KIRIBATI
CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT IN KIRIBATI. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOCelyn CARLIN.
52-year-old Mathew Matang lives with 40 family members on customary land in Abaroa, South Tarawa, Kiribati. As with many land parcels on the atoll, one side of his land is bordered by ocean, and the other by lagoon. During a king tide in 2005, water rushed from the lagoon over a sandy rise, inundating much of Mathew’s land. Ever since, high tides have enveloped his land with increasing frequency. As a result, Mathew’s fish farm has been contaminated with salt water and is no longer viable due to regular flooding. Numerous food crops have perished and cannot be replaced. Tree roots and bases – the skeletons of deceased coconut, pandanus and breadfruit trees – litter the land, marking the places where healthy trees once stood. For Mathew’s family, this environmental change has meant significant financial pressure, as they must now purchase food that previously they would grow themselves. Although their self-made seawall of coral and old machinery was overtopped and eroded, Mathew still believes that a new, higher seawall will solve his family’s problems. However, he estimates that it would cost A$200,000, which his family certainly cannot afford. Regrettably, the Government’s Kiribati Adaptation Programme (KAP) has not been able to access financing sufficient to enable it to pay for private seawall repairs or reconstructions. Despite knowing the projections of future sea-level rise and the risk of further storm surges, Mathew does not wish to leave Kiribati, the country he loves so dearly. His hope is that his Government and the international community will not be too quick to encourage the migration of the i-Kiribati people. Instead, he wishes that those responsible for climate change would fund adaptation measures that lead to an improvement in the quality of life of the i-Kiribati people until the time when a national exodus becomes inevitable, which, of course, he hopes and prays will never come to pass.

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If you would like to find out how you can help the people of Kiribati in their quest for a brighter future and to keep abreast of developments relating to our Climate Change and Displacement Initiative, please feel free to have a look at the Displacement Solutions website
www.displacementsolutions.org
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Few nations are as deeply and dramatically affected by the consequences of climate change as Kiribati. The country’s looming fate has both the Government and the citizenry of this small island nation ever more on edge as the once distant predictions of climate change come increasingly to pass. The very real and palpable sense of unease and often outright fear that is apparent (in what is otherwise a rather pious, joyful and light-hearted culture), is heart-wrenching testimony to the climate displacement tragedy slowly unfolding in Kiribati. The 110,000 people of Kiribati living on its 32 atolls and one island now worry openly that their tiny land mass of only 719 km² is slowly but surely being eaten away by seas that have for an eternity provided a source of sustenance, beauty and tranquility.

Having interviewed scores of i-Kiribati citizens over the past three years, Displacement Solutions (DS) has yet to meet a person or family who has not already thought deeply about their own personal migration plans, should it come to that. The people of Kiribati are already coming to grips with the idea that they may one day need to leave their cherished island homes. No one knows for certain, however, just at what point Kiribati will become effectively uninhabitable; this could become the tragic fate of the country perhaps as early as 2050, or, all other things being equal, not occur for a century or more. In 2012 it is still not too late to prevent worst case scenarios from taking place, and DS believes that a new, vigorous and harmonised strategy of both ‘fight’ and ‘flight’ could positively transform Kiribati both in socio-economic and human rights terms, but also in terms of long-term viability as a nation in their struggle against climate change.

In September 2011, as part of its Climate Change and Displacement Initiative (CCDI), a team from Displacement Solutions and UN-HABITAT carried out its second mission to Kiribati to investigate the very real displacement threats posed by climate change. The six-person expert mission coincided with the first-ever visit by a UN Secretary-General to the severely threatened atoll nation that is spread across the central Pacific Ocean. Some of the mission team stood arm to arm along the landing strip with thousands of excited and almost giddy i-Kiribati citizens watching the Secretary-General’s plane touch down, all of whom, without exception, exuded hope that somehow the UN might come to their aid and help preserve the much beleaguered country from eventual inundation. This was an extraordinarily moving moment in a land where few world leaders ever tread. As Ban Ki-Moon said during his short, 36-hour visit: “Climate change is not about tomorrow. It is lapping at our feet - quite literally in Kiribati and elsewhere… I have watched the high tide impacting those villages. The high tide shows it is high time to act”.

Many Pacific Island nations, including Kiribati, have always been vulnerable to an array of environmental threats including droughts, storm surges and occasional king tides. Today, however, the continued physical existence of Kiribati is far from secure. Large areas of Kiribati’s land area could be submerged due to sea-level rise as early as the middle of the century, and it is clear that this process has already begun. If the scientists have got it right, Kiribati could disappear entirely during the lifetimes of children who are alive today. However, the final wave or storm surge that submerges Kiribati will be only an epilogue to the true story of Kiribati and climate change that is yet to unfold. Although the story is well advanced, the critical chapters are yet to be written. The past 20-40 years mark some of the greatest changes in the history of these Micronesian islanders. Traditionally, they enjoyed healthy subsistence-based lifestyles grounded deeply within a cultural framework of which all i-Kiribati are immensely proud. More recently, however, for reasons of climate change, globalisation and modern-day living, things have changed dramatically for i-Kiribati and now for the first time in their history they are suffering from severe overcrowding in the capital South Tarawa and face a series of preventable health concerns including hepatitis, leprosy and TB. Access to clean potable water is becoming a serious problem throughout the country and employment, educational and other economic opportunities are severely limited. It is a nation beset with social, economic and human rights concerns. When visiting the country it is all too easy to lose sight of the longer-term threats to the nation given the growing slums in the capital, the ubiquitous rubbish piles that hideously pollute the beaches and roadsides, crumbling infrastructure, decrepit health care and
water services and other socio-economic ills that daily challenge the people and Government.

Underlying all of these ongoing and other developmental and human rights concerns, however, is the uncertainty brought out by the potential impacts of climate change. These now permeate the daily thoughts of i-Kiribati people. Many i-Kiribati parents indicated to the mission team a fear of their unknown future, indicating that they have been told that either they or their children will not be able to live out their lives in Kiribati. Their selflessness is driving all of them, each in their own unique ways, in search of a plan for the safe passage of their children should the seas carry away their land. When visiting a local school, it became clear that children should the seas carry away their land.

The chapters in the Kiribati story yet to be written cover the period from now until either displacement or rapid enough to save Kiribati in the long run. With hopes of migration diminishing, therefore, debate has centered on whether Kiribati should prioritise a flight strategy involving mass migration and resettlement, or whether a series of major adaptation projects might yet yield the results needed to preserve Kiribati’s place among the family of nations. Because of the seeming inevitability of i-Kiribati migration to safe third countries, most notably Fiji, New Zealand and Australia, some decision-makers have taken the view that adaptation measures are effectively a waste of both precious time and resources, in effect asking: "Why spend money on adapting to climate change and improving the social and economic prospects of the country if the population is just going to leave anyway?" Indeed, a simultaneous focus on both adaptation and migration requires a careful, yet precarious balancing act, and often this policy tightrope confounds both Kiribati supporters and donors as to which position to pursue; fight or flight?

The photographs in this booklet, taken by New Zealander Jocelyn Carlin, show the faces, smiles, hopes, cultural pride and unique physical beauty that stands to disappear forever if climate change undermines the very existence of Kiribati; an unbelievably tragic outcome of human-caused global warming. Similar images will also be included in a short documentary by Displacement Solutions on climate displacement in Kiribati that was shot in September 2011. It is our hope that the photographs below and the upcoming film will help open the eyes of the world and reveal to it the reality of Kiribati today, and most importantly, what is to be lost with what appears increasingly to be its looming demise. Displacement Solutions believes, despite everything, that every Kiribati citizen and, indeed, the very State of Kiribati itself, has rights to exist and flourish, and that the international community (in particular those nations most responsible for climate change) have a legal obligation, and not merely a moral one, to preserve the sovereignty of Kiribati and protect the full spectrum of human rights of all i-Kiribati people.

**Developing a new, rights-based strategy to tackle development challenges now, while simultaneously preparing the population for the possibility of eventual flight will offer the best outcome for a country confronting challenges no country should have to face.**

**Fight and Flight:**

**The Hopes and Limits of Adaptation**

After intensive investigations within the country over the past several years and thorough analyses of numerous reports addressing the effects on Kiribati from climate change, Displacement Solutions believes that the pursuit of a coordinated strategy that focuses simultaneously on improving the human rights and development prospects of all i-Kiribati people today (Fight), combined with an approach that guarantees the right to new land in safe locations, whether within the country or elsewhere, for everyone forced to flee the country as sea levels rise to unsustainable levels (Flight) will hold out the best hope for the people of Kiribati.

Although Kiribati has made repeated and valiant efforts advocating for climate change mitigation since joining the UN in 1999, as well as testing the region’s political waters with proposals for mass migration and even the establishment of a new territorial configuration for the country, these pleas have largely gone unheeded. As a result, an understandable (but nonetheless worrisome for the implications this decision generates) consensus appears to be emerging within the country that neither mitigation nor adaptation will be substantial enough to save Kiribati in the long run. Although, the number of Kiribati forcibly displaced individuals has dropped since 2014, there is little evidence that this is anything more than a pause in a trend towards mass displacement.

A sole focus on adaptation might seem *prima facie* desirable, given the clear wish of many i-Kiribati to remain in their country of birth, the reluctance of either Australia, Fiji or New Zealand thus far
to formally loosen their immigration policies to allow larger-scale migration from Kiribati, and also the danger that such mass migration could pose for i-Kiribati culture and sovereignty. However, even though climate change scenarios are inevitably uncertain, the risk that climate change will make Kiribati uninhabitable despite the best adaptation efforts is growing with each passing year.

At the same time, however, Displacement Solutions is convinced that with sufficient technical assistance, regional and global political backing and, above all, financial support, a meaningful portion of the physical territory of Kiribati (and perhaps all of its landmass) can be preserved and improved in the coming decades, thus ensuring long-term human habitation, and hopefully, ever growing prosperity. To achieve this, though, will be an extremely daunting task. The Government has estimated, for instance, that it would cost some US$ one billion to construct a seawall around South Tarawa alone. In a country with an annual GDP of less than US$175 million and which to date has accessed less than US$20 million in global adaptation funding, adaptation as a long-term strategy for national survival is clearly not without its practical limitations. As the main adaptation element in the Government’s overall strategy, the Kiribati Adaptation Programme is carrying out important work protecting key infrastructure and the freshwater supply, but these laudable efforts are no alternative for either a rights-based social and economic development policy designed to raise the entire population out of poverty or comprehensive adaptation measures that will secure the land mass of the nation as a whole.

Although the international community has voiced its intention to help fund the climate change adaptation needs of developing countries, including frontline states such as Kiribati, only a minute amount of actual support has materialised. The new Green Fund, created in Cancun as part of the COP 16 agreements with the exclusive purpose of financing adaptation measures to climate change, is intended to have an annual budget of US$100 billion, making it the largest global adaptation fund. This is a welcome effort on behalf of the international community, however, not only are present contributions falling far short of this figure, but in addition, the application procedure is regarded as both far too complicated and stringent for small island nations to manage effectively. Consequently, DS urges States to make substantive contributions to the Green Fund and other adaptation funds now, as a matter of urgency, so that vulnerable and under-resourced states like Kiribati can begin to implement approaches on the scale required to protect their citizens from the effects of climate change. Additionally, these funds should have clear and fair application procedures, so that deserving poor countries are not prevented from accessing them. Indeed, funding earmarks should be made for all of the heavily affected nations, beginning with those such as Kiribati whose entire existence remains under threat. An initial US$ one billion earmark to a Special Kiribati Adaptation Fund (SKAF) could well secure the continued existence of the country and prevent future displacement and the need for large-scale migration, and should be pursued without delay.

Thus, while Displacement Solutions believes that comprehensive adaptation-based solutions are possible, particularly if the SKAF is created, at the moment it remains unlikely that Kiribati will be able to access the funds required for this to occur unless, of course, the practices and behaviour of donor nations improve dramatically. At the same time and as an interim step that could improve the long-term prospects of the country while larger-scale adaptation measures are contemplated, there is nothing in technological terms to prevent the construction of a soaring, reinforced tower or lighthouse (and residences) on a secured island where intensive land augmentation and land-level heightening processes were undertaken. This process could begin today and form the foundations of a far larger and more complete adaptation process such as the SKAF that could protect all of Kiribati over the longer term. This interim project could also help secure Kiribati’s sovereignty for decades or centuries to come.

These and other measures are possible, but the active pursuit of either comprehensive adaptation protecting the territory of the country as a whole or the idea of a lighthouse securing in perpetuity the land mass required to maintain sovereignty and the recognition by other nations, or even the implementation of a national development plan that secured the full spectrum of rights for the population, have all been over-shadowed in recent months by what appears to be the Government of Kiribati’s primary strategy for grappling with climate change, that of the ‘flee and start again’ approach, otherwise known as ‘dignified migration’.

**Titling Towards Dignified Migration**

After years of tirelessly pressing the world to do more on climate mitigation and adaptation, President Anote Tong and others within the Government have increasingly prioritised a sophisticated, well thought out strategy of long-term dignified migration. With requests for new territory elsewhere repeatedly falling on deaf ears, with only minute amounts of adaptation funding having been provided thus far, in an era when corporate representatives show up in South Tarawa selling manmade floating islands that go for a cool US$ one billion, and when the developmental challenges facing the impoverished nation continue to worsen, dignified migration is clearly the next best, and most logical, policy outcome. The policy emphasises, through a merit-based system, specialised educational opportunities in professional skills that are in short supply in the region such as nursing and automotive engineering, based on the rationale that this will significantly increase the employment prospects of individual i-Kiribati citizens who eventually do migrate to countries such as Australia and New Zealand. This policy is seen
stands a good chance of transforming what could be a possible future scenario for the people into what will actually occur; in effect creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. As the population becomes increasingly aware that political decision-makers are placing ever more faith and resources into dignified migration, and possibly less resources into specific adaptation measures and general socio-economic development, (both of which are seriously under-funded at the moment), it is possible that ongoing crises in the key areas of health care, access to potable water, overcrowding, domestic violence and numerous other developmental challenges will go increasingly unaddressed, and worsen further.

If this were to occur, such a scenario could further encourage people to flee the country as overall living conditions decline, thus augmenting a debilitating brain drain that has already commenced, and mass flight that would alter the country beyond recognition. DS believes that far greater attention needs to be given to the brain drain issue, in particular in determining at which stage a tipping point will be reached when the population declines below a certain critical mass. In addition, a migration programme that in practice attracts only the most capable could have potentially disastrous consequences for those in the community who currently rely on eventual migrants who now provide their only means of support. To ensure that the country continues to progress and develop healthily – which is already extremely difficult - Kiribati will need to maintain a sufficient amount of skilled and educated people in the country.

Consequently, a scenario whereby only the best and brightest from Kiribati are offered opportunities in host countries through the dignified migration process might require some re-thinking.

As understandable and nuanced as the dignified migration policy may be, a dignified life, in full compliance with the universal rights held by all citizens, including basic guarantees to the highest attainable level of health, water, housing, work and many others for all i-Kiribati people need to be universally attainable in the immediate term. While the Government’s record in respecting civil and political rights is generally admirable, efforts taken to secure the full spectrum of economic and social rights need to be far more robust than they seem to have been to date.

To truly succeed, the Government of Kiribati may best serve its people through a more balanced fight and flight approach which significantly expands attention to the many dramatic social requirements of the country today, while simultaneously exercising great caution in not overplaying its hand in the direction of dignified migration. Upholding and expanding the enjoyment of human rights and preserving and expanding dignity should be the mutual yardsticks used to measure any success in grappling with the immense and unprecedented challenges facing the people of Kiribati.

In the End, It’s All About Land

The unique and beautiful culture of Kiribati places considerable importance on land, so much so that in many respects one’s own personal identity is intrinsically tied to one’s ancestral land. In a sense, one cannot exist without land, and these perspectives need to be borne in mind in determining the best policies for the Government to pursue in its quest of protecting the rights of its people. Virtually all of the land in Kiribati remains customarily held. As a result, most, if not all, land used by the Government for public infrastructure or Government buildings is leased from customary owners. Although the duration of leases is typically long - 99 years - this system is not without its limitations. For instance, when a lease expires, customary owners have been known to re-acquire their land irrespective of the work that has been done or buildings that have been made on it. Furthermore, land reclamation carried out by a lessee also becomes the property of the lessor.

Customary land rights may also come to complicate i-Kiribati internal migration and relocation issues because of climate change, given there is so little public land in Kiribati. Customary land rights and other local customs can make it impossible for newcomers to purchase land and have contributed to the creation of the slums in Betio in the capital South Tarawa, and other densely populated, poverty-stricken areas in what should be a Pacific island paradise. The Government’s plan, financially supported by New Zealand, to reduce population density in Betio (which already has one of the highest population densities on the planet) through resettling several thousand people to the Bonriki area near the airport at the opposite end of the atoll may yet work according to plan without any undue land disputes, but little progress is yet evident. Many within the country have expressed doubts as to the viability of any new town located...
so far from education and commerce activities, but it is too early to determine whether this innovative plan will succeed in its laudable aims. The space opened up in Betio could easily be re-occupied by new migrants from the outer islands, with the net result simply being yet more people on the main atoll which long ago surpassed a sustainable level of population. No matter what happens, it is hoped that the new settlement at Bonriki will be developed in full cognizance of likely sea level rises. Additional relocation efforts within the country as a means of providing land and livelihood options to families who lose land to rising seas, such as has been attempted in the past to Kiritimati Island, have yet to bear significant fruit and are probably limited in application for a host of reasons, not the least of which is the immense distance between the island and the rest of Kiribati.

Fiji’s Growing Role as Possible Problem Solver

As the practical limits of internal relocation become ever more clear, the Government is looking well beyond its borders for solutions. This has again centered on the critical question of land; not land in Kiribati, however, but rather a 5,000-acre center on the critical question of land; not land in Kiribati, but rather a 5,000-acre tract in a neighbouring country is clearly indicative of the policy directions in which the Government is increasingly placing its hopes.

Inter-island relocation and inter-country resettlement are not new phenomena in the region, nor to the people of Kiribati. The highly controversial resettlement of virtually the entire population of Banaba Island in Kiribati to Rabi Island in Fiji in 1945, as a consequence of resource depletion and associated phosphate mining, is perhaps a harbinger of what awaits Kiribati’s population today, and lessons learned from this and other past resettlement experiences, such as when Tuvaluans from Vaitupu resettled to Kioa Island in Fiji in the 1940s, should inform the design of any possible resettlement migration programmes to Vanua Levu. Much can be said of the possible move by i-Kiribati to Vanua Levu and Displacement Solutions will be devoting a detailed report to this question in mid-2012, based on on-site investigations in both Kiribati and Fiji. As things now stand, suffice it to say that the Vanua Levu option could, if played out carefully and with the full political support of Fiji (where such issues are already a permanent part of political discourse), be pivotal in the multi-level efforts by Kiribati to simultaneously preserve the cultural identity of the people, protect their human rights and secure what would effectively amount to a safe haven for ongoing governance of Kiribati should this be impossible within the country itself. Done properly, an eventual resettlement exercise could yield positive results for those choosing to move in this manner. Conversely, if done poorly without adequate preparation, financing and planning, a mass resettlement exercise of this scale could all too easily have catastrophic consequences for everyone involved. All participants in the process – the people moving, the host community and both the Government of Fiji and of Kiribati – need to be actively engaged in developing plans and processes that will prevent any resettlement site from suffering the fate of so many other attempts at resettlement – impoverishment, health crises, instability and insecurity. Clearly, it needs to be done right.

The Way Forward

With the benefit of time and reflection since the first DS mission to the country three years ago, it is abundantly clear that the multitude of issues facing the people and Government of Kiribati are of an increasingly complex, multi-faceted and urgent nature. Based on discussions with hundreds of people and after careful reflection, DS would like to offer five key recommendations on the climate displacement crisis facing the country:

Firstly, it is clear that despite the many and increasingly sophisticated pleas for assistance, the global community has moved far too slowly to avert the devastating impacts of climate change, and where it has acted, it has done so in generally piecemeal, small-scale interventions that have been unsuccessful in improving Kiribati’s future and current prospects. Far more needs to be done in the immediate term to assist the Government and population of Kiribati to more effectively address the series of climate-sourced and overall socio-economic problems that confront the i-Kiribati populace, both internally in developmental and related sectors, as well as externally as migration becomes increasingly likely. Such measures should include the establishment of an earmarked US$ one billion Special Kiribati Adaptation Fund (SKAF) that would begin to provide the resources the country needs to comprehensively tackle adaptation challenges.

Secondly, Displacement Solutions believes that Kiribati needs a dual-pronged approach in dealing with its climate change issues. It is not feasible to focus on ‘fight’ or ‘flight’ separately but rather both need to be brought into harmony with one another. Throughout the entire harmonisation process, human rights should form the cornerstone of both fight and flight strategies. This, in turn, will improve the daily prospects of i-Kiribati people, increasingly satisfy the Government’s pre-existing legal requirements towards its people, and, ultimately, set the country on course for a sustainable future.

Thirdly, based on the prevailing circumstances...
facing the Government of Kiribati, the dignified migration idea is a refined policy that reflects the Government’s thinking and which reveals just how severe the predicaments facing this nation are in real terms. Grounded deeply in the wish of every i-Kiribati citizen to never become or be treated as a refugee (particularly in a region where the major power broker, Australia, detains asylum seekers for excessive periods of time in often appalling conditions), the dignified migration policy seeks to provide the best possible outcome for the largest number of people. Caution needs to be exercised, however, to ensure that unwanted and perhaps unintended outcomes of such an approach do not come to pass. An expedited brain drain, systemic bias that favours the already educationally and economically privileged and the growing inability of the State itself to function at optimal capacity will not serve the interests of citizens in the long run.

Fourth, the Kiribati story is not only one of climate change, though climate change will often play the leading part. Other development issues need to be urgently addressed and no longer neglected. These include health, education, overcrowding, sanitation, alcohol abuse and the abuse of women’s rights. Adequately addressing and resolving these issues would directly contribute to a state of readiness for i-Kiribati people ahead of a life in a new country as the demonstration of skills, education and health are required by the migration programmes of Australia, New Zealand and Fiji.

Finally, if inter-country resettlement does become inevitable, this must be done correctly. Intensive physical and financial planning, host-community engagement, and fair and equitable processes need to form the cornerstones of the entire process. If the Government of Kiribati decides to facilitate the resettlement of some of its people to Vanua Levu and the Government of Fiji agrees, there is every chance that the ‘New Tarawa’ or ‘New Kiribati’ that emerges there will become the cultural and possibly even political centre of the i-Kiribati people. This land-based solution to looming climate displacement in Kiribati could work, but no effort should be spared in the many years this process will take to ensure its permanent viability and prosperity.

Kiribati will be, and is already being affected significantly by climate change, and the nation lacks the resources to address these impacts on its own. Kiribati’s carbon emissions constitute a mere 0.003% of global emissions. It is an unjust world where the very existence of a small island nation, through little or no fault of its own, is so severely threatened.

Clearly, the developed countries that created this crisis have a responsibility to assist vulnerable countries to deal effectively with the very real impacts of climate change. With the backing of the international community, the Government of Kiribati will find it far easier to pursue an ever stronger rights-based approach to both development imperatives and threats of climate displacement. Embracing a simultaneous fight and flight approach to the many challenges facing the nation will stand the best chance of protecting the long-term interests of the country and its body politic.

Kiribati’s future can still be a bright one and hope is certainly not yet lost. To achieve this, however, will require the collective efforts and good will of people and institutions the world over. With proper attention and commitment, Kiribati can and will flourish and prosper for centuries to come.

Scott Leckie
Director and Founder – Displacement Solutions.

Pristine and paradisiacal small Kiribati islands, such as this one, show to the world the beauty that stands to be lost as climate change intensifies, largely as a consequence of the actions of developed countries.
Taiwan Park serves as a reminder that aid donations in Kiribati have often only been provided in return for fishing licenses or votes in the UN General Assembly. The international community will need to look beyond self-interest, and instead help Kiribati respond to the challenges of climate change as a matter of justice and respect for human dignity and human rights.

These family homes on South Tarawa, the low-lying capital of Kiribati, are typical of the many houses that line the coastline of this island—their close proximity to the water's edge and their marginal elevation above sea-level make them extremely vulnerable to rising seas and weather events associated with climate change.
A tropical Kiribati vision. Tragically, it is predicted that the dark and foreboding clouds that herald storms and storm surges will, with increasing frequency, crown this horizon.

The limited adaptation measures underway in Kiribati do not involve the protection of customary land. Consequently, many i-Kiribati, such as Naniten who is pictured here, have made admirable, but inevitably piecemeal efforts to reclaim lost land using mostly coral and waste.

A lady sweeps the yard in front of her clean, but simple house in this glimpse of relaxed Kiribati life.
Traditional singing and dancing competitions held in community Mwaneaba are a strong and beautiful feature of i-Kiribati culture.

An inland family compound – one young woman makes a mosquito net, while the other embroiders a tibuta.
Given the risk of whole country inundation, it is important that the invaluable culture of Kiribati is captured and preserved – an outcome best ensured by a dual-pronged ‘fight’ and ‘flight’ approach.

A new DS project - ‘Coastal Kids’ - will commence in 2012 to connect school children from Kiribati, such as those pictured here, with children of the same age in Australia to learn from one another and to discuss the issue of climate change face-to-face via Skype.
A Comprehensive, Coordinated and Harmonised Fight and Flight Strategy Will Best Serve the Interests of All i-Kiribati People.
Mike Foon (left), Secretary of Home Affairs, with former counterpart Nakibae Teuatabu (right), standing before the disappearing islet, Aberairang. Nakibae was the first Secretary for the environment when it was established in 1991, one year after the government initiated the first warnings about climate change.

The consequences of our actions now will have a profound impact on these children within their lifetime. Their smiling faces reflect the fact that a bright future is still possible – we cannot let them down.
Small-scale coral seawalls, such as the one being built by this family, are unlikely to provide any real security, aside from reducing the force of storm surges in the immediate sense. The construction of a more substantial seawall around all of South Tarawa, capable of providing long-term protection, is predicted to cost around $US one billion.
Young people sing as they walk casually along the top of a sea wall in the evening – climate change and the various responses to it have become woven into the fabric of everyday island life.
It is important that the Kiribati government take steps to ensure that its dignified migration approach protects the disabled and other vulnerable groups within Kiribati, and does not result in a crippling brain drain or premature en masse migration.

Relics from the brutal battle for South Tarawa during WWII.

High tide waters submerge the once arable land of Mathew Matang, pictured on the cover of this booklet.
Fish also provide an important source of income, and are mainly sold from roadside stalls.
The woman on the left is faced with the inevitable task of raising her children in a Betio Town Council slum – an overpopulated area rife with health concerns including widespread diabetes, TB and even leprosy.
Fishing remains an important part of life for many i-Kiribati and provides a valuable source of nutrition to complement an otherwise increasingly unhealthy Kiribati diet.
Development is slow in Kiribati - this local village store is one of only a handful selling basic imported household goods in the country’s capital.

United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon makes a public address about climate change in Kiribati in September 2011 ahead of his attendance at the Pacific Islands Forum, held several days later in Auckland, New Zealand.
Life by the sea. This family’s kiakia, a small traditional building made of pandanus and coconut materials, stands mere metres from the lagoon waters.

A clothesline is hung immediately above a seawall. Given the very narrow width of South Tarawa, the close living proximity to the ocean is all but inevitable.

The young people of Kiribati are inheriting a country plagued by both climate change and development challenges – challenges they cannot face alone.
Many i-Kiribati are content working and living in their beloved country, and are not yet ready to leave. This is one of a number of powerful reasons why a fight approach should complement a flight approach to ensure that the people of Kiribati can continue to live on their ancestral land for as long as is possible.