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Flowers in the Field: the social and spatial impacts of mobility on households in Kiribati

GEO 630 Master's Thesis

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Acknowledgements

On a warm September day in 2012, I took a seat in a crowded room among a diverse cohort of newly landed migrants hungry to learn our first words of German. Going around the room, there were students from Thailand and Egypt and other recognizable lands. As the young girl sitting next to me stood up, she shyly mutters "*Guten Morgen. Ich bin Mwaakin. Ich komme aus Kiribati.*" The fateful day in *Klubschule* was the beginning of a six-year relationship with the very distant and largely unheard-of atoll nation that is the focal point of this master's thesis.

During my six-year stay in Switzerland, I have had the continued support and comradeship of the tightly knit i-Kiribati/Swiss community, of Rosie our matriarch, of my sisters Tatau, Eimi, and Mita (although she is a proud Fijian) and of their spouses and children. Together we form an awesome family of misfits and my research in Kiribati would not be possible without your continued support and inspiration to share the warmth of the islands.

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This master's thesis is the culmination of meetings and interviews too numerous to name that have included members of the UZH department of Geography, NGO's, government employees, policy makers, politicians, development corporations, members of diplomatic corps, academics spanning three continents and especially my three colleagues: Heidi, Laura and Ta. I thank them sincerely for their guidance and support.

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Te Mauri Te Raoi ao Te Tabomoa.

Summary

Former Kiribati president Anote Tong (2015) linked expanded mobility with climate change adaptation under the policy of *migration with dignity*. With an assumption that rising sea levels would lead to displacement and relocation, Tong sought greater labor mobility opportunities to offset the risk of trauma associated with displacement (Tong, 2015). The current administration has digressed from the "*sinking island*" narrative but remains committed to labor mobility as a key livelihood strategy and as a precursor to rural development (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018). The comparatively high salaries of labor mobility schemes, however, have far-reaching transformative consequences on rural, subsistence households. As access to labor mobility continues to expand, the transnational households of migrant workers become increasingly multilocal between rural home islands, the urban center (South Tarawa), and places of employment. Within the power structures of the multilocal household, the increased household contribution of migrant workers leads to patriarchal household roles being vastly renegotiated.

This study follows the results of ethnographic fieldwork in Kiribati shadowing the Ministry of Employment and Human Resources. During the 10-week field study, unstructured expert interviews and semi-structured episodic interviews of returning workers, applicants, and non-participants were conducted to reveal the social and spatial impacts of transnational mobility. This study situates current mobility trends in a broad context not limited to climate change and disaster displacement but including education and labor mobility through a theoretical framework of cooperative conflict and multilocality. Results highlight the unintended rural-urban migration that continues to contribute to the overpopulation of South Tarawa and the changing bargaining power of households that are empowering returning female migrant workers.

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Abbreviations

APTC: Australian-Pacific Technical College
A$: Australian Dollar
BTC: Betio Town Council
CIPFI: Cook Islands Pearl Farmer's Initiative
DFAT: (Australia) Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
JSS: Junior Secondary School
KIT: Kiribati Institute of Technology
KUC: Kiribati United Church
KV-20: Kiribati Vision 20
MEHR: (Kiribati) Ministry of Employment and Human Resources
MFAT: (New Zealand) Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MP: Member of Parliament
MTC: Marine Training Centre
NAWPP: Northern Australia Worker Pilot-Program
NGO: Non-government organization
NZ: New Zealand
OB: (Kiribati) Office of the President
PAC: Pacific Access Category Resident Visa
PLS: Pacific Labor Scheme
RERF: Revenue Equalisation Reserve Fund
RSE: Recognized Seasonal Employer
SDC: Swiss Development Corporation
SSS: Senior Secondary School
SWP: Seasonal Worker Programme
TUC: Teinainano Urban Council
UK: United Kingdom
UN: United Nations
US: United States
USP: University of the South Pacific
UZH: University of Zürich

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1. Introduction

Abaiang, Kiribati (Source: self)

Atoll nations remain acutely vulnerable to the effects of climate change (Connell, 2015). With 33 atolls straddling the Equator and International Dateline in the central Pacific, Kiribati is at the forefront of current climate migration negotiations. The sandy atolls, sitting barely two meters above sea level are threatened by both slow and quick-onset natural disaster. As the oceans warm and expand, Kiribati is projected to face a future defined by coral bleaching, inundation of freshwater tables, and increased erosion. The normally calm waters of Kiribati will experience further abnormally strong cyclones. The increasingly hostile environment threatens the future of the picturesque atolls leading to discussions on future relocation under the "climate refugee" narrative (Tong, 2015).

As a pre-emptive measure against the trauma associated with forced migration, the Kiribati government under the direction of former president Anote Tong sought adaptation to climate change through increased labor mobility (Tong, 2015). Labor mobility, it was hoped, would not only improve employable capacity to international levels, but help Kiribati adapt to climate change through out-migration that would lower population and provide Kiribati households with vital remittances. Although the current administration under president Maamau has moved away from the *migration with dignity* narrative, labor mobility remains a key development goal under the proposed Kiribati Vision 20 (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018).

This thesis seeks to fill the research gap of current mobility trends in Kiribati from the point of view of the reconfigured household. Using a qualitative, ethnographic approach, primary data was collected by the researcher while embedded in the Kiribati Ministry of Employment and Human Resources. The unique positionality facilitated access to a diverse group of experts and key informant interviewees while simultaneously facilitating participant observations *vis-a-vis* ministerial shadowing. The data collected during the 10-week fieldwork on location in Kiribati broke from previous "climate refugee" discussions (cf. Tong, 2015) and revealed a narrative that exists on both a domestic and international scale of pluralism ranging from short-term disaster placement to permanent out-migration facilitated by New Zealand's Pacific Access Category resident visa. Although popular media continues to highlight future displacement and relocation, mobility in Kiribati exists on a broader spectrum whether as a livelihood strategy or for long term household strategies including education, healthcare, or employment.

The labor market in Kiribati is limited by few paid-employment opportunities concentrated in the urban center, South Tarawa (Autio, 2017, p. 8). To supplement rural households that are dependent on subsistence livelihoods, the availability of short-term income generated through copra production provides sufficient capital for most outer-island financial needs (Throsby, 2001). Deviations from subsistence lifestyles, however, necessitate strategic migration of household members resulting in youth leaving their home-islands for continued education and adult household members applying for

participation in labor mobility schemes in either New Zealand or Australia (Kiribati Ministry of Labour, 2015; Underhill-Sem and Marsters, 2017). In Kiribati, the Ministry of Employment and Human Resource (MEHR) is charged with procurement and screening of applicants for potential foreign employers. Beginning with required basic training, South Tarawa becomes a node in the applicants' multilocality due to undefined lag times before successful job placement that often span several years. The overall remoteness and small populations of outer-islands in Kiribati affect transportation costs that are prohibitively expensive for applicants wishing to return to home island. During the period of uncertainty, prospective migrant workers thus seek to join urban extended families and become integrated into household labor roles in South Tarawa through either paid or unpaid labor. In some cases, arriving applicants find further opportunities to integrate through marriage to urban locals and/or the arrival of members from their home-island household.

As applicants secure employment in labor mobility schemes, attachment to the urban center is further cemented. Owing to a lack of adequate flight connections, returning migrant workers regardless of island of origin are returned to South Tarawa. After the successful completion of fixed term, non-recurring employment contracts (6-9 months) uncertainty remains on the side of returning workers as to when and if they will be rehired. The uncertainty in the employment cycle coupled with high travel costs and often lengthy voyages between South Tarawa and home-islands are barriers for returning workers hoping to return to home-islands. Secondly, these outer-islanders are returning with cash in hand facing only limited investment prospects in rural economies outside of the urban center. Earnings and remittances to outer-island households can thus only be utilized for limited construction projects and to relieve some basic hardships of subsistence lifestyles. The urban center, alternatively, offers attractive options for returning workers to spend their savings, including investment, education, and leisure.

Labor mobility trends in Kiribati follow closely with theories of transnational multilocality. As Thieme (2014) discussed, migrant workers from rural backgrounds seek employment opportunities in foreign labor markets to improve household livelihoods. Following successful employment, however, the migrant workers increasingly gravitate

toward domestic urban centers to maintain access to foreign employment opportunities. The expanded households of migrant workers thus exist on a multilocal and transnational level. Rural households in places of origin continue to house elderly and dependent children. Places of employment in foreign countries offer a source of income to support households left behind. Urban centers, however, act as a middle point for returning migrants and household members to access education, further employment, and investment while within the territorial confinements of the rural place of origin (p. 44). In the context of Kiribati, South Tarawa is the urban middle point for returning migrant workers.

The multilocal i-Kiribati households of migrant workers not only push spatial boundaries, but internal household power dynamics. As migrant workers from the rural Kiribati are employed on farms in New Zealand and in Australian hotels, the household morphs from subsistence households dependent on hard labor to transnational and multilocal households that experience a rural-urban shift toward South Tarawa. Migrant workers attaining salaries inconceivable in the domestic labor market experience elevated bargaining power due to the increased household contribution. As female participation in labor mobility schemes increases, household gender roles are renegotiated.

At the household level, as individuals gain access to paid employment, internal power structures begin to change. Following Sen's (1987) model of cooperative conflict, household members have individual bargaining power to affect the outcomes of household negotiations. Bargaining power correlates with an individual's perceived contribution to the household's benefit. The perceived contribution, in rural societies is often gender biased favoring male household members and thus limits the bargaining power of female household members. Female household members can thus be at a disadvantage to negotiating favorable household outcomes (pgs. 20-29). As female household members in Kiribati successfully enter paid employment, perceived household contribution significantly increases and threatens the patriarchal monopoly on decision-making. Although Sen's model of cooperative conflict has been criticized for not taking into account social barriers that are unnegotiable limits of female bargaining power (Agarwal and Bina, 1995), initial analysis of interviews and participant

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observations revealed a context in Kiribati where female had agency to freely enter employment and obtain further education.

In the context of vulnerability to climate change, this master thesis seeks to examine the spatial and social impacts of mobility on households in Kiribati. The objectives of this study thus are to:

- Grasp current mobility trends of I-Kiribati.

- Understand the impact of mobility on I-Kiribati households.

and further asks the research question:

How does mobility affect household power relations on a multilocal scale in Kiribati?

From the main research question, sub-questions are to be investigated:

1) How are cooperative households regulated in Kiribati?
2) What household-related factors affect an individual's decision to migrate?
3) To what extent are I-Kiribati mobile?
4) What barriers do I-Kiribati face to access mobility?
5) How do households use wages from labor mobility?
6) To what extent is perceived climate change vulnerability reflected in household strategy?

For the purpose of investigating the research question, (unrecorded) unstructured expert (cf Bogner and Menz, 2016) interviews in Switzerland, Hong Kong, Australia, Fiji, and Kiribati preceded fieldwork carried out between July and September 2018 in South Tarawa, Kiribati. While being embedded in the Ministry of Employment and Human Resources (MEHR), a qualitative case study consisting of 24 (recorded and transcribed) semi-structed episodic interviews (cf. Flick, 2010, p. 185) was undertaken. South Tarawa

remains the only urban center in Kiribati and offered access to a diverse range of applicants, non-participants, and returning workers.

This master thesis is structured into 6 chapters beginning with this introduction and followed by a background of Kiribati. The third chapter situates this study through a theoretical framework of cooperative conflict and multilocality, while the fourth chapter explains the methodological approach. The fifth chapter offers an analysis of the results that answer the research sub-questions, where each sub-question is entitled a sub-section. In chapter six, the master thesis is concluded with a final discussion of the research question.

2. Kiribati Profile
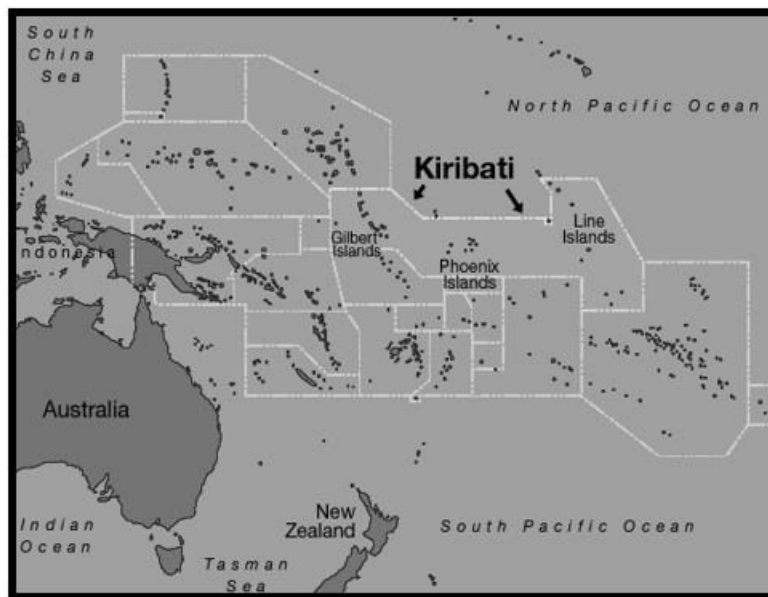
Figure 1: Map of Kiribati. (Source: Kiribati Office of the President, 2018)

Straddling the equator and the international dateline, the remote atoll nation of Kiribati is compromised of the Gilbert, Phoenix and Line island groups (CIA, 2019). With a population comparable to a small town, transport links are limited and travel to the islands is arduous and costly. Although geographically close to Hawaii, limited flights to the country's main airport (Bonriki International Airport) necessitate transit through Fiji, Nauru, Marshall Islands, or Solomon Islands. Infrequent connections not only hinder tourism but limit mobility for most I-Kiribati households as fares for a single roundtrip passage to Nadi (Fiji) can equate to the equivalent of half the I-Kiribati annual GDP per capita (The World Bank, 2019).

Since 1995, the government owned airline, Air Kiribati has connected the islands of the Gilbert island group with parallel services among the Line island group (Air Kiribati, 2019). Air transport reduces travel time that would otherwise be undertaken by precarious ferry crossings. Although travel is possible between many islands, there are no direct connections between the Gilbert and Line islands and service between South Tarawa (in the Gilbert island chain) and Kiritimati Island (in the Line island chain) requires a costly stopover in Fiji. An inability to attract tourism greatly limits economic development in Kiribati. While neighboring Fiji benefits $377.3 million from tourism per quarter (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2017), Kiribati only attributes 21.8% of its economy to tourism (Knoema, 2017). A lack of infrastructure and logistics in this remote part of the world largely exclude the tropical paradise from the growing regional tourism sector, depriving the i-Kiribati of gainful employment opportunities.

In 2018, the government of Kiribati stated long-term development goals through the release of the Kiribati Vision 20 (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018). By shifting policy goals away from migrating as a climate change adaptation to building resilience through development, the Kiribati Vision 20 calls for greater investment in outer-island development, fisheries, and tourism industries. In addition to the Kiribati Vision 20, this section will look at Kiribati through the topics of colonialization, climate change, the economy, and the dependence on foreign aid, offering an introduction to the remote field site that is the focus of this case study.

2.1 Urbanization following British colonialization

According to Donner (2015), population density in South Tarawa has been an issue since early colonial times. The struggles of a subsistence lifestyle led outer-island populaces to relocate to the capital. As the population soared, colonial officers looked to relocation as a solution. Beginning in the 1930's, the British began relocating settlers to the Phoenix Island group. The relocation to the previously uninhabited island chain was short lived as settlers struggled with access to resources. Two decades later, the British had greater success with a resettlement scheme in the Solomon Islands. To this day, a group of i-Kiribati settlers reside in Ghizo (Donner, 2015). Although resettlement succeeded as a means to ease overpopulation on a small scale, high birth rates coupled with in-migration caused continued population growth in South Tarawa. Since independence, the population has continued to soar. Waste, sanitation, education, health, and employment institutions have been unable to cope. Roughly half of the nation's population lives within ten square kilometres (a comparable population density to London) (Chauvin and Mathiesen, 2015).

As the population in South Tarawa grows, household dynamics are beginning to change. The sea and the islands no longer support a subsistence lifestyle (Autio, 2017, p. 9). Due to the overpopulation of the fragile atoll ecosystem, the population of South Tarawa has thus turned to imported foods sourced through the post-colonial network. Cabin biscuits and corn beef have not only become a staple in Kiribati, but for the entire Pacific region (Ford, Patel and Narayan, 2017). Dependence on processed foods and overcrowded conditions are leading to high rates of disease in South Tarawa leaving Kiribati unable to meet millennium health goals.

According the Kiribati Ministry of Health and Medical Services (2015), registered cases of diabetes and hypertension have been a growing concern. While diabetes and hypertension affect the populations of all outer-islands, non-communicable diseases remain more prevalent on the more developed islands of South Tarawa and Kiritimati. The prevalence rate of diabetes in 2016 reached 15.7% with the South Tarawa district of

TUC exceeding 800 cases. Hypertension rates for the same period in TUC hovered just below 800 cases. Given the high population density of South Tarawa, communicable diseases are also prevalent. Leprosy, for instance, affects 17 out of 10,000 people in South Tarawa. Statistics for the period of 2010-2015 showed more than 450 cases reported. Of the greatest concern, however, is Tuberculosis reaching a rate of 421.1 cases per 100,000. Kiribati also has the dubious title of highest regional infant mortality rate (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2015, p. 67-71).

2.2 The UN convention on decolonization: end of British rule in the Pacific

In 1960, a hodgepodge of newly independent UN member states pushed for the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People* (United Nations, 1963). At the end of World War II, one third of the world's population was under colonial rule. Nearly two decades after the UN declaration, Kiribati would take its first steps as a fully independent nation. Due to remoteness, a small population and a lack of local leadership, Oceania was the last region to be decolonized by the British (see Table 1). Beginning with Samoa under the helm of the Samoan royal family, the final dominos of the British Empire fell. Although larger territories such as Papua New Guinea and Fiji were able to achieve full independence, most smaller territories opted for free association with the larger nations of Australia, New Zealand, or United States (Deckker, 1996).

Table 1: Independence Dates: Oceania	
Country	**Date**
Samoa	1 January 1962
Nauru	31 January 1968
Tonga	5 June 1970
Fiji	10 October 1970
Papua New Guinea	16 September 1975
Solomon Islands	7 January 1978
Tuvalu	1 October 1978
Kiribati	12 July 1979
Vanuatu	30 July 1980
Source: (CIA, n.d.)	Design: Marazita, 2019

According to Thomas and Postlethwaite (1984), Oceania maintains a complex web of political alliances. Small independent nations are dotted by remnants of a colonial past. The US, UK, France, and New Zealand still occupy territories within the region. Free association or trusteeship offset many vulnerabilities of small, remote Pacific island nations. A free association based on the Cook Islands framework was a favoured decolonization framework that allowed the UK to protect vulnerable territories while fulfilling UN requirements. Similar relationships exist today in Marshall Islands (US), Federated States of Micronesia (US), Palau (US), Niue (NZ), Tokelau (NZ), and Pitcairn (the last British Territory in Oceania). Additionally, most French Oceania colonies have remained under French control: New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna Islands (Thomas and Postlethwaite, 1984).

Unlike the aforementioned islands, Kiribati opted for full independence. Under the leadership of the staunchly pro-independence president Sir Ieremia Tabai (at the age of 29), Kiribati became an independent republic on 12 July 1979 (Talu and Alaima II, 1979, p. 112-121). The first president hoped that independence would allow his people to return to their simple life. In an introduction, shortly after independence, then president Tabai introduced his people to the world as a simple people with simple needs and simple desires and with the thirst of a young nation yearning for independence. At the time of Independence, the context of climate change was in its infancy with the term global warming not coined until 1975 and with a global population of less than four billion people, climate change was not on the agenda. As the world grappled with the Vietnam incursion on the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia, little attention was paid to global warming (Rasool and Schneider, 1971). Tabai declared unilateral independence from the UK having no suspicion of his atoll nation's future climate struggles (Talu and Alaima II, 1979, p. 121).

For the islands of Kiribati, the independent nation state was a foreign concept. According to Talu and Alaima (1979), before colonization, the framework (and name, being the local derivative of the English term Gilbert Islands) of a united Kiribati had not been imagined. Having been Micronesian seafarers living around clan based *maneabas*, the leaders attempted to blend Micronesian culture and western institutions. With the best of

intentions, Tabai looked to independence as means of cultural preservation, not realizing that the i-Kiribati could never unhinge the relationship to western institutions. Under the repercussions of independence, the problems of urbanization persisted, and the 29-year-old Tabai lacked the experience of his colonial predecessors to cope. Without Britain or any foreign association, Kiribati was left a remote republic in the middle of the Pacific to deal with its own problems (Talu & Alaima II, 1979, p. 13). In the absence of a free association agreement, the government of Kiribati is solely responsible for the well-being of the i-Kiribati. Unlike Tokelauans who enjoy New Zealand citizenship, the i-Kiribati carry a Kiribati passport and are afforded no rights to abode outside of their home jurisdiction (Murphy, 2015).

2.3 Sinking islands?

As an atoll nation in the central Pacific, Kiribati is vulnerable to the slow and rapid onset effects of climate change. Slow onset effects of climate change are difficult to measure, but rising and warming sea levels are expected to lead to coral bleaching and increased erosion (Murphy, 2015). Research on slow-onset effects of climate change in Kiribati is complicated by the effects of unplanned development, beach mining, and partial seawalls. Although slow-onset effects remain inconclusive, quick-onset effects associated with natural disaster are becoming more prevalent. Being on the equator, Kiribati is normally not affected by cyclones that stalk neighbouring island states.

Damage caused by cyclone Pam 2 years on. Port Vila, Vanuatu (Source: self)

In 2015, remnants of cyclone Pam that caused deaths in Vanuatu, struck Tuvalu and the southern Gilbert islands of Tamana and Arorae (Taupo and Noy, 2016; Handmer and Iveson, 2017). Destruction caused in the southern Gilbert islands included damage to homes and inundation of freshwater tables and arable land. The remote location of the islands complicated recovery efforts. Shortly after striking the southern Gilbert islands, South Tarawa was hit by tidal waves that destroyed key infrastructure in the urban center. Betio island, with the highest population density of Kiribati, suffered paralysing damage to homes and to the hospital. Patients from Betio hospital were displaced to the sports centre during reconstruction. The worst damage, however, was to the Betio-Bairiki causeway. As a vital junction between the port of Betio and the TUC district of South Tarawa, devastation of the causeway led to bottlenecks in relief assistance (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018).

Popular media discussions on Kiribati revolve almost entirely around the climate change narrative. The charismatic ex-president, Anote Tong, successfully billed Kiribati as the sinking islands facing mass displacement. The Tong tenure was annotated by *migration with dignity* and with the purchase of land in Vanua Levu (Fiji). Through frequent speeches on the international circuit, Anote Tong successfully sold the narrative of Kiribati as the sinking islands in need of a contingent relocation plan supported by the international community (Ellsmoor and Rosen, 2016; Farbotko, Stratford and Lazrus, 2016). Tong's *migration with dignity* initiative attempted to juxtapose labor mobility as a dignified alternative to the climate change refugee narrative. Due to limited domestic paid employment and further education opportunities, Tong hoped to raise i-Kiribati employable capacity to international levels to facilitate integration into new home countries. An integral element of the "dignity" narrative was that, as opposed to trauma associated with forced migration due to disaster displacement, i-Kiribati would have a choice to migrate through frameworks of skilled labor (Tong, 2015).

As the Tong narrative gained attention by western media outlets, the climate change narrative in Kiribati became oversimplified. Documentary filmmakers transcended on South Tarawa highlighting examples of erosion, flooding, and displacement ostentatiously linked to climate change. Households living on marginal lands became poster-children for the effects of climate change and the popular climate refugee narrative cemented by publicity around the relocation of the Tebunginako village on the island of Abaiang (Office of the President, 2019) and the New Zealand case of Ioane Teitiota requesting asylum due to climate change (McDonald, 2015).

Although Tong is respected in international climate change debates, his party ultimately lost the presidential election of 2016 to Taneti Maamau. The current administration has shifted focus from climate change displacement to building resilience through economic development and land reclamation. As part of the Kiribati Vision 20 initiative, Maamau plans economic development of the outer-islands to alleviate rural-urban migration and the Temaiku land reclamation project that will build urban resilience to potentially support a third of nation's population (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018, p. 20).

Climate change predictions for Kiribati point to higher rainfall, rising sea levels and unpredictable natural disasters (Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO., 2011). Researchers have pointed to the effects of slow-onset natural disasters in Kiribati that include compromised freshwater tables and salinification of arable land, but recent natural disasters point toward the vulnerability to quick-onset natural disasters (Campbell, 2010, p. 72). Following the 2015 destruction associated with cyclone Pam, the first week of 2019 saw déjà vu with the remnants of cyclone Mona striking the southern Gilbert islands a second time. Although damage was greatest in Arorae and Tamana islands, South Tarawa suffered flooding due to torrential rains. The full implications of cyclone Mona are yet to be determined. While the future effects of climate change in Kiribati are complicated by overpopulation and uncontrolled development, recent natural disasters that are predicted to intensify foreshadow a bleak future for the vulnerable atoll islands.

2.4 Economic trends

Remoteness and economies of scale complicate integration of Kiribati into the global market. As an atoll nation, Kiribati has few natural resources. Rich phosphate deposits on Banaba island were all but depleted during colonization. Tuna fishing, however, continues to be a source of revenue for the government. Sophisticated foreign tuna trawlers, however, have limited competitiveness of the local tuna export industry (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018). Employment in Kiribati is still dominated by the government sector with slow growth in the private sector. Households supplement the lack of paid employment opportunities with non-paid labor that includes fishing, gardening, home building, etc (Kiribati Ministry of Labour, 2015).

2.4.1 Phosphate depletion

Present day inhabited Kiribati is a low-lying atoll nation, but this has not always been the case. Before the twentieth century, the island of Banaba reached an elevation of 80 meters (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). The nearly 2,000 strong Banaban population enjoyed fertile lands enriched by guano laced soils. With colonial exploration came the discovery of phosphate. In the 80 years of phosphate mining, Banaba was reduced by 50 meters and the once fertile island was transformed into a lunar-like landscape that would see the relocation of the entire local population to Rabi Island in Fiji (Cranston, 2015). For the British colonies, the Banaban (as well as Nauruan) phosphate deposits were profitable. Nutrient poor farms in Australia and New Zealand relied on the constant supply of cheap, high quality Banaban fertilizer. While the locals coped with mining hardships, Banaban phosphate guaranteed food security to Britain's larger colonies (Teaiwa, 2015).

With World War II underway in the Pacific theater, Japan sought strategic control of Banaba Island (King and Sigrah, 2001). Landing in Kiribati in 1942, the Japanese began a campaign to control strategic assets. To secure phosphate reserves, local Banabans were marched off to labor camps and dispersed to other islands. As was common under

Japanese occupation, conditions were harsh, and crimes (especially stealing) were severely punished. By the end of the occupation in 1945, 349 Banabans were thought to have perished (King and Sigrah, 2001). After Kiribati was liberated by the allies, the British convinced the Banaban natives to relocate to Rabi Island in Fiji, citing degradation of Banaba Island. While expats enjoyed high standards of living on Banaba Island (Cranston, 2015), the Banabans endured tent communities in Rabi. Although mining has long ended, the islanders are still unable to return to their homeland. Life on Rabi Island was supported by an A$10 million trust fund from phosphate royalties. The trust fund, awarded to the islanders in a drawn-out court case, was mismanaged and depleted. The islanders thus continue to live subsistence lifestyles on Rabi (King and Sigrah, 2001). As phosphate mines were exhausted in 1979, the British ended their reign over the Pacific. The newly independent country of Kiribati was left with little more than coconuts and tuna. During the eighty years of strip-mining, the British Phosphate Company mined 22 million tons of high-grade phosphate, leaving a displaced community of Banabans and a resource poor country in the central Pacific (Talu and Alaima II, 1979, p. 107).

2.4.2 Post-colonial economy

The remoteness, lack of infrastructure, and severe drought limit economic activity. International and domestic, inter-island trade is dominated by imported goods. Between 2007 and 2015, the trade deficit in Kiribati increased by nearly A$ 54 million to surpass A$ 125 million led by a reliance on imported foodstuff. The Kiribati economy thus relies on revenue collected from fishing licenses obtained by foreign vessels. In the 6-year period ending in 2015, fishing license revenue grew by A$ 168.3 million to a high of A$ 197.8 million. The increase came as a result of the sub-regional Nauru agreement vis-à-vis a vessel day scheme (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018, p. 16-17). The higher revenue of fishing license contributes substantially to the Kiribati economy where local economic activity and manufacturing capabilities are minimal (see figure 2).

Fishing License Revenue (A$ million): 2006-15

Figure 2: Fishing License Revenue in A$ million. Source: KV-20 p. 17
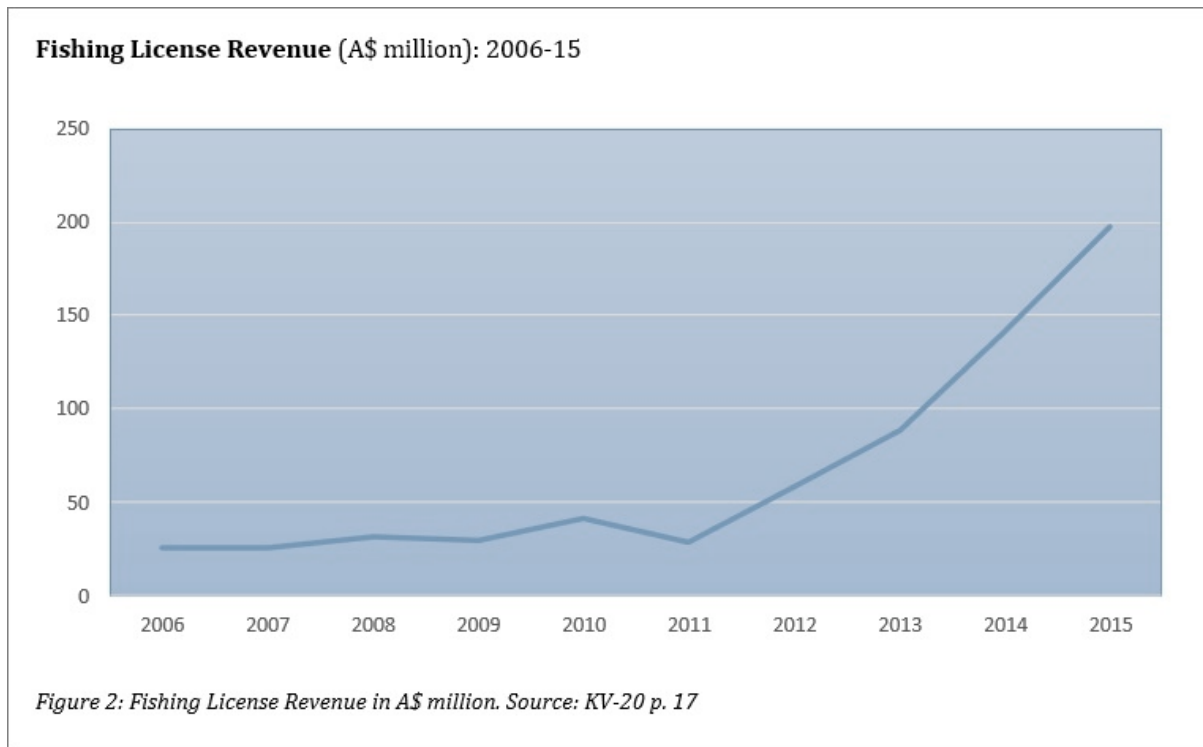
Remittances and earnings from labor mobility schemes are a crucial livelihood strategy at the household level. Seafarer remittances have been well documented but show a slow decline in both annual remittances and participation (Campbell and Warrick, 2014). Newer, higher paying schemes in Australia and New Zealand where remittance data is scant are gaining importance (Merwood, 2012). The statistical gap may be due in part to the locally paid salaries at site of short-term migrant workers.

At the national level, budget deficits are met by the successful investment of phosphate royalties that were paid to the Kiribati national government. As the financial vehicle behind the investment of the royalties, the Revenue Equalisation Reserve Fund (RERF) recently passed the A$ 1 billion benchmarks as set out in the Kiribati Vision 20 (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018). Dividends from the RERF are dispersed to make up government deficits and for investment projects, such as land acquisition in Fiji and the purchase of two Embraer aircrafts from Brazil (Schofield, 2018). The bulk of Kiribati funding comes from foreign partners in line with the regional dependence on aid. Remoteness and small populations on Pacific islands have led to a regional reliance on Australia, France, New Zealand and the United States (Gani, 2006). Australia and New

Zealand remain the primary benefactors to the Kiribati government and continue to support i-Kiribati education attainment through local programs and access to international continued education.

2.5 Dependence on foreign-aid

According to Riddell (1999), on a per capita basis, the pacific islands nations receive the most foreign aid in the world. Although the islands are sparsely populated and geographically remote, the high amounts of aid have limited development and created a parental-like dependency on regional power brokers (Gani, 2006). While development aid has evolved to foster livelihoods, foreign aid to Kiribati has focused on basic sustainability. While the founding president had hoped for an independent Kiribati, the reality of the remote atoll nation's vulnerabilities sought a need for outside assistance. With a total of A$27.7 million dollars in aid in 2017-18, the Australian government continues to be Kiribati's main benefactor (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019).

2.6 Kiribati Vision 20: Development Framework 2016-2036

The cornerstone of Taneti Maamau's presidency lies in the long-term development framework set-out in the Kiribati Vision 20. Replacing the Tong-era *migration with dignity*, Maamau envisions building climate change resilience through economic development and integration. The four-pillar system is supported by wealth, peace and security, infrastructure upgrades and good governance and promotes natural, human and cultural capital. Economic development goals of the Kiribati Vision 20 aim for strategic investment in fishing industries, tourism, marine infrastructure, and deep-sea mining (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018). Maamau's government has billed the Kiribati Vision 20 as an aim to transform Kiribati to be the "Dubai or Singapore of the Pacific."

With 3.5 million square kilometres of Pacific Ocean, the fishing industry supports

Kiribati's fledgling economy through the payment of licensing fees under the vessel day scheme. According to the Office of the President (2018), license fees generated A\$197.8 million in 2015. To increase revenue, the Kiribati Vision 20 sets out to invest in local marine added-value infrastructure projects and further integration of local fisherman into the foreign vessel dominated sector through strategic investment in long line vessels. Realizing these initiatives will necessitate the investment in local port infrastructure that is often non-existent on many outer-islands. The lack of ports on outer-islands not only complicates inter-island trade, but also the arrival of aid during natural disasters. Under the Kiribati Vision 20, fisheries revenue would increase to A\$1.2 billion by 2036 (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018, p. 18). Current fishing license regimes have done little to promote inclusion of the local fishing community. Under the Kiribati Vision 20, Maamau calls for medium sized, long line vessel fleet development and changes to current long line quota systems to promote further sustainability. In order to facilitate the domestic fishing sector, transhipment hubs in the port of Betio and Kiritimati Island are expected to be developed by 2027 and 2036 respectively (p. 63).

Tourism also plays a crucial role in the development of domestic economies under the Kiribati Vision 20. As Kiribati is a small atoll nation with limited resources and complex logistical barriers, Maamau envision the development of luxury, eco-tourist hotels in South Tarawa and Kiritimati Island akin to the Maldives. Development of the tourism sector would not only provide employment opportunities for locals, but also for returning migrant workers employed in the Australian hospitality industry (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018). The Kiribati Vision 20 digresses from the narrative of Kiribati as a victim of climate change destined for relocation. Through economic growth, the policy seeks to build resilience to climate change rather than adapt through migration. The plan calls for development of outer-islands to ease overpopulation in the urban center of South Tarawa. Employment would then be generated through investment in medium sized, long line vessel fleets and in development of luxury eco-tourism.

2.7 Kiribati summarized

This chapter has offered insight into the history and current political climate of Kiribati and set a stage for the field site of this master thesis. Prior to colonialization, Kiribati was a collection of clan-based atolls centered around iconic maneabas (Talu & Alaima II, 1979, p. 13). As a UK colony, development of the urban center in South Tarawa commenced. Education and employment opportunities offered an alternative to the hard labor associated with outer-island sustainable lifestyles. Continued development and the dismantlement of barriers for post-colonial immigration to Tarawa led to overpopulation in South Tarawa. While South Tarawa continues to urbanize and grow, the economy of Kiribati is hampered by remoteness and a lack of natural resources (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018). Depletion of phosphate reserves during colonial times has left Kiribati reliant on income from the tuna industry and foreign aid. With limited economic activity, the government remains the main procurer of employment.

The modern Kiribati political landscape has been dominated by fears of climate change. Under the direction of former president, Anote Tong, policy aims in Kiribati pushed an agenda of *migration with dignity* where labor mobility was billed as an adaptation to climate change. Publicity of Kiribati's plight led to a distinction as the sinking islands and led to the eventual acquisition of land in Fiji as the future destination of the i-Kiribati climate displaced persons (Ellsmoor and Rosen, 2016; Farbotko, Stratford and Lazrus, 2016). The Maamau administration however has changed course away from migration as an adaptation and seeks to build resilience through economic development under the long-term Kiribati Vision 20 initiative.

3. Conceptualization of Household Cooperative Conflict in the Context of Multilocality

In line with the research question (see chapter 1), this chapter seeks to build a theoretical framework between mobility and household bargaining power. Using an interlude between household bargaining and a tendency of multilocality leading to rural-urban migration of transnational migrant workers, this theoretical framework not only allows for understanding of growing settlement in South Tarawa, but also of the renegotiated household power structure. As potential labor migrants shift from outer-island sustainable livelihoods to entrance into labor mobility schemes, power relations within the household change considerably. Household gender imbalances are renegotiated and reconstructed through the transnational scope of labor mobility that can only be understood by the nexus of theories on households and labor mobility. This chapter is split into three sections and will discuss Sen's theory of cooperative conflict, multilocality, and a synthesis of cooperative conflict and multilocality in the context of mobility in Kiribati.

3.1 Household power structures and strategy

Sen (1987) interprets the household from a development economist point of view as a space of cooperative conflict. Working together in cooperation, members of the household aim to increase access to goods and services for the benefit of the household. Although the household cooperates on mutually beneficial goals that elevate all household members, accumulation strategies lead to internal conflict that can lead to a point of dissolution referred to as the breakdown position. In cooperative conflict, however, household members bargain for both allocated household labor roles as well as the allocation of goods and services. In some cases, allocation is more implicit depending on social norms. Should a household member consider leaving (i.e., divorce), the breakaway member would attain a maximum well-being outside of the household that is often referred to as the "fallback position". The fallback position of any household member depends on factors, including education attainment, ability to secure paid employment, professional training, age, health, and in most cases gender in which women can contextually be disadvantaged. Taking into account an individual's fallback position, bargaining power where an individual has less to lose through household conflicts achieve favourable outcomes in the distribution of household labor and consumption (Seiz, 1995, p. 24-25).

The point of household dissolution (divorce) is referred to by Sen (1987) as household breakdown position (p. 17-18). In the model of cooperative conflict, Sen further describes a scenario where household breakdown depends on the directional factors of: "well-being levels at the breakdown points, perceived interests, and perceived contributions." (p. 21) Household members thus have varying levels of influence over household outcomes. Additional factors such as age, education attainment, and local social constructs contribute to a household member's bargaining power in cooperative conflicts. Bargaining power in the rural household setting results from perceived household contribution that often results in a patriarchal hierarchy. Gender in rural households influences bargaining power due to the perceived value of monetary and/or physical contributions that favor male household members. The female household voice

is suppressed in conflict until the point of a breakdown in negotiations (p. 25).

Focusing on the breakdown point in household conflicts, bargaining positions are strengthened or weakened depending on an individual's breakdown position. Individuals with more to lose in a household breakdown are thus disadvantaged in their bargaining powers and are often manipulated through threats that influence perceived outcomes. Solutions thus become more influenced by perceived interest than by resulting well-beings. Breakdown responses can therefore be influenced by perceived interest. Sen postulates that negative well-being at the breakdown point is related to the negative well-being following a collusive solution and notes that: "Given other things, if the breakdown position of one person were worse in terms of well-being, then the collusive solution, if different, would be less favourable to his or her well-being." (Sen, 1987, p. 22)

3.1.1 Perceived contribution of gendered roles in subsistence-based household settings

"In the stylized 'primitive' situation, the disadvantages of women in terms of 'breakdown response' would relate greatly to purely physical factors, even though the role of physical factors will be governed by social conditions." (Sen, 1987, p. 25)

Whether through paid employment, hunting and gathering, or caregiving, a sustainable household depends on a plethora of job (Sen, 1987). The labor role of a household member affects bargaining power in conflict resolution. Although all members of the household may contribute equal energy to supporting the household, bargaining power in the paid-employment setting favors the highest paid individual. Household bargaining power is thus influenced through an individual's perceived contributions to the household (p. 25). Women in male controlled households, where the male member of household seeks paid employment and the female remains at home as a caregiver face a disadvantaged bargaining position.

Sen's model of comparative conflict describes a scenario where women in rural settings remain at a disadvantage to male heads of household. According to Sen, male household members in rural households attain the highest perceived household contribution through either manual or wage labor. In cases where female caregivers often side in the perceived best interest of other household members, males have autonomy due to a higher perceived household contribution to negotiate solutions in line with personal interests and wellbeing. While women in more developed context may enjoy greater bargaining power, gender gaps in education and wages are factors that continually reproduce a gendered advantage to male dominated conflict resolution (Sen, 1987).

According to Kaspar (2006), female household members are often limited to deciding operational factors of the household. Although females may have influence over more important strategic trajectories, strategy is often decided unilaterally by male heads of household. Additionally, Kaspar (2006) states that there exists a stark divide in levels of female empowerment between nuclear households consisting of parents and dependent children and extended households. While in nuclear households, females were elevated to decision-making roles in the absence of male head of households, extended households showed an opposing trend in which household decisions were further consolidated to elder male household figures. The absence of the husband not only concentrates increasing decision-making power with a father-in-law, for example, but also represents the loss of the husband's ability to mediate on behalf of the wife, resulting in lower bargaining power. Any increased autonomy generally reverts to household norms after male household members return. Kaspar notes, however that even after male members return, female household members enjoy increased agency in financial affairs and in community-based participation. In the absence of male household members, the role of female decision-making can also be limited by an expectation to consult the absent male household members (pp. 298-299).

3.1.2 Bargaining Power within household hierarchies

According to Seiz (1995), the gendered inequalities of bargaining power begin at the most basic act of household cooperative conflict: formal establishment of the household (i.e.,

marriage). The example of marriage can thus be understood as household bargaining, where two individuals weigh not only the perceived benefit of marriage versus a fallback position of being single, but also the perceived social benefits of the union. Seiz (1991, 1995) realizes using a neoclassic household model where a household remains in a perpetual process of negotiations to increase utility, a process that includes conflict, compromise, and constant household bargaining. As previously acknowledged, household bargaining occurs over consumption and the division of labor (1991). In rural societies, the household division of labor limited the role of female household members to domestic and childcare roles. In the context of household bargaining and conflict, household members leverage perceived contribution within social contexts that additionally favor male household members. The gendered household roles relegated to female household members hold minimal perceived household contribution (1995).

According to Sen (1987), sustainable households depend on the contribution of household members whether through paid labor, food procurement, manual labor, or domestic work. The member's bargaining power, however, differs not only depending on gender, but also on the comparative perceived contribution to household strategy. While all members may contribute equally to a household's well-being, in the absence of social norms dictating otherwise, the highest-paid household member has the highest perceived-contribution (Sen, 1987, p. 25). Females in patriarchal societies where female household roles are limited to domestic work and men participate in extra-household labor, face household bargaining barriers. Agarwal (1990; Agarwal and Bina, 1995) argues, however, that it is not the female's barrier to enter the labor market that is at issue, but social constructs where the agency of females to achieve favorable outcomes is restricted (Jackson and Pearson, 1998, p. 142). In some cases, bargaining power can be further restricted through threats of violence and coercion.

On a more sobering note, the work of Vyas *et al.* (Vyas and Watts, 2009; Vyas, Mbwambo and Heise, 2015) in Tanzania highlighted a complex relationship between the role of female employment and domestic violence. In their study, household bargaining that had deteriorated to threats and acts of domestic violence led female household members to seek paid employment outside of the household to improve bargaining capacity. In some

cases, however, the female's entry into employment was perceived as provocation for further domestic violence. Although there was risk of increased domestic violence, Vyas *et al.* found that continued employment empowered female household members through access and control of individual assets. Additionally, the paid employment allowed female household members to contribute directly to household support and in some cases support extra-household relatives, build savings, and allow for land acquisitions showing an improvement of fallback position and thus improved household bargaining power. Vyas *et al* thus found that female employment not only positively affected individual bargaining power through a higher perceived contribution but mitigated potential conflicts that would have otherwise resulted (2015, p. 55).

3.1.3 Criticism of the cooperative conflict model

Criticism of Sen's model of cooperative conflict continues to revolve around the argument that female household members are blinded to their gendered interest by an assumption that their bargaining position favors the perceived collective household's well-being and are thus unaware of individual well-being. Agarwal (1990), as previously discussed, sees the female's choice to side with the collective well-being during a conflict more as a social construct where the female household member is aware of their individual well-being but restricted by social norms. Apffel-Marglin and Simon (1994) additionally suggest that the selfless acts of female household members relinquished bargaining position is a reflection of "nature over nurture." Kandiyoti (1988) states, however, that the arguments of removing agency from the female's bargaining position in a household conflict risk negating the role of women in predominately subsistence-based households to a separate "otherness" that would not allow for a means of empowerment (p. 140). Jackson (2013) argues that a perception of female household members relegated to a position as "the other" in a binary relationship with male household members should not limit an understanding of females as subservient household members under spouses and dependent children. The assumption of female household members without an individual perceived well-being in which gendered household roles become binary, has the danger of not only underestimating the female agency in cooperative conflict, but also of assuming that men act solely out of self-interest and neglect collective household well-

being (Jackson, 2013, p. 27).

3.2 Multilocality: from circular to rural-urban migration

Labor mobility is a vital livelihood strategy for the world's most remote communities (Mandel, 2004). Whether to fund household education attainment or to support household expenditures, Sassen (2005) explains that labor shortages in domestic and international labor markets lure rural populations with the promise of paid employment, while adding that sustained labor mobility benefits both sending and receiving communities. While sending households benefit obviously from remittances, receiving labor markets benefit from an availability of labor to fill labor gaps in areas including aged care, construction, domestic work, horticulture, hospitality, etc. Due to an increasing prevalence of labor mobility, the topic remains a key theme of academic research. Although labor mobility exists on a national scale, transnational labor mobility plays a pivotal role in popular media and political debate. Whether it be Mexican farmers in the United States, Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, or South Asian construction workers in the middle east, transnational labor mobility exists on a global scale (Sassen 2005). In the context of this study, i-Kiribati migrant workers have been employed in Australia, the Cook Islands, and New Zealand and aboard container vessels at sea. Migrant workers through their connections to home countries and receiving countries begin to build multilocal social capital on a transnational scale.

In addition to local nodes in sending and receiving countries, migrant workers from rural Kyrgyzstan, for example, working in neighboring Kazakhstan and Russia were found to gravitate toward a third node. In her research, Thieme (2014) found that the Kyrgyz migrant workers of rural backgrounds were increasingly motivated to relocate to the national urban centers of Osh and Bishkek, leaving minor dependants and elderly household members behind in rural Kyrgyzstan (Thieme, 2014). According to Thieme, social capital had been a driver behind the domestic, rural-urban migration where the urban center became a place of residence for migrant workers. Urban centers provided

migrant workers with influential social contacts that facilitated access to further employment in receiving countries.

3.2.1 Transnational mobility leading to multilocality

International migration additionally exists on a transnational space where migrants straddle social capital of transnational multilocalities simultaneously (Pries, 2001). Identities of migrants in a new country extend beyond national borders through social and political links. From an economic point of view, Schiller *et al.* (1995) point to three underlying roots of transnational identity. Firstly, migrants experience social and financial insecurity in both home and receiving countries due to the continued global shift in capital. Insecurities are further complicated by underlying racism in global centers of capitalism further limiting integration into the receiving country. As immigrants maintain ties with home countries and increase ties in the receiving country, transnationality is cemented through underlying political loyalties linked to the immigrant's changing national identity (p. 50). Whether participating in circular labor migration as planned household strategy or as displaced refugees, Pries (2001) notes that migrants maintain transnational identities facilitated by increased access to improved communication technologies. In cases of temporary migration, communication between household members separated by transnational boundaries may implicitly or explicitly affect household bargaining and decision-making for the procurement of goods and services. International migration theory has previously focused on the relationship between migrants and return migrants. Advances in transport in the 20th century, however, have led to transnational migration in which transnational multilocal nodes can be sustained by migrants with ever-increasing ease (Pries, 2001, p. 68).

According to Dannecker (2005), transnational space not only affects the migrant, but also members of the household left behind. The transnational space and social context are increasingly transformed in multilocal spaces where gender roles can be reconstructed around an expanded context. As Dannecker found to be the case in Bangladesh, access to the transnational space through migration often favors the rigid gender structure (of

Bangladesh) in which men find favorable support to migrate. Men in Dannecker's study sought to reproduce the local context of gender relations through the guise of religion. Local contexts, however, are difficult to effectively replicate in transnational space where access is dictated and influenced by external dimensions. According to Dannecker, "Women will move, regardless of politics and discourses in Bangladesh. They will initiate further transformations of gender and power relations" (Dannecker, 2005, p. 668)

3.2.2 Circular migration

As migration increasingly becomes a contested topic within political circles, temporary and circular labor migration continues to gain acceptance by stakeholders seeking to fill employment gaps against growing opposition to migration. According to Vertovec (2007), not only are temporary labor migrants benefiting receiving economies, but the increasing benefit of transnational migrant remittances and their benefit to spur development in sending states has been explored in literature. Stakeholders are drawn by the perceived benefits to receiving states, development in sending states, and households in places of origin realised through quick access to expanded labor markets. Additionally, receiving countries mitigate substantial risk of migrants through technological improvements that allow monitoring through smart borders and expanded databases. The benefits of temporary labor migration, however, have been slow to lead to political action and policies increasing labor mobility. While there are obvious benefits to remittances associated with circular migration for the sending country, receiving countries remain skeptical of the win-win-win scenario (Vertovec, 2007, p. 7).

Academic literature additionally remains cautious on the effects that circular migration has on sending communities and households in the place of origin. As Newland (2009) argues, the scholastic criticism of circular migration is often based on the perspective of observer dictated personal values that often cites social impacts of removing labor migrants from the local sending country context and the trauma associated with splitting up households along international borders. In some cases, the out-migration of labor migrants has been criticised for leading to brain drain in the global south. Stakeholders favoring temporary migration over resettlement in the receiving country have used the

convenience of transnational social constructs to hire, as Newland suggests, young male candidates with strong family attachment in the sending local. As circular migration has evolved, however, policy makers have begun promoting stable circular migration with job security for migrants complying with program rules. Circular migration can be further enhanced through the proliferation of continued education opportunities and upward job mobility (Newland, 2009, p. 22).

3.2.3 From circular to rural-urban migration

According to Lucas (2004), theories on rural-urban migration and economic development are linked to scholastic literature on the process of urbanization. Owing to technological advances in a post-colonial setting, the world population within a few decades moved from a largely agriculture-based economy to a predominately urban fuelled capitalist engine. As rural-urban migration become less restrictive, Lucas (2004) postulates that rural migrants filled unskilled labor gaps in urban centers that grew out of the increased skill sets of urbanites. The urban centers not only offered paid employment opportunities for rural migrants but also served as a center for education, opportunity, and leisure on both an individual and household level. The unique juxtaposition of the rural and urban spaces fuelled a diverging level of skill sets leading to a rural/urban divide that inevitably drew more migrants to the city. As Lucas notes, set skills accumulated by rural migrants were connected to skill sets available in the receiving urban centers (Lucas, 2004, pp. S54-55).

In the thematic context of this thesis, the post-colonial Pacific region has experienced clear trends toward urbanisation from outer-islands and remote communities to urban centers remnant of the colonial-era. Kiribati, Fiji, and Vanuatu continue to experience concentrated urban population growth (often double the population growth of rural areas) leading to overcrowded conditions and increased competition for scarce resources (Storey, 2006). Unlike other island nations in the Pacific, Fiji has faced urban-rural migration that is increasingly due to a racial divide and indigenous land rights that followed unrest in 2000. In Fiji, urbanisation has centered around Suva and Lautoka on Viti Levu. Unlike Suva and Lautoka, the draw of i-Kiribati to South Tarawa is in line with

Luca's understanding of urbanization that perceived a polarized urban center as a hub of education, opportunity and leisure. According to Storey (2006), the population of South Tarawa grew 5.2% solely within a 5-year span leading up to 2000. As the only urban center in Kiribati, the 28km-long sliver of land constituting South Tarawa is now home to half of the national population suffering from severely over-crowded conditions (Storey, 2006, p. 8).

3.3 Linking multilocality with household power structures and strategy

"In the case of migration, it is not only those who migrate but also those who do not who are affected by migration, and this includes both the family members who remain behind and the people in the receiving area. They all have to renegotiate their positions and needs; this can open up new opportunities but can also reinforce or create new power imbalances." (Thieme, 2008)

To understand the spatial and social effects of labor mobility on Kiribati, a multi-theory approach that incorporates both the spatial trajectory and household dynamics of mobility is necessary. During fieldwork, the researcher observed a Pacific region that can be understood as an anomaly where remoteness and isolation have allowed communities to sustainably maintain historic livelihoods in metaphoric bubbles immune from outside influence. Growing geopolitical influence, however, has courted the attention of regional partners that have offered the rare opportunity for rural households on these remote islands to access the world's most developed markets. The unique access has opened a transnational space between the dichotomy of remote, rural households that during colonial times had little use for monetary instruments and the cosmopolitan centers in Australia and New Zealand within a state sponsored employment regime. Migrant workers leave subsistence lifestyles for financial accumulation and begin a multilocal shift, relying on social capital in the receiving country, the urban center of South Tarawa, and the place of origin. Within the resulting transnational space, household labor roles are reconstructed and gendered roles are contested as employer-driven employment schemes request female migrant workers. The fallback level of female migrant workers thus increases to incontestable levels.

Migrant workers in transnational households contribute to household strategy and thus individual household bargaining power is improved through the increased economic solvency (Antman, 2014). As Antman (2014) found, female employment positively affects ability to negotiate preferential household outcomes (p. 563). Tufour *et al.* (2016) further explored the specific issue of gender and changing household power structures in the context of Ghanaian returning migrant workers in which gender was contextualized as a process. Female migrant workers returning from urban centers to rural households successfully negotiated household cooperative relationships to affect household outcomes. To successfully improve outcomes however, returning female migrant workers maintained cooperative relationships with male and elderly heads of household. By maintaining cooperative relationships, returning female workers maintained control of assets and participation in entrepreneurial activities. The household power structure of female returning workers was thus defined in a context of contradictory household roles both as caregivers in the patriarchal household and as traders in an entrepreneurial capacity (p. 1492-1493).

Although this chapter has highlighted many of the positive aspects of migration, it shall be noted that migrants are often marginalized in the receiving context and are thus vulnerable (Thieme, 2008). According to Ellis (2003), migrants live on the edge between success and failure. The rights of temporary circular migrants remain dubious and affected by a lack of social and economic capital in the receiving state, as well as a general lack of knowledge on labor rights. While wages and remittances may improve household living conditions in the place of origin, the wages are not sufficient to allow for significant access to social capital and thus increased empowerment of the labor migrant in the receiving state (Thieme, 2008). Much like the cycle of circular migration, the labor migrant's social capital in the receiving country can be affected by issues of racism and limited social capital and households benefit from transnational scales (Schiller, Basch and Blanc, 1995, p. 50). An analysis of the unique opportunity for pure-Kiribati households to enter labor mobility schemes cannot thus be understood without an understanding of both multilocality and the resulting power shifts in the household. This study thus becomes less of a study on the social effects of labor mobility and instead morphs into a narrative of the dynamic i-Kiribati household as it is moulded through the process of finding, often transnational, multilocality.

4. Methodology

This qualitative study represents an iterative process that has evolved from initial interest in the theory of place attachment into a study of social and spatial household impacts of mobility in Kiribati through a framework of the model of cooperative conflict and multilocality. The abductive research process supplements an ethnographic approach that seeks a novel answer to the research gap that questions the outcome of *migration with dignity.* To answer the research question (How does mobility affect household power relations on a multilocal scale in Kiribati?) fieldwork was undertaken while imbedded in the Kiribati Ministry of Employment and Human Resources (MEHR) between July and September of 2018.

This chapter is broken down into six sections. These include ethnographic approach, positionality, sampling strategy, data collection and data analysis. The sections of ethnographic approach and positionality seek to position the researcher's background as it pertains to the approach of this study. The sampling and data collection sections justify the basis of the fieldwork undertaken in Kiribati. The data collection section is further broken down into sections on expert interviews, participant observation, and episodic interviews. The data analysis section explains the abductive and grounded theory approach to collecting and interpreting the data. The chapter finishes up with a review of the limitations of this study.

4.1 Ethnographic approach

When approaching a research topic from a decentralised point of view and with a commitment to interpreting meanings, the ethnographic approach becomes a central ethos to understanding local institutions (Bevir, 2011). Researchers of ethnography seek immersion and assimilation into the local context of fieldwork to understand the research topic from a bottom-up point of view. Assimilation into the field site may include learning new languages, living with local families, or extended periods of fieldwork. Ethnography is a common approach for qualitative research in remote locations, including Kiribati (Harrison, 2018) and is associated with data collection through participant observation. The participant observations often include qualitative interviews and long stints in archives reviewing and analysing historic documents to build local narratives (Castree, Kitchin and Rogers, 2016, p. 139).

In the case of this study, the researcher was embedded in the Kiribati Ministry of Employment and Human Resources for the duration of the fieldtrip, relying on participant observation through shadowing, expert interviews, and episodic interviews to explain the social and spatial impacts of mobility in Kiribati. The ethnographic approach, however, did not start with fieldwork, but had been a slow process of acclimatization into the i-Kiribati diaspora in Switzerland beginning six years prior. Previous background and networks facilitated quick acceptance and entrance into the local setting, including ministerial shadowing that began upon arrival.

4.2 Positionality

According to Rose (1997), the advantage of the qualitative researcher in data collection and analysis lies in the commonality that positionality is unique. Each researcher enters the field through a lens of ontology, epistemology, personal experience and world views that cannot be replicated. When conducting fieldwork, positionality is not only about the researcher's perception of the field but equally about how the field interacts with the researcher. This existential co-perception becomes a unique gate keeper to gathering

data (Rose, 1997). Reflecting one's positionality, although never entirely possible, allows for greater understanding of the individualistic qualitative lens through which the data was analysed.

As will be discussed later (section 5.1.2), foreigners in Kiribati are referred to as i-Matangs, a reference to the similarity in appearance of arriving European explorers to local deities. Since colonization, an often-amicable relationship grew between i-Matangs and i-Kiribati. Although the relationship is amicable, foreigners are often met with initial scepticism. As a Caucasian-European male, the researcher was immediately perceived by interviewees as foreign. An extensive local network, however, allowed for quick acceptance that included acceptance into a local household. Additionally, being embedded in the local government, interviewees initially questioned the researcher's role in labor mobility schemes, especially during the roll-out of the Pacific Labour Scheme. In the context of the ministerial office gender was not a factor for interviewees.

4.3 Sampling strategy

In an effort to answer the research question within the context of interview constraints, potential key informants (episodic interviews) were targeted based on participation in labor mobility schemes. Access to initial informants was arranged by MEHR as the gatekeeper. Subsequent informants relied on snowball sampling and the diverging group of gatekeepers that consisted of prior interviewees, both for episodic as well as expert interviews. To guarantee data rich cases, interviewees were chosen based on a balance of genders, home island, and three categories, mainly: returning migrant workers, applicants for labor mobility schemes, and non-participants in labor mobility schemes. Although every effort was made for non-binary genders and a range of ages groups, a lack of available participants hampered efforts.

Snowball sampling offers researchers the opportunity to quickly gain access to data-rich cases in new and unfamiliar settings (Sedgwick, 2013). Utilizing a network of gate-

keepers, researchers use the extended network to quickly and efficiently access targeted key informants. MEHR, for instance was able to quickly identify and locate participants and applicants from all labor mobility schemes. Due to the volume of contacts at MEHR, potential informants were easily screened for select target groups that ensured diversity of the data pool. The potential informants were then cold-called by MEHR (or in some cases prior-interviewees) who would often arrange for key informants in concurrent sessions to reduce data collection lag time. Procuring potential expert interviewees also relied on snowball sampling in which prior-interviewees served as gate-keepers. Before contacting potential interviewees, the candidate's thematic positionality and prior works were carefully reviewed. All expert interviews were arranged through cold-calling following a personal introduction from prior-interviewees.

A unique challenge of sampling for the episodic interviews came in the form of convincing potential informants that interviews would in no way impact potential access to labor mobility schemes. Although this was not an issue for returning workers and non-applicants, the issue became problematic during the roll-out phase of the Pacific Labour Scheme when more than 1,000 applicants transcended on the ministry's office[1]. Taking advantage of the raw access to the pool of applicants, several applicants were requested to participate in the research project fuelling local rumours that interview participants were being offered employment. To quell demands by applicants to be interviewed, the objectives of the interviews were clearly explained and were handled more discreetly.

A breakdown of the interviews showed a gendered distribution of ten female, ten male, and one key informant not fitting into binary gender categories. Although there was hope for generational diversity, owing to the age-restrictions on labor mobility schemes, the age of the key informant pool thus ranged from 21 to 43. Of the informants, twelve had been employed in a labor mobility scheme, five applied as labor mobility scheme candidates, four were uninterested in labor mobility schemes, one had been a Latter-Day Saint missionary, and six had been educated overseas.

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[1] Source: observed by researcher during September 2018.

4.4 Primary data collection

Table 2: Breakdown of Interviews

Interview Type	Quantity
Expert	11
Key Informant	21
Combination Expert/Key Informant	3
Total	*35*

Design: Marazita, 2019

The ethnographic approach employed in this study allowed for a multitier approach to data collection that included participant observation, interviews, and ministerial shadowing. The multitier data collection approach along with a unique positionality allowed for an innovative production of knowledge using: interviews (see Table 2), shadowing, and participant observations to answer the research question: How does mobility affect household power relations on a multilocal scale in Kiribati?

4.4.1 Expert interviews

" Expert knowledge…at a more fundamental level, signifies the knowledge one needs to probe into the causes of problems and the principles of problem-solving strategies." (Pfadenhauer, 2016, p. 82)

Fourteen unstructured expert interviews (see Table 2) were conducted spanning academia, government, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and multi-national institutions. For the purpose of this study, experts were purposefully chosen for their ability to influence thematic policy and thus included heads of diplomatic missions, influential members of development-aid organizations, published academics, and executive level ministry officials. Interviews were conducted on location in Switzerland, Hong Kong, Australia, Fiji, and Kiribati. The unstructured interview guide was chosen to

facilitate the gap in knowledge between the quasi-expert researcher and the professional expert (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p. 40). The context of the unstructured interview offered the advantage that experts constrained by time limits were not limited by an interview guide that reflected the assumptions of the quasi-expert researcher. To combat personal biases, expert interviewees were carefully chosen to reveal wide ranging views on the subject and included not only finding a transdisciplinary group of interviewees, but also experts from diverse geographic locals through triangulation.

The goal of expert interviews is to grasp expert knowledge that can be a tool in multi-method approaches to triangulate data (Bogner and Menz, 2016, p. 47). A debate around defining the expert exists but in the interest of relevance to triangulating data in a context of vast thematic research gaps, this study used a sociology of knowledge approach to define the expert. Within the framework of sociology, the expert can be understood to be an individual assumed to have broad thematic knowledge reinforced through their professional capacity that effectively limits the participation of lay individuals (pp. 50–52). Expert knowledge provides significant individual and organizational insight into topics that may be otherwise undecipherable through other methods (p. 4). In the context of ever-evolving negotiations on mobility and a lack of recent research in Kiribati, expert knowledge offered a vital connection to current debates that was triangulated with episodic interviews and participant observations.

Experts often requested that interviews be off the record due to the political sensitivity of climate change and migration. Off the record interviews permitted greater freedom of expression and frankness from the expert point of view. Responses commonly included personal experiences in the field, frustrations, and frank comments on the current state of affairs. These thoughts offered experiences that are often absent from academic research and demonstrated a complexity to the relationships between climate change, mobility, and the resolve of policy makers. In lieu of recordings and transcriptions, notes were taken during the interviews, the results of which shaped the background of the research topic. Three expert interviews in Kiribati, however, were recorded and transcribed. The objective of expert interviews focused on the perceived link between Kiribati, climate change, and migration.

4.4.2 Participation observation through ministerial shadowing

Shadowing allows the researcher to observe ministerial level procedures while embedded within the government allowing for a positionality that morphs into participant observation (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010, pp. 104–106). Participant observation from a ministerial point of view offers unique access to policy makers and government procedure that offers researchers an articulated understanding of bureaucratic negotiations that are not always apparent in public sentiment. Ministerial shadowing considers participant observation ranging from informal office discussions to more formal interviews with senior staff.

The Ministry of Employment and Human Resources is charged with labor mobility and overseas both the Kiribati Institute of Technology and the Marine Training Centre. The ministry is overseen by the Minister and a permanent Secretary in a hierarchal structure. Being embedded in the ministry offered the advantage of observing labour mobility from both a top-down and bottom-up point of view. Ministerial access allowed not only for reliably sourcing experts and accessing the most relevant policy documents, but also for accessing labor mobility scheme participants and candidates at a crucial time for the implementation of the Pacific Labour Scheme.

4.4.3 Episodic interviews

Between July and September 2018, 21 semi-structured episodic interviews were undertaken. The interviews lasted between 10 minutes and 1.5 hours with an average of 44 minutes and were conducted in English (with a translator available for 2 interviews). To ensure coherence in the data analysis phase, an interview guide consisting of five thematic flip-cards (see Appendix) was used at discretion depending on the trajectory of the interview. The semi-structured interview approach facilitated easily comparable data sets in the context of non-repeatable interviews (Adams, 2015). Interview guides formed a framework to guide conversations but were not rigid and served mostly as a means to fill benchmark criterion. In contrast to structured interviews, the semi-structured format allowed interviewees to personalize interviews through tangents and

personal interests that deviated from interview guides (Flick, 2000, p. 193). In the case of the mobility in Kiribati, key informants freely recounted experiences abroad, hardships, and dreams of better futures. While the interviews hit the benchmarks of the interview guide, additional commentary and narratives produced rich and diverse data sets that were analysed within the boundaries of the research question.

The semi-structured approach was supported through episodic interviews focusing on the production of episodic and semantic knowledge. According to Flick (2010), episodic knowledge is produced through key informants recounting personal narratives, while semantic knowledge builds on assumptions (p. 185). The episodic interview approach allowed for data sets that examined questions in line with the theories on household and translocality while offering flexibility to expand on the key informants' personal narratives and perceptions with a goal to find a nexus between the theoretical and the narrative. The semi-structured episodic interview format facilitated data collection among the diverse group of returning workers, potential candidates and non-participants (p. 185-187). Through analysing the divergent narratives found in the data sets, the social and spatial impacts of mobility in the context of Kiribati blossomed into a web of domestic and international mobility where power structures grew and morphed with the elevated status associated with employment.

The i-Kiribati household is a unique institution that interviewees often simplified owing to a lack of precise vocabulary. In line with the findings of researchers using surveys in Kiribati (Oakes, Milan and Campbell, 2016), interviewees often eluded to short, simplified answers to interview questions that reflected the interviewee's perception of the researcher's interest. Episodic interviewees however allowed interviewees to explore the complexity of i-Kiribati households that would otherwise be over-simplified when described in English. Through the extended narratives, interviewees revealed episodic knowledge that detailed not only household relationships and mobility history, but more personal narratives and goals of emigration re-enforced by expressed household strategy.

4.5 Grounded theory and primary data analysis

Grounded theory is a methodological framework that sets a systematic approach to theory production (Charmaz, 1996; Rennie, 1998; Wuetherick, 2010). Although not exclusive to qualitative research, grounded theory relies on data saturation and can be a part of the iterative process (Rennie, 1998). As Charmaz (1996) elaborates, grounded theory requires a fluid process of data collection and analysis supplemented through memos that facilitates a continuously updated interview guide that serve to verify and modify assumptions and preliminary theories. Sampling thus focuses on supporting emerging theories that emerge from memos (p. 28). Selective coding of data further seeks to enhance the resulting process through a visual model (Wuetherick, 2010).

New phenomena and research topics with little scientific background fit well with a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is however not suitable for data sets that fit into previously developed theoretical frameworks. The topics of Kiribati, climate change, and climate migration were by no means novel topics in research. Previous researcher had pointed to the sustainable livelihoods approach, for example, to demonstrate a relationship between labor mobility as a climate change adaptation (Campbell, 2010). While the topic of this project may seem to be well saturated in academia, a closer look at the methodology of previous studies reveals a novelty to this project's fieldwork. The positionality revealed data from the qualitative interviews that diverged from previous research and for which grounded theory was advantageous.

Grounded theory is not limited to qualitative research and thus can be approached from the inductive and deductive dichotomy. In both quantitative and qualitative research, grounded theory can take a deductive reasoning approach (Castree, Kitchin and Rogers, 2016, p. 201). Qualitative research however often uses inductive reasoning, relying on prior memories and experiences to predict future occurrences. Due to the nascent *migration with dignity* initiative, qualitative researches have been unable to inductively link labor mobility and climate change adaptation. In most cases qualitative research is

linked to an inductive approach. Schools of reasoning, however, are not limited to this dichotomy, and additionally offer an abductive approach.

Temporal limitations of inductive reasoning in grounded theory production have been debated. Since there can be no assumed link between past experiences and future results, Timmermans and Tavory (2012) argue that there are limitations to the compatibility of an inductive approach to grounded theory. Abductive reasoning, however, relies on identifying novel occurrences that are temporally contextualized and negate the limits of past events associated with inductive reasoning and thus aids researchers to quickly and effectively situate new occurrences (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). Although this novel point of view can be used by both qualitative and quantitative researchers, abductive reasoning is commonly associated with criminal investigations. Abductive reasoning aims to find the most logical conclusion given the contextual data available for novel occurrences.

This study utilized the interpretative tradition of grounded theory that relied on personal narratives. According to Charmaz (1996), the interpretive tradition seeks to situate research topics through the concern and experiences of interviewees whether through concrete situations or personal reflections. The personified data is mobilized to promote theory generation. As data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, early narratives act to shape interview guides as the researcher aims to theorize encapsulated emotions and desires of interviewees (p. 30). Abductive reasoning allowed for an adequate approach to grounded theory that sought an "inference to the best explanation" of how mobility was constructed in Kiribati. The data analysis thus aimed to eliminate possible scenarios until the most logical explanation was revealed that broke from previous assumptions linked to livelihood frameworks and place attachment, instead pointing toward the model of cooperative conflicted and the theory of translocality.

4.6 Validity, Limitations, and Challenges

For background purposes, expert interviewees were chosen based on thematic reputation and included respected academics of climate migration, ambassadors and members of the diplomatic core, executive level government officials, members of parliament, representatives from development aid networks, and representatives from NGOs. As a passive observer in MEHR, the researcher benefited from open access to an abundance of migrant workers and applicants that were narrowed down to ensure diversity. The results of this study through triangulation thus represent a saturation of not only key informants, but of expert interviews. Initial findings were continually verified through participant observation and informal discussions within the context of the ministry. The conclusions of this study culminated from an instinctively iterative process.

As with all qualitative research, this study is limited by the positionality of the researcher. From conception to conclusion, positionality is inherent throughout the study. The data sets and analysis represent the lens of past experience and personal identity that is unique and unreproducible. Being a Caucasian male embedded in MEHR led to an initial perception of a power structure between the researcher and the key informants requiring constant reflection throughout data collection. Key informants had to be reminded that the researcher and participation in interviews would in no way affect employment in labor mobility schemes.

Although Kiribati is an English-speaking country owing to UK colonialization, language barriers were often a challenge. Any discussions on family situations were complicated through the uniqueness of i-Kiribati social norms, including transient households, understandings of employment and emigration. Questions often had to be repeated and open-ended questions necessitated follow-ups with simple yes-or-no answers. In an effort to bridge language barriers, translators were employed for two interviews with key informants. The initial translated interview was conducted using an employee of the ministry as a translator and resulted in suspicion by the key informant. While the foreign

researcher was perceived as being unbiased, the presence of the ministerial employee resulted in the shortest interview of the data set, lasting barely seven minutes. Additionally, as was the case with both the first and second translated interview, the translators seemed to feed key informants answers during pauses in responses. The using of a translator was quickly abandoned for a preference of slow and often repetitive interviews.

5. Analysis and Discussion

This chapter aims to present an analysis of the data collected during fieldwork. The chapter is split into 7 sections that aim to answer the 6 sub-research questions. In the first section, the social fabric of Kiribati will be explained as observed by the researcher. The following sections look at the reasons for mobility and the current mobility options offered to i-Kiribati. Next, this chapter will look at mobility barriers before focusing on household allocations of labor mobility wages and perceived vulnerabilities to climate change. Finally, the chapter will conclude by reviewing the interviewees' preferences for permanent out-migration.

5.1 Interpreting Household in the Social Fabric of Kiribati

Acknowledging that varying social structures exist on each island and that there are subsets of households that act as outliers, observations on South Tarawa revealed four general categories that affect household power structures that are represented by the four sections: social groups of Kiribati (5.1.1), gendered household hierarchies (5.1.2), labor distribution in the extended household context (5.1.3) and a discussion on crossing social boundaries(5.1.4). This section aims to answer research sub-question 1: How are cooperative households regulated in Kiribati?

5.1.1 The social groups of Kiribati: from pure-Kiribati to i-Matang

This section outlines the social dichotomy of the pure-Kiribati versus the i-Matang while acknowledging how religion and gender roles relate to social groups in the context of households.

Pure-Kiribati

The term pure-Kiribati is associated with individuals perceived to be the golden standard of "traditional practices." Extended households characterize both urban and rural communities in Kiribati. Not only does the extended family ensure sustainability, but also offers a refuge for individuals facing adversity in the harsh environmental context. Unlike other parts of the world, remoteness from any effective market economy limits access to otherwise common services, such as construction, food, restaurants, and leisure. To reduce household vulnerabilities to a lack of access, i-Kiribati families tend to be large. As one interviewee living in the urban center stated:

> *"There are currently 18 people in our home. We all sleep together without privacy. We have a private room for our 6-week old baby, so he doesn't get trampled, but the others sleep in the open space. It's my father in laws land."* (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Outside of the urban center, where markets are effectively non-existent, communities

depend on dynamic social relations between households to guarantee sustainable livelihoods. Households can be fluid in which individuals either move between various households as desired or occupy positions in multiple households simultaneously. One interviewee originating from the outer-islands noted, *"The people in the island are social, they move around. They go to each family."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018). In some cases, individuals can seem to be transient, following short term paid employment trends, social preferences, and/or hierarchal instructions.

Patriarchal hierarchies in pure-Kiribati households follow the *unimwane* system. The *unimwane* are the group of elder men that control access to the sacred maneaba and thus influence community decisions. The strict code of conduct governed by the *unimwane* differs between islands but are universally recognized as an association with one's home-island. The current republic with a centralized government, president and unicameral national parliament has greatly diminished the role of the *unimwane* (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018). The patriarchal elderhood system, however, remains where elder family members have discretion to dictate all household strategies, including work, mobility, education, and marriage. As an interviewee explained:

> *"We wanted to go to New Zealand, but my father said no. We wanted to do the New Zealand PAC, but my father said no. He said 'We're born here in Kiribati, we have to live here in Kiribati. No going there. You don't have to go there because this is you, Kiribati. You are born here…you have to die here.' So… from now on, I don't think to go overseas now. I have to stay with my family."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Although largely symbolic in modern times, the *unimwane* still holds influence in some outer-island communities. The *unimwane* in select communities are consulted to settle communal disputes or as a vote of confidence in times of doubt. Unlike the democratically elected parliament, the ranks of *unimwane* exclude female membership. Increasing female education attainment that has exceeded male counterparts has eroded the patriarchal system. As one expert from the outer-islands stated:

> *"We have the umani system. We acknowledge that and the unimwane also acknowledge the great contribution the women can make to the village. The women have their own associations in the respective villages and have their duties toward the respective villages and churches. The unimwane often ask the women for assistance. In the council, the women contest the*

> *seats and currently there's one lady in council."* (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018*)*

The pure-Kiribati household is a social fabric that adapts to changing circumstances of vulnerability and prosperity. The extended household can be composed in its basic form as a web of kinship but can also incorporate individuals from various families attached either loosely through necessity or more formally through commonly practiced local adoptions. The pure-Kiribati power relations depend less on perceived contribution and more under a patriarchal elderhood authority where the head of household can unilaterally limit household bargaining and extra-household affairs, including mobility.

I-Matang

If pure-Kiribati is understood as bearers of traditional social norms, i-Matang would represent the perceived bearer of foreign norms that originated with the first European settlers to the islands. From the pure-Kiribati point of view, any social deviation from the perceived pure-Kiribati set of social norms can be attributed to i-Matang culture including atheism, female alcohol consumption, promiscuity, ambition and greed. Pure-Kiribati would be ostracised for taking on perceived i-Matang characteristics and thus often face social barriers when returning from labor mobility schemes or even returning to rural home islands. Although the racial dichotomy is rigid, acceptance into both social groups is possible (but not guaranteed) through either marriage, family acceptance, or religion.

As a household unit, there are limited i-Matang households residing in Kiribati with most foreigners in the country, individually under the employment of foreign governments/aid projects, or as volunteers. Within the context of employment, many foreigners reside in motels which serve as the center of expat socializing and leisure. The restaurants and hotels frequented by expat groups serve as a rare reprieve from local subsistence lifestyles of, for example, many pure-Kiribati households. For most households excluding the highest paid government officials, the cost of the imported foods on offer bar i-Kiribati access to expat circles. Within the expat circles, home country (mostly Australia) social

norms are reproduced and restructured within the limitations of the limited local economy.

The Role of Religion

During early colonial occupation, missionary Hiram Bingham II oversaw a shift from indigenous religions to Christianity (Talu and Alaima II, 1979). Mirroring regional trends, Christianity has become a *de facto* subset of the local identity for both progressive and pure-Kiribati. Christian teachings are often taken literally and affect household decisions. One interviewee reflecting on the possibility of emigrating to New Zealand stated:

> *"I want [my son] to stay in Kiribati because the second coming is soon and overseas will be, I'm scared of the violence before Jesus' second coming. It depends on him, if he really wants to go overseas, it's his choice, but I prefer he stays in Kiribati until Jesus comes and we all fly up to him. That's our belief. We're working with our life but in the back of our mind, we just want to stay here because, we don't know, but the violence and signs before Jesus's coming would be less in Kiribati. There would be the time that the SDA would be allowed to buy food unless they have a chip in their... That's the worse sign, but hopefully we're not around when that time came. I want my son to grow up and make his plan according to God's plan."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Christianity is often connected to household identity and serves as a source of social capital. In the context of the subsistence livelihoods and remoteness, religion is not merely connected to morality, but rather membership in a church offers access to superior services (secondary schools and tertiary education), and even development and emergency aid. Christian missionaries from the United States have become ubiquitous on all atolls of Kiribati and share a unique positionality to local knowledge production. Nevertheless, community and island identity can be linked to membership in one church. As an expert discussing the role of religion on a home island described:

> *"My island is different from the rest. We believe in only one church. Life on the island is predominately associated with the church. People are most willing to help whatever church needs to be done. The women have their roles in the church, a lot are deacons. In both villages, we have female pastors. We are allocated those pastors from the churches here."* (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Within the social groups of i-Matang and pure-Kiribati, religion occupies a grey-area that is both foreign and local. In this context, religion holds practices associated with both social groups, most obviously the need for household financial contributions that within some churches were publicly disseminated as social pressure. For many households, the steep donations requested by church leaders hinder household livelihoods and are a stress on remittances. As one interviewee noted:

> *"I used to be [religion removed] and I would sometimes give 70AU$ every fortnight. Sometimes people sell you the bread and you have to pay 10AU$ for fundraising. I don't want to support these types of fundraising."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

The steep contributions from households dependent on subsistence livelihoods is justified by church leaders through perceived social pressures connected to responsibility. Churches stand largely autonomous from outside control mechanisms and thus there is no pressure from government factions to reign in on excessive donation requirements. As the interviewee continued:

> *"People here might need to be more aware that they don't need to give money to the church if they can't afford it. Sometimes they feel if they don't give money it's a sin, but if the government would openly tell them to look after their children first, then they might listen. Especially the [denominations removed]. The mentality is that if they don't pay it, God will punish them. Sometimes the money is used for the maintenance of the Maneaba, some goes to the Pastor, some to the Priest to maintain electricity and the rest I don't know."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Further reform of donations is thus limited by the lobbying power of the major religions in Kiribati. Given the role of religion in personal identity and a community's access to superior public services, the electability of politicians is connected to church relations. As an interviewee described:

> *"It's hard for the government…because politicians can't talk openly about it, as the church would not support that candidate. The [denominations removed] are very powerful with many voters."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Church teachings and perceived morality affect household decision and cooperative bargaining. Within the pure-Kiribati social norms, there is little room for publicly criticizing religious institutions. In reality, however, there are individual and household negotiations when religious and traditional spaces create conflicts as can be observed during wedding celebrations. The wedding banquet known as *botaki*, joins both families in festivities through mutual contributions of copious quantities of food including the ubiquitous roasted pigs. Abstaining from the *botaki* in line with religious teachings, however, oftentimes conflicts with relatives from other religious denominations and adds pressure to hosting families to practice the traditional festivities. Religious teachings have also conflicted with traditional dancing and family planning. Although there are encroachments on religious practices from traditional norms, church membership is nearly universal.

5.1.2 Gendered household hierarchies

Gender plays a crucial role in household hierarchies. Although the perceived contributions of female and male household members are not explicit, the rigid patriarchal elderhood system has historically limited the female role in household decision-making processes relegating household decisions and household representation in the maneaba[2] to male head of households. The gender roles are still evident not only in pure-Kiribati households, but in governance institutions such as *unimwane* councils and the national parliament where, as of 2018, there were only three sitting female members of parliament. As an expert noted:

> *"In terms of politics, a lot of women have tried to join but not many have gained seats in parliament. Some have joined to replace husbands when they die and are simply there to complete their husband's terms and don't seem to return to politics after."* (expert, South Tarawa, August 2018)

The gendered division of household labor for females coincides with the celebrated first menstruation. Following the first menstruation, a ritual ceremony takes place to prepare

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[2] The meeting house where clan decisions were historically made.

the young girl for her household duties in which the young girl fasts for three days, drinking only water and *muimoto* (young coconut water).   As one male, reflecting on his sister's first menstruation ritual on the island of Marakei noted:

> *"I live with my family there so they can help me...I have to follow my culture there. It's strict. For example, the girl, who reaches the puberty she must follow the culture and they will bind her stomach to the post and give her only coconut water and drinking water from morning to night for three days. It's very hard."* (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Following the ritual fasting, the celebrant is taught by elder female household members to manually spin coconut fibre into rope. The coconut husk rope serves as a basis for the traditionally female dominated roll of roof thatching. As household labor demands continue to evolve and young females increasingly attend school, the role of the first menstruation ritual has become more symbolic than a matter of livelihoods and is becoming less common in South Tarawa.

Household gender roles in Kiribati are constantly being renegotiated due to increased education and entry into labor mobility schemes. The widening gender gap of education attainment favoring female i-Kiribati is contributing to an increased hiring of female government employees. The Kiribati education system is not only open access but is compulsory up to the primary school level. Female i-Kiribati students have outpaced male entrants for both secondary and tertiary level attainment and thus are becoming the only viable candidates for executive level ministerial vacancies. As one expert stated:

> *"You probably observed the traditional role of women, understand that women should stay at home looking after the children and extended family, but with education people's mindsets have changed and many women see that they have opportunities once they are educated. It's good to see that a lot of young women are getting jobs in government and working their way up the ladder. There are a lot of Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries in high ranks and it's commendable that women are showing their capacity to work alongside men."* (expert, South Tarawa, August 2018)

The changing gendered labor roles are not limited to the paid employment sectors of government but have additionally trickled down to community levels on outer-islands. Elderhood committees, *unimwane*, are increasingly accepting the added value that educated female members of the community can offer. As one expert from an outer-island described:

> *"The women have their own associations in the respective villages and have their duties toward the respective villages and churches. The umani often ask the women for assistance. In the council, the women contest the seats and currently there's 1 lady in council. We also have women magistrates, but that's up to the chief justice here, but the women apply on their own."*
> (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Although the value of the female voice in community decision-making is increasing, females struggle to break gender barriers at the household level. There is still a perception that male household members have an inalienable authority to unilaterally dictate household strategy. As the gender specific fallback positions rise due to access to paid employment, however the strict household gender rolls are leading female i-Kiribati to rethink marriage. As one returning migrant worker noted:

> *"I tried to work hard for [my parents] and give many chances to them. Then I didn't want to marry because I want to help my family more, because the problem in Kiribati is that when you marry the boy must be the boss. They can tell me not to send money back. That's the culture here."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

The clash between the subservient role of females in i-Kiribati households and modern empowerment has led to a regional epidemic of domestic violence. Kiribati currently has among the highest rate of domestic violence in the world and recent attempts to offer policy protection to female victims has had little effect. As one expert noted:

> *"It's good to have the new laws in place but they need to have action. It seems the police need to work with the court, but the domestic violence cases don't get prestige in the systems and they don't get reported or prosecuted. Very few cases do."* (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018)

In some cases, there is a perception that gendered household inequalities are explicitly sanctioned by state policy. The Kiribati policy for family reunification allows male i-Kiribati to sponsor residency visas for female spouses. Under the visa regime, the female spouse has the right to take-up gainful employment and to settle in Kiribati. For female i-Kiribati wishing to sponsor male foreign national spouses, there are barriers to securing residency permits. As one interviewee stated while discussing the situation of her foreign national husband still living abroad:

> *"They mentioned as a wife from Kiribati, it's very hard to invite her husband and it's unfair because Kiribati husbands can invite their wives to work here."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Sexual minorities in the context of Kiribati are increasingly associated with gender roles. Although sexual minorities have always existed in Kiribati on a discreet basis, the recent acceptance garnered by the *Bimba* movement of mostly homosexual males living as females has led to local inclusion and tolerance. This association has also led to a local assumption that homosexual men identify under the gender category of female and thus should fill household rolls that would normally be allotted to female members of household. Although statistics are not available, sexual minorities have communicated a perception that high levels of domestic violence and hate crimes are endemic to the community.

5.1.3   Extended households: sustainability through labor distribution

Expanding on Sen's discussion of household bargaining (section 3.2), rural households in Kiribati depend on a variety of skillsets to build sustainable livelihoods. The remoteness of the atolls and the harsh environment have led to an extended household approach. Labor in the extended household is divided between such activities as fishing, roof thatching, gathering, child rearing, cooking and copra and toddy collection. In outer-islands, financial instruments remain uniquely outside the main strategic need (and grasp) of households and thus there are limited options for paid employment. Basic financial responsibilities are normally met through either copra production that is subsidized by the national government or through remittances. Increased competition for limited resources in South Tarawa, however, has necessitated the search for paid labor into the sustainable household framework of urban residents.

The centralized Kiribati national government, introduced during colonial times, remains the nation's largest employer (Kiribati Ministry of Labour, 2015). Government positions

are prestigious and highly competitive with high-level officials receiving free housing, access to scholarships, frequent travel opportunities, and a car. Having a high-level government official in the family not only provides a means of waged income but is also perceived to offer preferential access to government programs. Members of Parliament as welfare bearers, additionally, reinforce hierarchal relationships (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018). Ministers as members of the President's cabinet lead from the inner-circle of Parliament. The ministers are elected Members of Parliament and thus change frequently. Within the ministries, there are permanent: Secretaries, deputy Secretaries, directors, etc. Although politics continues to be male dominated, permanent government roles are dominated by highly educated females.   Government employment is competitive, as one interviewee noted:

> *"... in school I didn't reach the highest level, I can't find a job here. In the ministries."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

The lack of domestic employment opportunities has created added pressure on the Ministry of Employment and Human Resources to procure external positions in labor mobility schemes in which participants receive salaries that can exceed most domestic government salaries.   Employment in labor mobility schemes, unlike government positions, are open to most i-Kiribati with limited English attainment, allowing even educationally disadvantaged outer-islanders to gain entry to paid employment.

5.1.4   Blurred lines: where pure-Kiribati and i-Matang meet

Rigid social constructs in Kiribati exist based on the historical relationship between the i-Kiribati and i-Matangs. This section has described the dichotomy of pure-Kiribati and i-Matang, along with the effects that Christianity and employment have had on ever changing gender roles. Although the dichotomy exists between pure-Kiribati and i-Matangs, individual integration between the two social groups is possible. On the one hand, foreigners can be accepted into i-Kiribati families and enjoy components of both social constructs, albeit without rigid social rules expected of i-Kiribati. Acceptance within the i-Kiribati community, however, cannot be assumed even by marriage. On the

other hand, i-Kiribati considered to be influenced by foreign ideals can face animosity within the i-Kiribati community and in the context of the extended household. Returning workers, for instance, with savings in the otherwise economic class-free Kiribati are often written-off as half i-Matang due to a perceived stinginess. An i-Kiribati can be labelled as a half i-Matang not only due to labor mobility schemes, however, but also in instances where a member of the household returns from urban South Tarawa to rural home islands.

5.2 Reasons for mobility

Attention around the "climate refugee" narrative and forced displacement has dominated popular media on the topic of Kiribati and mobility. The current attention has focused on perceived vulnerabilities to climate change and an assumption that atolls would become uninhabitable. The results of qualitative interviews, however, have suggested that limited access to education and increased employment opportunities are the main drivers behind both domestic and international mobility. Within this context, this section will situate the broader drivers of both domestic and international mobility and aims to answer research sub-question 2: What household-related factors affect an individual's decision to migrate?

Life in outer-islands characterized by subsistence livelihoods is being challenged by increased education attainment. The juxtaposition of tradition livelihoods against the perceived opportunities offered in the market economy influence long-term household strategies to increase household education attainment. Education offers a chance for younger generations to improve livelihood standards and to escape dependence on constant manual labor. Although there are primary schools on each outer-island, senior secondary school access is only available in central hubs and at the highest saturation in South Tarawa. Household strategy thus must take into account not only the scholastic barriers to education represented by entrance exams, but also the geographic barriers.

Households in the most remote outer-islands may be forced to migrate domestically in an effort to access further education opportunities. As one interviewee stated:

> *"I chose Tarawa for the [children's] school and also I need to make a business but haven't yet. I'm just planning, but I think it's better to live [in South Tarawa] for the education."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Following secondary school, there are limited domestic tertiary education opportunities. As secondary graduates with form-7 credentials approach graduation, coveted government subsidized scholarships to continue tertiary studies either domestically, or in degree programs at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji are decided through exit exam scores. Tertiary education is a driver of qualified students to travel temporarily overseas. As one participant with relatives in Tuvalu noted:

> *"I was visiting my family, brothers and sisters [in Tuvalu]. I spent time with my grandfather and continued my studies at USP there. I was doing foundations, I finished them and got a scholarship to Fiji and was studying my BA computing science and IT, but I didn't complete it because in 2010 my father was sick, and I withdrew that semester and returned home. I tried to contact Tuvaluan gov for my sponsorship and it was all screwed up."* (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Although education is an opportunity for younger generations to escape the hard lives associated with subsistence livelihoods, education is rarely the sole driver of mobility (particularly overseas). The education and employment opportunities that drive domestic rural-urban migration have contributed to over-population and unique vulnerabilities to health and disaster displacement that are not shared by outer-island households. Although there is paid-employment in South Tarawa, it rarely suffices a household's reprieve from subsistence livelihood strategies. The overpopulated conditions have thus led to fierce competition for the limited resources of the small atoll. As one interviewee lamented:

> *"...on Tarawa, fish is disappearing and things on the reef are also disappearing, but on my island, they have plenty plus there's not a lot of people. Here it's overpopulated and everything is gone."* (male, South Tarawa, July 2018)

As education attainment increases across Kiribati, and the pool of employable candidates with secondary school qualifications increases, unemployment steadily rises. Secondary school graduates without access to tertiary training do not meet the requirements for lucrative government employment and are thus in competition with all other job seekers for remedial employment in hotels and small businesses. Due to the lack of opportunity and fierce competition, secondary school graduates often take up unpaid labor roles in households. Many secondary school graduates look overseas for employment opportunities that match the individual's more advanced skill set. As one expert explained:

> *"For us, [mobility schemes are] an opportunity for [the children] because it's very difficult to find work, especially with the level of education they have. Many of them are only up to form 6,7 and maybe 5. With that level of education, it's very difficult to find work here. Perhaps with the businesses here, but with the government it's very difficult as they are competing with degree graduates and post-grads."* (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018)

The overpopulated conditions also lead to increased competition for land. Fiercely protected indigenous land rights not only limit development in South Tarawa, but the growing urban population is leading to the settlement of marginal land that is acutely vulnerable to inundation during normal high tides and abnormal periods following regional anomalies. Natural disaster is projected to increase both in intensity and frequency in reaction to climate change and it remains unknown how the government will protect these already vulnerable households. The situation is apparent in the western-most district of Betio that was devastated by cyclone Pam. As an expert working in Betio at the time noted:

> *"Most of the houses here are government houses, but in the middle are people from Betio. Now people are moving out and they are building their homes near government houses and creating their own communities. I don't know if it's legal or not, but they are settling. It leads to problems because they aren't meant to be settled. There's no water source and it's also a place that they keep all the pigs."* (expert, South Tarawa, August 2018)

At times, competition for land in Kiribati can turn physical. As the government must lease plots of land from land holders, arguments over land access can lead to the destruction of

public infrastructure by land-owners. During the fieldwork for this project, for example, arguments over the government's lease of the land occupied by the airport on Abemama Island resulted in significant damage to the runway, causing serious delays and further barriers to domestic mobility. At the household level, the arguments over land can lead to violence. As lands are continually partitioned among complex webs of extended families, land ownership legitimization can become complicated. As one interviewee explained:

> *"There are often fights, for instance my father-in-law inherited land and a tenant argued that the grandmother had promised him the land because of his service to the grandmother. Sometimes, there is even physical violence over land. It is very difficult for outer-islanders coming to Tarawa without land. If you illegally occupy a land, the government will give you a warning and then if you don't leave, they will break down the house."* (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Households of South Tarawa are constantly in competition over scarce resources and as domestic employment opportunities are scarce, households often must look further afield to supplement livelihoods. As evident by the demand for labor mobility schemes and the importance that the theme has garnered in parliamentary sessions, for instance, household mobility is driven by the comparatively high wages offered in labor mobility schemes. As interviewees noted:

> *"Because there's not a lot of jobs. There isn't a lot of money. In Kiribati, when you don't have money it's hard."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

<div align="center">and</div>

> *"That's the (employment opportunities) now. It's the only way to earn money. Many jobs here you can't get money."* (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Outer-island households with the opportunity to access labor mobility schemes can experience stark livelihood transformations. As previously noted, access to financial capital in outer-islands is often limited to labor intensive copra production. Even with copra prices guaranteed and subsidized by the national government, income from copra production pales in comparison to wages offered on farms in Australia and New Zealand. As one prospective labor mobility participant stated:

> *"I think that working overseas is better than staying here because I know when I was in the Copra as a temporary [worker], I just made 100AU$ and something for 2 weeks. It's very small. I think working overseas is better, because you work hard, and you earn lots of money."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Not only are there advantages for rural households, but urban households can also experience transformation. As one teacher from South Tarawa justified:

> *"I can get better earnings maybe 270AU$ versus 20AU$ as a teacher, and I here as well that you can have student loans."* (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

There are not only wage inequalities between domestic employment and overseas labor mobility schemes, but also between the mobility schemes. As will be discussed further in the following section (4.3: Mobility access and trends), there is a wage hierarchy among the labor mobility schemes. Seafarers, for example, receive superior training through the *Marine Training Centre* for work aboard cargo ships. Following completion of the regimented training, however, seafarers receive the lowest pay and work under difficult conditions with long stints at sea. A culmination of the training and experience aboard cargo ships, however, elevates seafarers' opportunities to join higher paid schemes in the Australian hospitality sector. As one previously employed seafarer currently employed in Australia explained:

> *"I decided for now to go work in the [Australian] hotel. Compared with the ship, on that we earn only 1,200 USD compared with the hotel they make us 800 AU$ per week."* (male, South Tarawa, July 2018)

The perception of paid employment and better living standards overseas influences household preferences to emigrate to escape the harsh working conditions associated with subsistence livelihoods. Remoteness from effective economic markets hampers access to medicine, technology, and foodstuff that, in most of the world, would be taken for granted. As one parent explained:

> *"Our preference at this point is to move overseas for my children to eat better foods and have a better education. I wanted to work in my country, because Kiribati needs me. Having kids changed that. I would rather they live a better life. I've heard from friends in Australia that children there get money before they reach the age of 16, whereas here they don't. Also, in the schools they are well looked after, if there are bullies then there is*

counseling. There is limited varieties of food here and it is expensive."
(male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Although attention around climate migration has dominated current narratives of Kiribati and mobility, results from the qualitative interviews revealed no first-hand preferences of interviewees escaping climate change. Alternatively, both domestic and international mobility could be contextualized into the household strategy of diversifying livelihoods through increased household education attainment and access to paid employment. Overcrowded conditions in South Tarawa, increasing secondary level education attainment, and a lack of jobs pushed households to strategize potential access to overseas labor mobility schemes. Employment overseas was perceived by i-Kiribati households not only as a means to increase revenue through remittance but as a means for children in the household to escape poverty and to enjoy less-labor intensive lifestyles in line with perceptions of the i-Matang lifestyle, where financial stability would most of all lead to independence and free-will.

5.3 Extent of i-Kiribati mobility

Mobility remains a key strategy for modern I-Kiribati whether in times of disaster displacement or for labor mobility schemes in Australia, New Zealand or onboard cargo vessels plying distant oceans. Mobility occurs on a domestic dimension: island-island and rural-urban migration, as well as on an international scale of temporary, circular, and permanent out-migration. Due to visa restrictions for Kiribati citizens, however, international migration is rarely permanent and revolves around access to educational funding and employment. The importance of mobility as an alternative livelihood is cemented through a connection to domestic development policy (Kiribati Office of the President,   2018).

This section enlisted a mixed-method approach that acquired data from a literature review, ministerial shadowing, and coded interviews to situate mobility in the i-Kiribati context. The section is subdivided into seven sections: a scholastic literature review of the nexus between labor mobility and climate change adaptation (5.3.1), displacement due to quick-onset natural disasters (5.3.2), education mobility (5.3.3) labor mobility (5.3.4), the Pacific Access Category resident visa (5.3.5), followed by a discussion of the limits of current mobility schemes (5.3.6). This section aims to answer research sub-question 3: to what extent are I-Kiribati mobile?

5.3.1 Past research on migration in Kiribati

Given future climate predictions for Kiribati, research suggests migration as a key adaptation to climate change and an alternative to the forced relocation of popularly termed "climate refugees" (Yamamoto and Esteban, 2017). Relocations are not only traumatic, but costly as seen in the $48 million resettlement of Isle de Jean Charles (population 100) in the US state of Louisiana (Benton *et al.*, 2016). Alternatively, Global South countries such as Kiribati are turning to labor migration as a cost-effective adaptation to climate change (Fornale, 2017). Ever increasing labor permit quotas in Australia and New Zealand continually rewrite the regional mobility narrative. Following policy changes, studies focus on regional policies and examined labor mobility in the context of climate change.

Ever evolving policies limit the relevance of current studies and increasing migration rates necessitate wider qualitative approaches. While linking international migration exclusively to environmental degradation faces challenges, internal displacement statistics show that nearly 2% of i-Kiribati were displaced in 2015 in a context of cyclone Pam (IDMC, 2018). As an adaptation to climate change in vulnerable Kiribati, previous administrations have promoted labor migration through *migration with dignity* (Curtain *et al.*, 2016). As the population of the capital South Tarawa swells, labor migration has not only seen as adaptation to climate change but has become a vital source of remittance. Qualitative approaches to studying migration in Kiribati remain scarce. This study will

seek to move away from text analysis and quantitative studies based on local, bilateral, and regional migration policies and into a holistic ethnographic approach to mobility. In line with the research questions, focus of the review will include studies on contextualizing climate migration, mobility, household vulnerability, and relevant policy connected to New Zealand and Australia.

This literature review will focus on the four main research topics of the climate change and labor migration debate. Firstly, research has transitioned from the refugee debate and focused on a clearer definition of the controversial climate migrant. As the environment is rarely the full migration narrative (Baldwin and Fornalé, 2017), this review will look at the relationship between climate change and labor migration as an alternative to prohibitively expensive community relocations. In the labor migration debate, benefactor countries New Zealand and Australia are leading policy drivers. While studies are continually updated to reflect evolving policy decisions in the Pacific region, researchers (Oakes, Milan and Campbell, 2016) conducted a mostly quantitative study on household vulnerability and mobility in Kiribati. These topics contextualize the current climate change versus labor migration debate, providing a comprehensive state of the art.

Defining climate change migration remains a debated topic. In line with the results of expert interviews, the controversial terms environmental migrant and climate migrant have quickly become the politically correct description of the more charged term *climate refugee*. Moving away from the refugee discussion, migration however rarely follows purely environmental causes. Slow-onset environmental disasters, such as rising sea levels, affect sustainability and livelihoods to a point that most migrants are forced to migrate in search of livelihoods (Tacoli, 2009). The line between climate change migrants moving as a direct result of uninhabitable conditions resulting from climate change and labor migrants in search of livelihood opportunities becomes blurred as migration is often a combination of factors. These hybrid labor migrants are thus difficult to enumerate and link back to environmental factors. Concern remains that strictly defining the term climate change migrant will lead to exclusion (Piguet and Laczko, 2014). The fluidity between labor migration and climate change in the region has led Australia and

New Zealand to focus on broadening labor migration opportunities for Pacific atoll nations specifically affected by climate change (Fornale, 2017).

Policy frameworks introduced by New Zealand and Australia continue to shape regional migration in the climate change context. As key contributors to the Kiribati government's operational budget, donor state policies are vital to migration opportunities for i-Kiribati and the wider discussions of labor migration opportunities. Oakes, Milan, & Campbell (2016) found that a majority of i-Kiribati favor migration but are hindered by a lack of capital and opportunity. Recognizing the need for labor opportunities, labor migration remains a priority of i-Kiribati negotiations and have been included in the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA) and the regional Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER Plus), an agreement between Pacific Island countries and Australia and New Zealand (Fornale, 2017). The agreements have produced ever expanding quotas of labor migratory permits for citizens of Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu. Researchers continue to push for increasing availability of permits and an eventual uncontrolled opening of labor markets to atoll nations affected by climate change (Berkelmans and Pryke, 2016).

As regional policy promotes labor migration as an adaptation mechanism, research fuelled around the need for facilitated mobility intensifies. There are continued fears that international migration for the i-Kiribati will not only be economically hindering but will also be traumatic. Losses of customary land and diffused integration into larger populations will hinder i-Kiribati identity, community cohesion and lifestyle stability (Campbell and Warrick, 2014). Given present climate change projections, though, researchers predict eventual environmental migration. The transition from climate migrant to labor migrant could not only relieves overcrowding in densely populated Kiribati, but also brings in indispensable remittances (The Nansen Initiative, 2013). While benefits to Kiribati are obvious, the migrants also fill a labor gap in the Australian low-skilled labor market (Berkelmans and Pryke, 2016). Although there are mutual benefits to an expanded labor mobility, i-Kiribati mobility remains low. Prohibitive travel costs, low education attainment, and a lack of access to documents remain migration barriers (Oakes et al., 2016).

Although New Zealand and Australian policies have dominated discussions on regional issues, the UN University conducted a study on household vulnerability and mobility in the Kiribati climate change context (Oakes et al., 2016). Among the findings of this study were the identification of migration barriers, gender differences in migration experiences, and the realization that 94% of surveyed i-Kiribati have been impacted by environmental hazards over the preceding decade. Although the study highlighted vulnerabilities and barriers through quantitative surveys and (limited) qualitative focus groups, serious questions regarding the methodological approach cast doubt on findings. Further studies are needed to understand the experiences of successful migrants and their effects on household mobility.

5.3.2 Displacement caused by rapid onset disasters

Although Kiribati is often associated with disaster displacement vis-à-vis *migration with dignity*, the extent of disaster displacement remains small and difficult to numerate. Disaster displacement following destruction associated with cyclone Pam in 2015 was observed on the islands of: Arorae, South Tarawa, and Tamena (female, South Tarawa, September 2018). In most cases, disaster displacement in Kiribati remains localized with displaced households temporarily relocated to nearby, extended family households. Estimates of displaced people following cyclone Pam in Kiribati have been put at around 500. As one expert explained about the damage to the southern Gilbert island of Arorae:

> *"Some homes were destroyed but in terms of the waves coming into the house. Most homes are local builds with thatched or iron roofing...Many homes in the north and south part had waves coming in, so they had to vacate and live with their families in other parts. For some people...there was little damage. But for some they had to rebuild the homes. It took some months, 1-2 months."* (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Damage from Cyclone Mona: Arorae, Kiribati 2019 (source: Onorio)

Although most households were able to re-build relatively quickly using local techniques, teachers housed in concrete housing had to be relocated to less vulnerable areas of the island. The expert continued:

> *"Many homes in the north and south part had waves coming in, so they had to vacate and live with their families in other parts. It was mainly the school where the teachers live. It was just the teachers houses and they had to escape. The villagers came and helped them vacate. They had to live in the Maneaba."* (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018)

While the islands of Tamana and Arorae were directly hit by the tail of cyclone Pam, South Tarawa was more severely affected. As the storm moved north and combined with abnormally high tides, South Tarawa was inundated by seawater. As an expert working in Betio during the time of the disaster explained, the waves caused by the storm were like walls of water smashing against the coast (expert, South Tarawa, September 2018). Significant damage was caused to infrastructure and to households along both the lagoon and ocean-side coasts. The waves inundated homes and caused displacement. Displaced individuals and households found refuge with extended families less affected by cyclone Pam. The Betio hospital, one of only two hospitals in South Tarawa was compromised by the disaster and all patients were forced to be evacuated to the centrally located sport complex. While the households in the outer-islands were able to rebuild within a short time period, South Tarawa continues to rebuild with a focus on resilience to future natural disaster.

5.3.3 Student migration

Primary School: North Tarawa, Kiribati (Source: self)

Although there are compulsory primary schools on every island, senior secondary schools are located exclusively on the islands of: Butaritari, Abaiang, South Tarawa, Abemama, Tabiteuea, and Kiritimati. Access to senior secondary schools is further impeded by availability and, in the case of private secondary schools, high tuition. While there were 16,880 i-Kiribati having achieved primary school levels in 2016, only 5,262 had attended senior secondary school (SSS) (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018). Strategizing further education, households often relocate to South Tarawa to secure entrance in either public or private secondary schools. According to one interviewee:

> *"[my family] moved from Nonouti to South Tarawa together in 1994. I was born in 1981. My father moved here for our school."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Given the geographic disadvantage and high competition, enrollment in junior and secondary schools pales in comparison to primary school statistics. (see: table 3)

Table 3: School Enrollment by Education Level

| Education Level	2014	2015	2016
Primary	16201	16043	16880
Junior Secondary School	6788	6683	6432
Senior Secondary School	4960	4980	5262
Total	*27949*	*27706*	*28565*

Source:(Kiribati Office of the President, 2018)   Design: Marazita, 2019

Additionally, there are four domestic tertiary institutes: Kiribati Institute of Technology, Marine Training Center, Kiribati Teachers College, and the University of South Pacific. Tertiary programs range from technical training courses to entry level university courses. Although school enrolment rates continue to rise driven by growing primary school enrolment, junior secondary school and senior secondary school have shown little growth (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018, p. 22). The domestic tertiary institutes offer limited and mostly specialized programs that focus on local demands and labor mobility scheme strategies. More advanced degrees, in the health sector for example, require external training. As one expert stated:

> *"I started as a community nurse and I transferred overseas for school. I did further study in Sydney University where I did my bachelor and master's…"*
> (expert, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Fiji remains the primary international destination for continuing education, but other destinations include: United States, New Zealand, Australia, and Morocco where scholarships are mainly funded through host country aid-programs and religious institutions. As dictated by scholarship terms, all graduating students must return to Kiribati to contribute to the local labor market. As the regional center of tertiary education, there are vast programs available to prospective students.

Figure 3: Flows of I-Kiribati education migrants. Source: Unesco
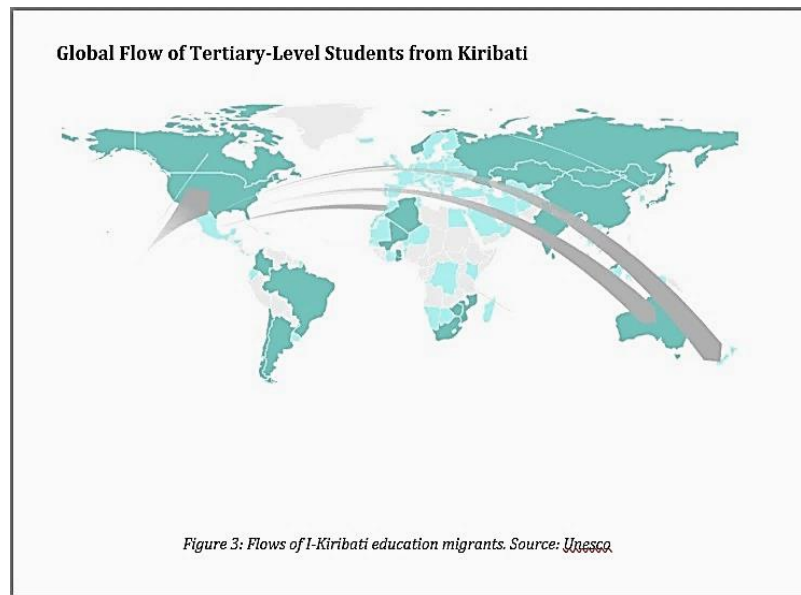
The University of the South Pacific, founded in 1968, serves as the conglomerated institute of higher education for the region's 12-member states (University of the South Pacific, no date). The main campus in Suva (Fiji) is supported through satellite campuses throughout the region. As with senior secondary school, tuition fees are a barrier to gaining international tertiary education and to encourage further education, a variety of scholarships are available. Based on Form-7 scholastic results, high-achieving senior secondary school graduates are eligible for full scholarships to pursue tertiary studies at USP. The government sponsored scholarship is a part of broad, regional partnership between USP and member nations to pool together strong candidates (University of the South Pacific, no date). Candidates for further education in Fiji can either be chosen during the final year of senior secondary school or following the completion of foundation courses at the USP – South Tarawa branch. As one interviewee discussed:

> *"I was doing foundations, I finished them and got a scholarship to Fiji and was studying my BA computing science and IT."* (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Returning graduates find limited professional opportunities in Kiribati. As the government is the nation's largest procurer of employment, university graduates often take-up lucrative government positions that come with benefits that often include

housing. Government employees additionally have access to post-graduate scholarships for further studies abroad.   A significant portion of the government workforce is comprised of returning graduates (see Table 4).   Government employees wishing to continue post-graduate studies have additional funding opportunities.

Table 4: School Attainment of Government Employees in Kiribati

Education Level	Number of Employees
Secondary	
F3	275
F5	397
F6	254
F7	274
Tertiary	
Certificate	1450
Diploma	705
Degree	318
Post Graduate	83
Master	99
PHD	1
Other	
	144

Source:(Kiribati Office of the President, 2018)   Design: Marazita, 2019

Visa regimes for post-graduate level studies in external universities allow for family reunification. Kiribati government employees studying in USP – Suva for example, can enroll dependent children into English-speaking Fijian primary and secondary schools. Access to post-graduate studies with family reunification becomes a household strategy to not only increase employability, but to strengthen the position of younger generations in a household. As one government employee explained:

> *"My plan when I joined MTC was to become a chief engineer, but since I work for the government, I'm eligible for scholarships in Fiji. I'm also planning to apply to the open equity scholarships with AU and NZ. I have*

friends in AU who might assist me." (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Access to post-graduate studies funded by development aid and religious institutions have similar effects on household decision-making. As one interviewee described:

> *"...while my father was studying at the theology school, I lived in Fiji for 5 years in the northern part of the main island."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Gender parity indexes for the years 2011-2014 show that domestic school enrolment is dominated by females, with a ratio in 2014 of 1.04 females to male (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018). The gap widens at the university level where in 2018, 65% of graduates from USP-Kiribati campus were female. Although politics in Kiribati remain male dominated, positions of permanent secretaries in the government ministries are dominated by educated female staff. In addition to USP, Australia supports further education through the Australian-Pacific Technical College (APTC). The APTC has campuses in Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu, and PNG aiming to offer a pathway to internationally recognized qualifications. Programs available include technical studies, hospitality, and aged care. APTC offers scholarships to qualified students (Kiribati Ministry of Labour, 2015).

This section offered insight into both domestic and international education mobility opportunities accessible through government and religious based scholarships. Important to note is that this list is not exhaustive. Although scholarships revolve around tertiary training, it is important to note that there are additionally i-Kiribati privately funded in universities abroad, as well as minors sent abroad for education. Although statistics on privately funded i-Kiribati studying abroad are scant, Fiji is presumed to be the main destination, whether for minors in primary and secondary schools or adults in tertiary programs.

5.3.4 Labor mobility

I-Kiribati have relied on labor mobility as a livelihood strategy since pre-colonial times. After the arrival of the first Europeans, i-Kiribati workers were arranged work aboard whaling vessels and in farms and on plantations in North and Latin America. More than two centuries later, labor mobility remains a key livelihood strategy. Kiribati and donor partners have invested heavily in training programs to give i-Kiribati applicants a competitive edge. The first training school, the Marine Training Centre, opened in 1967 and catered to seafarer cadets followed by the Kiribati Institute of Technology and the Kiribati Teachers College (Kiribati Ministry of Labour, 2015). Domestic employment opportunities in Kiribati are mainly limited to the islands of South Tarawa and Kiritimati Island. As data on domestic labor migration is highly individualized, this section will focus on seafaring and current labor schemes available through New Zealand, Australia, and the Cook Islands.

Seafarer

As Kiribati' first labor mobility scheme, seafaring predated independence. Since the 1960's the Marine Training Center under German supervision trained exclusively male seafarers. Deck hands and qualified stewards have been hired to work on board cargo ships mainly in Germany for contracts of up to eleven months. Remittances from seafarers provided households with an important source of income to cover household tuition fees and build homes. As seafarers have little need for money aboard vessels, salaries were paid directly into local bank accounts in Kiribati. In 2010, remittances from seafarers accounted for an estimated 12.8% of household income (Kiribati Ministry of Labour, 2015).

Potential male candidates for seafaring require training at the Marine Training Centre. Beginning with recruitment, admission to the seafarer program is highly regimented. Pre-selection of potential candidates revolves around the results of a preliminary aptitude test. Successful candidates are then required to have a physical examination. Prior to entrance, all candidates must additionally pass interviews in English. Much like

a military school, the everyday life of cadets is regimented, and infractions are strictly punished. A quota system promotes equal opportunity for rural i-Kiribati from outer-islands and the Marine Training Centre annually sends recruiters to the outer-islands in an effort to identify potential candidates. The quota system for outer-islands is based on population with Kiritimati Island having the largest quota. There are not always enough satisfactory candidates, however, to meet the outer-island quotas. Remaining slots are thus allocated to other outer-islands or to South Tarawa. Both the Marine Training Centre and MEHR make every effort to provide seafarer opportunities to outer-island residents.

Stringent entrance requirements for seafarer training and higher pay in competing mobility programs has resulted in a sharp decline in applications. Reaching a peak in 2002 with more than 1,100 employed seafarers, the ministry continues to report an overall decrease. Statistics between 2002 and 2003 show a decline of more than 300 i-Kiribati seafarers resulting in annual remittances from seafarers plummeting from a high of nearly A\$ 12 million at the turn of the millennium to nearly A\$ 7million in 2016. Although remittances from seafarers reached a staggering low of just over A\$ 4 million in 2010, seafarer remittances still accounted for 17.9% of urban and 9.1% of rural household incomes (see figure 4) (Kiribati Ministry of Labour, 2015).
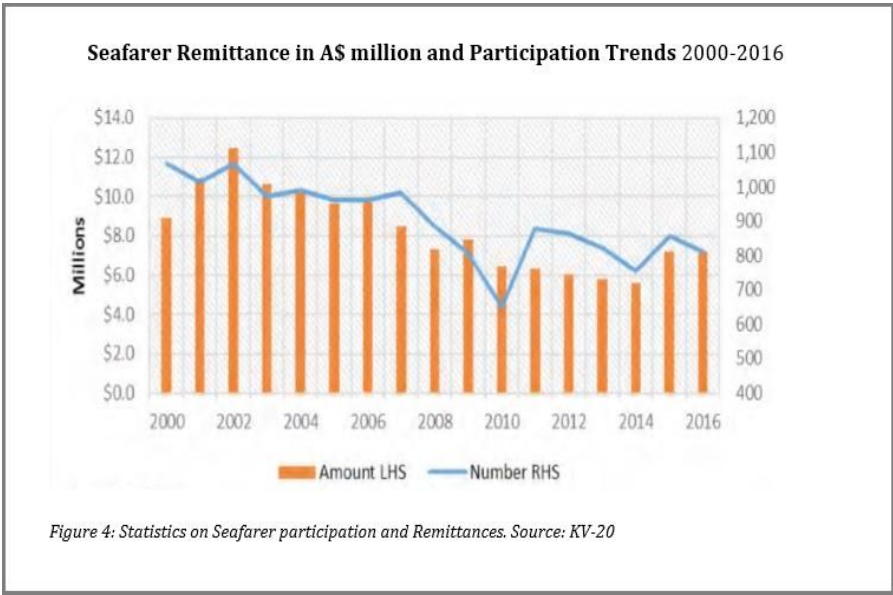

Figure 4: Statistics on Seafarer participation and Remittances. Source: KV-20

The Marine Training Centre hopes to bolster seafarer rates through expanded officer level training. The master class pilot program will commence with a focus on domestic fleet officer of the watch (OOW) training. Upon completion of the pilot program, cadets will be certified for entry level officer positions. Following the pilot program, the Marine Training Centre plans to offer OOW training that meets international regulations for Master Level-VI. The goal of the Marine Training Centre's officer training program is for an eventual internationally recognized Master Level-IV training, offering a pathway for both i-Kiribati and international cadets to lucrative, skilled officer positions[3]. Acceptance into the Marine Training Centre necessitate households to relocate to South Tarawa. As one interviewee noted:

> *"My dad is from Abaimama, Aurore, and Maiana, but mainly they lived in Maiana. They came over when he was 18 and became a seafarer."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Given the experience and success of the Marine Training Centre, the Kiribati government envisions expanding satellite branches to all outer-islands. Beginning with Kiritimati Island, the satellite branches will offer programs to improve the employability of outer-island locals, whether it be safety courses to work on domestic shipping trolleys or as seafarers on cargo ships. The expansion of the Marine Training Centre is part of the greater goal of the Kiribati Vision 20 to increase education capacity and to lower the high unemployment rate that plagues Kiribati's economy. The costly expansion, however, is still in the pre-planning phase and the representation of the Marine Training Centre in the outer-islands is limited to the recruiting visits.

The regimented training at the Marine Training Centre has produced highly trained stewards. With decades of experience working aboard cargo ships, experienced stewards, however, are often the most competitive candidates for lucrative hospitality contracts in Australia through the Northern Australia Workers Pilot Program. Tough conditions, low pay, and long jaunts at sea have pushed many former stewards to leave seafaring for hospitality jobs that offer 40-hour work weeks, higher salaries, and 4 weeks of paid

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[3] Source: MTC/Ministerial meeting in September 2018 at the MTC headquarters in Betio.

annual leave. For many seafarers, the perception of better working conditions is too hard to pass-up.

The importance of seafaring on the livelihoods of i-Kiribati households is well documented among interviewees. There was, however, additionally a negatively perceived link between seafaring and crime. Crimes committed by seafarers remained mostly drug related, including a high-profile case of i-Kiribati seafarers in Italy. Although most reported crimes were linked to organized crimes and drug trafficking, one interviewee discussed her ex-husband currently imprisoned in the United States.

> *"Maybe he's still in prison in America, but I don't know where he is. He has been in prison since 2007. He was long-lining on a long line ship and when he was there, he might have been drunk and there was a homeless man from Honolulu. That man always went to the I-Kiribati people for money and maybe my husband got angry and they fought. [The homeless man] was knocked out and then my husband went to the room and got a knife. He has been in prison since then."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Seafaring is the cornerstone of Kiribati' labor mobility schemes. With a history spanning five decades, the Marine Training Centre has built a reputation for training qualified seafarers. Remittances from seafarers continue to be a key livelihood for households both in South Tarawa and in the outer-islands. Although participation in seafaring has dropped since 2002, new officer training programs hope to bolster applicant numbers and elevate Kiribati's status as a regional training center for skilled seafaring officers.

Nauru

During the phosphate boom in Nauru, labor shortages attracted migrant workers from across the region. I-Kiribati workers not only worked as laborers in the mine, but also in technical capacities and as domestic employees in the homes of local-elite. During the period of labor shortages, i-Kiribati migrant workers under long term employment conditions were joined by dependents, or in some cases started new families. Nauru

offered household education opportunities that were lacking in Kiribati. As one interviewee explained:

> *"Nauru employed islanders from around the Pacific to work as carpenters and baby sitters. [my father] met my mother in Nauru."* (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

As phosphate reserves were depleted and revenue mismanaged, i-Kiribati migrants returned to Kiribati with extended household members. Nauru not only offered employment opportunities, but also guaranteed household access to secondary schools. Upon returning to Kiribati, a lack of employment opportunities and stringent education regimes strained household access to labor. As one interviewee explained:

> *"My father doesn't work, but he used to work when we lived in Nauru. I lived there from 1990 to 2001. I was born in Kiribati but grew up in Nauru until class 7."* (interviewee, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Secondary students returning from Nauru faced bureaucratic barriers due to an inability to transfer form 7-level credits from outside education institutes leading to barriers for returning i-Kiribati students to compete for further opportunities.

Horticulture: circular and temporary migration

Labor shortages in New Zealand and Australia have resulted in labor mobility schemes that benefit Pacific Islanders. Since 2007, hundreds of i-Kiribati have made the annual migration south to work as pruners, pickers and wrappers on farms. The Recognized Seasonal Employment scheme (RSE) and Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) are mutually beneficial to the economies of both Kiribati and of receiving nations Australia and New Zealand. Inclusion of female participants in the labor schemes has greatly changed gender roles in patriarchal Kiribati households. Unlike the seafarer program, the horticulture labor mobility schemes require little education and English proficiency, attracting candidates from the outer-islands. The gender inclusive schemes fill the gaps left by seafaring, while offering higher wages and shorter contract commitments (Immigration New Zealand, no date). This subsection will detail both the RSE and SWP programs that are often debated in parliamentary sessions.

Figure 5: Labor mobility participation. Source: MEHR
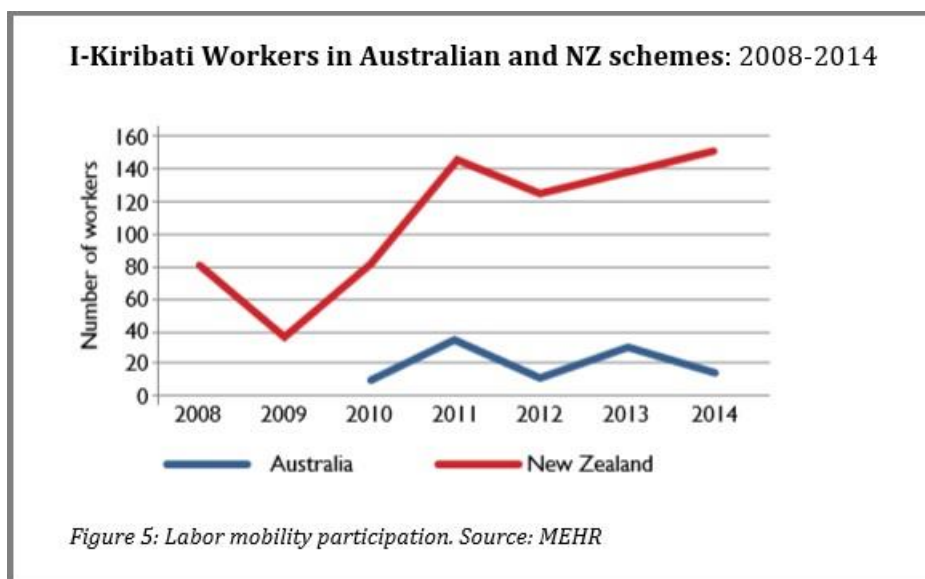
New Zealand introduced the Recognized Seasonal Employment (RSE) scheme in 2007 in an effort to fill labor shortages in horticulture sectors. Following New Zealand, Australia introduced a similar program in 2012. Together, these programs employed 621 i-Kiribati between the first and third quarters of 2018 for short-term work in the horticulture sector. The RSE scheme is also offered to other countries in the region, namely: Fiji, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu (Immigration New Zealand, no date). Together, the programs offer vital access to employment that promote additional livelihood opportunities in a region plagued by unemployment and a reliance on development aid.

Unlike seafaring, pre-selection requirements are minimal. Successful candidates must pass physical and criminal background checks. In some outer-islands, the island elders are consulted during the pre-selection process. Barring physical and criminal limitations, candidates need only remedial English proficiency and minimal education to join the work-ready pool of candidates. Participation in the RSE is open to residents of all islands and applications are handled through the local island councils. Pre-selection by local island councils follows employment requirements relayed by MEHR. Upon pre-selection, candidates are then invited (at their own cost) to attend basic training in South Tarawa that is organized by MEHR. A combination of minimal scholastic requirements and island

quotas facilitate outer-island participation. To take advantage of island quotas for the seasonal worker schemes, it is not uncommon for candidates with household connections to multiple outer-islands to apply with multiple island councils.

Following the island councils' pre-selections and basic training, profiles of candidates are added to the work-ready pool of candidates. Potential employers review the profiles and preferred candidates are interviewed at the discretion of the employer. Potential employers are encouraged to travel to Kiribati for the interviews on trips that are often subsidized by MEHR. Interviews then take place in person. Due to high demands and the employer-driven system, lag time from registration at the local island council to employment can be years. In some cases, applicants under the jurisdiction of Betio Town Council have reported wait times of 10 years.

Under the terms of RSE, employment contracts are restricted to a maximum of 7 months. Employees are hired by gender with employers exclusively hiring groups of female or male candidates. Travel from Kiribati to the farms is arranged by the employer but paid by the employee as per the employment contract. Living arrangements are provided by the employer with rooms grouped by nationality. It is not uncommon for migrant workers of various nationalities to work together on the farms that may include not only Pacific islands, but also South Asians, Australian Aboriginals, and European backpackers. As a measure to avoid conflict, there are often strict restrictions on alcohol consumption imposed for the duration of employment punishable by expulsion.

Although the program is limited to seven months, many participants return in successive seasons. The temporary work mobility thus morphs into circular migration, where in some cases the employee spends most of the year abroad. Even after long-term participation in labor schemes, however, employees do not have the right to reside or of family reunification and remain recognized as short-term labor migrants. There is, however, no guarantee that an employer will rehire past-employees. The completion of the short-term contract thus fulfills any contractual obligations of the employer.

The introduction of the SWP followed the RSE and expanded regional labor mobility opportunities. Seasonal work in the horticulture industry represents a key livelihood strategy for both urban and rural i-Kiribati. The success of the programs is evident through inclusion in bipartisan policy frameworks that have extended through both the Tong and Maamau administrations. MEHR envisions remittances as a driver of economic growth and small and medium enterprise investment, both in South Tarawa and in the mostly undeveloped outer-islands. With growing demand for employment and pressure from members of parliament, the Kiribati Vision 20 calls for expansion and diversification of the seasonal workers programs (Kiribati Office of the President, 2018).

Like New Zealand, Australia has been facing a growing labor shortage in the agriculture sector. Similar to New Zealand's RSE, Australia introduced the Seasonal Worker Program on 1 July 2012 that is open to nationals of Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Seasonal workers taking part in the SWP receive work contracts of up to nine months that are often renegotiated in subsequent seasons (Department of Jobs and Small Business, no date).

> *"...Australia because it's very safe and fair. You live happily there, and everything is fine. You can't complain about your salary. The companies are very fair."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Current figure for the RSE show that the number of i-Kiribati migrant workers in New Zealand grew sharply from 80 employees in 2008 to 226 by the third-quarter of 2018. Figures for the SWP show that the number of i-Kiribati migrant workers in Australia also grew from less than 20 in 2010 to current highs of 395 in the third quarter of 2018.[4]

Northern Australia workers Pilot Program and Pacific Labour Scheme

Unique demands in the employment sectors of Northern Australia prompted the Australian government to offer the Northern Australia Worker Pilot Program (NAWPP). Targeting microstates in the Pacific region, the NAWPP was open to job seekers from Kiribati, Nauru, and Tuvalu to fill employment gaps mainly in the hospitality industry.

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[4] Source: Figures presented during shadowing.

Unlike seasonal work in horticulture under the SWP, the NAWPP offered successful applicants longer term employment of 2-3 years with four-week annual paid leave and higher salaries than previously available to unskilled migrant workers.

In December 2016, the first i-Kiribati workers arrived in Australia. Employment has been focused primarily in the Queensland resort islands of Hayman and Hamilton. Recent figures for September 2018 from MEHR showed that 69 i-Kiribati workers were employed under the NAWPP.[5] The pilot program has proved mutually beneficial for Hayman Island with the employer offering to extend current employment contracts. Following the successful completion of the NAWPP, Australia launched the expanded Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) on 1 July 2018 for nationals of Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu with a planned gradual expansion to all Pacific island nations[6]. Like the NAWPP, the PLS seeks to fill employment gaps in the low and semi-skilled employment in the key areas of hospitality, aged care, and non-seasonal agriculture, forestry and fishing with employment contracts of 2-3 years. Unlike the NAWPP, the PLS targets employers in rural and regional Australia.

Unlike the RSE/SWP labor mobility schemes, MEHR requires that PLS applicants meet industry specific criteria that includes employment and/or education background in the area of interest (MEHR representative, female, Bairiki, July 2019). Applicants meeting pre-requisites must past rigorous English language proficiency exams and a health screening. Do to the long-term nature of the program and the willingness of employers to extend contracts, there had been hopes among interviewees that the NAWPP/PLS would be pathway to permanent residency and application rates surpassed the thousand-mark within the first two weeks of enrolment.[7]

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[5] Source: Ministerial update during shadowing.
[6] At the Pacific Islands Forum, September 2019 in Nauru, Australia announced that the PLS would be expanded to other Pacific Island states.
[7] As observed by the researcher.

Current regional labor mobility schemes

The Kiribati Minister of Employment and Human Resource, Ioteba Redfern and Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Henry Puna signed a bilateral memorandum of understanding in February 2018 to explore labor mobility opportunities. The memorandum directly targets the pearl industry as supported through the Cook Islands Pearl Farmer's Initiative (CIPFI) (expert, South Tarawa, July 2019). Under the terms of the agreement, employment on pearl farms in the Cook Islands would be opened to i-Kiribati job seekers. The memorandum represented a shift in directive for the ministry from multilateral, south-north labor mobility schemes to bilateral south-south agreements. Within months of the memorandum, Kiribati sent the first migrant workers to the Cook Islands. The preliminary group of pearl divers arrived on a chartered vessel direct from Kiritimati Island and in lieu of pre-departure training administered in South Tarawa, received basic training upon arrival. The Cook Island labor scheme thus allowed migrant workers direct access to the worksite forgoing the rural-urban migration associated with earlier circular labor mobility schemes. (expert, South Tarawa, July 2019).

Unlike Australia and New Zealand, the Cook Islands is a small island state. Due to remoteness and distance, coupled with colonial alignments that position the Cook Islands under the New Zealand cone of influence, transportation of workers between the two nations is complicated. Current transport links are limited to either chartered vessels or flights that require stopovers in New Zealand and are further complicated by visa requirements. The relatively small-scale of employment demands and transport barriers have hit the competitive advantage of i-Kiribati migrant workers in the Cook Islands labor market.

5.3.5 Permanent out-migration: Pacific Access Category resident visa

Under the auspice of independence, i-Kiribati thus do not benefit from the free movement and access to employment markets of neither Australia nor New Zealand. Additionally, for even short visits, both Australia and New Zealand require i-Kiribati passport holders

to apply for tourist visas. For i-Kiribati hoping to emigrate, visa regimes remain a significant barrier to access destination countries. For a select few households chosen at random, however, New Zealand's Pacific Access Category resident visa (PAC) offers an opportunity. As one interviewee explained:

> *"It's very hard to get citizenship and live in Australia. There are a lot of things that you need to do if you want to live in Australia. You need to sit the exam and pay a lot of fees. The exam about English and in that exam, you should be 100% and after that you can get citizenship. That would be very hard for us. I had that conversation with my wife because she wants to move to Australia. That's where I'm planning to go, but it's very different from New Zealand. In NZ, you just try your luck with the PAC and once you have luck you stay in NZ. In Australia, you have to sit the English exam."*
> (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Offered to nationals of Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, and Tuvalu, the Pacific Access Category (PAC) resident visa is a visa lottery that offers conditional and indefinite residency in New Zealand. Successful applicants are selected based on national quotas, with 75 visas allocated for i-Kiribati nationals (New Zealand Immigration, 2019). As a prerequisite to visa issuance, candidates must demonstrate a valid job contract with salary sufficient to support their dependent family. The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) through the New Zealand High Commission in Bairiki offers employment search assistance and pre-departure training. Since establishment in 2001, the PAC resident visa has allowed for up to 250 immigrants annually from the Pacific islands. As one interviewee described:

> *"I-Kiribati people can't go to Australia to live, only New Zealand. Every March, there's a form, a ballot and then you go there with your family."*
> (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Unlike Kiribati, however, New Zealand does not recognize the legitimacy of extended households. Based on a nuclear household framework, PAC resident visas are limited to nuclear household members, i.e., spouse and dependent children. In an effort to legitimize extended families both for domestic and international legal purposes, adoptions within the extended household are common. As one interviewee discussing their household context explained:

> *"The husband [of my sister], he's I-Kiribati with New Zealand citizenship from the PAC and my sister adopted the rest of my siblings. They ended up in a part time fruit picking job. That's the main problem. Once they got a job, they had money and started to make friends and drink."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

The PAC resident visa has proven popular in Kiribati with a total of 36,831 applications[8] filed between 2002 and 2017. The promise of the PAC resident visa to not only live in New Zealand, but also to offer stability, employment and family reunification is an unsurpassed opportunity for many of the remote island inhabitants. Unlike labor mobility schemes, the PAC resident visa only requires rudimentary English language skills. South Tarawa educated elite as well as outer-island residents are thus on equal competitive footings. Although current requirements call for English language proficiency and restrictions on age, the annual application fee remains the biggest barrier for potential applicants. At the time of printing, the initial application fee stood at A\$105.60 with subsequent annual application fees of A\$59.60. For a country lacking employment opportunity, the application fees represent hurdles for otherwise qualified i-Kiribati applicants (Immigration New Zealand, 2019).

Successful applicants for the PAC resident visa have faced barriers due to unscrupulous employment offers. Although MFAT offers employment assistance, successful applicants have been known to use social networks to procure employment contracts. In some cases, these employment offers have no backing and new immigrants remain destitute as they navigate the local New Zealand job market. The inability to find sustainable employment within 6 months then voids the PAC resident visa and applicants are repatriated to country of origin. For the period of 2014-15, 69 i-Kiribati prospective candidates secured job offers, an increase of 8 from the 2013-14 period (Immigration New Zealand, 2019). Due to low education attainment of many PAC recipients, employment in the horticulture industry mirroring labor mobility schemes is common.

Since 2001, the PAC resident visa has affected mobility in the small island developed states by offering a limited pathway to indefinite residency for nationals of the

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[8] Source: Compiled from New Zealand Immigration data by Tobias Leonhardt.

independent states of Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga and Tuvalu. The program has led not only to new and vibrant Pacific Island communities in New Zealand, but access to alternative livelihoods for the countries of origin. Expat communities in New Zealand continue to aid extended households in their home countries through remittances, social exchanges, and support for education and for migrant workers temporarily residing in New Zealand.

5.3.6 Limits of current mobility schemes

Current mobility trends are affected by local barriers to accessing education and paid employment.   Historically, labor mobility participation was limited to male-only employment as seafarers.   Current labor shortages in Australia and New Zealand, however, have facilitated access for Pacific Islanders, including i-Kiribati, to foreign labor markets. The employment schemes, however, are short term and often result in circular migration.   Attracted by wages that exceed the highest salaries of local government officials, lag-time from application to successful employment can be measured between years and decades.   Due to visa restrictions of i-Kiribati citizens, permanent out-migration is mostly limited to acceptance into the Pacific Access Category residency visa offered in a visa lottery by New Zealand. Migration and mobility additionally occur on individualized cases. Due to competitively poor working conditions and the opportunity for individual skilled labor visas across the region, Kiribati is currently experiencing a brain drain, for example, in the medical field. As the overall size of i-Kiribati diasporas around the world are miniscule, accurate statistics are scant.

5.4 Mobility barriers

*"People who stay in the [outer] islands, they don't care about money. They
can go fishing. Those people who come back, they need to save money.
They spend little and have savings. They have money in their mind, but
the islanders, money to them is nothing."* (expert, South Tarawa,
September 2018)

The multilocal nature of mobility in Kiribati is reinforced through specific mobility barriers at the rural, urban, and international scales. Initially, rural migrants face transport and logistical barriers of returning to home islands. Once in South Tarawa, prospective transnational migration is restricted by repressive visa regimes associated with the independent nature of Kiribati. This section aims to answer research sub-question 4: What are the barriers to mobility faced by i-Kiribati?

5.4.1 Barriers of returning to home islands

Barriers of returning to outer-islands contribute to the rural-urban migration thread of multilocality. Upon acceptance of an applicant's admission to labor mobility schemes by the outer-island councils, applicants leave home islands for the urban center of South Tarawa. In South Tarawa, applicants are required to attend preliminary training that prepares the candidates for employer interviews. Mistrust in bureaucracy, however, is an additional reason that prospective migrants remain in South Tarawa. As one interviewee noted:

*"When I was selected [for the RSE] I just wanted to come here and always
be able to go to the Labour (MEHR) so that I can see when my time to travel.
In 2011 I was [re-]selected till now."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Given the lack of advanced notice in the employer-driven hiring process and uncertain and expensive transportation back to home islands, South Tarawa whether through choice or lack of options becomes the applicant's new place of residence. Flights that are often canceled for weeks on end are cause for uncertainty from the perspective of the prospective migrant worker. For households not strategizing livelihoods around labor

mobility schemes, household education access is a further draw to the urban center. As households become dependent on private education systems, for example, the promise of further education access in South Tarawa that is non-existent in outer-islands home islands keeps households in South Tarawa. As one mother explained:

> *"I prefer to stay in [South] Tarawa for my little son's education, but maybe someday when my children are older, I will want to go back to Kiritimati Island."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Younger generations educated in South Tarawa then face the barriers, already high in the urban center, to enter paid employment. As one interviewee noted:

> *"...Form 6 at St. Louis in Tarawa I graduated in 2016. I came here for secondary school, went back to Marakei, and came back to search for work."* (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

As migrant worker households become increasingly organized in South Tarawa, subsistence lifestyles deemed necessary for outer-island livelihoods are forgotten. Younger generations, some born in South Tarawa, become accustomed to urban lifestyles facilitated by purchasing powers of migrant worker parents and face added barriers to integrating in home islands. As one interviewee explained:

> *"I was born in Tarawa. My parents are from Tarawa, but my father was born in Onotoa and my mom is from Nikunau and I was born in Bikenibeu. I was in my father's home island for 10 months. I stayed with my uncle there. It was very difficult for me because I can't cut toddy, I can't do jobs like a gentleman. I like to sweep and do watching because I can't do jobs like a man. I don't have power."* (interviewee, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Members of urban households often have little advantage of returning to home islands. On one hand, subsistence livelihoods can be a barrier to return migration, while on the other hand, returning migrants with sophisticated technology and savings are pressured through reintegration into extended households to share wealth across the household, impacting long-term fallback positions.

5.4.2 Barriers to international mobility

Access to transnational mobility can be restrictive for i-Kiribati households. Being from an island with limited education and employment opportunities with a desire to contribute to market economies in developed countries, households must successfully negotiate the divergent social constructs. From the i-Kiribati household prospective, barriers to international migration are not only limited to visa regimes as discussed previously (section: 4.3.5), but also language, financial, social, health and gendered barriers. The barriers not only limit access to Australia and New Zealand, but also to regional neighbors, such as Fiji and the Marshal Islands. Although English is an official language of Kiribati, English proficiency among i-Kiribati remains low with a preference both in households and professional circles to communicate in Gilbertese. As one interview explained:

> *"...speaking English...I only spoke a bit. It was mixed nationalities in Primary and then we moved to the town and it was a mix of English/Fijian. It was a problem..."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Additionally, most households are dependent on scholarships for continued external education. With low employment rates in Kiribati, negotiating tuition to international tertiary education is a challenge. Households receiving remittances from Australia and New Zealand, however, are in some cases able to strategize further education overseas. As one returning worker stated:

> *"If [my daughter] doesn't pass the scholarship then I must pay, but I'm waiting for the names to come. If she didn't pass, then I have to pay a lot for her to go to Fiji. I still save the money for the future."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Barriers to international mobility, however, are not always linked to education attainment and financial isolation. Gendered barriers to mobility within labor schemes, for example, can be further restricted due to policy (either domestic or receiving country) or employment requirements. Until the inclusion of female migrant workers in the horticulture industry, prospective female participants in labor mobility schemes were

completely excluded and continue to be excluded from seafaring employment opportunities. As one interviewee explained:

> *"There was the rule that only men could go overseas and females in the program had to find jobs locally because of issues of high rates of pregnancy when overseas."* (interviewee, South Tarawa, August)

The institutionalized gender restrictions that were often blamed on a female perplexity to procreate not only legitimized gender inequality in the transnational space, but additionally in households where starkly uneven contributions led to a gender divide of bargaining power. It is unclear, however, how the absence of male household members retroactively affected female autonomy. The inclusion of female participants in the early nursing mobility scheme, *CANI*, additionally hit barriers. The now discontinued program, was limited by high rates hepatitis and domestic nursing shortages. As one expert explained:

> *"Most of the nurses from the intake, some of them had hepatitis and their enrollment was canceled. There was another component of the program to send qualified nurses to Fiji to upgrade them to a bachelor [degree] and come back, but it didn't happen because there was a concern of how many nurses there were in country... There were 2 or 3 others and when they returned, they caught up from where they left off. Some of them had also been terminated and either looked for other places in Australia or came back."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

As competitive mobility schemes have become employer driven and largely female inclusive, barriers to transnational mobility have shifted to skill disparities.

5.5 Household distribution of migrant worker wages

Labor mobility schemes offer i-Kiribati households an additional livelihood strategy. This section will focus on the responses from returning workers about household wage dispersal. Responses have shown that migrant worker wages have supported: miscellaneous household support, housing projects, transport, savings contributions and small and medium enterprise investment (see table 5). This section aims to answer research sub-question 5: How do households use wages from labor mobility?

Table 5: Uses of wages from labor mobility schemes

Use	Quantity
Family Support	9
Business Activities	9
Savings	8
Building a Home	5
Family Education	5
Misc. Overseas Spending	3
Land Acquisition – Outer Islands	2
Home Upgrades	2
Transport	1
Total	*44*

Design: Marazita, 2019

5.5.1 Overseas remittances

The positive effects of seafarer remittances have been well documented for several decades. With little need for money at sea, seafarer wages are paid directly into local accounts in South Tarawa and into prearranged retirement funds. While seafarers are at sea, seafarers dictate household access to funds. As one returning workers explained:

> *"Every month, I would send money to my savings, to my family, and to my [Kiribati Providence Fund]."* (interviewee, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Monthly remittances from seafarers support the household's ability to sustain livelihoods during the absence of male household members. The standardized remittance of wages to local bank accounts facilitated accurate statistics.

Although seafarer accounts are arranged to pay standard allowances to household members, seafarers additionally have the flexibility to disperse additional funds while at sea. As one seafarer noted:

> *"Most of the money went to my account and the bank only gave the 200 AU$ that I had previously signed for, per month to her account. The rest was kept in my account. Sometimes when she needed more money, she could tell me on the phone, and I could send her more. When I came back, it was enough for me when I came on holiday."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Due to the long-term contracts in the shipping industry, remittances can be easily budgeted to ensure a household's financial stability and support household strategy. The direct payments alleviate the burden of transfer fees and forex charges normally experienced by migrant workers. Unlike the seafarer program, however, wages for migrant workers employed in the Australia and New Zealand are dispersed locally by employers. Remittances from land-based labor mobility schemes thus face high costs associated with transfer fees and, in the case of New Zealand, forex charges. Although there have been innovative mobile applications that facilitate remittances, Western Union remains the preferred method of transfer. As one interviewee explained:

> *"We just spent for our rent, and the car that we used, and rice. The rest we saved or sent back through Western Union. It was quite expensive but there was no other choice."* (male, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Although migrant workers aim to influence the use of remittances, isolation from the household leads to autonomy in household decision-making. When questioned on the perceived use of remittances, a returning worker explained:

> *"...Bought food, but I don't know. He was with the money and I didn't know because I was in Australia. I told him to use it wisely because it's very hard to get the money there. So, he needed to buy something that was very important to him and to the family. He has support what he needed and what they needed. When I came, they had built the traditional house with*

> *it, so I think that's why they needed all the money. I don't know. I just tell them to use it wisely. maybe they just buy food and pay the school fee, because one of my nephews is in the secondary school, in one of the catholic schools."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Remittances allowed households to purchase food and provide services that were compromised due to the migrant worker's absence. Additionally, households strategized the use of remittances to support religious obligations and functions (as discussed in section 4.1.2). In households where migrant workers had had less perceived household contribution, however, some migrant workers had less control over remittances. The remittances of young, single female migrant workers, for instance, could be used simply for leisure activities by household elders in South Tarawa.

The use of remittances for leisure activity were, however, not standard practice and young household members were often empowered to influence household strategic decisions. The high perceived wages of migrant workers in Australia allowed migrant workers to not only influence, but in some cases dictate household decisions, leading to increased household investment in education, shelter, and business activity. One 29-year-old female returning worker, for instance, explained:

> *"I had a plan for my family. I saved my money and sent it back by Western Union so that they could make a small business, that was my goal and then I went to New Zealand and I saved if we have a payday and then that's 300 AU$ in one week and then I saved and had 1000 AU$ and something, 1500 AU$. Then I sent it back to my family. They received the money and came here to South Tarawa and bought the rice and sugar for the small business, and then they went back to Maiana and build the small business. I tried to save for them, I tried to work hard for them and give many chances to them."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Remittances and the influence of migrant workers could affect, not only livelihood strategies, but also household mobility trends on a multilocal bases.

Household remittances by migrant workers to Kiribati depend on wage levels and labor mobility scheme payment methods and remittances have historically been associated with seafaring. The importance of remittances by seafarers have been documented and have served as a political incentive to expand labor mobility schemes. Whether to build homes or to secure household opportunities for increased education, remittances have improved household livelihoods since before independence. Migrant workers employed

in Australia and New Zealand and paid locally by employers, sent remittances less frequently. The higher wages of the land-based mobility schemes, however, allowed households to access education and mobility opportunities and to invest in small and medium sized enterprises.

5.5.2 Saving for long-term household strategy

Land-based labor mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand pay wages rivalling the highest paid salaries in the Kiribati national government. The comparatively high wages can significantly improve household livelihood strategies. Not only are migrant workers able to send regular remittances to facilitate a household strategy and livelihoods, but migrant workers returning from Australia and New Zealand often return with significant savings. The savings can often exceed average Kiribati annual salaries. As one interviewee revealed:

> *"I sent money back to my family and there was around 5000 AU$ left in the account plus the [retirement fund in Australia]."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Continued participation in circular labor mobility schemes increases household savings that contribute to long-term household strategy. For migrant workers prioritizing household education, savings from labor mobility schemes can secure entrance into private secondary and even tertiary programs and forgo the reliance on standardized exams and competitive entrance into public secondary schools. As one returning migrant explained:

> *"I have a savings for his education. Once he goes to the secondary school, the money that I saved for him can go to his high school. I have savings for him. I made a different account for my husband and for him."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

The ability to control personal savings from labor mobility schemes allows returning workers to have autonomy in household strategy that is not otherwise possible under subsistence livelihood structures. The ability to dictate household strategy represents a

combination of increased perceived contribution and fallback position that often transcends social norms, including gender roles.

Although education remains an important household strategy in households with migrant workers, savings from labor mobility schemes mostly target increased autonomy from the extended household hierarchy. Comparatively high wages allow households to acquire land, enlarge homes, and in the long-term, build concrete homes with tin roofs. Oftentimes, migrant workers seek immediate autonomy by investing in additions to extended family households that limit the power of extended household members in nuclear family decision-making while continuing to enjoy the extended family distribution of labor and leisure. As one returning working noted:

> *"[our home is] a Kiribati house like a buia and then we bought some roofing to expand it. We're still doing it. Just for me and my [nuclear family]..it's not very big, just for me and my children and my husband."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

For migrant workers with spouses and dependent children, the goal of autonomy is an important priority. The shift to a nuclear family allows returning workers to focus household strategy on dependent children and forgo the need to consider the opinions of extended household members under traditional hierarchies. In an effort to increase autonomy in household decision-making, the long-term goal of migrant workers often prioritizes further isolation from the extended family. As one returning worker explained:

> *"[I] Built a new home and did the renovation. I was planning to buy a piece of land that's in my wife's family. I am interested in the land and for that I'd like to save money for that land. I would buy it and build a new home there and move my family to that place. That's my new plan for the next year."* (male born in outer-islands, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Following increased autonomy and securing education opportunities for dependent children, migrant worker households prioritize improving livelihoods. Due to drought and inundation of freshwater tables by seawater, water scarcity is an issue for all atolls in Kiribati, but most specifically for the overpopulated urban center. Long term strategy thus focuses on the need to secure potable water. As one returning worker explained:

> *"We buy the solar pump for water. From the well, we didn't want to increase the electricity bill so that's why he bought the solar pump."*
> (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

For households still depending on primitive wells and rainwater collection systems for freshwater, returning workers with independent homes focus on easing the burden of water collection through the installation of automatic water pumps.

> *"...if I get my own place, I will buy a water tank. It is very useful. To drink and cook."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Returning workers born in South Tarawa and outer-islands alike are building homes in the urban center, where there are household opportunities and upward mobility. A concerted effort by the Kiribati government to develop and liberalize property regimes in Kiritimati Island has attracted interest. As one returning worker whose parents settled in South Tarawa from Kuria Island explained:

> *"I'm going to buy one plot of land for my parents on Kiritimati Island. I managed to send my younger sister to school. I managed to pay for her school fees I supported my family and all of them so that's another dream."*
> (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Returning workers' savings from labor mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand significantly improve household living standards. For migrant workers with dependent children and spouses, savings empowers a shift from extended to nuclear household decision-making. The resulting nuclear family allows migrant workers to reconstruct household hierarchies and diffuse patriarchal elderhood hierarchies. Within the nuclear household context, savings from labor mobility schemes no longer face the burdens associated with larger households where savings may otherwise be quickly diluted by the priorities of elder household members. Returning migrant workers thus prioritize the use of increased savings to improve household bargaining position through not only an increase in perceived contribution and fallback position, but also through a decrease in the social hierarchies of extended families.

5.5.3 Improving household access to labor through investment

In an effort to encourage the domestic market economy and supporting the Kiribati Vision 20, pre-departure training includes instructions on establishing small and medium enterprises (expert, South Tarawa, July 2018). Although not all returning workers focused on long term goals, three returning migrant worker had established businesses and/or engaged in trading activities, while a fourth returning migrant worker had a refined business plan to fund after the next season's employment. Investment in small business allows returning workers to sustain wages while not employed. As the key informant noted:

> *"When I came [back to South Tarawa] I just made a small [business] so I could save the money. I sold Kerosene out of the house…to maintain the money, because I know it's only 6 months per year [that I work], so I can save 3000 AU$. I paid 200 AU$ something for the Kerosene and then I sold out to the people."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Returning migrants participated in small scale trading activities between the place of employment (New Zealand) and Kiribati. As one returning worker explained:

> *"I buy the t-shirt and shorts. 15 t-shirt and the shorts only 20 pieces because I come back and put in the store and I send some to Maiana to sell. They cost 9NZ$ in New Zealand and here they sell for 27NZ$, but I share with my Auntie because she gives me the money. She sends the money from Kiribati to New Zealand and then I go downtown and ask her what she likes, and I send photos of the new clothes. She chooses and I bring it back with the receipt then we hang it in the store, but now it's finished (sold out)."*
> (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Other small businesses included acquisition of a rental car. As one interviewee stated:

> *"[My] third [dream] is buying my own new car, I got it already and renting it out as one of the rental car businesses."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Due to the circular mobility of labor mobility schemes, business supported by migrant workers offered employment opportunities for household members. Taking into account applicants for labor mobility schemes, one key informant sought employment overseas to contribute capital to an existing construction company. Key informants engaging in or planning to establish business activities represented both urban and rural origins, but all shared the commonality of being female. While social hierarchies favor male as the heads of household and leaders of government, females run many of the country's largest

businesses. Whether it be as hotel developers or supermarket owners, female business leaders are confronting the patriarchal system.

5.5.4 Labor mobility as a driver of long-term household strategy

Remittances from labor mobility schemes primarily support miscellaneous household expenses resulting from the lack of paid employment opportunities in Kiribati. Key informants supported household education of both nuclear and extended relatives. Remittances not only enabled support access to domestic education, but in some cases supported household education opportunities in Fiji. Key informants, however, tend to have little knowledge of household uses for remitted wages with assumptions that remittances were primarily used for food and miscellaneous personal needs. Additionally, one key informant noted that family remittances were primarily used in leisure to support household gambling habits.

Savings from comparatively high wages in labor mobility schemes allowed returning workers to improve living conditions. Of the thirteen migrant workers interviewed, seven saved enough wages to either build or upgrade existing homes. Homes built by migrant workers were not limited to modern concrete builds, but also traditional homes. The informants came from a diverse background of urban and outer-island origins, as well as both female and male. All homes built and upgraded, however, were in South Tarawa. While building was limited to South Tarawa, informants reported land acquisition on the islands of Kiritimati and Maiana.

Wages from labor mobility schemes allowed female returning workers to break predetermined household gender roles normally associated with rural households. Female returning workers have additionally been empowered to establish small businesses that benefit households through added revenue. As female household members become successful entrepreneurs, household power structures were elevated in line with a combination of perceived contribution and increased fallback position. Returning to Kiribati with savings, female returning workers often enjoy greater autonomy over wages earned while overseas. The relationship between increased female

household bargaining power, however, can clash with traditional hierarchies. As such, the distinction can lead to hesitation of females entering into marriage.

5.6 Household perceived vulnerability to climate change

The results of the interview responses to climate change are purely organic and were not solicited. They were not contextualized through previous administrative approaches. This section aims to answer research sub-question 6: To what extent is perceived climate change vulnerability reflected in household strategy?

5.6.1 Climate change as a driver of mobility

Following Tong's *migration with dignity*, the topic of climate migration became a household topic in Kiribati. Tong's proposal followed an assumption that displacement and relocation were inevitable and that the direct effects of climate change were experienced by a majority (Oakes, Milan and Campbell, 2016). Current policy, however, is challenging the view of displacement, favoring resilience and mitigation to climate change. Key informants referred to climate migration either as secondary sources or as a matter of discourse akin to religious views. As one key informant noted:

> *"Some of the people in New Zealand they feel sorry for the people here because they worry about climate change, but here we are still happy. Some of the people are thinking of climate change and feel sorry and offer help to leave."* (female, South Tarawa, September 2018)

A similar sentiment was shared by a second key informant, who expressing doubt explained:

> *"I have heard a lot about climate change and people have started to move and yeah people are planning to leave, but I know too that there are some countries, if some funds from overseas that try to help with those problems and sanitation."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Awareness that climate change may lead to displacement is an underlying assumption in the context of interviews. Although there may have been some expectation by

interviewees that the topic would be covered in the interviews, thematic responses held a mostly defensive stance of resilience against rising sea levels. The perception of interviewees was disbelief that climate change would challenge the continued habitation of the atolls, whether for pragmatic or religious reasons. The narrative dictated through qualitative interviews was thus closely aligned with current policy aspirations of resilience over displacement and loss and damage.

5.6.2 Individual perceptions of climate change

As noted, previous administrations have billed Kiribati as victims of slow-onset natural disaster that would inevitably lead to loss of territory and displacement. The narrative was associated with projections of rising sea levels that are expected to be as high as 4.65m by 2200 (Climate Analytics, 2014; Kopp *et al.*, 2014) and could inundate freshwater sources leading to food insecurity before engulfing the low-lying atolls. The narrative that ignored the effects of quick-onset natural disasters was not only the narrative offered by the previous administration (cf Tong 205) but remains a popular theme of documentaries. In the context of key informant interviews, the *sinking islands* narrative dominated key informant perception of climate change. Perceived vulnerability thus revolved around the threat of rising seas. As one key informant noted:

> *"They say that rising sea levels. I think that you know that Kiribati is really small and if they wave comes through to Kiribati then all the islands will disappear. So where can we be? There are no mountains for us. I think we go to the stadium. That's why everyone is scared even me, but I'm so proud to be Kiribati."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Interviewees also discussed climate change as secondary sources. Interviewees suggested perceptions that the i-Kiribati diaspora in New Zealand also shared concern and pressured extended household members to consider out-migration from Kiribati. As one expert who was active in the cyclone Pam recovery efforts explained:

> *"...some of the people in New Zealand, they feel sorry for the people here because they worry about climate change, but here we are still happy. Some of the people are thinking of climate change and feel sorry and offer help to leave."* (expert, South Tarawa, August 2018)

The fear of climate change and the *sinking island* narrative was not universal. One key informant explained:

> *"...some of my friends want to leave Kiribati and I ask them why. They say that next time Kiribati is going to sink, but in the history Kiribati didn't sink. The old people tell us Kiribati can't sink. I don't believe it and I'm not scared for the climate change. I just want to get more education and the jobs."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Not only did some interviewees question the *sinking island* narrative, but there were suggestions that all effects of climate change would be countered through foreign intervention.

> *"I have heard a lot about climate change and people have started to move and yeah people are planning to leave, but I know too that there are some countries, if some funds from overseas that try to help with those problems and sanitation."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

With the exception of one interviewee, no concrete examples of climate change were offered throughout the duration of fieldwork. Although, driving along the island, there were ample examples of sea encroachment, locals describing said events would also contextualize encroachment with extensive beach mining and unplanned sea walls. Sea encroachment was not discussed by key informants. One key informant, however, associated climate change with reminiscent nostalgias of environmental change in the informant's home island of Kuria, explaining:

> *"Kuria island is in the middle of Kiribati. Before it was quite cold in the nights. It had fog, but now after climate change, everything is gone."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

5.7 Preferences for permanent out-migration

Research on the topic of mobility in Kiribati often center on the assumption that i-Kiribati have an inherent desire to remain on the islands through place attachment (Oakes, Milan and Campbell, 2016). Interviews with key informants initially confirmed these results, however follow-up questions revealed that the initial suggestions were not accurate and that not only did interviewees prefer to emigrate but had been actively planning to emigrate.

Some returning workers described plans to use labor mobility schemes as a vehicle to build savings and as a potential path to future permanent residence in Australia, but most key informants were initially cautious to diverge household intents to emigrate. Although initial responses of several key informants pointed to a desire to remain in Kiribati, the reality of emigration was revealed through the nearly universal participation in the PAC resident visa lottery program from New Zealand. Discussion about PAC participation elicited further narratives of the desire to emigrate, build new households, and support extended households in Kiribati through remittances from the destination countries. Poverty and a lack of opportunity in Kiribati were the defining factors of key informants desiring permanent out migration. As one interviewee stated:

> *"I'm planning [to build a home] if I come back from Australia and I get some more money, but I'm not sure if I want to build here because here it's overpopulated. I think it's much better to live [in Australia]."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

<div align="center">and another:</div>

> *"...if I have a job offer, I will go back [to Australia] after the 3 years. This is due to high population here and limited land and I'd like to give it to other family members."* (male, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Returning workers with experience living in New Zealand and Australia were aware of the struggles and harsh environments in their places of employment. Unlike the tropical islands of Kiribati, interviewees described the cold climates where work was hard and unending. Acknowledging the challenging changes to livelihoods needed for successful integration into new homes, interviewees expressed preferences to emigrate as

confirmed through subsequent application for the Pacific Access Category residence visa lottery. As one interviewee explained:

> *"I like New Zealand. I know it's very different from Kiribati and it's cold. I want my skin to turn more white (sic). We use the long sleeves all the time because it's very cold, but the Maori people didn't wear the long sleeve, they wore the singlet because they've been in New Zealand, but New Zealand is very nice. You get some money and you have a lot of opportunities in New Zealand. The food is very cheap."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Building new lives in New Zealand and Australia was not only about personal preference but as was perceived as a necessary advantage for household education goals. Unlike Kiribati where there are significant barriers to education attainment, Australia and New Zealand were perceived to offer open-opportunity. As one interviewee noted:

> *"I hope my daughter goes overseas because I want her to understand more English and have a better future. She can make goals and achieve them. Maybe she could get a small job here in Kiribati, but maybe at some point she wouldn't be able to find a good job even with a diploma."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Some returning workers discussed desperation to outsource household education goals to any available regional hubs. Although Australia and New Zealand were preferred destinations, Fiji was also considered by one informant who explained:

> *"I think that [my children] need the opportunity to go overseas. Myself and my wife we have the plan to maybe not stay in Australia, but we are trying our luck with the PAC in New Zealand, but we haven't had luck. We will continue it for our children. We think that if we move overseas, [the children] will have more opportunities to learn new skills and it will help their future. If we don't have any have any chance to do that, then we need to save a lot of money to send them to private school in Fiji or New Zealand or Australia."* (male, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Table 6: Key informant mobility preferences

Mobility Goal	Quantity
Emigration	15
Circular Migration	2
Remain in Kiribati	3
(domestic migration)	1
Total	*21*

Design: Marazita, 2019

Although there is a strong desire to emigrate (see Table 6), current visa regimes available to participants in unskilled and low-skilled labor mobility schemes offer no pathway to permanent residency. Visas for employment in the horticulture industry coincide with annual employment contracts. Hopes for a pathway to Australian permanent residency through renewal of the longer-term NAWPP visa were recently dashed when contract extensions for work on Hayman Island required i-Kiribati workers to return to South Tarawa for visa processing. Key informants with plans to migrate thus rely on participation in the PAC resident visa lottery. Although results from this study show a strong preference for out-migration regardless of destination country, six key informants preferred to remain in Kiribati [see table 6]. As one returning worker discussing the issue of the Pacific Access Category resident visa noted:

> *"That's my plan to go to New Zealand, but my family doesn't want to go because Kiribati is their home. New Zealand is very nice, you get your own home and you can make money, that's what I tell them, but they tell me that I can go to New Zealand and they can stay in Kiribati. That's my dream for my family to live in New Zealand. We tried to fill [out] the PAC but we didn't pass. Everybody tried. From the outer-islands they do it."* (female, South Tarawa, July 2018)

Interviewee responses pointed to strategic preferences to emigrate to Australia and New Zealand. Although nearly all discussions revolved around plans to either win a coveted Pacific Access Category residency visa to New Zealand or through entering long-term

employment contracts in Australia, one returning Latter Day Saint missionary having been assigned to the United States explained:

> *"I love that American's don't live with extended families. Here you see a lot of fighting over food and a lot of gossiping. For example, if your husband's family doesn't like you then they can talk to their son negatively about you. I don't like it. I think it's better to live only with your husband and kids. When you fight it doesn't involve your family. That's why I loved the American culture too. They are responsible for their kids, but your decision is yours. When someone proposes to you and you accept it's fine, but here you have to ask your mom and dad and they can make you find another one."* (female, South Tarawa, September 2018)

Citing family, comfort, and religious fears, a minority of key informants demonstrated a preference to remain in Kiribati. Of the informants wishing to remain, most were educated, government employees with significant mobility experience and potential. Unlike households strategizing out-migration to escape poverty and in search of education access, reasons for staying in Kiribati were highly individualized and showed no clear trend. Expressing a preference to stay in Kiribati in line with previous research, one informant following rural household hierarchies explained:

> *"We wanted to do the New Zealand PAC, but my father said no. He said "we're born here in Kiribati, we have to live here in Kiribati. from now on, I don't think to go overseas now. I have to stay with my family. I like Kiribati because it's relaxing. I can do whatever I want. The rules are relaxed, and you know everyone in Kiribati. It's a small world in Kiribati. It's my own country and I'm free to do what I want. Even though there are factors that make you want to leave, it's where I belong, where I grew-up. I like it because of my belonging."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

and an additional interviewee stated:

> *"I like Kiribati because it's relaxing. I can do whatever I want. The rules are relaxed, and you know everyone in Kiribati. It's a small world in Kiribati. It's my own country and I'm free to do what I want. Even though there are factors that make you want to leave, it's where I belong, where I grew-up. I like it because of my belonging."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

While some interviewees showed either social or household attachment to Kiribati, government officials were more pragmatic. For the seasoned government employees, high-level domestic appointments allowed households to not only educate dependent children in but offered household access to mobility. Kiribati for the government officials

was thus not a barrier to either domestic or international household strategies. As one expert described:

> *"…because my husband and I are still living together. My husband also has a contract with the government and is [Ministry and title removed]. My three kids are in Australia. Two are working and the other lives in Fiji but is now helping my daughter with the new baby in Australia. One is a nurse and the other married an I-Kiribati born in Australia. I have two kids here, one working in finance and the other as a nurse."* (expert, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Government employees in Kiribati not only benefit from competitive salaries and access to further education but are also provided with government funded housing. One government employee discussing the barriers to reside in New Zealand noted:

> *"I know it would be a very difficult life, though because in New Zealand we would be working for our rent and our living until we are stable and then buy a mortgage, which I don't think it would be possible. It might be possible with a good job, but compared to here, we have our house and don't have to pay rent and we work for our living."* (female, South Tarawa, August 2018)

Preferences to permanently emigrate from Kiribati are individual household decisions but follow a trend of escaping poverty and seeking opportunity. Due to the PAC residency visa lottery, there is a preference to move to New Zealand. In the case of Kiribati, poverty points to a break in both the model of cooperative conflict and the theory of multilocality. Poverty and lack of opportunity that begins in South Tarawa and is replicated in outer-islands is a breakdown point in household negotiation where perceived interest outweighs well-being to such a drastic point that would-be i-Kiribati emigrants are willing to blindly leave their households. Given the opportunity to emigrate, the urban residential node of South Tarawa would be abandoned, reducing multilocality. The comparative advantages sought by returning migrant workers in South Tarawa would no longer benefit the informants as immigrants in destination countries. Informants actively planning to emigrate thus invest sparingly in South Tarawa households and infrastructure. Multilocality in Kiribati thus becomes a temporal construct that depends entirely on access to transnational mobility.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the transformation of i-Kiribati households through the social and spatial impacts of mobility on atoll islands that are acutely vulnerable to climate change. Politicians and popular media have successfully billed the i-Kiribati as future climate refugees through a narrative of rising seas and sinking islands. To combat the trauma associated with being a trapped population leading to forced displacement, the former administration of Anote Tong aimed to offset forced migration through labor mobility (Tong, 2015). Although there have been administrative changes in Kiribati, labor mobility remains a key development goal for the central Pacific nation. This study aimed to understand the drivers behind mobility in Kiribati, the consequences of the mobility on households, and if there were any links between mobility and climate change.

Facing nascent labor mobility schemes, researchers often drew connections between labor mobility and climate change adaptation using livelihood frameworks that established benefits of remittances and out-migration induced population reduction (Campbell, 2010). The studies were limited in their scope owing to a lack of access to labor mobility participants. Breaking from experience of other researchers, this study used a novel methodology in which the researcher was embedded in the Kiribati Ministry

of Employment and Human Resources while shadowing ministerial work and conducting both qualitative expert interviews and episodic key informant interviews of returning workers, applicants, and non-participants in labor mobility schemes. Seeking a fresh prospective from livelihood frameworks, this study employed a theoretical framework that approached the topic from household power structures as identified through household cooperative conflict in a context of multilocality (see chapter 3). Kiribati is a remote nation and, unlike other Pacific island nations, achieved full independence without association to larger, regional powers (Foster and Macdonald, 2017). As such, Kiribati outer-islands and, to an extent, the urban center remain a collection of rural households living labor intensive subsistence livelihoods against the backdrop of unique social norms. The remoteness and lack of paid employment in Kiribati necessitate extended household approaches that are inherently transient in nature to offset community vulnerabilities to poverty. Although Kiribati is one of the least developed states, homelessness does not exist leading to households that are dynamic and changing depending on community needs.

Temporary labor mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand allow a unique opportunity for the rural i-Kiribati households dependent on subsistence livelihoods to be elevated into transnational spaces, living between rural outer-islands and the developed regional centers of Australia and New Zealand. Comparatively high wages paid to migrant workers elevate household purchasing power to such an extent that households previously dependent on hard labor are, within the span of a year, able to invest in household infrastructure and long-term household strategy. In the absence of other high-paying household employment, migrant workers as the gatekeeper to wealth thus have a comparatively high perceived household contribution. The juxtaposed nature of living between developed and rural societies greatly affects household power relations.

Through a hybrid theoretical framework using the model of cooperative conflict and the theory of multilocality, the narrative of the transformative i-Kiribati household begins to develop. Owing to a lack of methodologically sound data on mobility in Kiribati, this study applied a grounded theory approach to data collection and analyses, triangulating participant observations associated with ministerial shadowing, expert interviews, and

episodic key informant interviews that sought to promote the accuracy of the results through a diversified set of data rich cases. Initial findings revealed a connection between labor mobility and rural-urban migration. The centralized nature of labor mobility schemes in South Tarawa lead to an initial rural-urban migration from even the most distant atolls. While labor mobility is by no means the only factor causing rural-urban migration, half of the national population now resides in South Tarawa. For prospective migrant workers, residents chosen by outer-island councils travel to South Tarawa for pre-departure training. Following the pre-departure training, applicants remain in South Tarawa due to uncertainties in the hiring process, unscheduled employer interviews, and visa processing. Additionally, the cost of return transport to places of origin are prohibitively costly. While the barriers of returning to outer-islands may be too high, social obligations of extended households in South Tarawa facilitate outer-islanders to live in the urban center without financial concerns. Due to high demands on labor mobility schemes, wait time between training and eventual employment can last years. Applicants thus slowly integrate into the urban center and the once rural household begins to transform.

Successful applicants employed in labor mobility schemes continue to cement residency in South Tarawa. Although labor mobility schemes are short term with duration depending on the program, migrant workers often fall into circular migration pathways where they are rehired by employers annually. Owing to finite contracts, however, there is no certainty for returning workers. In some cases, returning workers are hired by different employers or change programs in search of better wages. The uncertainty in circular migration creates a further dependency for returning workers to remain in South Tarawa. Returning workers of outer-island origin would run the risk of missing out on employment opportunities if they were absent from South Tarawa, as the reliability of return transport remains a constraint. Additionally, migrant workers returning with comparatively large savings find limited household investment opportunity in outer-islands, whether it be building shelter, providing education for household minors or leisure activities. A lack of opportunity and markets serve as barriers for multilocal migrant workers to return to outer-islands. As the migrant workers further cement their livelihoods in South Tarawa, they not only become rural-urban migrants but contribute to overpopulation and thus all of the vulnerabilities associated with overpopulation.

In response to the research question: *How does mobility affect household power relations on a multilocal scale in Kiribati?*, migrant worker households settling in South Tarawa experience a reorganization of power structures. In the context of cooperative conflict, Australian and New Zealand level wages increase the household bargaining power of migrant workers. Previously unemployed rural residents working in undervalued roles on outer-islands can, through new employment contracts in labor mobility schemes increase their perceived household contribution. Returning workers who previously had little bargaining power in household decision-making thus have authority to dictate important household decisions. Although this in some cases can be vetoed under the *unimwane* system where the opinions of elderly men are exalted, returning worker often have control of labor mobility scheme earnings.

Returning migrant workers often negotiate the use of earnings for the best interest of the nuclear household. Wages from labor mobility schemes provide households with necessary revenue sources to secure food and shelter while the migrant worker is employed overseas. Wages additionally support rising education attainment within a household by providing a means of funding private secondary school tuition. Although key informants reported using wages to build and upgrade housing in South Tarawa, no key informants mentioned the use of wages from labor mobility schemes for the use of offsetting vulnerabilities associated with climate change preferring to offset vulnerabilities in line with poverty reduction.

Kiribati is a fiercely patriarchal society where household violence against women has reached endemic levels. Although the topic of domestic violence did not come up among key informant interviews, female participation in labor mobility schemes could be interpreted with an increase in household bargain power for women. Breaking from social norms, female returning workers with control of wages often dictated household strategy including on housing, education, and long-term household strategy. The gender ripples caused by labor mobility schemes, however, are not merely reflected in household trajectory. In line with the Kiribati Vision 20 goal of increased investment, control of earnings from labor mobility schemes has empowered female returning workers to invest in small and medium sized enterprises in an effort to improve both nuclear and extended household livelihoods and long-term stability. Female returning workers from

labor mobility schemes interviewed for the purpose of this study reported a variety of business schemes including rental cars, kerosene trading, and construction companies in South Tarawa; the establishment of small-scale retail outlets in outer-islands; and cross-border trading between the employment country and Kiribati. Unlike female respondents, no male interviewees reported increased business activity involvement as a result of increased wages from labor mobility schemes.

The tendency of female migrant workers to establish business activity is mirrored on a larger scale by the many female run businesses in South Tarawa, including hotels and supermarkets. Although females are continually taking an active role in commerce, the female voice in Kiribati remains suppressed both in households and in political circles. This study acknowledges the role that female returning worker entrepreneurship could play in fulfilling development goals under the Kiribati Vision 20. Female dominance is not limited to entrepreneurship, however, with growing gender gaps in education favoring women. As the female i-Kiribati demographic continues to become more educated and control a larger number of coveted labor mobility positions, they could have the power and resources to substantially affect not only household decision-making and strategy, but community and national trajectories.

This section has aimed to draw conclusions on the social and spatial impacts of mobility in Kiribati. Although the focus of this study has prioritized labor mobility opportunities due to the past assumptions of labor mobility and climate change adaptation, it is vital to remember that mobility in Kiribati exists on a plural scale, whether due to disaster displacement, labor mobility, family reunification, or in pursuit of further education. In the context of pluralism, labor mobility remains the most obvious pathway to accelerate household mobility in Kiribati. Mobility exists on both domestic: rural-rural and rural-urban and international scales, but urbanized South Tarawa remains the final destination for most migrants seeking a respite from hard labor associated with subsistence livelihoods in rural Kiribati. South Tarawa, suffering from overpopulation and vulnerabilities to both human and climate induced disaster, stands as a symbol of the limits of mobility for most i-Kiribati nationals. While these conditions push both outer-islanders and South Tarawa residents alike to look for employment abroad, the hopes of

the many i-Kiribati interviewed for the purpose of this study to eventually emigrate are not supported by current policy.

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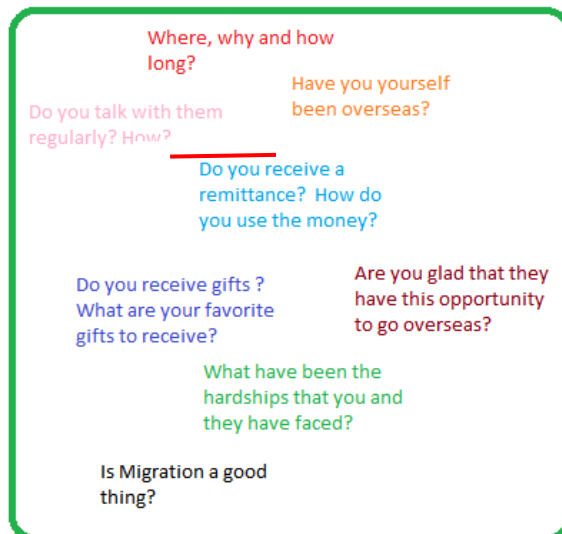# Appendix: Key Informant Interview Guide

I. Home and Family background

Self Employed

Finances

How many work in your household?

Are you active in climate change groups?

II. Member of household overseas

Use support instead of remittance.
Leaving your Island
Does it (the support) assist you in your everyday life?

III.   Would you like to leave Kiribati?

Barriers?

<div>

YES

Where?
     When?

Why?

Preperations?

NO

Somewhere else in
Kiribati you'd rather
be?

</div>

Do you want your children to live overseas? Why?

IV.   Likes

<div>

Food

Friends/Are all of your
friends related to you

Music

Activities

</div>

V.   Dislikes
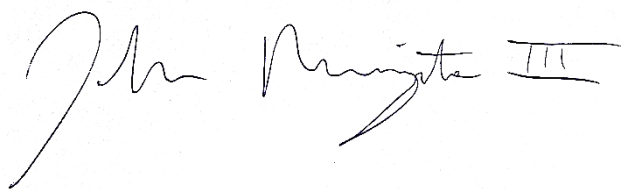
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Food

Petpeeves

Music

Activities

Types of People

</div>

**Anything you find annoying or unacceptable in your eyes?
People from what countries annoy you?**

Final Question: Yes or no: would you leave Kiribati?

Personal declaration:
I hereby declare that the submitted thesis is the result of my own, independent work. All external sources are explicitly acknowledged in the thesis

18/04/19 – Küsnacht, Switzerland

Contact: john.marazita@gmail.com