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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Australia's Role in Supporting Kiribati's Migration with Dignity Policy Dealing with Sea Level Rise in the South Pacific

Munjin Syafik<sup>1</sup> | Raisha Nadina Nur Fitria<sup>2</sup> | Bama Andika Putra<sup>3</sup> ✉ | Darwis<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1234</sup>*Department of International Relations, Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar, Indonesia*

**Corresponding Author:** Bama Andika Putra, **E-mail:** [bama@unhas.ac.id](mailto:bama@unhas.ac.id)

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| ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe Kiribati's adaptation efforts through the "Migration with Dignity" policy that the government made to deal with the sea level rise problem and to describe Australia's role in supporting Kiribati in carrying out this policy. The research method used in this research is a descriptive analytical research type that describes the cause and effect of a certain phenomenon, in this case, climate change, by describing data, facts, and arguments relevant to the discussion. The results of this study indicate that through migration policy as an adaptation strategy, the Kiribati government builds its capacity to respond to human security threats arising from sea level rise and fulfills the responsibility to ensure the survival of the population through education and skills development programs. In this regard, Australia plays a role as the dominant regional actor by providing assistance through AusAID. Australia's foreign aid as a donor country is used to meet the needs of Kiribati as a recipient country to support the "Migration with Dignity" policy.

| KEYWORDS

Australia, Kiribati, Sea Level Rise, Migration with Dignity

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### 1. Introduction

Climate change is a natural phenomenon that poses a threat to the global community today (Putra 2021). According to experts, anthropogenic factors have significantly contributed to the problems that give rise to this phenomenon (HUXLEY 1998). At the beginning of the 21st century, a scientific panel consisting of 100 experts from various disciplines was asked by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) to rank various environmental problems based on the scale of impacts that have arisen in the 21st century (Price-Smith 2002; Putra 2020; Wati, Risadi Apresian, and Dewi 2018). The top rank of environmental problems is climate change (Putra 2021). Climate change has been scientifically proven and caused by global warming or commonly known as global warming, as a result of the greenhouse effect or greenhouse gases. Along with changes in the earth's temperature caused by excess carbon production, there is an increase in seawater globally. According to a study by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), since 1850, the year with the warmest temperatures occurred in the last 12 years (Adibroto 2011). Rising temperatures make glaciers or melting ice sheets add to the volume of water in the oceans. In addition, due to climate change, snowfall is reduced, so glaciers cannot freeze faster than usual.

Therefore, as the temperature of the earth increases, seawater will continue to rise. Based on the results of research conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (US Agency for Climate Science & Information), in 2019, the global average sea level was 3.4 inches (87.61 mm) which is the highest annual average in the satellite record since 1993 until now. In 1993, sea levels rose at a rate of 0.11 to 0.14 inches per year and were estimated to be twice as fast. Meanwhile, from 2018 to 2019, global sea levels rose by 0.24 inches or 6.1 millimeters (Lindsey 2021) (Rebecca Lindsey 2020). Global warming is causing the melting of ice in the arctic, causing sea levels to rise and causing islands and even low-lying archipelagic countries to sink (World Wildlife Fund 2009).

Kiribati is a country located between Australia and Hawaii, and Tarawa is the capital city of this island nation. Kiribati is a country located in the Pacific Ocean (Halstead 2008; Saha 2018; Tertia and Perwita 2018; Wallis 2015). Rising sea levels have an impact on island nations in the South Pacific, especially Kiribati. Sea water inundated agricultural land and springs. For the people of Kiribati, both land and sea have economic, political, and cultural influences. Global action is needed to reduce the impact. The economic, social, and political challenges faced by climate change have prompted the world's governments to make several policies aimed at reducing impacts and focusing on mitigation and adaptation efforts (Beddu, Cangara, and Putra 2020; Burhanuddin, Putra, and Cangara 2021). It takes a role and political will in the effort to handle it (Anugrah, Putra, and Burhanuddin 2020). The President of Kiribati, Aneta Tong (2003 – 2016), issued a policy called Migration with Dignity. The policy is a strategy issued by the Government of Kiribati. Australia is committed to working with the Government of Kiribati in building resilience to climate change and its impacts.

## **2. Analytical Framework**

This research focuses on the impact of sea level rise as a result of climate change and adaptation efforts through Kiribati's Migration with Dignity policy, as well as the support provided by Australia as a major role in supporting Kiribati's adaptation efforts to face sea level rise in the South Pacific (Medcalf 2019; Tarte 2017). The approach in this study includes sea level rise as one of the impacts of global climate change and is a natural phenomenon that has a direct impact and threatens every individual in the coastal sector. Environmental degradation as part of environmental security creates vulnerabilities to access freshwater resources economically and socially. Thus, several residents and governments of affected countries have begun to make mitigation and mitigation efforts.

The author will focus on adaptation efforts, one of which is external migration across national borders. This research will also focus on the importance of a policy carried out by state and non-state actors to provide a sense of security for each individual from all forms of threats, one of which is sea level rise.

## **3. Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative research method that is descriptive analytic. This type of research describes the cause and effect of a particular phenomenon, idea, or phenomenon. As well as describe the data or facts found during the research objectively. Data collection techniques are taking or looking for secondary data from the problems studied through literature studies such as books, journals, theses, articles, and reports. Data collection is taken from reference sources that are related to the problem to be studied. The research stage is to identify problems and analyze the data and facts found.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

Global temperatures rise along with sea levels, and some mass media, climate scientists, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have begun to voice migration or mass displacement of people from their island countries in the Pacific because sea level rise is something that cannot be avoided (White et al. 2014). Adaptation and community resilience are a top priority for lowland archipelagic countries to ensure sustainable livelihoods and reduce the impact of climate change through various adaptation efforts (Resosudarmo, Alisjahbana, and Nurdianto 2012).

Kiribati has a tropical climate with air temperatures that correlate with the temperature of the oceans surrounding this island nation (Chapsos and Malcolm 2017). These climate threats are temporary, varying throughout the year (IOJI 2022; The David and Lucile Packard Foundation 2018). In an effort to adapt, the Government of Kiribati issued the concept of migration, which was initiated by President Aneta Tong, who served from 2003 to 2016. The Migration with Dignity policy is based on the ability of each individual to freely decide on external migration to other countries due to the adverse effects of climate change, especially sea level rise.

Kiribati's migration policy aims to minimize the impact of permanent relocation of communities due to the threat of rising sea levels. This policy includes the creation of education and training programs needed by the people of Kiribati so that later people can become workers. This economic value is obtained by working in the migrant destination country (Faisal 2016). The Kiribati government strongly believes that the development of education and workforce skills is the main supporter of the Migration with Dignity policy. This is one of the adaptation efforts in dealing with the impact of sea level rise. Sea level rise is one of the driving factors for I-Kiribati migration due to the threat of economic and social vulnerability due to environmental changes.

This education is an important factor of change in society. The program is an important step in acquiring the skills and experience that young people will need to work abroad. Migration with Dignity has been on the agenda of the Government of Kiribati. The government started the strategy with a program at the Kiribati Institute of Technology. The program provides technical and vocational training with the aim of improving the skills of young Kiribati in carpentry, plumbing, nursing, accounting, trade, and shipping as a training program for young people before finally embarking on external migration.

Since the start of the Kiribati Technical Vocational Education and Training Sector Strengthening Program (TVETSSP), provided by the Kiribati Institute Technology (KIT). The education and training program provides direction for increasing productivity in the

workplace. Livelihood opportunities for I-Kiribati, both at home and abroad and contribute to social growth and equity. KIT or Kiribati Institute Technology. This post-secondary education and training program is designed to develop the skills of I-Kiribati youth aged 25-29 and 30-34 years as part of the population with post-secondary school qualifications. Based on enrollment from year to year, female I-Kiribati are the majority of students in this education and skills development program (Nasution 2016). The Kiribati government has adopted this policy as a long-term adaptation program to avoid unplanned large-scale migration, which can lead to vulnerability and lead to conflicts, one of which is a regional conflict. This strategy aims to improve the quality of training in Kiribati and offer internationally recognized qualifications. These factors are critical in accessing more employment opportunities, particularly in the Australian market.

TVETSSP's long-term vision is to support the Kiribati government's vision of becoming an internationally respected country, which plays an important role in increasing national economic growth and increasing I-Kiribati job opportunities, especially overseas. Especially young people, both women, and men. This program is designed to contribute to three sectors, namely: (1) youth participation, (2) workplace productivity, and (3) job opportunities abroad. But most importantly, the results of this education and training sector complement Kiribati's series of adaptation efforts in dealing with the impacts of sea level rise (Peddle and Mckay 2015).

In the education sector, development and skills training program as one of the supporting factors for external migration through the Migration with Dignity policy; the government also provides relevant pre-departure training for young people at the Kiribati Technical Institute (KTI) to prepare them how to adapt to life and work in Indonesia and other countries. Each student is given an understanding of their rights at work, such as wages and social security. The management of the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program at the Kiribati Technical Institute includes providing labor market information and tracking systems, TVET information systems on skills, management, quality assurance, accreditation, and certification.

TVET was developed as an ongoing skills training linked to income-generating opportunities. The shipping sector, as a part of post-secondary training, presents the best job opportunities abroad. As of June 2015, some 750 young Kiribati have followed global shipping routes on ships. Groups of work-ready migrants participate in various sectors in the Asia-Pacific region. Kiribati's efforts to facilitate labor migration using the government-to-government method (Voigt-Graf 2016; Voigt-Graf and Kagan 2017). One of the priorities of the Government of Kiribati through the Migration with Dignity policy is the migration process as part of the adaptation efforts carried out with access to employment and market opportunities for skilled migrants.

As one of the countries that has a position in the Pacific region, Australia's goal in cooperating with the Kiribati government is to develop the economy of people who are vulnerable to sea level rise, especially in terms of livelihoods (Choong 2019; Medeiros 2005). In addition, Australia's support through educational assistance to I-Kiribati is intended to increase the population that has the quality of education, especially for the younger generation. Support through this educational assistance program is provided to make I-Kiribati strong and able to find work. Through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia supports technical and vocational training in required areas through bilateral assistance programmes.

AusAID, as the pioneering agency for foreign aid for the Australian government, provides educational scholarships to I-Kiribati through one program called Kiribati – Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI). Nursing, as one of the sectors included in the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program, received support from the Australian Government through AusAID. KANI is implemented through the Griffith University International Unit. The program is pursued until students reach the undergraduate level or diploma in nursing and have a certificate.

This Nursing Initiative Program (KANI) was awarded by Australia from March 2006 – to June 2014. 84 young Kiribati women and men received nursing training at Griffith 81 University, Brisbane. As of February 2014, 78 students had a bachelor's degree in nursing (Voigt-Graf and Kagan 2017). Among these graduates, some are already working as certified nurses in the elderly care sector, as full-time and part-time workers in Australia. In addition to the nursing sector, there are also those who work in the social work sector. After a few years after becoming a nurse in the workforce, I-Kiribati can be free to live permanently or leave Australia. Australia is a major donor to support Kiribati on its journey to addressing climate change, the environment, economic growth, and developing disaster risk management.

As a developed country, Australia has provided a lot of assistance to Kiribati in supporting the Migration with Dignity policy. Australia's aim in providing assistance to Kiribati is to fulfill diplomatic purposes. As a country that has ratified the UNFCCC, Australia has fulfilled its promise that developed countries must assist developing countries in meeting their needs to address climate change. There was a widespread social disturbance that forced some people to migrate. This educational assistance program can assist long-term migration policies (Nasution 2016).

The TVETSSP Kiribati skills training and education development program receive financial support from the Australian government. This financial aid was used for the construction of the Kiribati Technical Institute (KTI) facility. In addition, the quality of teaching from the Ministry of Kiribati was also raised to a recognized international level. Australia also provides access to qualification certificates for students at KTI. Therefore the quality of training in Kiribati offers qualifications that are recognized as an important step in accessing market opportunities for the Australian workforce.

This education and skills development assistance is provided in the form of tuition fees, travel, accommodation costs such as textbooks, and support for other learning materials, as well as contributions to basic living expenses. AusAID's involvement in the education and skills development of the Kiribati youth community is managed collaboratively and integrated with all processes, planning, and the Kiribati government's national budget carried out by the MLHRD. This collaborative attitude allows for an effective process of managing aid funds while taking into account existing capacities.

Through TVET, the Kiribati government is one of the governments with better human resources. As the main destination country for the I-Kiribati, Australia's other role in supporting the Migration with Dignity policy is through the Seasonal Work Program (SWP). This program is provided by Australia as a country that provides market opportunities for I-Kiribati workers who decide to migrate. This seasonal work scheme was announced by the Australian government, which will help workers access the market in low-skilled jobs in Northern Australia, such as care for the elderly (elderly), tourism, hospitality, and industry. Australia provides access to labor through this program by providing a five-year visa for 250 I-Kiribati per year (Faisal 2016).

This educational scholarship assistance provided by Australia is related to education and other impacting sectors, such as access to employment, as well as the quality of education. AusAID, in its education support, uses several programs issued, manifested by dialogue or negotiations between governments, staff, and teacher training, to stakeholder institutions from each government, both Kiribati and Australia (Halstead 2008; Nabbs-Keller 2020; Smyth, Plange, and Burdess 2008; Troath 2019). The provision of assistance is carried out through dialogue and negotiations between governments in determining the planning and allocation of assistance. There is also dialogue assistance between Australian MPs to further enhance bilateral assistance to Kiribati.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research addresses Kiribati's adaptation efforts through the "Migration with Dignity" policy that the government made to deal with the sea level rise problem and to describe Australia's role in supporting Kiribati in carrying out this policy. The results of this study indicate that through migration policy as an adaptation strategy, the Kiribati government builds its capacity to respond to human security threats arising from sea level rise and fulfills the responsibility to ensure the survival of the population through education and skills development programs. In this regard, Australia plays a role as the dominant regional actor by providing assistance through AusAID. Australia's foreign aid as a donor country is used to meet the needs of Kiribati as a recipient country to support the "Migration with Dignity" policy.

As one of the long-term challenges, climate change requires solutions, both nationally and globally. Such a solution requires appropriate action at the country level. Kiribati, as one of the small and developing island nations in the Pacific Region, is at the forefront of feeling the effects of climate change. Residents in this country are one of the communities affected by sea level rise due to the increasing temperature of the earth. The Migration with Dignity policy is carried out to provide protection for vulnerable people in the short term and their empowerment and dignity in the long term. The policy is a relocation and migration strategy as an option for the community; due to the impact of climate change, the choice is given especially to young people in Kiribati. The government directs the policy to create quality human resources by prioritizing secondary education as well as basic professional training.

In the "Migration with Dignity" policy process, Australia responded by playing a role in supporting Kiribati's needs in dealing with the impacts of environmental change. Australia's role in this regard is to provide foreign assistance to Kiribati as a country experiencing vulnerability and also as a small and developing island nation in the Pacific Region. Its foreign assistance through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), under the AusAID program, focuses on improving education, developing job skills, economic growth, and managing infrastructure.

Through the analysis made above, this article contributes to the discourse of bilateral relations in general. By analyzing forms of partnership and conditions laid out, we can better understand why state actors undergo partnerships at a bilateral level. Nevertheless, a major limitation of this study is access towards data. Most of the Kiribati figures were taken from secondary sources, as primary sources were close to impossible to access from Kiribati.

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