit still limited and infrequent, to national and international news, information, and media through

newspapers, television, internet, and radio. While I-Kiribati youth are excited to have more imported culture and entertainment, including music, movies, and fashion and readily adopt foreign elements into their everyday life through their speech, behavior, and dress, most of the elders view this as a terrible loss of culture and tradition.

As one student noted, “I guess it’s the influence from the movies and stuff like that that are sort of pushing [I-Kiribati youth] away from learning or practicing these sort of [traditional] skills.” Similarly, another respondent stated, “The younger generation...they have modern ideas and they kind of contradict the ideas of the older generation. Sometimes [the elders] get mad, especially with the cultures that the younger generation are using.” For example, one student noted that, “Most students at the juniors level start to smoke and they say things like what they saw in the movies, but for older people they are very sad...[that the youth] are being greatly influenced with the Western cultures.”

Along with increased acculturation and Westernization, many I-Kiribati youth have more independence and freedom while living in the capital and are able to socialize and engage in activities and behavior that would not be permitted on the more conservative outer islands. With less development and outside influence, the islands beyond Tarawa have maintained a far more traditional lifestyle and although there were aspects of life that they enjoyed, many of the students found life on the outer islands to be very challenging and preferred living in the capital.

For example, a few students mentioned that, unlike the capital, there was always work and chores to be done on the outer islands as the traditional subsistence lifestyle required the entire family to perform daily activities that included cutting toddy, fishing, and helping their family with the subsistence crops: “Life is a bit hard on the outer islands, ‘cause you have to work. It’s like you have to do it the local ways. We have to wake up very early in the morning



and we have to go work in the *babai* pits, but in Tarawa, you know we didn't have to do that.”

Another student mentioned that it was difficult to visit the outer islands as those living there observed and adhered far more strictly to traditional rules and practices, “It's because they have less influence from the outside...They are very protective of their culture and they still have that mentality from the past. [They are] very traditional, yeah...you always have to be careful of what you say and what you do. It's very hard for someone from the main island to go to an outer island.”

Consequently, after experiencing the freedom and excitement of life in Tarawa, many of the I-Kiribati youth found the outer islands to be too dull, quiet, and isolating. As one student mentioned, “I guess it's because there's not much to do there. It's just the men going out fishing to catch the food for the day and that's all.” Another student explained, “In Tarawa, the youths go out, like having a drink or something like that, but in the outer islands, they don't...The youths on the outer islands have life but not the same as compared to people in Tarawa.”

**More Freedom and Independence for Women.** In the more conservative and traditional areas of the country, particularly on the outer islands, young girls and unmarried women are closely watched and kept at home and out of trouble. In Tarawa, however, the behavior of young I-Kiribati women is changing. Young women now have more independence than they have ever had before and they also have more freedom to wear and do whatever they want or like, much to the dismay, anger, and disapproval of their elders. As one female student remarked:

I think it has changed... In Tarawa, they live a very modern life unlike the outer islands. For instance...marriage is a very big thing in our country and young females are expected to be virgin at their first marriage. And now, in Tarawa, that kind of practice is...not that common. On the outer islands it is still very strict and if you are not a virgin, it is very ashamed and to your family.

Although it is becoming more accepted for young women to be allowed more freedom in the capital, there are still many families who continue to follow the traditional customs and practices. As one female student remarked, “It depends on the parents, like for my parents... We aren’t allowed out late at night, we have to go home like before dark. And then if we are not home by like eight o’clock, then our dad will follow us out and come looking for us.”

Another female student mentioned that the biggest difference for her between Kiribati and Australia was the freedom that she experienced while in Brisbane. She felt that, while life in the islands was changing especially in the capital, much remained the same as there were still many things she and most young women were not allowed to do and they still had to obey their elders and older brothers: “Here [in Brisbane] we have more freedom, ‘cause we are away from our family, but there...we have to do what our older brothers said and what our parents said. We are not allowed to do certain things, but here we can do whatever we want. We are free.”

**Youth Delinquency in the Capital.** As more I-Kiribati youth are deciding to move to the capital for more opportunity, entertainment, and independence, there is a growing problem of youth delinquency. Since there are very little jobs available, the students mentioned that the youth in particular have little to do to occupy their time besides spending their days hanging out with their friends. “You know, young people they [are] just mugging around and do whatever they like and parents, although they’re being strict, it’s just life. I think it’s just normal there and...they don’t bother about it anymore.” A few of the students stated that many young people end up getting into trouble and incidents of crime and violence in the capital were on the rise among I-Kiribati youth as well as cases of drinking, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. As one student stated, “There are kids roaming around causing more crime as you might imagine, drinking,

early pregnancy. And all that stuff, you know, that's why there's a high rise in teenage pregnancy back home and AIDS is going up at the same time."

**Pollution and Lack of Waste Management.** In addition to the overwhelming economic and social issues in the capital, the students mentioned that Tarawa was also experiencing extreme environmental degradation as a direct result of overpopulation and increased migration from the outer islands. For example, as more food and goods are being imported and consumed by the growing population, the amount of waste, such as plastic and metal tins, is rapidly accumulating. On such a small atoll in the middle of the Pacific, there is nowhere for the trash to go and most of it ends up discarded on the beaches and in the lagoons. One respondent stated, "It's very sad in my own experience... People don't really care for their beach. You can see a lot of rubbish and like what I experienced here [in Australia] is that the beach is where people go to get refreshed and have a good time, but back in Kiribati, it's like a dumping area."

This practice has resulted in widespread pollution of the land and water and has caused many severe environmental and health issues for those living in Tarawa. One of the effects of pollution has been the contamination of fish populations around the islands and is particularly bad in Bariki, one of the small islets of the capital. The same respondent explained, "There's one island in northern Kiribati where most people have had fish poisoning, because maybe it's the result of dumping chemicals and bad things into the water."

**Increased Morbidity.** With the rapid population growth, high population densities, and increasing amounts of pollution and environmental degradation in the capital, health issues, already some of the worst in the Pacific, are becoming more serious. The students mentioned that cases of tuberculosis and dengue fever were all increasing and even leprosy was starting to make

a comeback in the islands. With contamination of the water supply by human waste, trash, and other pollutants, water-borne diseases such as diarrhea were also a huge problem.

According to the students, the health care system on the islands was also extremely poor and limited in comparison to what they saw in Australia as I-Kiribati doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals did not have nearly enough training, resources, or equipment needed to adequately help everyone seeking care and treatment. For example, one of the students mentioned that even though cases of dengue fever were extremely high, most people, even some patients at the main hospital in the capital, did not have access to mosquito nets, making it nearly impossible to prevent the further spread of these vector-borne diseases or contain outbreaks. As he stated, “For example, my family, we have a lot of people in our house. So, we can’t use the mosquito nets to protect ourselves while the others in the house are not. [To] make it fair, we just put ourselves to the mosquitoes. It is especially bad for the elderly and sick, because they are very weak.”

Another respondent stated, “The health care is very poor back in our country. It’s not very practiced well and they didn’t put things in their appropriate places. Like the needles and the tablets, they just throw them outside and burn it on the ground where you can walk and see it. You can see the ash and you can smell the chemicals...it’s not good.” Lacking a way to properly dispose of hazardous medical waste, used needles, expired medication, and other highly dangerous materials would also end up on the beaches and in the surrounding oceans and lagoons. All of the above socio-economic and environmental factors have played an enormous part in motivating people to migrate away from the islands.

## **Climate Change and Migration**

**Impacts in the Islands.** When first bringing up the issue of climate change in Kiribati, all of the students stated that they had personally observed great environmental changes occurring on the islands. For example, since Kiribati is only about two meters above sea level, many mentioned that they had witnessed firsthand the widespread flooding caused by rising tides. One respondent stated, “Yeah, [the island] is only two meters above sea level and with a slight change in tide, the land will get flooded...you can see it happening.” Another student recounted their experience during one bad flood, “I’ve seen it a lot. There’s one time when the tide rises and the tides came all the way up and then we were like swimming in the road!”

Along with rising tides and flooding, most students also mentioned that they had noticed extreme coastal erosion in Kiribati. This was especially obvious to them after they had spent some time in Australia and then had gone back to the islands to visit their families. One respondent described what she saw after being away for two years:

It was really dramatic - And it’s everywhere, not just on the place I was living in, because the main island is very small, I noticed that it was everywhere, on all sides...the ocean side and then the lagoon side. I was like, “Oh, my God! The rumor is really true!” I thought it was just a rumor, you know, because, I had heard about it here that Kiribati is sinking and the sea level is rising...I didn’t believe it, but now I believe it after going back and seeing the difference.

Extreme coastal erosion and flooding had already caused a great deal of destruction throughout the islands, as one student from one of the southern islands stated, “My home before was near the coast and we had a seawall that we built, but now it’s been destroyed and all the houses have been destroyed.” The students believed that a lot more of the coast would be impacted over the next few years, directly affecting their homes, their land, and their entire communities. The same respondent predicted that, “Sometime when probably I am going back, maybe next year or the next year, the year after, I might see that my house is in the sea now.

That's when I can say to the new generation, 'This is where my house was and this is where I grew up, but now it's not. Now it is in the sea.'"

A couple of students mentioned that erosion on the outer islands had already forced their families to relocate. One student from the outer island of Abaiang, which has experienced some of the worst coastal erosion, stated, "[Our land] disappeared. It eroded away and then all the traditional buildings, like the *maneabas*, they are going to be eroded away in years...Most of my family are still living there, so they move from that area to find another...that's not affected." She also mentioned that while some of her family remained, others had migrated to Tarawa after losing their land.

In addition to coastal erosion, the higher tides and increased flooding have also caused the limited fresh water supply on the islands to become salty and brackish, affecting not only the water for human consumption but also the water used for growing essential subsistence crops. As one respondent stated, "Our main source of food, they call them *babai* pits, they start dying 'cause of the salty water. They need water of about pH 7 to survive and they become too salty, because the sea level is rising." While crops and other vegetation on the islands are struggling to survive the erosion and rising tides, they are also being affected by hotter temperatures and less frequent rainfall. As one student noted, "The trees...they are dying. We used to have plants and green plants, but now I realized that they are all dying. I think it is from the rising of the temperature as well, it is becoming hotter and then the sea level rising."

More frequent periods of prolonged drought have also affected the amount of rainwater available that families depend on as a fresh water source. One student responded, "Last Christmas when I went there, most people don't have rainwater. They had run out, because it's been many months without rain and it's hard because they run out of rain water and there's no

rain for seven or eight months.” This same student also mentioned that with less rain and increasingly brackish and polluted wells, people living in the capital had to pay to be connected to the main water system in order to have access to treated water. However, as water became increasingly limited from both overconsumption and drought, the government had been forced to implement a water quota for each household. “We have a water system, we have our own well, but then the water that’s treated to kill the bacteria, you have to pay like \$30 to connect it to your place with the pipe and you only get so many liters of water a day...now it’s like every second day.”

**Climate Change Awareness.** From the students’ responses, it was evident that all the students were very aware that great environmental changes were occurring in the islands. In addition to their firsthand observations of erosion, flooding, and other impacts, the students that I talked with were also taught about climate change while in Kiribati and Australia. Through class lectures, assignments, and research, the students were also able to learn more about some of the ways in which they could possibly mitigate and adapt to the environmental changes.

Although they have some awareness about climate change and climate change adaptation, most of the students that I talked with admitted that they still did not have a good understanding of what exactly climate change is and why it is happening. This respondent’s description of how he learned about climate change was typical of most of the students:

It is very hot and very polluted back in the islands, and that’s the one thing that we hear from our teachers when we are here, that the hot climate is a sign that there might be sea level rise, because...I’m not sure, but that’s what I’ve heard from them. That the Earth’s not well protected now, so the sun beams are getting stronger.

Another respondent saw what was happening on the islands, but was still unsure of how that was a reflection of the larger environmental impact: “I mean I haven’t really talked to a scientist or... maybe listen to or see one of those documentaries on it, but still for me, I know I have seen the

changes. I don't really know about it, because I would like to hear it from a real scientist, you know, is it really going to happen?"

Even though the students were aware of the changes happening in Kiribati, most of them felt that the general knowledge and awareness of climate change and its impacts was very low for the people living on the islands. They believed that most I-Kiribati, especially on the outer islands, were unaware of the concept of climate change. One respondent said, "I think most of the people back in Kiribati, they kind of have no idea what climate change is. The only people that do know of the problem are those who are educated." The few Islanders who did have knowledge about it were those with access to the information available in the capital. The students believed that this disparity of knowledge could be due to the fact that all of the government ministries, NGOs, and other organizations have their headquarters in the capital and it was difficult, expensive, and time-consuming to travel and communicate with those living in the outer islands. As another respondent stated, "It's very rare for environmental professionals to go to the outer islands."

Consequently, with access to information and scientific data concentrated among the educated elite in the capital, most I-Kiribati were aware that changes were happening but they did not understand why they were happening or if it was actually true or just rumors. Even those who were considered to be among the more educated still did not have a comprehensive understanding of climate change or its potential impact on the country, especially in regards to sea level rise. One respondent explained the level of understanding that most Islanders have about the looming environmental impact: "They have heard that Kiribati will be disappeared in, you know, in years. But they don't have the knowledge like is it true or what is the real



information? So, yeah, they just know, but they do not understand in detail about what is really happening.”

The students mentioned that in addition to the difference in climate change knowledge and awareness that existed between the capital and the outer islands, there was also a huge gap that existed between the younger and the older generations. Part of this difference in climate change awareness between the I-Kiribati youth and the elders was a result of the youth having more access to education and information as well as the elders’ stricter adherence to traditional culture and customs. As one student said, “That’s the main problem, like for my grandparents, they do know [about climate change], but they don’t believe it. They are like, “Oh well.” They are not judges. They are not going to judge that our island is going to disappear or something like that.”

This common denial and disbelief about climate change among the elders was also attributed to their strong religious beliefs. According to the students, the elders relied on their deep faith in God to protect them, their family, and the islands. As one respondent explained:

They believe that it won’t happen, because God has promised that after the flood through Noah’s time, that there will be no more floods. So that’s one of the beliefs that they think... From what I’ve heard when I was back on the islands, most of the older generation would say, “Nah.” They do believe [change is] happening, but still they say it won’t happen.

Some of the students mentioned that in addition to classes at school, they had also learned about the effects of climate change through various governmental and NGO meetings, workshops, and performances that were held in some of the villages in the capital and outer islands. These programs and events were conducted in an attempt to raise awareness in the community about the threat of climate change as well as share various techniques and methods the Islanders could use to protect their homes and their land. This included information on building seawalls and planting trees to prevent erosion, as described by one respondent: “I saw

one in the outer island that would promote the building up of the seawalls and especially in the part where they have been eaten by the tides...Yeah, there have been programs to help preserve the mangrove trees and to plant more trees.”

One student provided a detailed example of some effective climate change workshops and performances that were geared towards keeping the attention of people in the community while at the same time educating them about important issues:

I guess the funny thing about people from Kiribati, is that they like entertainment and being entertained. So, people from the ministries, in order to spread the message, you have to come up with something that will entertain them as well as educate them at the same time. So, the ministry of environment, they came up with this very creative way of educating the people and they put together different youth groups from different churches and religions and communities and then take them around to perform ... Someone might just pretend to become the land, whereas someone might just pretend to be the waves eating away the land and they do a lot of silly stuff and people will go, “hahahaha,” you know.

Although these government workshops were attempting to raise awareness, one student felt that the workshops he had attended were not very helpful or informative since the presenters had not taken the time to listen, understand, or relate to the community. As such, the respondent had a much different experience than that of the example above:

I can say that people working with the environment, they did not really listen to the community...That’s why people are not really quite aware of that and because they didn’t take much time to listen to the community and teach. For us, as we’ve been in school, we were lucky, because we learned about that, but we don’t hear about the climate change in the church and like that...I think that’s better, if people from church or around the community can share about climate change, ‘cause that’s the only way they can understand.

**Future Migration.** A few of the students stated that since they had been in Australia, a lot more programs and workshops had taken place around the islands and, as a result, more people were now aware of the impact of climate change and what it might mean for the future of their country. One respondent explained:

They have been doing heaps of awareness since I've been here, so who knows there might be some changes...people might have changed their mind, I mean it's 2012, but I'm pretty happy that they are still doing all of these awareness and teaching it to all of the students in high school and that is something very interesting, because everyone back on the island knows about what is happening.

As awareness increases and extreme environmental change becomes more evident, more I-Kiribati were starting to consider future migration, viewing relocation as the only way to ensure their survival. While many were now looking for ways to move overseas, most of the population had continued doubts about the potential threat of sea level rise and other long-term climate impacts and did not want to leave the islands or be away from their homes and their family. One respondent stated, "Everyone back on the islands is aware of the fact that sea level is rising and that climate is changing, but I don't know why they don't have that sort of urge, you know, to panic or to start looking for something to do before the future. They just, they're relaxing and they tell you, "Oh, we'd rather die here." Another student noted "Some [I-Kiribati] are now getting worried and they are looking for some escape, like going to New Zealand for work and are applying for that. Yeah, but those who do not understand, they still stay and they seem like they don't have any problems."

Although climate change awareness was increasing, there was still a great divide that existed between the youth and the elders in terms of understanding climate change as well as how they felt about the idea of having to possibly relocate away from the islands. The students believed that most of the youth living in Kiribati had more knowledge about climate change and were highly motivated to leave the islands in search of more opportunities and a better future for them and their families. One respondent stated "A lot of the younger generation are like, "Oh, we don't want to die here when our island sinks. We really want to go before it sinks!" Another

student replied, “Most of the [youth] want to go and experience the world outside the islands... My brother would also say that he’s going to apply for the KANI program next.”

The students mentioned that, whether it was due to their lack of awareness and understanding about climate change, their pride, their faith and religious beliefs, their strong connection to the land, or all of the above, their elders did not want to leave, preferring instead to live out the rest of their lives on the islands. As one student stated, “[The elders] get attached more to where they live and they just don’t want to change.” Another respondent explained:

Some of the older people that I talked to [about climate change], they said, “Oh, that can’t be true. God gave us this life, he can’t just take it away just like that.” It’s just a different kind of belief and they said, “Even if it’s possible, I don’t want to move from here. I want to die here!” You know, like, “My husband died in this country, I want to die here with him. I want to be buried in this island. I don’t want to leave this island.” And when I say, “And what if you are not dead before it sinking?” and they say, “I want to sink with the country!”

Consequently, many of the students stated that their parents and grandparents did not want to emigrate as they did not believe in climate change or the possibility of the islands becoming inundated by sea level rise and, even if it did turn out to be true, they would still prefer to live and die in the islands. For example, one student stated that his parents did not want to migrate, instead “They just want to come visit, but then they want to go back to the island. Yeah, because they don’t believe in climate change and all that stuff that the island is sinking. They say, “Oh, no. If that’s the case then we would rather die here.”

**“Migrating with Dignity.”** With the possibility of future migration as a result of climate change, extreme environmental degradation, and overpopulation, I wondered if the students were aware of the adaptation strategy of “migration with dignity” that had been proposed by President Anote Tong. I discovered that while many of the students were familiar with this idea, others had never heard of it.

Those students who were aware of “migration with dignity” felt that although more people were interested in migrating, it was still very difficult as there were not that many opportunities for I-Kiribati to live and work abroad. The population still had to follow the same immigration process as everyone else and, consequently, many were still waiting for their chance to leave. One respondent said, “I think there are more students and more people over there that need to migrate and move from the islands, but there are not enough opportunities for them. They do have programs for people to go to New Zealand, but still there are people over there waiting.” Some of the students believed that if the time did come when the population would be forced to relocate, other options for migration would become available and that would make it easier for them to leave the islands: “When that time comes, there will be more good things happening to us like being able to invite my whole family. But, at the moment, we all go through the same process as others.”

One student stated that even if there were increased opportunities for I-Kiribati to migrate in the coming years, relocation of the entire population would prove to be extremely difficult and challenging. He responded that while I-Kiribati youth, like the KANI students, would be able to adapt and assimilate relatively quickly and easily to their new environment and lifestyle, the elders and many others, particularly from the outer islands, would have an exceptionally hard time adjusting. Consequently, he felt that being forced to permanently move away from the islands would ultimately be “a disaster” for the I-Kiribati people:

It will be very hard. I mean, like for us, to come and live here, I found it very easy, but for them, I don't know if they would find it easy or hard, because life is totally different, especially with those who don't have that much education and stuff like that. To survive in a place that is totally different, different climate, the food, the skills that they bring with them from the islands they won't be able to use them here ... I reckon that it would be a disaster to move them here.

## Summary

Although knowledge and understanding of climate change remains low throughout the islands, especially among the older generation and those living outside of the capital, all of the students were aware that great environmental changes were occurring and mentioned witnessing the effects firsthand. However, while climate change did play a part in influencing their decisions to enroll in the KANI program, the students were more influenced by the current social and economic challenges in the country. This included limited resources, high youth unemployment, and lack of job opportunities, as well as degradation of health and living standards in the capital.

While a few of the students were aware of the “migrating with dignity” adaptation strategy, most of the students were simply interested in migrating and working overseas because it would provide them more opportunities for education, employment, and a chance at a better life for them and their children. Gaining employment overseas would also provide a way to help support their families back in the islands where the cost of living has increased, as they could send remittances to help their family obtain needed food, goods, and services. Although providing for their family was the most important motivation, the students were also influenced by increased urbanization and Westernization in the capital and wanted to experience the world outside of the islands where they had more freedom and independence, especially for women.

While the “migrating with dignity” strategy and programs like KANI aim to facilitate labor migration, the students mentioned that only a few I-Kiribati youth have been able to benefit thus far and there were still not that many opportunities for overseas work. Furthermore, the students responded that while more of the younger I-Kiribati were interested in relocating, the vast majority of the population, particularly the elders, were unwilling or unable to leave the islands and face the challenges of trying to adjust to a new life in a new country.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Data and Analysis: KANI Program

The lack of employment opportunities as well as the extreme economic, social, and environmental issues in Kiribati has motivated many young people, including the KANI students, to try and leave their island homes to seek out brighter futures elsewhere. During the ten semi-structured interviews that I conducted at Griffith University, Logan Campus in Brisbane, the KANI students provided me with in-depth, detailed accounts of their perspectives and personal experiences with the program as well as its significance for themselves and their families. Their responses are separated into three different sections that summarize the past, the present, and the future in regards to the students' involvement with the KANI program.

#### **Past**

This initial section is related to the students' experiences when they first became involved in the KANI program. After choosing to enroll in the program, I inquired about the application process they had to go through in order to be selected as well as the following training course they took in Tarawa before coming to Australia. Was the preparation course in Tarawa helpful? I also asked them about their first experiences coming to Australia and about the culture shock that they experienced. What were their initial impressions? What were the biggest challenges? The students also stayed with a host family in Brisbane for a few months when they first arrived, and I inquired about their experiences living with an Australian family. Had the Australian host families and the KANI staff helped the students adequately adjust and adapt to their new environment and life? Was the addition of a transitional camp beneficial to them?

**Awareness of the KANI Program.** From the students' responses, I found that when the students in the first cohort applied to KANI, the vast majority of the population in Kiribati was unaware

of the program as it was only in its beginning stages and access to information in the islands was very limited. At the time, there was some access to newspapers, television, and internet in the capital, but availability was infrequent and intermittent. In the outer islands there was little to no access to electricity, much less television or internet.

Due to the general lack of awareness at the start of the program, there were only a few hundred I-Kiribati who applied for the first cohort. All of these applicants were living in the capital at the time and had heard about the program primarily through radio advertisements and from family or friends who were either employed directly by or had connections to the government or health services in Tarawa. As one student replied, “I just heard from word of mouth throughout the community and from advertisements. I didn’t even really know [about it at the] start, I just went there thinking of applying for the Kiribati nurse, but then they told us that there was a special program that would be here.” As for the other student from cohort one, she stated, “I heard about it when I was in high school from my neighbor, and she knows about it because she’s working in the hospital and they are the first ones that were told about it.”

With the success of the first cohort, the program became more well-known, even to those living in the outer islands. As with the first cohort, a few of the students from the second and third cohorts heard about the KANI program through radio advertisements or through friends already involved in the program. One student stated, “I guess it was on the radio, because we don’t have TV where they can get to announce stuff. You know it’s just radio. And then also through friends, ‘cause I have heaps of friends who came here before me in the first and second cohorts.” Many of the students also learned about the program from parents, relatives, or friends from the capital. Another student said, “One of my classmates’ mom is a nurse and she was



telling him to apply, and then the guy asked us, ‘Oh, there’s a program for the nurses to go to Australia.’”

Interest in the program increased on the islands along with the growing awareness. Instead of just the few hundred who applied for the first cohort, thousands of I-Kiribati from both the capital and the outer islands traveled to Tarawa to take the admission exams for the second and third cohorts. This group included people from all areas of society such as those who had just graduated from secondary school and those who were a little older and already employed. One student noted, “There were a lot of people there and those who had just finished high school and those who had been there that already had employment in the government. I think everyone is interested to be part of it.”

**Application Process.** With thousands of people applying for the program, as in the case of the last two cohorts, I was curious as to the process the students went through to be selected. I found that the testing process was the same for each group and consisted of several different exams that tested both nursing and English language skills, including the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), an international English exam. These intensive exams would determine who the best candidates would be for the program, as only those with the highest test scores were chosen. Consequently, out of the thousands who initially applied, only the top thirty were selected for each cohort. As one student in the third cohort stated, “It was like thirty taken out of like thousands! The first time we sat it was just a general meeting like from the nursing school back on Kiribati. The second time we did more screening on English, like talking, listening, and that was much more difficult.” Another student in the second cohort described the process as follows:

You have to go through heaps of exams and it was very tough. There were heaps of students and people who wanted to join KANI and so, the first lot was about two or three thousand people. So they had to cut down the number to about a hundred and forty, and that's when they sat another exam and then cut down the number again to seventy and then again to forty and then thirty were taken from those forty.

**Preparation Course in Tarawa.** After passing all of the examinations, the chosen students from each of the three cohorts were then required to complete a four month intensive Academic Preparation Program in Tarawa. This preparation course was created as a way to provide the students with essential training in order to improve both their English language skills and general academic skills that they would need to succeed in their coursework, including the best techniques for studying, writing, and doing research. The students were also taught about Australian life and culture in order to help prepare them as much as possible before they left the islands to begin the program. As one student described it, it was “an English program where two teachers from Australia came and teach us about English and different ways of life, like culture and the names of famous buildings. It was very good for us because we haven't been here before and we just know a little bit through the pictures and movies.”

During this time, the students were not assured if they were actually going to be part of the program for they still had to complete one last English language test at the end of the four months. Only if they passed this final test were they officially enrolled in the KANI program. A student said, “We were not quite sure if we are really coming to Australia or not, 'cause there would be another test that will be held at the end...It's a long time of waiting. 'Am I going to Australia?’” This put a lot of added stress and pressure on the students as they would only find out at the very end of the course if they would actually be travelling to Australia or not.

Some of the students mentioned that even with the preparation training, they had been worried about passing the final test as they felt their English language skills were still very

limited. They had all taken English classes previously in school; however, they mentioned that I-Kiribati was spoken more often than English by both the I-Kiribati teachers and the students. According to one respondent, “In Kiribati, English is not our first language. Even in schools, they taught us in our own language, even if English language is the subject; they speak in I-Kiribati.” Consequently, the students felt that they did not have a lot of opportunity to practice or improve their English before leaving the country and were not very confident in their ability.

**First Experiences in Australia.** Once the students had successfully passed all of the required exams and were officially accepted into the KANI program, they moved to Brisbane to begin their studies at Griffith University. For all of the students but one with whom I talked this was the first time they had traveled outside of Kiribati and it was the first time any of them had been away from their families and on their own. When I asked the students to describe their first impressions of Australia and what their initial experiences and feelings had been like, all of the students commented on the great culture shock they felt as well as the fear, wonder, and excitement of travelling to a place that was entirely new and different from what they knew back on the islands.

A few of the students recounted that even the short layover they had had in Fiji on the way to Brisbane was an immense shock for them as they found themselves exposed to a new landscape, a new environment, and even new technology that they had never seen before. This led to some challenging situations for the students as they had to learn quickly, mostly by trial and error, how to navigate their way around. A couple of students mentioned their first exciting and also terrifying experience encountering an escalator. For example, one student said,

We have to go through Fiji for transit, a three hour transit, and that’s my first time to go to Fiji as well and we see these stairs that move...escalators. They were just moving by itself, and, “Oh, I’m not taking the escalator!” It was so frightening for me that first time and I didn’t use it, I just took the stairs. (laughs)

As they were in the airplane flying over Australia and about to land, the students stated that even though they had learned a little about Australia and had seen pictures and watched videos about the country, it was still a completely new experience to see it in person. As one student stated, “Oh, it was amazing! It’s sort of like you’re in heaven, but it’s just...different. I mean, there’s happiness everywhere, but I guess it’s just because we have never been to a place that is so full of lights, the roads, the buildings, you know, everything...just amazing.” Another respondent said,

It’s a big shock. When we first came here, it was night at that time and we flew over Australia. So we started looking through the window at the land and “Wow!” We could see a lot of lights, all different colors from up there. It was a good view and we think that we entered some imaginary world or something like that. It was my first time to come to a big country like this, a modern country. This was the first time outside of the islands.

When the students finally stepped off the plane in Australia, everything was completely foreign and new to them. This included the climate, for as a couple of the students mentioned, it was August when they first arrived, which is wintertime in Australia. Coming from a tropical, equatorial island nation, none of the students were adequately prepared for the shock of feeling cold weather for the first time, and most had not brought appropriate clothing from the islands. One respondent said that, “I think most of us at that time, they came without jumpers and because you imagine coming from a country which is warm all the time, they don’t sell a lot of jumpers and stuff like that.” Another respondent told me that the Student Contact Officers brought some outerwear for the arriving students, otherwise they would not have had any warm layers to protect them: “When we first got out from the airport, we were freezing cold. We got here in winter, in August, and it is very cold, but the first [student contact officers], they managed to bring the winter clothes, jumpers, and stuffs, and then they share it out too.”

All the students mentioned how shocking it was coming to Australia initially and finding themselves fully immersed in a new country and culture, and I wondered if they felt the course in Tarawa had adequately prepared them for the transition. Most of the students responded that although they found the course to be helpful, there was simply not enough time to fully prepare them for everything they would need to know, as many things had to be learned through cultural immersion and firsthand experience. This was especially true when it came to their English language skills, which were still very limited when they arrived. When asked if they felt they had been adequately prepared for the move to Australia, one respondent replied,

Not really. It's because, for our English is very low, the period of time that we had the lessons and for us, those who have limited knowledge of English, I think it's not enough. But at least we had the idea, like how do they speak, how do they communicate, but it's not enough. I just went with the flow. It was just really hard.

**Transitional Camp.** Working with the first cohort was a learning experience for the KANI staff and administrators as they had to discover what worked and what needed to be changed or improved for later cohorts. Based on the initial experiences of cohort one, the KANI program had the second and third cohort students go to a transitional camp for a short time to learn a little more about Australian life and culture in an Australian setting. This included useful information about local foods, customs, and how to successfully navigate the city. This way the students could stay together as a group for a little while longer before going off to live with their different host families, and it was hoped that this additional instruction would help make the transition to Australian life easier for the students. One respondent described the experience at the camp:

We stayed there and we learned things about Australian life and they get to introduce the new type of foods and the meals that are in Australia...It helps us to forget about missing our family for the first week and it's really good for us to attach to Australian life. They managed to take us out and they teach us how to use public transport for the first time.

After the camp, all of the second and third cohort students were sent to live with their assigned host families. Although the preparations they received both in Tarawa and at the camp were helpful, the students were still very nervous and apprehensive to be separated from the other KANI students and figure out on their own how to live with an Australian family. As one of the girls in the second cohort stated:

Oh, that's the most terrible experience! It's the last day [of camp] and all the Australian families came to take whoever they were responsible for, and then it's like, "This is getting sad!"...Then we started thinking, "What are you going to do when you reach their home?" Then you start imagining how things are going to happen there and you know that you are going to be lonely and you don't know the culture.

**Homestay Families.** Upon their arrival in Brisbane, the KANI program and staff had arranged for the students to stay for a minimum of three months with an Australian host family. It was hoped that this would help the students learn more about Australian life and also make it easier for them to adapt to their new surroundings. While most of the students stayed with the families for just those three months, some stayed much longer, including one of the students in the second cohort who stayed with his host family for a year and a half. Although there were many challenges for the students in regards to learning how to live and adapt to a new environment and culture, it was a mostly positive experience for the students as they were able to learn more about Australian life and have more practice speaking English.

Unlike the later cohorts, the first cohort of students was sent directly upon arrival in the country to stay with their assigned homestay family, without the benefit of the transitional camp. One of the students from this initial group told me that she really enjoyed staying with her host family as they had gone out of their way to make her feel comfortable and at home, including cooking food that she liked, taking her shopping for clothes and other things that she needed, and teaching her about Australian life:

It was the most amazing experience with my homestay family. I was really lucky because, I eat rice most of the time, which is our main staple food back at home. They would cook a lot of my favorite foods, like fish and rice...I had a very good experience with my homestay family. They did a lot for me, like even teaching me some of the cultures here, so it was good.

The other student from the first cohort, however, had a somewhat different experience. She told me that she had had a very hard time at first as she had been placed with a host family who lived farther away and this made her feel very isolated from the other KANI students. After asking the KANI staff to move her closer to the campus, she ended up having a much better time as she was able to spend more time with the other I-Kiribati students and was also able to get to class and other places around town more easily on her own and with other students. As she described,

I find it a little bit uncomfortable and difficult trying to adapt to the new family and where I lived with my host family, it was a bit more countryside from here...It was just hard for me, you know. When we first started classes, everyone got together to catch the bus, but I was just by myself, because I had to go and wait for my parent to pick me up all the time and drive me every day, because there is no bus to there...It was a bit difficult for me at the start and I had to go and tell one of the KANI officers to relocate me.

Overall, the students in the first cohort had a far more challenging time when they first arrived than those in the later cohorts. This was because, as the initial group, they had no idea what to expect and had to struggle to figure out and learn everything as they went along without the help and support of other students with prior experience. As one of the respondents stated, “For the first cohort, when we first came, it was crazy. We had no idea of life here. We were all just experiencing culture shock at first.”

For the latter two cohorts, although they were a little more prepared than the first cohort after attending the camp, they still had a hard time adjusting and adapting to their new living situation. Most things, from the language to the food and even their beds, were so different from

what they were used to in Kiribati. Furthermore, being away from their family and friends and being alone in such a strange environment made their feelings of homesickness all the more profound. For one of the students from the second cohort, homesickness was a huge challenge as she was learning to trust the new family: “It was helpful, but more for us, like the students, we hate being in a stranger’s home. We didn’t know them and it’s going to take time to get to know them and trust them, you know. But it’s just the homesick part of it [that was challenging].”

One of the other second cohort participants also described her challenging experience when she first arrived at the home of the host family, and how she had great difficulty adjusting to her new life. In Kiribati she was used to living with a very large and talkative extended family. They all shared an open communal space that was used for both activities during the day and then sleeping at night when traditional mats were pulled out and placed on the floor. With her host family, however, she found herself in a very quiet household where she had her own room and privacy for the first time in her life:

When I first saw [my room], I was like, “Oooh! This is the first bed that I’ve had in my life!” Because back in the island, we normally live with extended family and there’s NO privacy, you know...At first I was excited, “Oh, I’m going to sleep on a bed! This is my new bed! I have my own room!”...But the silence makes it more boring and it makes me feel missing home more...I got thinking of the family and start missing the family. It’s when I know that I was alone.

Another challenge the students faced was practicing their English and making conversation with their host families. One of the second cohort participants described how difficult it was for her to understand the language and how she struggled when trying to speak: “It was really hard for me to communicate with my homestay. You know my English was not this good and then I can’t, like during dinner I didn’t know what to say, like when they are telling me stories and stuff like that, I was really wanting to join in and talk, but my English was not good.”



For one third cohort student in particular, beyond the typical homestay challenges he also found the new lifestyle hard to adjust to when it came to the enforcement of the family rules and adherence to strict schedules. He described the expectations his host family had about his behavior, “There was a time for dinner and a time for taking a shower and everything...They wrote the rules down and put them on the wall, and then you have to follow all of them. It was very difficult.” This was extremely challenging and frustrating for him as he had never had to do this before back on the islands.

Although there were many challenges and hardships when it came to living with their host families, most of the students from all three cohorts mentioned that they found the homestays to be helpful for them as they were able to improve their English language skills as well as learn firsthand about Australian culture. As one third cohort participant stated, “English is pretty hard...They were very helpful and very friendly and they also helped me by buying books for me to read so I can pick up some words to learn, you know, try to improve my vocabulary.” For another third cohort student, the daily conversations he had with his hosts helped him not only with his understanding of English and Australian life, but also provided him a chance to share his own stories from back home in the islands: “The father asked me every afternoon when he got back from work, he wants me to listen to him and he wants to have some conversation. So that’s the way he helped me to learn a little bit about English and also he can learn about my cultures from our talking.”

For one participant from the second cohort, although he was very shy in the beginning, he ended up growing very close with his host family and stayed with them longer than any other KANI student. “I was the only one that stayed with them for like a year and a half... My other good friends they just stayed with their homestays for three months, but with me, I stayed for

like a year and a half, ‘cause I really liked them. I was like a son, I would say.’” Another student from the second cohort also stated that, “It was actually good, because, well at first you get homesick, but then the families were wonderful and they kind of tried to accommodate you more.”

Overall, the students mentioned how it had been a terrifying, exciting, lonely, and challenging experience to leave the islands and their families for the first time and travel to a new country where almost everything was different and unfamiliar. They experienced great culture shock and homesickness as they first arrived and learned to adjust to living in a new environment. Most participants, however, mentioned that the preparation course, the transitional camp, the Australian host families, and, in particular, the KANI staff and students from the previous cohorts all helped them to settle in and adjust to their life in Australia.

## **Present**

After finding out about what happened when the students first moved from Kiribati to Australia, I next focused on the students’ current experiences with the KANI program, their classes at the university, and life in Australia. What were their courses like? What skills were they learning? What were some of the challenges they encountered during their training? How had the KANI staff helped the students adjust to university life and the requirements of their courses? In what ways had the students assimilated to Australian culture? What aspects of the I-Kiribati culture did they feel they have kept and still continue to practice? Was there an I-Kiribati community currently in Brisbane? If so, were the students involved?

**Student Experiences with KANI.** In regards to the students’ current experiences with the program and the courses, I first inquired about what skills the students were learning during their training. The students answered that they were being taught a great number of essential skills,

both through the Diploma of Nursing program at the Technical and Further Education College (TAFE) and then the Bachelor of Nursing program at Griffith University. These skills included everything from the communication skills on how to talk and interact with patients, to the procedural skills of taking a person's temperature, checking blood pressure, giving injections, inserting IVs, and putting in catheters.

For the first and second cohort students, during the diploma program at TAFE- Logan Campus, it was arranged for the KANI students to carry out their courses at the Griffith University-Logan Campus. As such, they were separated from the other international and Australian nursing students and only associated with the other I-Kiribati students in the KANI program. Although it was more comfortable for them to be together and study as a group, this made it more difficult for them to improve their English skills and learn about Australian life:

Especially with the language, at the first time, we were not involving with all of the students...We were doing our courses, everything that we have to be taught at the TAFE Logan Campus, it was being carried out here. It's quite difficult, because every day we have the same environment and, although they try to improve the language and the speaking, we keep using Kiribati and it's not really helping us with language and to mingle with other students.

Once they had finished with the TAFE courses, they started at the Griffith University for their Bachelor's degrees and began attending mixed classes and lectures with both Australian and other international students. One of the students in the second cohort mentioned that while she found it very difficult to speak up and express herself at first, she was getting used to it and felt more comfortable and at ease interacting with other students outside of the KANI program:

The classes were mixed, and then during the group work I find it hard to express my points, but the students are helpful, but I'm...it's just me, I don't know how to state it right and how to clarify everything to them. It's like the group working together and then the nursing placement as well. We go out on placement the first time and...I finally had to communicate with the other language students, like with my nurses and there's a communication barrier...

It's getting easier, I think. Now like during these times having tutorials and lectures with the Australian students it's becoming normal, I'm getting used to it.

Because of the feedback provided by the first and second cohort students, instead of attending separate courses only with other KANI students, it was arranged for the third cohort to take all of the courses at the TAFE-Logan Campus. This enabled them to interact and make friends with other students outside of the KANI program and also helped to improve their English skills. According to one of the second cohort students, "It's much better where they are, because they make friends with different people from, like Aussies and other people and everyone where they had their class together, 'cause they get to sit with other people and they can talk in a different language, like English language."

**KANI Student Supports.** The students mentioned that AusAID provided them with financial support through a full scholarship to help cover their tuition and living expenses. The students also received both personal and academic support from the KANI staff, in particular the Student Contact Officer, who was responsible for making sure the students had all of the help and support they needed in order to make it successfully through the program. For instance, the Student Contact Officer assisted the students in finding extra services on campus such as counseling and tutoring to help them with their English, research, and time management skills, as well as any other issues they might have. As one student from the third cohort stated,

Sometimes [the classes] are very difficult and sometimes they are good, but we are glad that there's a lot of support and help from AusAID, and they put up extra tutorials and classes and counseling...there's a lot of support that they give just for the KANI students. We are lucky.

The second and third cohorts were able to take advantage of these services early on in their coursework as well as a number of other improvements in the KANI program, and could rely on the support and knowledge of the previous cohorts as well as the personal and academic

support from their professors, the KANI staff, and the Student Contact Officers. One student explained:

I find out that there a lot of helps, we are lucky to have this [university] and here we get access to different services, like the English help and we have supporters, like [the KANI Student Contact Officer] and the others. The lecturers and all of the teachers are really supportive as well. They are quite understanding.

Each new cohort could benefit from both the successes and failures of the previous groups, and the students in the first cohort, although a bit jealous of the improvements, expressed their deep gratitude and were happy to have been able to help their fellow students. As one of the students from the first cohort stated,

I mean, I'm jealous to be honest, our cohort is very jealous about the amount of assistance the cohort three and cohort two is having, but in return we are always grateful. Sometimes we have to go through these first things, although they are not that successful at some point...But it's good. It's always good in return for the next cohort.

The students in the third cohort understood just how difficult it had been for the previous students and were extremely grateful for all of the help they received. One of the third cohort students stated, "We say many thanks for those in cohort one and two, because they gave us a lot of help." Another student from this last cohort also mentioned that they were all very appreciative of the previous two groups for they had more experience with the courses and with life in Australia and were able to provide a lot of advice and support: "The other students helped a lot because they are kind of adapted to the life here, so we owe them a lot."

**KANI Challenges.** I also asked the students about what they felt were some of the more challenging aspects of the program. It was evident that each cohort faced a great number of challenges when it came to adapting and adjusting to the course work and the requirements of the program. The first cohort, however, had a far more difficult time as they had to struggle to figure

things out as they went, while the second and third cohorts could rely on the support and knowledge of the previous cohorts.

One of the students from the first cohort stated that she felt her group had been the most vulnerable as they had not received as much support or assistance at the beginning as the latter two cohorts. The students in the first cohort stated that they had been unaware of the student support services at the beginning, and only discovered them later after they had struggled with great difficulty to get through their classes and assignments:

I think it's a good thing to [provide a] voice for our cohort, nursing cohort one, because they are a very vulnerable cohort. I think that the mistakes that they all made, they were the first, so they made it better for the next groups...We are grateful to have this English help, especially English. It's just not our first language and it was very, very struggling and at the same time, learning and then doing all of the English assignments and being in university here.

Without the additional support at the beginning, some of the students in this first group ended up not finishing the KANI program and returned to the islands. As one of the first cohort students expressed, "Many of us dropped out and some were terminated from the program. You know, they just can't cope...and they just quit. They just can't take it and they had to go home to their families."

Although a few of the students mentioned that the courses were interesting and they liked working with the patients, it was extremely difficult for all of them to adjust to the rigors of university life, as their academic and technical skills were severely limited when they started the program. The students struggled the most with their English language as it was still hard for them to communicate their ideas, which made learning highly technical nursing skills in a second language even more difficult. As one student said, "I found that it was very difficult learning English and that made it very hard and slow to do my study, but I am still working on it and I try to finish it successfully."

Furthermore, a couple of the students also mentioned the great difficulty they had with their time management skills. One student said, “There is a big difference than back in Kiribati, because there, time is not important. I found it very difficult here when I first came here, you know, for our assignments...they are very tough on the assignments and the due dates.” Consequently, many of the students struggled when it came to adhering to the strict deadlines for assignments and exams, however, with the support of their professors, the KANI staff, and the other students in the program, the students were able to get the assistance that they needed to adjust to both the cultural differences and the requirements of the courses.

**Cultural Adaptation.** To find out more about their current lives, I also inquired as to how the students felt they had adapted and assimilated into Australian life. The students mentioned that although it was incredibly hard at first in terms of dealing with the culture shock, they had to just take it all in. As one student stated, “The [Australian] lifestyle, it’s just go with the flow and be with my friends.” They found the more time they spent living and studying in Brisbane, the easier and more comfortable life became for them as they were able to gradually adapt to the Australian culture. One respondent stated, “For me, it’s kind of like pushing yourself to adapt to what you are in and that is something that can help you to be part of the community and you won’t even have any issues...You kind of understand the culture around you and try to blend in with them, It just makes it easier for you.”

Learning the idiosyncrasies of the common language outside of school proved to be a much slower and far more difficult process than just learning about the basics of Australian life. For example, one respondent described the great frustration and embarrassment she felt when first trying to understand the Australian accent and vernacular, which made even the most simple of interactions challenging: “It’s like when you are buying a bus ticket or your train ticket and I

was like, I am really scared of this part here, talking to an Aussie and going out and buying some KFC...I would rather not go out then. It was really hard.” While it was extremely challenging at first, the students found that the longer they were immersed in Australian life, the more their English improved along with their self-confidence.

**Keeping Traditions.** As the students became more comfortable with the language and more knowledgeable about Australian life, I also wanted to know what elements of I-Kiribati culture they felt they were holding on to and what customs they were continuing to practice, if any. I found that although they were adapting and assimilating, all of the students were still holding on to what they believed to be the most crucial elements of their culture. For example, every student mentioned that respect, especially for their elders, was an essential aspect of I-Kiribati culture that they kept with them in their courses, their work, and their everyday lives. As one respondent stated, “I think it’s a part of us, like all of us Kiribati students treat all of the elders with respect because of the culture...So we can’t forget, it is still with us.” To many of the students, this was the most important aspect of Kiribati culture, as one student explained:

Respect. That is the main thing I really like about Kiribati, respect. Without respect, I don’t know, I wouldn’t be as good a person as I am. That is one thing that I actually am just trying to keep, even though when I am here, there’s some cultures back home that I should be practicing here, still the respect part of it is something that I just keep holding on to.

One of the respondents explained how this deep-seated respect and compassion for their elders was especially apparent when the students went to work at a local nursing home during their first clinical placement. The KANI students felt that this set them apart from the other local and international nursing students:

We started from the nursing homes and because we are from where we are, we are very family oriented people and we do care very much about our elderly and...we feel empathy for the elderly people...I think that’s what makes us stand out from the other students when we did our placement there. We also approached the entertainment coordinator in the



clinical placement and we told them that we are very happy to one day do the entertainment dancing at their facility and they were very impressed and so we did that for all of the elderly patients, everyone. They really enjoyed it!

The KANI students said that in addition to performing their local dances and songs for the nursing home, they also continued to practice and perform traditional I-Kiribati dances and songs for other gatherings and celebrations, such as birthdays, ceremonies, and other events. As one student stated, “The local dancing, which represents our culture, that’s another important one that I need to keep practicing...[The KANI students] also bring their costumes here, the local costume.”

Performing traditional songs and dance is also an important part of the I-Kiribati Independence Day celebrations as well as other festivities and, as such, it was essential for everyone in the community to come together to practice throughout the year in order to prepare for their performances. One respondent stated, “It is very important for Independence Day. They get together and practice Kiribati dancing and traditional dancing.” This deep sense of community therefore helped to keep the traditional I-Kiribati culture alive for as another student mentioned, “The traditions like singing and dancing are the main things that we are still practicing here. So it’s good.”

Religion is also an extremely significant part of I-Kiribati society. One of the female students mentioned that her faith she brought with her from the islands was still a very important part of her life. Going to church every Sunday was a custom that she continued, or attempted to continue, on a regular basis in Australia: “I know that I have to go every Sunday because that is what I believe in, but when I find it hard sometimes, like I have some difficulties and I didn’t go, I feel bad about it...When I was young until before I came here, we never missed one Sunday, and missing one here is like committing a big mistake or something like that.”

**I-Kiribati Community in Brisbane.** One element that helped the students keep their traditions going was the strong I-Kiribati community in Brisbane. The I-Kiribati have a highly social culture that is extremely family and community-oriented, and the KANI students continued this while in Australia. The students mentioned that there were about two hundred other I-Kiribati expats living in the Brisbane area that had come to be split into two separate communities. Members of these groups would get together to socialize and also celebrate many events such as I-Kiribati Independence Day. As one student stated, “There’s also a Kiribati community here. It’s established by those who have married Australians and they kind of are making their community here...It’s not that big. It’s about two hundred people, but it’s good that we can celebrate our Independence here in Australia.”

The students also felt that they had a strong feeling of community and friendship among the I-Kiribati students in the program, which, as one student stated, had been a key catalyst for helping bring I-Kiribati across the waters to Australia: “The KANI Program is the largest group. We just came in a group, like there are more than eighty students now. So yeah, we all live in one place, like around this area. So I think we are the largest group of Kiribati in the country.” Furthermore, most of the KANI students, after staying with their Australian host families, chose to live and room with other KANI students. A student from the third cohort stated, “We stayed with students from the first cohort until we could find our own house.” A second cohort student also responded, “I am living with [other KANI students] now. There are four of us.”

As the students lived in the same area, a few of the students mentioned that this helped them to come together to socialize with each other. One respondent stated, “We live close to each other... close enough that... on the weekend or maybe when someone has a party we can

come and have a group together and catch up with everyone.” Another student explained how this helped them to continue their traditional customs,

We do have dances during the Independence and if we have functions, like birthdays and something like that, we usually celebrate this as we would celebrate in Kiribati. It’s the same culture, we are sitting around the place, we don’t have any chairs or sitting at all the tables, we just circle around and then do what we usually do like celebrating... I think we can’t forget our culture here, it’s still with us.

While the majority of the KANI students moved in with other I-Kiribati friends or relatives, one of the girls in the first cohort chose to live with native English speakers instead. After living with some of the KANI students at first, she felt that she was not able to improve her English or learn about the Australian culture as much as she would like. She therefore decided to live with students from both Australia and Canada for about two years before moving in with other I-Kiribati students and her family. Although she was not practicing English as much as she was before, she felt more connected to her family, her community, and the I-Kiribati culture:

When I first came here I wanted to learn so much about English and to being able to fit in and improve my English... so I moved out and shared a unit with other English speakers so I could speak English and I stayed there for nearly two years. I think it helped me a lot to be more independent... I have my family to care for now, so that’s when I decided to move out and be with my Kiribati boyfriend and then husband and then having a baby. I think it’s good in some ways. I feel like I am more at where I’m from in Kiribati and can share everything with them, the Kiribati way.

By having the support of the KANI staff other students in the program, and other I-Kiribati expats, the students have been able to support each other through the challenges that have arisen while trying to adapt to a new country and culture as well as the hardship of being away from the islands and their friends and family back home. Being together as a group has also helped the KANI students to keep practicing and holding on to what they consider to be the most important aspects of their life, their heritage, and their culture. One student summed it up by saying, “Sometimes we don’t notice that we are keeping our own culture, but we just do it. Like,

you know, it's a part of us. We are all laughing together, sharing together... Especially some of our cultural values.”

## **Future**

Finally, I asked about the future of the KANI students, specifically what they would like to do after they graduate from the program, where they would they like to live and work, and why. Would the students want to stay in Australia once they gained their degree or would they move back to be with their families in Kiribati? If they stayed in Australia, what challenges would the students face when trying find employment? Would their families in the islands want to move and relocate with them once they had gotten settled? What kind of process would the students, their partners, and their families have to go through in order to apply for a work visa and eventually residency and citizenship in Australia?

**Australia or Kiribati?** While the students were still working towards their degree and had yet to make concrete plans, they all responded that they would like to stay in Australia after they graduated. Even though it was hard for them to be so far from their families and their homes, the biggest factor influencing their desire to stay was the fact that there is an extreme lack of jobs and opportunities for them back in Kiribati where unemployment, particularly among the youth, is especially high. One respondent stated, “There are heaps of people out there in Kiribati who want jobs there, and if I go back there I would be taking their spot, whereas while I'm here I do have a place here, so it's better staying here rather than going back.”

The students also felt that since they had been provided such a great opportunity to come to Australia and take part in the KANI program, they should stay and put their training and degree to use, and try to find employment in the Australian health care system. Furthermore, a few students mentioned that because they were provided with a full scholarship to earn their

degree, they felt a sense of obligation to stay and work in Australia in order to make a contribution to the community and show their appreciation: “By working for the Australian people, it helps to pay back or to show gratitude to the Aussie government for paying for all of the school and everything, for the program and for us.”

Although the students all responded that they would like to stay in Australia, they were still unsure of where they would like to live and work within the country. While the students would ultimately have to go wherever they were offered employment, whether it is in Brisbane, another large city, or in a rural area, they were all expressed their interest in working in the Outback as they would like to experience the rural Australian life and environment. One of the students stated, “I would prefer to go to the Outback, but it just depends on if I can get a job there. I’m interested in working with the Outback people and the environment and I want to experience it.”

A few students also mentioned that a position in the Outback would also allow them to gain more experience before coming to work in Brisbane or other large city. One respondent replied, “I would like to start in the rural areas to get more confidence in working before I come to the big city. I really need to get that because I don’t have confidence at the moment. It’s really hard to get a job here. That’s what my plan is now, to go to the Outback and then come back to Brisbane.”

The students also felt that they would be more comfortable and confident working with the Australian Aboriginal communities as they felt a sense of affinity and a shared connection with them. As one student responded, “I think that’s interesting to work Outback, ‘cause it’s kind of like the same background that I came from and I might have more confidence and more comfort working there.” Another student stated, “Well, I’ve kind of been thinking about the

Outback. I like working with Indigenous people... and so [I thought] it might be good to go and work with them because we kind of share the same cultures.” Furthermore, many of the students expressed that they had great sympathy for the plight of the Indigenous Australian community and responded that they would like to work with them and help in some way:

It would be very amazing to work with the Indigenous. It’s very hard to find them around here in the city, and we’ve been watching documentary films about them. It can be very sad too, because, I mean, they have their own culture and it just reminds me about home. They have that pride in them too, and if I can sort of help in a way, because I think that I can understand them more...I just would want to give it a go just to work with them and see if I could bring even a small change.

A few students did respond that they would most likely stay in Brisbane after they graduated and would try to look for employment in the city. However, their preference was still to work in the Australian Outback and they would like to get a job there if they could, perhaps after they had gained a little more experience. One student explained,

I’m planning to stay and apply in hospitals in Brisbane first...I am interested in community nursing as well and going out in the Outback and helping Aboriginals, but at the same time I know that I need the skills and knowledge, a lot of experience in hospitals, so that’s why I think of applying first in the hospitals and then gradually building up there and then maybe helping the community.

Some students also mentioned that although they planned to stay and work in Australia, they would like to eventually go back to Kiribati, even if only for a short time. Besides visiting their families, they felt that it was important for them to share some of their newly acquired knowledge and training with the local hospitals and clinics to help improve the health care in the islands. One student stated, “I think everyone in the KANI Program wants to stay. We really want to go back and show some practices, some nursing practice to our nurses, but I think not now...maybe later.” Another respondent said, “I hope to continue work and further studies here

and then maybe while I went to visit my family [back in Kiribati], maybe I can have the opportunity to go to the hospital and just share my knowledge and skills.”

In addition to the lack of employment and opportunity in Kiribati, the thought of climate change and its potential impact also influenced the students’ decision of whether to stay or go back to the islands. One student specifically said, “Too little opportunity and there’s too much unemployment back home, and if we think about climate change, that’s hard to go home to also.” Another student also stated that although he would like to go back to Kiribati and help the community back in the islands, he also saw how climate change was affecting the country and felt that he and his family would have a more successful life and future in Australia:

I’ve been thinking of the two choices that I have, of whether I’m going back or whether I’m going to stay...If I’m able to go back to Kiribati, I would just like to improve awareness with hygiene and the way they can protect themselves from different kinds of environmental impacts to their health. It’s very good and I think that we KANI students are the ones that are going to change the islands’ health system, especially now that we studied...And it’s also very good for me to stay here [in Australia] and watch my family, because the main issue now that we have in Kiribati like the small islands and the sea level...the waves have been getting over the lands sometimes during the very high tides and all of the outside villages and roads located on the coast have been [flooded] and that’s the reason why I am thinking the other way...that I am going to stay here.

**Finding Employment.** Although there were more job opportunities in Australia than in Kiribati, the students stated that it will still be difficult for them to find employment after graduation. For example, one of the students stated that even with their degree and training, it was still hard to find a job due to their lack of work experience:

I can say that’s it quite hard to find a job in Australia... At the moment, I work casual with a nursing agency now...but I’m not working as a nurse with them. I am working as an assistant in nursing (AIN), so I don’t give medication, I just assist...When you want to work as a nurse, they want at least one or two years of experience and it’s quite hard, because with us, we continue our studies and it’s hard to get that experience.

The KANI students were also at a great disadvantage when looking for employment as Australian citizens were generally hired before non-citizens. It is necessary for non-citizens to apply for an employer-sponsored work visa that would allow them to work and live in the country. However, as one student mentioned, most of the large public hospitals did not want to spend the time and expense required to sponsor non-Australian citizens. The KANI students, therefore, felt they would have a better chance applying to smaller institutions where they would have a better chance of obtaining the necessary sponsorship. One of the students in the second cohort mentioned that during a placement their final year, they attended a meeting where they received some helpful advice and tips for finding employment after they graduate:

[The facilitator] said, "Citizens will have more privilege rather than international students, 'cause when you are looking for jobs, the public hospitals, they get to choose the citizens first. They won't provide sponsorship for them, 'cause if they aren't citizens, that is expense for the hospital."...So she said, "If you want to have a job, it's better that you start looking for jobs at the nursing homes and the private hospitals, not the public hospitals, 'cause they are more willing to provide the sponsorship."

In order to live and work in the country permanently, the students must go through the long and difficult process of applying for residency and eventually citizenship in Australia, including proving language proficiency and gaining sponsorship from an employer in order to obtain a permanent work visa. According to one of the students, "At first they say that we need to pass the IELTS test. Second, we need to apply for a kind of visa that would allow you to stay here for six or seven months...You need to find a real job and then you can apply for the residency."

Many of the students were worried about the required IELTS test, as they felt they might have difficulty achieving a passing score which would indicate that they have a good comprehension of the English language and were qualified to gain residency and be employed in Australia. One student responded, "I'm thinking of staying here and working here, but I have to



work out somehow to achieve a [passing score] on the IELTS test...I don't have a problem passing all of the courses and everything, but the big challenge for me is the English test, because you know it's really hard and I have to work hard to achieve it." For those students who had already graduated, many were still waiting to receive their citizenship. As one student replied, "They are still waiting, but they are working here. Most of them have already gone to the Outback."

At the time the interviews were conducted, of the students who had previously graduated from the first cohort, three students had found employment at various nursing homes. Many others were still looking for work, and after a few students struggled to find employment, they ended up leaving Australia to go back to the islands. A cohort two student said, "Some of [the graduated KANI students] they can't manage to find a job and they went back to the island and some are still around here, but I'm not sure if they are getting jobs or if they are still looking."

One student mentioned that it was proving so difficult for graduating students to find employment in the Australian health care system that when the I-Kiribati Secretary of Labor came to speak with the KANI students, he gave them words of encouragement and told them to not give up on their studies. He assured them that they will receive help and support to find a nursing position, if not in Australia, perhaps elsewhere overseas. As one student stated:

Because we are toward the end of the program, [the I-Kiribati Secretary of Labor] can feel that it's hard for us to find jobs in here due to the English test...He give us courage by saying, "Just keep studying and finish your study, 'cause whenever you get a qualification and if it's hard to find job in Australia, we can find somewhere where you can work." So, probably in the Canada or somewhere else.

**Family.** As all of the students mentioned that they would like to stay in Australia after they completed the program, I also wanted to know if they would try to have their families join them once they had their degree. The students all responded that they would like to bring their families

to Australia if they could, either for just a short visit or to relocate permanently. One respondent who already had a husband and daughter said, “I think my family here is enough, but maybe just to visit [with] the rest. Just invite them to visit us, so they can experience the Australian life.” Another student stated, “When I move and settle here, I’m thinking of inviting all of my family, ‘cause there’s only my mother and one sister and one brother at home. So, just three of them. That’s the plan.”

Many of the students felt that if their family migrated to Australia, it would be a better life for everyone, especially for their siblings and younger family members as they would have an easier time moving and adapting and would also benefit the most from the opportunities for education and employment. As one student responded, “This is a great place and learning for everyone, especially the education system here is very advanced, especially English. I do really think that by bringing them over I can offer them a great opportunity.” Another student replied, “I’m the second eldest, so [my sisters] are still young and they really want to come over and then settling here and study here, but that’s the main part of my dad’s plans, ‘Just go and then you know if you can get a job, stay there and get an education and then let your younger sisters come over and study.’”

While their younger siblings were very interested in living and working overseas in the future, most of the students mentioned that their parents and grandparents did not want to leave Kiribati. For example, as the following student states, his elders had spent their entire lives in the islands and it would be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, for them to leave and move to a foreign land where they would feel like a burden to their families:

It will be tough for the older ones, especially our parents or grandparents. I guess it’s because they were all brought up there and they were young and old on the islands. So it’s kind of hard to push them out from there, ‘cause they have their own beliefs about the islands and stuff, but I’ll see how things go, if I have to drag them off (laughs)! I did have a

discussion with them about moving, but still they wouldn't...I guess it's because they grew up there and they're old and they kind of get this sense that they think that they are not that useful, but I just tell them, "Oh, no, you are still useful to us!" I am still talking to them like twice a month and trying to convince them to change their minds, and, hopefully, sometime they will...one day.

As this last student mentioned, it was very difficult for the students to convince their parents and elders to consider migration. According to traditional I-Kiribati customs and culture, elders are to be shown the highest respect by youths and should never have their opinions or beliefs challenged. As one student explained, "[The elders] are tough, you know. They don't want to listen ...It's hard too, 'cause we are from a culture that when you are older than another one, you can't take any advice from them. You can, but you can't be seen to do that, you know. The elders have to make decisions and they won't dare listen to the young ones. That's part of respect, and you can't convince them if they don't want to listen."

Even if their families were interested in eventually moving and relocating to Australia, the students mentioned that the Australian immigration process was so long and complicated, that it might prove far too difficult for many of their family members, especially their elders, to migrate permanently. As one student stated, "I think the process is really hard for other people from the islands to come and stay and study here. You have to go through the process, like their immigration and stuff like that...and it's a long wait." As another respondent explained:

That's what always motivated me, to keep continuing to study hard and then bring over my family. But, when you stay in Australia, you get to know all of the laws and how immigration works and how to get visas approved and everything like that. I came to understand that it's quite impossible to bring them here to live for the rest of my life and the rest of their life. I suggested that I would invite them to come and stay, but that is how the law works, they can't come and stay with you forever. That's good for the young people, but for the elders, it's hard, it's quite hard...With the young people, like my nieces and nephews, probably they would have a chance, but I would love to invite them all over.

Many of the married students experienced firsthand just how difficult it was to get a visa for their spouses to move and stay with them in Australia. As one student responded, “Two years ago I got married and I decided to invite my husband over, and then I notice everything and how things happen in reality and how I have to get the visa and all the sponsorship and you need to have sufficient money in your account and everything like that. I thought I could invite all of my family, but it’s quite hard!” Although the immigration process was extremely challenging, most of the students were determined to help their families migrate, no matter what they had to do or how long it took. As one student replied, “I think it’s still difficult, but I will find a way.”

### **Summary**

Once they had passed all of the examinations and were accepted into the KANI program, all of the students felt that, even with the preparation course in Tarawa, they were still completely overwhelmed when they first arrived in Australia. Even though there were many challenges, with the help and support they received from their Australian host families, the KANI staff, previous cohorts of KANI students, and in the case of the last two cohorts the transitional camp, the students were able to successfully adjust and adapt to their new lives as well as the strict requirements of their courses.

While the students were learning to adapt to Australian life and culture, they mentioned that they still held onto the most important elements of I-Kiribati culture, tradition, and identity. Respect for their elders and connection to their families still remained an important part of their lives, and they all mentioned that they were sending what money they could to help their families back in the islands. Many also mentioned that they had traveled back to the islands to visit their relatives and planned on returning as often as they could.

Furthermore, the students also stated that there were two major groups of I-Kiribati expats living in Brisbane at the time, and these communities and the close bonds they had with the other KANI students also helped them to cope with all of the challenges and hardships of relocating and being so far from their family and friends in the islands. The students also mentioned that being involved with these communities also helped them to hold on to their sense of identity and culture by helping them to keep I-Kiribati customs and values alive, including the practice and performance of traditional songs and dances.

All of the students mentioned that they would like to stay in Australia to find work after graduating and earning a nursing degree. Although they missed their families back in Kiribati, they had opportunities for a better life overseas and also had a chance to help support their families back home through sending remittances. The students mentioned that while they were learning many valuable skills that would help them to find future jobs in nursing, they still encountered some barriers to employment due to their foreign status. Looking to the future, the students hoped that once they had found employment, they would be able to help other members of their family migrate as well. Even though navigating the immigration process could be extremely challenging, KANI students hoped that some of the younger members of their families back home might someday be able to join them in Australia.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Conclusion

Throughout the history of Kiribati, from the first settlers from Micronesia to current day, the population has had to contend with a harsh environment with limited food, water, and resources. The islands are also extremely small and remote, and are prone to severe drought, coastal erosion, and occasional flooding from storm surges and king tides. Over thousands of years, however, the island inhabitants learned to adapt to their extreme environment and found ways to maintain a sustainable balance between population size and available resources. With the arrival of outsiders in the form of whalers, traders, missionaries, and colonial authorities, the balance shifted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as trading goods, a cash economy, and Western religion and laws were introduced and dramatically influenced the island life and culture.

Starting in the 1950s, Kiribati saw an increase in urbanization, government services, and infrastructure; however, development remained limited and was largely concentrated in the capital, South Tarawa. As the outer islands remained largely undeveloped and predominately subsistence-based, more Islanders (particularly young men) began to move to the capital in order to take advantage of the increased opportunities for education, employment, and entertainment. This trend has only continued to increase and has caused the population in the capital to swell from just a few thousand inhabitants to the more than 50,000 that are now occupying an area less than six square miles in size.

#### **Current Conditions**

As a direct result of this rapid population growth and ensuing overcrowding, South Tarawa now faces some of the most extreme social, economic, and environmental problems in the world. The island population has far exceeded the limited capacity of the environment, the

government, and the infrastructure of the capital and has resulted in a severe lack of essential resources such as land, housing, food, and water, as well as services, including education, health care, and waste management. Unemployment, poverty, severe pollution, water contamination, and increased morbidity and mortality are also serious issues for the growing population. These issues will be further compounded due to the increasing effects of climate change, including sea level rise, hotter temperatures, increased erosion, flooding, and drought. As the islands become more unsustainable and quality of life rapidly decreases, it has been predicted that by 2050, the islands might be uninhabitable due to the effects of climate change and overpopulation.

All of these pronounced economic, social, environmental, and health challenges are causing more I-Kiribati, particularly the youth, to consider emigration overseas to find a better life for themselves and their families. By getting an education and employment abroad, young I-Kiribati hope to escape from the hardships of life in the islands as well as have the opportunity to experience other cultures, have more freedom and independence (especially for women), and have the ability to send remittances back to support their family members who stay behind. To help those who wish to leave now as well as prepare for possible large-scale migration in the foreseeable future, the President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, has proposed an adaptation strategy, which he refers to as “migrating with dignity.”

The “migrating with dignity” strategy calls upon the international community, in particular Australia and New Zealand, to provide the aid and support needed to help young I-Kiribati get the education and training required to obtain skilled jobs overseas. With the long-term survival of the nation threatened by rising sea level and other effects of climate change, this strategy could provide a way for young I-Kiribati to move to other countries, find employment, and start a new life for themselves and their children. These early migrants could also potentially

help those who remain in the islands to adapt to future changes by providing the assistance, support, and information needed to help others migrate in the future. Ultimately it is hoped that by facilitating labor migration, this strategy will help alleviate some of the immediate issues related to population pressure in the capital and provide a way for I-Kiribati to begin migrating voluntarily as skilled migrants rather than being forced to leave the islands later on as “climate change” or “environmental” refugees. The Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI) is one such pilot program that came out of President Tong’s new adaptation policies, and the main themes that emerged from my research in this area are discussed below.

### **Summary of Main Themes**

The I-Kiribati students who were previously or currently enrolled in the KANI program were the subjects of this research project. By listening to their personal stories and perspectives, I was able to learn more about their experiences with the program as well as their life in Kiribati and Australia. I was also able to learn more about the major motivating factors that led to the students’ decision to leave behind their homes, their families, and everything they had known in order to participate in the program and have the opportunity to work and live in Australia. Consequently, I was able to gain a better understanding of the KANI program’s larger significance for the students, their families, their communities, and their nation.

**Migration Motivations.** There were a variety of push and pull factors that motivated the I-Kiribati students in my sample to apply for the KANI program. Climate change is a serious threat to the nation and is the issue that the international press most heavily emphasizes; however, it was not the main motivation behind the students’ decision to apply to the KANI program. Their country is one of the world’s most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, however, it will be years before the full impacts of sea level rise and other effects are seen and



felt. Consequently, social and economic issues, particularly the extreme lack of employment and opportunity for I-Kiribati youth, were stronger motivators for the students to apply.

With high youth unemployment rates, overcrowding, limited resources, and increased social, economic, and environmental degradation in the capital, the students jumped at the chance to take part in the program with the hope that it would give them the opportunity for employment and a better life overseas. The KANI program also offered a way to leave the islands, see the world, and experience social freedom and independence as well as experience Western life and culture. Furthermore, the KANI students were highly motivated to find work overseas in order to send remittances to help their family members back in the islands supplement their income and also purchase the food, goods, and other services that they require.

While it was not the main factor in their decision to apply, climate change was a significant reason in their wanting to stay in Australia after they graduate. While awareness remains limited in Kiribati, once in Australia the students were able to learn more about the effects of climate change and what it means for the future of their country. The students were also able to see the effects of environmental degradation more clearly and dramatically once they had traveled overseas and then had gone back to the islands for short visits. Consequently, while the economic pull factors were the main reasons behind the students wanting to migrate, it was a combination of the social, economic, and environmental push and pull factors that motivated them to want to stay in Australia permanently.

**Transition and Adaptation.** When inquiring about the students' experiences in Australia and with the KANI program itself, the students all mentioned how hard it was to leave the islands and arrive in a new country where everything was so new and unfamiliar to them. There were many challenges that they faced when trying to adjust to their new life in Brisbane and at the

university, including learning the language, the culture, and dealing with homesickness. The preparation courses on the islands, the transitional camp, Australian homestay families, and especially the KANI staff and students from the previous cohorts were crucial in helping the KANI students adjust and settle into their new life. The struggles of the first cohort showed just how important the assistance from the staff and previous students was in helping the students adapt and adjust, as it was some of the first cohort students who ended up leaving the program because they found the transition too difficult. Their experiences exemplified just how essential it is for those who are relocating overseas to have friends and family already established in the area to help provide needed information and support.

**Maintaining Connections.** One of the biggest concerns of relocating to a new country is the loss of one's community and culture. From the personal stories of the students, it is evident that while they have adapted and assimilated to Australian life, they continue to hold on to what they consider to be the most important elements of I-Kiribati culture and values. These include strong feelings of respect for each other and their elders, a deep connection to their family, community, and land back at home, and a desire to continue the traditional cultural practices that reflect their heritage. So even though they were living overseas, the students were still able to maintain strong ties with their family, friends, and communities in the islands through remittances, return visits, and the sharing of news, goods, and ideas.

The students also mentioned that they had a strong sense of local community as they were close with the other students in the program and were also involved with the I-Kiribati expats who live in the Brisbane area. By maintaining strong relationships with other I-Kiribati outside of the islands, the students felt that they were able to keep elements of their culture alive, including traditional songs and dance. Subsequently, although some of their culture was

inevitably lost as they left the islands, the most essential elements that define I-Kiribati identity have survived.

Furthermore, even though they will ultimately end up moving wherever they can find work and the students will become more widely dispersed, they say that they will continue to maintain these ties with family and friends. Many of the students mentioned that they have already had family come to visit them in Australia, and they were also trying to help other family members migrate and resettle there as well. Students also responded that they would continue to travel back to the islands in order to visit with family and friends, and would also help their communities by sharing their newly acquired knowledge and skills with the local health care professionals in the hospitals and clinics around the islands.

**Challenges for Future Employment and Migration.** The students felt that even though they were fortunate to be part of the KANI program and had the opportunity to gain the education and training needed to work as nurses in Australia, there were still many challenges that they faced when looking for employment, including lack of language proficiency as well as their non-citizen status. The immigration process also remains so difficult that most I-Kiribati are unable to meet the strict requirements needed to gain a visa to live and work permanently in Australia and New Zealand. Many I-Kiribati still on the islands do not yet have the necessary skills to gain employment overseas nor the ability to afford the high cost of moving and resettling. So while the students mentioned that many of their younger siblings were interested in joining them overseas, there were still many barriers they had to face for future migration and employment.

The students also emphasized that although they would like their family to join them in Australia, most of their relatives, especially their elders, did not want to leave the islands. The islands were their home, their life, their identity, and their connection to their ancestors, and they

could not imagine leaving their land. Many I-Kiribati also saw no reason to leave, for even though the students were trying to convince their family of the impending threat of climate change and rising sea levels, most remained unconvinced or simply stated that they would still prefer to live and die on the islands.

**Future of Kiribati.** Recognizing the impact that large-scale relocation could have on their own nations, Australia and New Zealand have begun to work more closely with President Tong and the government of Kiribati to help I-Kiribati get the training and education needed in order to obtain employment overseas. The students who participated in the program greatly benefited from the program as it offered them an opportunity to migrate, relocate, and have a chance at a better life for them and their families. By learning valued skills in nursing, the students would also be able to contribute to the Australian community and health care system. From the students' responses, it is evident that more programs such as KANI should be made available for I-Kiribati youth as only a small number of the population have been able to benefit thus far.

Consequently, the students mentioned that there was a growing number of I-Kiribati interested in migrating, as evident from the large turnout to apply for the KANI program, but overseas opportunities still remain extremely limited. While the current motivations for the islanders are mainly related to economic pull factors, as the population continues to grow and the effects of climate change increase, larger numbers will be motivated to leave due to the push of environmental degradation. As such, more programs, policies, and initiatives will need to be developed and implemented in order to help those I-Kiribati who want to migrate in the future.

### **Impending Policy Changes in the Pacific**

With the release of the latest IPCC report in late September 2013, it is now more evident than ever that human-induced climate change is occurring and that it is happening far faster than

previously predicted (IPCC, 2013). With 95 percent of all climate scientists now in agreement that human-induced climate change is undeniable, it is clear that more policies and initiatives need to be developed and implemented that deal with climate change mitigation, adaptation, awareness, and migration, particularly with the most vulnerable nations in the Pacific (IPCC, 2013; McGrath, 2013). Even with all of this new information and data available, after being sworn into office on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the newly elected Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, announced that he would take immediate action to repeal the carbon tax, which was created in an attempt to help reduce the nation's carbon emissions believed to contribute to climate change (Griffiths, 2013; <http://www.carbontax.net.au/>).

Furthermore, Abbott immediately eliminated the Climate Commission, which was an independent panel of climate change experts that aimed to study the effects of climate change on the country and the region and “provide the public with an ‘independent and reliable’ source of information about the science of climate change” (Dayton, 2013, para. 2; Kenny, 2013). He has also begun the process of cutting the Climate Change Authority, which “provides independent advice on the operation of Australia's carbon price, emissions reduction targets, caps and trajectories, and other Australian Government climate change initiatives” (Dayton, 2013; <http://climatechangeauthority.gov.au/>). This action is seen as a shocking and dramatic step backward from the previous administration in terms of climate change policy, and it has deeply concerned many leaders throughout the Pacific, including the President of Kiribati (“Kiribati President Concerned,” 2013).

Kiribati currently depends heavily on Australian aid, and if the policy of the new administration aims to back away from climate change issues, it could have a devastating effect on the islands and reverse many of the positive changes that have occurred. As President Anote

Tong stated, “We are watching to see what the declared policy of the new Australian administration is, how it translates down, because there is no question about [climate change]. Australia is not immediately under threat, but we the low-lying countries are, and so we have no choice but to take seriously the scientific projections” (“Kiribati President Concerned,” 2013). Therefore the future of other initiatives like the KANI program is unknown, leaving many young I-Kiribati wondering if their options for overseas employment and migration are now closed off to them.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As the KANI program is scheduled to be completed in December 2013, follow up research should be conducted to see what the graduates decided to do after earning their nursing degree. Were they able to successfully gain employment in Australia? Were they able to obtain residency and citizenship? Were they able to help other members of their family migrate? Should this and other similar labor migration programs be expanded and offered to more I-Kiribati? As the effects of climate change continue to worsen, more research needs to be done on adaptation strategies for both those who choose to migrate as well as those who remain in the islands. More research also needs to be conducted on the types of policies that will best facilitate labor migration and relocation. While small numbers of I-Kiribati are choosing to migrate now, in the future larger numbers will be looking to relocate as the islands become increasingly unstable and unsustainable. More research therefore needs to be done on how best to relocate this most vulnerable population in a manner that ultimately helps them to truly “migrate with dignity.”

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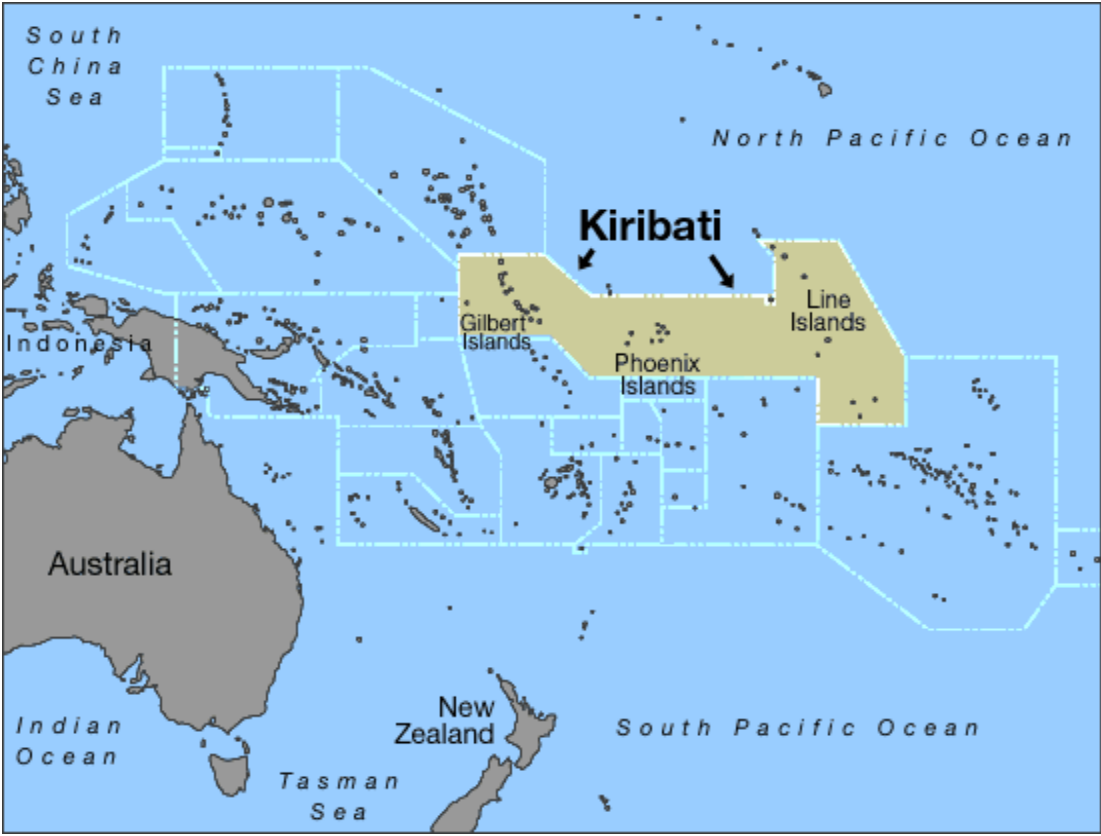
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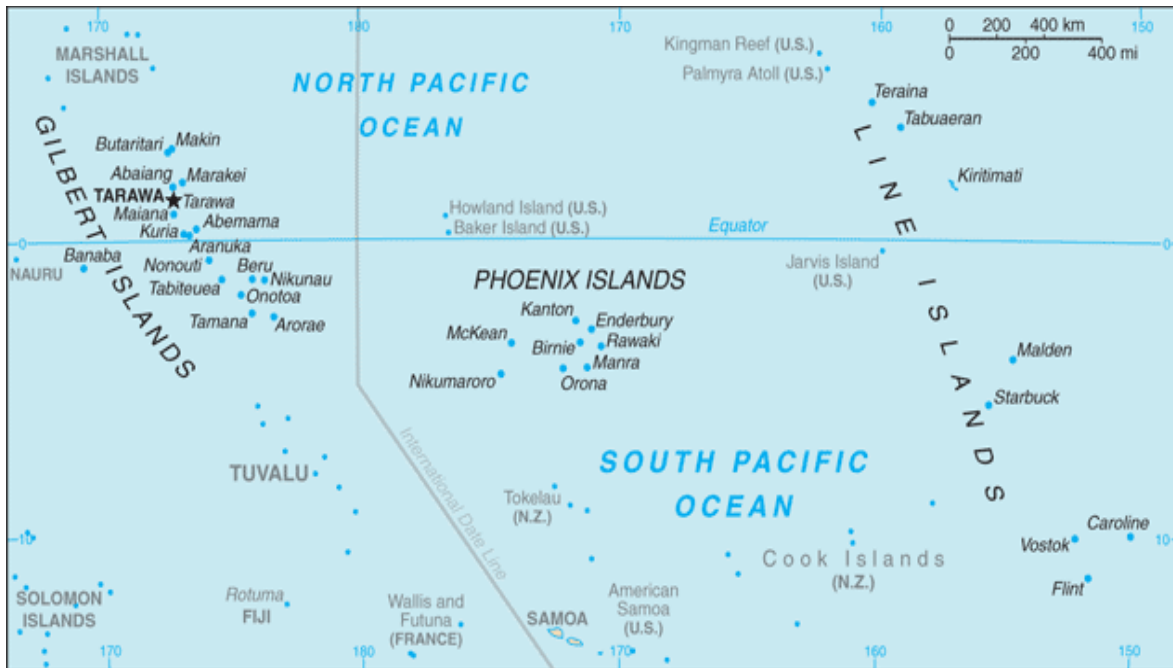
**Appendix A: Maps**

**Fig. 1: The Republic of Kiribati**



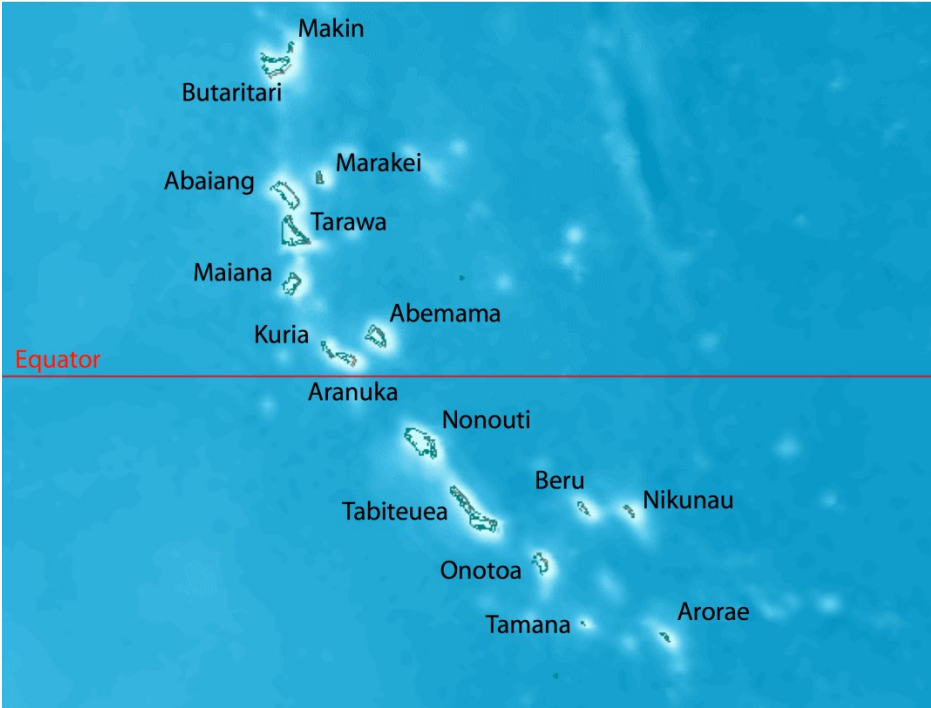
From: <http://archives.cnn.com/1999/ASIANOW/australasia/12/29/kiribati.millennium/map.kiribati.gif>

**Fig. 2: The Island Groups of Kiribati**



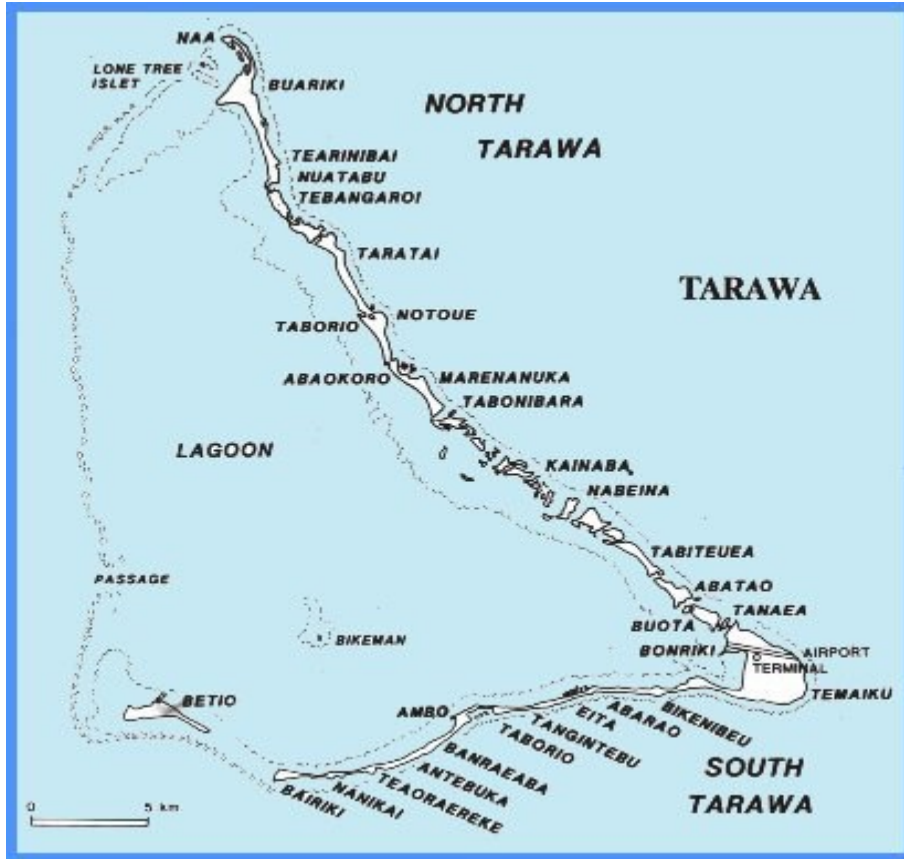
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**Fig. 3: The Gilbert Islands**



From: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilbert\\_Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilbert_Islands)

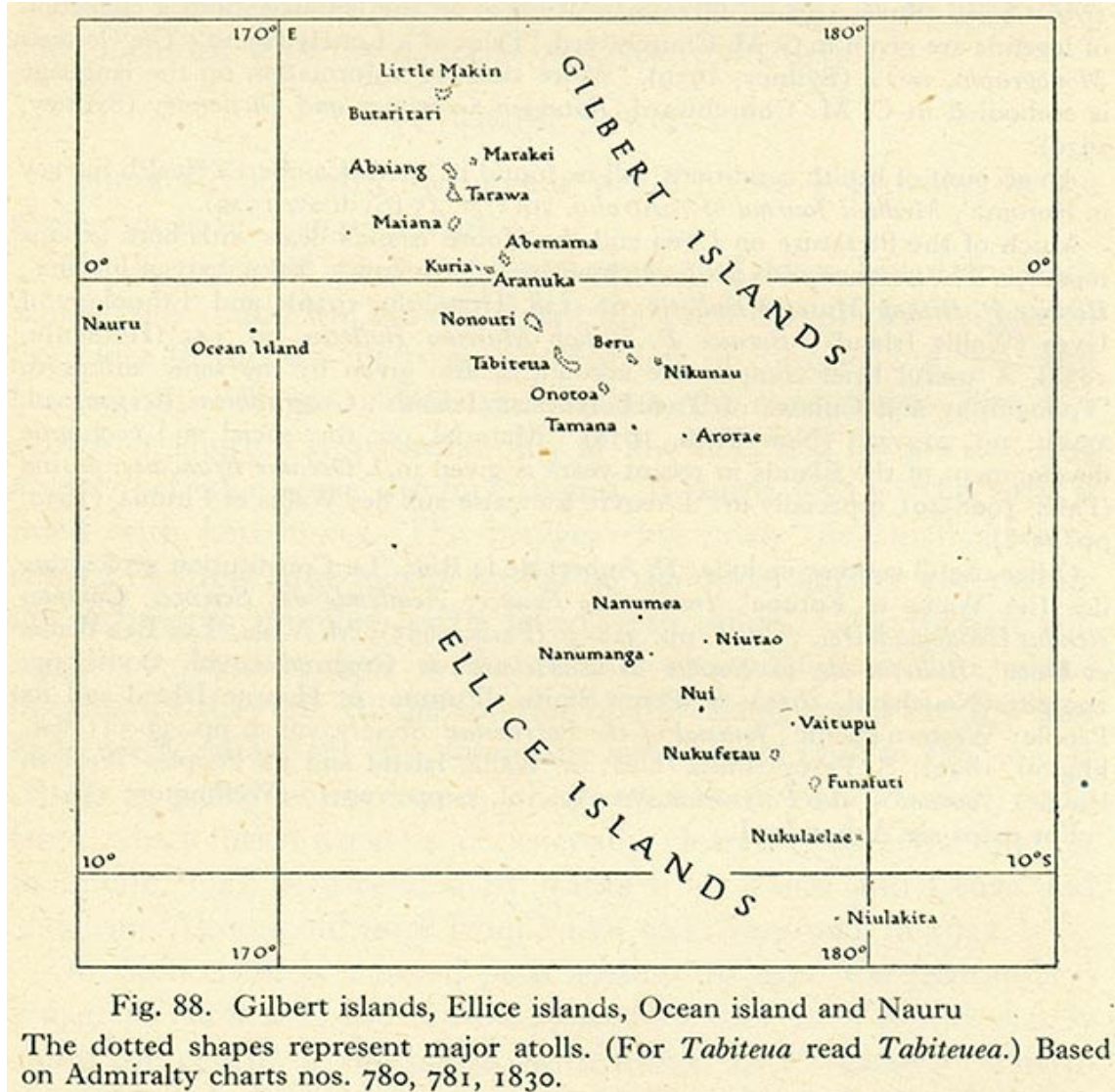
Fig. 4: Tarawa Atoll



From: [http://www.stamfordhistory.org/ww2\\_tarawa.htm](http://www.stamfordhistory.org/ww2_tarawa.htm)



Fig. 5: Gilbert and Ellice Islands



From: <http://maps.nationmaster.com/country/nr/1>

## Appendix B:

### Consent and Authorization Form

#### Evaluation of the Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI) Program and its Role in the Climate Change Migration Strategies of the Republic of Kiribati

The Department of Geography at the University of Kansas, USA supports the practice of protecting human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided to help you decide whether you would like to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should also be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.

---

**What the study is about:** You are invited to take part in a research study regarding the Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI) program at Griffith University. This study is designed to gain a better understanding of the I-Kiribati students' perspectives of the KANI program and the importance this program has for the students, their families, their communities, and their country.

**What you will be asked to do:** If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in your choice of an individual interview or focus group with other students currently involved in the KANI program. For both the interview and focus group sessions, which will each last approximately one hour, you will be asked to respond to and discuss various questions about the program.

**Taking part is voluntary:** This study is completely voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. During the interview or focus group, you may also choose not to answer or participate in any questions or topics that are put forth.

**Risks and benefits:** Due to the sensitivity of some of the issues that might be addressed in this study, some of the questions asked during the interviews or focus group discussions could be emotionally upsetting to you as a participant. The results from this study will be greatly beneficial as they will be used to expand on the literature and knowledge of the KANI program, as well as climate change adaptation, migration, and policy within the South Pacific. A small incentive, such as a food voucher, will also be provided to all participants.

**Your answers will be confidential:** With your permission, I will record the interviews and focus group sessions using a tape recorder to ensure the most accurate and reliable data. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential and all tape recorded data will be destroyed once the interviews and discussions have been fully transcribed. Transcripts of the discussions will be kept on a personal computer to which only the researcher will have access.

Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified. Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher will use a study number or a pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless required by law or if you have given written permission.

**Refusing to sign or cancelling the Consent and Authorization Form:** You are not required to sign this Consent form; however, if you refuse to sign, you will not be allowed to participate in this study. If you sign this form, you may still withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

**Possible follow-up inquiries:** There is a possibility that the researcher might have need to collect additional information from you after the individual interviews or focus groups have concluded. If you consent to participate in possible follow-up interviews by phone, Skype, and/or email, please check the box below and include your phone number and/or email address.

**Questions about the study:** If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Ms. Ann Wilkinson, International Project Officer at Griffith University, at [a.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au](mailto:a.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au) or (07) 373 56543. You can also contact Ms. Heidi Piper, Deputy Director of the International Office, at [h.piper@griffith.edu.au](mailto:h.piper@griffith.edu.au) or (07) 555-28039 for more information.

**Signed Consent and Authorization Forms can be brought to the KANI SCO Office, LO8 on the Logan Campus. Thank you.**

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### **PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION**

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu).

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

---

Participant's Name

Date

---

Participant's Signature

---

**Check the box of the session(s) that you would be most interested in participating in:**

Individual Interview       Focus Group

I consent to participate in a possible follow-up interview. \_\_\_\_\_  
(phone number and/or email address)

---

**Researcher Contact Information:**

Lara O'Brien (*Primary Researcher*)  
University of Kansas  
Department of Geography  
1475 Jayhawk Blvd  
500 Lindley Hall  
Lawrence, KS 66045, USA  
1 (913) 534-4156  
[laraob@hotmail.com](mailto:laraob@hotmail.com)

Jay Johnson (*Faculty Advisor*)  
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1475 Jayhawk Blvd  
402 Lindley Hall  
Lawrence, KS 66045, USA  
1 (785) 864-5547  
[jaytjohnson@ku.edu](mailto:jaytjohnson@ku.edu)

## Appendix C:

### Sample Questions for Interviews and Focus Groups

Name of Investigator: **Lara O'Brien, obrien.lara@gmail.com, 1 (913) 534-4156**

University and Department Affiliation: **University of Kansas, Geography Department**

Title of Investigation: **Evaluation of the Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI) Program and its Role in the Climate Change Migration Strategies of the Republic of Kiribati**

- When and how did you first become aware of the KANI program?
- Why did you decide to enroll in the program?
- What was your experience when you first arrived in Australia and began the program?
- How are you adapting to the new culture and environment you encounter in Australia?
- What elements of I-Kiribati customs and culture do you continue to practice here?
- Is there a strong I-Kiribati community here in Brisbane? In what ways are you involved?
- What skills are you learning from the KANI program?
- Do you think these skills will be useful in finding employment in Kiribati, Australia, or elsewhere overseas?
- Do you think these skills will be useful in aiding future migration and relocation?
- What are you planning to do once you graduate from the program?
- Will you return to Kiribati? Why/why not?
- Will you remain in Brisbane or will you move to another location in Australia?
- Will you move to another country? If so, where and why?
- Are you and your family looking to permanently relocate? Why/why not?
- What are the different push and pull factors that are influencing your decision of whether or not to migrate and resettle permanently overseas?
- Do you think these factors differ for your parents and elders? Why/why not?

## **Appendix D: Recruitment Email #1**

To KANI Students,

I would like to invite you to take part in an academic study about the KANI program by participating in an interview and/or focus group at Griffith University. Through the voices of students like yourself, I hope to illustrate the important role this program plays in the climate change migration and adaptation strategies of Kiribati.

My name is Lara O'Brien and I am currently a master's student in the Geography Department at the University of Kansas in the United States. My graduate research has specifically focused on the human dimension of climate change and adaptation in Kiribati and the population relocation strategy, "Migrating with Dignity," that was recently proposed by President Anote Tong.

The KANI program at Griffith University has been a key component of this migration strategy and I would like the opportunity to speak with you in order to learn more about your experiences, thoughts, and perspectives on the program. By sharing your stories and opinions, you will make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the KANI program and the possible impact it will have on the future of enrolled students, their families, their communities, and their country.

If you are interested in this study and wish to participate in an individual interview and/or focus group with other KANI students, please read and sign the attached Consent and Authorization Form and drop it off at the KANI SCO Office, LO8 on the Logan Campus. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Ms. Heidi Piper, Deputy Director of the International Office at Griffith University, at [h.piper@griffith.edu.au](mailto:h.piper@griffith.edu.au) or (07) 555-28039 ext: 28039.

~ A small incentive, such as a food voucher, will also be provided for those who participate. ~

Thank you for your time and I hope to talk to you soon!

Lara O'Brien

## Appendix E: Recruitment Email #2

### Research on the KANI Program

Hi, my name is Lara O'Brien and I am a graduate student at the University of Kansas in the United States. You received an email last week telling you about my research focusing on the KANI program at Griffith University.

I will be visiting the Griffith University- Logan Campus from **Monday, April 30<sup>th</sup> to Thursday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>**. I hope to be able to talk with you in either an individual interview or a focus group with other KANI students in order to learn more about your personal views and experiences with the program.

By sharing your stories and perspectives, you will greatly enhance the knowledge and understanding of the program as well as its importance for future climate change adaptation and migration strategies for the Republic of Kiribati and other small island nations in the Pacific region.

If you are interested in this study and wish to participate in an interview or focus group, please read and sign the attached Consent and Authorization Form and Interview/Focus Group Availability Form and drop them off at the main KANI SCO Office, LO8 on the Logan Campus.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Ms. Ann Wilkinson at [a.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au](mailto:a.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au) or (07) 373 56543. You can also contact Ms. Heidi Piper at [h.piper@griffith.edu.au](mailto:h.piper@griffith.edu.au) or (07) 555-28039 for more information.

**A small incentive, such as a food voucher, will be provided for those who participate.**

Thank you so much for your time and I look forward to meeting with you!

Sincerely,

Lara O'Brien

**Appendix F:**

**Interview/Focus Group Availability Form for KANI Study**

Ms. Lara O’Brien, a graduate student from the University of Kansas in the United States, will be visiting the Griffith University- Logan Campus from **April 30<sup>th</sup> to May 3<sup>rd</sup>** to conduct interviews and focus groups with students in the KANI program.

The purpose of Ms. O’Brien’s study is to listen to the stories and perspectives of the KANI students in order to contribute to the understanding of the program and its importance to the students, their families, their communities, and their country.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please fill out the form below and email a completed copy to Ms. Ann Wilkinson at [a.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au](mailto:a.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au) or drop off a printed copy at the main KANI SCO Office, LO8 on the Logan Campus.

**A small incentive, such as a food voucher, will be provided for those who participate.**

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Ms. Ann Wilkinson at [a.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au](mailto:a.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au) or (07) 373-56543. You can also contact Ms. Heidi Piper at [h.piper@griffith.edu.au](mailto:h.piper@griffith.edu.au) or (07) 555-28039 for more information.

---

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Check the box of the session that you would be most interested in participating in:**

**Individual Interview**     **Focus Group** (4-6 students)

**Please indicate below when you would be available for a one hour interview or focus group.**

<b>DAY/TIME</b>	<b>10-11</b>	<b>11-12</b>	<b>12-1</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>2-3</b>	<b>3-4</b>	<b>4-5</b>
<b>MONDAY, April 30</b>							
<b>TUESDAY, May 1</b>							
<b>WEDNESDAY, May 2</b>							
<b>THURSDAY, May 3</b>							

\*If these times are not convenient for you, an alternate time either earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon can be arranged to better accommodate your schedule.