

Indigenous Engagement Case Study: Forging Enduring Connections in Kiribati

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1. An overview of the original research project(s)

This case study is based on three connected projects funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council UK (AHRC):

1. Troubled Waters, Stormy Futures: heritage in times of accelerated climate change, 2015-16 (*Grant ref: AH/M006263/1*)¹
2. Enduring Connections: Heritage and sustainable development in Kiribati, 2016-18 (*Grant ref: AH/P007635/1*)²
3. Troubled Waters- Reaching Out, 2017-18. Grant for impact (*Grant ref: AH/P00959X/1*)

Core team:

KiriCAN: A grassroots environmental organisation in Kiribati

Natan Itonga, Cultural heritage expert, artist and teacher

Sara Penrhyn Jones, Senior Lecturer in Media, Bath Spa University and filmmaker

Anna Woodham, Lecturer in Arts and Cultural Management, King's College London

Bryony Onciul, Senior Lecturer in Public History, University of Exeter

Kate Rigby, Professor of the Environmental Humanities, Bath Spa University³

Richard Gott, professional Sound Recordist/Artist

Matthew Gordon-Clark, (then) Senior Archivist, State Records of South Australia



Climate change is a global challenge that will be experienced in local ways everywhere. This report focuses on Kiribati, a low-lying nation with 33 atolls scattered across 5.2 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean. Kiribati was formerly under British rule between 1892-1979, as part of Gilbert and Ellice Islands, becoming an independent nation in 1979. As a least developed country on the Development Assistance Committee list, it faces the challenge of aiming for sustainable development whilst also dealing with the current and projected effects of climate change. Some of these effects, such as increased storm surges and rising seas could lead to wholesale displacement of over 110,000 people by the end of this century. Global media usually represents Kiribati as a 'drowning paradise', but this dominant narrative obscures other current environmental and societal challenges. Such representation also fails to evoke the richness and diversity of Kiribati's indigenous heritage.

Our research is premised on the idea that a better understanding of the currently overlooked cultural aspects of climate change is needed to produce a more profound appreciation of what is at stake.

This, in turn, will produce more holistic, effective and sustainable solutions. It means thinking about the way that climate change affects culture, but also acknowledging that a community's way of life, values, stories and beliefs must also be part of climate strategies and responses.

The first project, 'Troubled Waters', considered the vulnerability of coastal communities to climate change at three comparative sites in the UK and Kiribati. 'Enduring Connections' was a follow-on research project one year later, focusing exclusively on Kiribati, and involving more collaboration with local indigenous partners. This was an opportunity to engage with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, the team was implementing a range of relevant activities in Kiribati and the UK as part of the impact project 'Troubled Waters - Reaching Out'.

For simplicity, this case study will summarise the collective aims and methods of these three projects in Kiribati, whilst highlighting the development of the team's objectives and approaches over the three-year period. It became clear to us that the richest and most beneficial research can only happen through investment in meaningful relationships at a local level. During this time we transformed from a team of UK-based researchers doing some of their work in Kiribati, to an international team working together on more equal terms to implement a co-decided agenda. The distinction between 'research' and 'impact' became less relevant in this increasingly participatory and responsive approach.

2. Original intention of the project

Our ambition was to develop a clearer sense of what heritage means through a local lens in Kiribati. This was to advocate for a greater prominence for local cultural values and heritage concerns within discussions and policymaking related to climate change. This positions heritage in all its forms as intrinsically connected to environmental challenges and strategies.

3. Aims and Objectives

Our initial objectives were established before anyone in the UK-based team had visited Kiribati. As the research developed over time, we were able to listen to local voices, and together identify new goals that were very specific to Kiribati. They all involved partnership, collaboration or engagement with local communities and organisations.

- Empower KiriCAN to implement locally-identified sustainable development goals and community-engaged strategies for environmental challenges
- Explore how local cultural organisations are projecting and protecting Kiribati culture now, and whether there are plans for a climate-changed future
- Work with an indigenous cultural heritage expert, Natan Itonga, to create a locally-authored and multi-faceted representation of Kiribati in a collaborative film. This will be a counterpoint to existing representations of Kiribati as a 'drowning paradise' in global media
- Offer a heritage specialist from Kiribati a cultural exchange visit to UK museums. This reciprocates our visit, and develops long-term strategies for cultural continuity and renewal, reinforcing ideas of survival, despite potential displacement
- By working in a participatory and self-critical way, we are contributing to a broader vision for inclusive co-created knowledge, particularly in indigenous settings

4. Project methodology

Building reciprocal relations, and supporting the decolonisation and indigenisation of heritage practice, is key to our methodological approach.⁴ We were very conscious that research can be extractive, and we sought to address this common imbalance. Our methods fall under three broad categories.

4.1. Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research involves partners and collaborators in the co-production of knowledge, and the design of solutions. It calls for researchers to be flexible and prepared to

adapt. This research normally happens between researchers and those directly affected, who should be empowered to solve their own problems. There is no straightforward formula for this method, but this approach can position 'subjects' as co-researchers, and experts in their own right. When working with partners and communities in this way, it is important to consider direct remuneration for people's time. In this particular project, the local environmental organisation, KiriCAN, was an essential link to local communities.⁵

4.2. Creative Practice as Research

Creative practice as research was integral to the project, with film as the specific medium. Our transdisciplinary approach brought people and ideas together in new and unique ways, to discover and articulate thematic narratives. This was critically important in a complex multi-partner project, that was both interdisciplinary and international. Creativity is always central to this approach and the *process* of creating the work was just as important - or even more important - than the finished films. In a postcolonial setting like Kiribati, it is even more important to pay attention to the fraught politics of representation, and issues such as language. This has many practical and creative implications for the process and end products.⁶

4.3. Qualitative research

Other qualitative methodologies were utilised to support the research:

- Semi-structured interviews • Participant observation • Discourse analysis
- Indigenous approaches to heritage management • Oral history
- Meaningful engagement and reciprocity • Desk-based scholarly research

Costs and Consequences of Engagement

Engagement is a positive approach to research. However, presuming that community members are simply beneficiaries can obscure real risks and challenges:

- Often participants are not paid wages, but expected to volunteer their time and knowledge in exchange for representation, access, training and/or expenses
- Community members can be held accountable, even if they do not have ultimate control or responsibility, for the project
- Participation can effect a community member's personal relations and social standing
- As locals, they have to live with the consequences of the perceived successes or failures of a project, and how it impacts their community, long after external researchers leave

It is vital that researchers carefully and fully consider the potential for negative consequences before engaging, plan how to mitigate these issues, and build reciprocal relations that work towards positive, long-term outcomes for all involved.

Bryony Onciul, *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice: Decolonizing Engagement*. New York: Routledge

5. Key groups and stakeholders

Key partners in Kiribati:

- **KiriCAN**, a grassroots organisation and project partners
- **Natan Itonga**, cultural heritage expert, artist and teacher. Collaborating artist
- **Communities in Nanikai, Banan Village, and Ambo Village** (through KiriCAN)
- **Teweariki Teaero**, Cultural Advisor

Below are **four examples** of project activities, accomplished with a range of these stakeholders and others.

5.1. Tackling waste with indigenous partners



Photo: Sara Penrhyn Jones

"We will drown in rubbish before we drown in water."

(Claire Anterea, KiriCAN, 2015)

During the making of the project's first film in 2015, Claire Anterea talked about the challenge of waste in Kiribati, and this became an important theme in our research. It seemed that communities in Kiribati were experiencing research fatigue. Having their voices and perspectives heard and understood globally may

not translate into direct or immediate benefits on a community level. Reciprocity is very important in Kiribati, and with this in mind we began to ask questions about *how* the local community could benefit from our research in the ways that mattered most to them.

We partnered with KiriCAN on a new project in 2016, so that over the next 18-months they could be flexibly resourced to address locally identified priorities. This participatory approach complemented our more abstract exploration of the connection between heritage, climate change and sustainable development in Kiribati. The framework for this process included a formal contract with KiriCAN, outlining expectations and budget. Three main phases were timetabled: (i) community consultation to identify environmental priorities; (ii) implementation *with* the community; (iii) evaluation. Resourcing KiriCAN adequately was important for non-exploitative research practice. For the UK researchers, KiriCAN provided a feasible and sustainable way to deliver community-driven work within the project timescales.

After consultation with several communities in South Tarawa, KiriCAN decided to focus on waste. Locals were frustrated by inadequate rubbish collection by the under-resourced council, with serious consequences in South Tarawa due to urbanisation and extremely high population density. Endemic communicable diseases are connected to poor waste management, and Kiribati's under-five mortality rate is the second highest among the Pacific Island countries. KiriCAN's vision is to "clean up the whole of Tarawa". Together with the communities, they decided to buy two trucks that could collect rubbish, and train volunteers to use them. There was concern that this may not be sustainable, e.g. if the trucks needed repair. However, KiriCAN plan to raise revenue through hiring out the trucks, providing a stream of income to feed back into the scheme.



Ambo Village, Photo: KiriCAN

"When you translate how that [the trucks] will impact people on a community level, it will have a lot of positive impact on children, you know, clean water... because the rubbish will end up in our drinking source, the spread of mosquitoes, and with the recent outbreak of dengue fever, diarrhea, so it will all connect to health. It won't solve the issue altogether, but help minimise it." (KiriCAN focus group, 2018)



Banan Village, Photo: KiriCAN

Most importantly, KiriCAN works to motivate communities to solve their own problems and know their rights. Working together to tackle problems can lead to other positive impacts. Succeeding through local co-operation and action can lead to greater community engagement on a range of societal and environmental issues.

"When we talk about waste they [the villages] really want to do something to solve it, but they are losing hope, because their rubbish doesn't get picked up. So

what is the point of picking up our rubbish if at the end there is no collection? The project with the trucks will give them hope, to say that we can really clean up our village." (KiriCAN focus group, 2018)

Upskilling ourselves as researchers in the UK:

Participatory or creative research can often move a project into new or unfamiliar terrain. In our grant application we included some training for the UK-based team on 'Development, Climate Change and Gender' with Alyson Brody, an anthropologist with expertise on gender and social development. Brody created a freely available resource on how to integrate gender-sensitivity and meaningful participation in development projects: ['The Art of Listening'](#).⁷

5.2: Film production through local, indigenous collaboration

The project's first film, ['Troubled Waters'](#)⁸ explored some of the ways that climate change is experienced in Kiribati. Sara Penrhyn Jones and sound recordist Richard Gott spent three weeks there in 2015. Apart from an existing personal connection with one of the founders of KiriCAN, there were no formal partnerships in place at this stage. Through this work, new connections were formed. Interviews were conducted with a range of people, such as: a local pastor; a journalist; Pelenise Alofa (KiriCAN); Natan Itonga (then a Cultural Officer at the Museum); Teweiariki Teaero (artist and heritage expert), President Anote Tong, former President Ieremia Tienang Tabai, and members of the local community in Abaiang, South Tarawa and North Tarawa.

Some of the main insights gained through the production of this film were:

- The specific, indigenous relationship with ancestral land in Kiribati must be understood in order to fully appreciate what the loss of that land might mean
- That the two main trees, coconut and pandanus, are integral to daily survival, heritage and cultural identity in Kiribati
- There is a strong relationship between the living and the dead, which makes the issue of how to deal with graves important in the trauma and planning for climate migration
- There is a sensitivity/contention around the definition of poverty
- Accessing oral histories is not straightforward or unproblematic, and Kiribati's cultural heritage is not homogenous
- Although the ocean is a threat in Kiribati, it is also an important part of Kiribati's territory, identity, and economy, and is a resource that needs protection

The 'Troubled Waters' film has been used and [reshaped](#)⁹ for numerous educational and advocacy purposes. This includes the United Nations Climate Change Conferences in 2016 and 2017, the Association of Critical Heritage Studies 3rd Biennial Conference in Montreal, the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg in 2017 and World Symposium on Climate Change Communication, Manchester, 2017. Dissemination was achieved through existing collaboration, and through new partnerships, which the film helped to forge. However, we also wanted to change the power dynamics of the filmmaking process.

The next film, which is currently in production, is far more collaborative, conveying indigenous perspectives and knowledge in richer ways. Based on his extensive knowledge of Kiribati culture, Natan Itonga was commissioned as a collaborating artist. Natan worked with Sara Penrhyn Jones and Richard Gott, using film and sound to explore and express themes emerging from the work of the whole team. With Bryony Onciul present for part of this process, this was an opportunity to further integrate expertise on indigenous heritage into the creative process through dialogue, observation, and longer off-camera interviews with community

members. The film will mostly be in the Kiribati language, which embodies indigenous knowledge and meaning.

"As far as I know you are the first filmmakers or researchers that are working, you know, almost full time with a person like me. This is very new and it's unusual. I think it's very effective and you're really... like following the eye of the informant... all the way to the places where the information is located, even to the outer islands... it's like the information that I have, and my eyes, is *in* the frame of your camera."
(Natan Itonga, 2018)



5.3: Engaging with local heritage organisations

"Kiribati Identity, Kiribati Culture... we keep all this information so that people can know our prehistory and how do we go from here...if we actually know what happens from here, to here, then we can be... able to make decisions and prepare for what is going to be happening in the future. But if you don't know the basics... and we just want to try to come up with future plans, I don't think we will be able to manage."
(Mrs Pelea Tehumu, Senior Cultural Officer, Te Umwanibong' Culture Center & Museum, 2017)

Senior Archivist (State Records of South Australia) Matthew Gordon-Clark, and Anna Woodham conducted eight interviews with Cultural Sector workers, Government Ministers, Government Officers and others in Kiribati in 2017, including:

- **Mrs Pelea Tehumu**, Senior Cultural Officer at the 'Te Umwanibong' Culture Center & Museum, Bikenibeu
- **Mrs Teawa Tuara** the Senior Librarian (then acting Head Archivist) at the Kiribati National Library and Archive in Bairiki
- **Sisters Lucy and Eilean of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH)** Missionary, Bairiki/ Teaoraereke, who keep an archive on the history of the Mission and Kiribati History
- **Mr Mankaoti Timeon**, Head of the Kiribati Adaptation Programme
- **Mr David Collins**, the newly appointed Minister for Education (who oversees the Archive)

The most important findings were:

The government-supported cultural sector in Kiribati is currently underdeveloped and under-resourced with low public awareness of the museum in particular. The Culture Center and Museum and the National Archive suffer from a lack of unified strategy (although at the time of our visit there were plans for a national cultural policy) and professional skills development. This is partly due to a lack of consistent local training provision.

There did not seem to be any, or very minimal, thought given to disaster planning, conservation and the potential impacts of climate change on the paper records of Kiribati and the Museum's collections and archives. There has been in-depth fieldwork conducted to record the diverse forms of cultural heritage (including the pre-Christian indigenous heritage) across some of Kiribati's 33 islands, but there didn't seem to be a firm plan for the completion of this work across the whole country, which is costly and time-consuming.

There are ambitious plans to develop the state-led cultural sector in Kiribati including the construction of several new museums, but there is a risk that cultural heritage is being used

rather narrowly as just a tool for economic development through tourism, rather than also as an important focus for community/sustainable development. Likewise, initial findings suggest that the government and the citizens view the archives as an information resource for current business needs only. Their cultural value as a repository of the history of the government and citizens of Kiribati does not appear to be appreciated. Some museums *outside* Kiribati are beginning to recognise and negotiate their role in regards to climate change and its impacts. However, there is potential to take this action further by offering more direct support to museums in climate threatened areas, by offering advice, guidance and professional support.

5.4 Cultural exchange with a local indigenous heritage expert

Natan Itonga, was selected by our partners KiriCAN (based on his cultural heritage knowledge and the decade he spent doing cultural mapping across the dispersed islands of Kiribati) to be the person we brought to the UK to visit museum collections from Kiribati. This enabled us to reciprocate the way he hosted us in Kiribati.

Natan came to the UK on our invitation in October - November 2017. Over a ten-day period Bryony Onciul led a tour of collections, with support from the team, in particular Anna Woodham. They visited: the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter; Manchester Museum; Pitt Rivers, Oxford; Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology Cambridge; Horniman Museum stores, London; British Museum and stores; and private collections in the home of Michael and Roti Walsh at the Kiribati Embassy in Abergavenny. The visits created knowledge exchange opportunities and were carefully documented, to enable: the museums to update their collection records and exhibits; Natan to take information back to Kiribati; and to inform our research.

The importance of collection visits for source communities is increasingly recognised in museum practice. Our cultural exchange had three core aims: 1. To decolonise and rebalance the extractive nature of researchers parachuting into locations, and instead building meaningful relations based on reciprocity; 2. While repatriation of material culture was not part of the remit of the project, the exchange created the opportunity to make information and images of UK-based Kiribati collections more accessible to people in Kiribati, especially to the keepers of I-Kiribati cultural heritage; 3. To explore the idea that collections or items can act as cultural ambassadors,¹⁰ considering the potential for meaningful relationships to be rekindled between I-Kiribati and their remote material culture, which could be supportive to thinking about a relocated future for the people of Kiribati in the future.

To aid Natan's choice of which museums to visit and collections to view in the UK, we created a catalogue of as many UK museum holding of Kiribati material as possible, and were guided by Natan's key interests in traditional canoes (*Te Baurua*); meeting houses (*Maneaba*); Tattooing and early material culture collected in 1800s.



Manchester Museum. Photograph: Sara Penrhyn Jones

Together we selected museums that held significant Kiribati collections, particularly items that represented pre-Christian cultural traditions and items related to Natan's holistic interest in Kiribati heritage. This resulted in a diverse selection of artefacts being on show to us. Traditionally researchers tend to focus on one type of object (e.g. weapons) rather than a cross-section of daily life and ceremonial practice. Bringing together such items created opportunities to get a 'bigger picture' of the material culture and make links across practices that curators noted does not normally happen.

Curators recognised the value of the exchange: "It allows for new meanings outside of a museum context.... It allows Indigenous peoples to reconnect with their material culture, and for museum professionals to understand material culture through their eyes. It builds strong relationships and networks and goes some way to healing problematic pasts inherent in the collections/collecting practices." (Nicolas Crowe, Pitt Rivers Museum, 2018)

Natan also saw value in viewing and handling the collections in person: "Referring back to these items that have been kept in the museums is a kind of attaching yourself to ... your original identity. It's... good that they have it kept, to maintain and safeguard our heritage." (Natan Itonga, 2017)

6. Insights into key challenges, opportunities and future directions

6.1 Challenges

Working in Kiribati, led by local objectives, and working in creative, collaborative and reciprocal ways was deeply rewarding for the UK-based team. However, it was also a very demanding process to manage, especially when working within the structural, cultural and geographic limits of UK academia. Although there is potential for positive impact, working differently also means taking risks, and the stakes are higher.

For partners in Kiribati, they had to provide time for free, to develop ideas and provide written letters of support, without any guarantee of funding. This is risky, as failed grant applications may lead to loss of goodwill. Even when the grant applications are successful, KiriCAN operates from a vulnerable position without core-funding, and there were no guarantees that this research would be supported in the long term.

This project was designed to enable grassroots work, but receipts and invoices were not always easy to obtain to cover expenses. There is an ongoing need to discuss and manage expectations, and work within the limits of available resources and time. These limits reduced our flexibility and resilience. When a key indigenous partner became ill there was no capacity to make up the lost time. Unanticipated illness, severe weather, transport failures, and access issues, all posed significant risks to the wellbeing of the team and the success of the project. Some challenges seem unavoidable. The bureaucracy surrounding research and film permits, meant days spent waiting for permits that could not be obtained in advance. This relates to the government's crackdown on access: "The government is really careful now...one reason given is that the media are not culturally competent to report [on Kiribati] in a way that will not stir conflict amongst I-Kiribati people." (KiriCAN focus group, 2018)

The importance of language consideration cannot be overstated. Language is key to communication, and we recognise the need for outputs to be bilingual and/or presented in imaginative or non-text based ways. This makes the research more accessible to (or in some cases enjoyable for) the community it focuses upon. This is essential for decolonising research practices. Follow-on support for translation (such as film subtitling and discussion over specific meanings in oral stories or songs) was not adequately considered in advance. Differences and distance - whether cultural, linguistic, geographic or technological - all pose challenges to the 'usual' modes of communication.

There are many different islands, groups and communities in Kiribati, with various needs and agendas. Even with KiriCAN leading this process, some communities will be excluded. Language barriers, geographical distance and local politics mean some people and perspectives will not be easily accessible to outside researchers. Working with KiriCAN positioned the UK-based researchers in local politics and relations, through their affiliation with one particular organisation. As such it is important to recognise the limitations of the work.

It was difficult for researchers in the UK to independently evaluate the outcomes and benefits at a direct community level. Asking KiriCAN for written reports was cumbersome and bureaucratic for them. So there was a need for more on-the-ground presence for the UK-based team to gain better local understanding of local politics and networks. This would also enable more in-depth and bottom-up research and project evaluation. All parties would have preferred more time, yet managing more than one month in the field can be challenging to balance with other commitments. Nevertheless, we believe in the importance of face-to-face working as key to meaningful dialogue, local understanding, and collaborative working between partners. Eating and socialising together is part of this relationship building, and relationships need to be nurtured to be maintained.

Cultural awareness and local guidance is key to observing protocols. This meant planning for welcome ceremonies and meetings with local dignitaries at every stop along the way. It is imperative to observe rules or beliefs around visiting, such as travelling in the right direction and completing research within one visit, rather than returning to the same community too soon. Failure to observe protocol can cause offence and create obstacles for the research. Gifting was one area where we learnt from each other, with Natan advising the UK team, and Bryony advising Natan on UK gifting customs. There is a need to be mindful when selecting and presenting gifts to help ensure they don't exacerbate challenges such as plastic waste.

It is important to have some knowledge of national and local governance, e.g. *who* is responsible for collecting waste, and *how* does this relate to the work achieved by KiriCAN at a community level? External factors, like a change in political administration, can also have a significant effect on the research. There is currently little appetite in Kiribati for open discussions around climate change in relation to cultural heritage, especially if the relocation of collections and records outside the national boundaries becomes necessary to ensure their continued physical existence. The subject does not chime well with current political discourse around Kiribati identity, and this is an important sensitivity.

Cultural Awareness in Research

"If you interview people in their homes, they won't tell you fully who they are. That's our custom, and if they really are poor, or can't afford this and this, they'll never say it. It's just a different kind of society, we'll never say: oh we don't have that, we don't have money, we don't have food. So with researchers who are doing poverty researching, I think that's a problem, that in Kiribati we'll never tell the truth... It's very shameful for them to be called poor. Or maybe they really don't understand these kind of interviews, these kinds of projects."

KiriCAN focus group, 2018

6.2 Opportunities

Some of the most interesting work is accomplished through dealing with challenges. When there is doubt over the direction of a project, it is important to have open dialogue within the team, and seek external advice if necessary. This turns a challenge into a learning opportunity for all. For example, the 'rubbish truck' scheme from KiriCAN was a focus for discussion in a sustainable development workshop with development expert Alyson Brody.

Accepting the idea of reciprocity was very rewarding. This was a transformative element of the work for the UK-based team, creating a strong sense of purpose, whilst also offering meaningful opportunities for indigenous partners. Natan hosted the UK-team in Kiribati, who in turn were able to host him in the UK. This project was an opportunity to utilise indigenous knowledge across platforms, in Kiribati, in film, and UK museum collections. Bringing together people in Kiribati, UK and Kiribati diaspora helped widen and deepen relations around heritage and climate change on more equal terms.

Although it might be uncomfortable for UK-based teams to be so reliant on local partners, it is also important to remember that a collaborative, locally-driven research is the only approach that could be truly sustainable. The challenges experienced by working in these settings should serve as a reminder of both the value and necessity of investing in long term and meaningful partnerships at a local level. When partnerships work well they can add legitimacy and legacy to the research.

KiriCAN's general perspective on partnership

Key insights

- The best collaborative projects in general are *not* heavily led by donors.
- They appreciated past (other) projects where they were given hard cash to take into villages, without "any fuss", which means no need to invoice for funds or gather receipts for every small local payment. There is strong implicit trust.
- There is a knock-on effect when the villages are engaged with in simple and direct ways (backed by adequate funding), they "initiated other things that were beyond the project objectives, you know, so, it kind of motivates".
- Engagement works best through living with - and knowing - the community, doing things together: sleeping, eating, dancing, singing.
- Providing translated material is important, as well as finding other accessible ways of communicating, "not in a fancy English terms, but you know, just story telling". There should be thought given to how to make engagement fun.
- It is usually best when projects are managed by *regional* institutions, such as the University of the South Pacific, who "understand Pacific ways".
- It is difficult for KiriCAN when expected to do travel bookings for foreign researchers: "The design of islands are scattered in Kiribati, they're not the same with the place that they know ...which is why it's easy for them to travel and communicate [but] with us, no internet on every island, so it's hard. But they never see that. They just give instructions."
- KiriCAN appreciated the arrangement with this project, commenting "a good research project is about the way we communicate. It's not dogmatic. Our work with you is more like with friends, and it's so different to [donor-led projects]. We are partners working together".

KiriCAN focus group 2018

6.3 Future Direction

Developing our work with KiriCAN around waste, heritage and climate change

The participatory action research to tackle waste in Kiribati could be upscaled. KiriCAN want to build on this work, either through more in-depth engagement in the same wards, or through geographical expansion into other communities. They can use this project to attract more international funding, further building their reputation with the community, government, and outside agencies, and improving their capacity. They would like support to develop office skills such as administration and financial management, as well as media communication skills. In the medium term they want to form their own research office so that they can be more directly involved in funding applications. KiriCAN could also showcase the benefits of more

participatory, gender-aware and culturally-attuned approaches at home, but also as a positive example in the international development field. KiriCAN is interested in incorporating artistic methods and heritage expertise into their community engagement, partly due to their involvement in this collaboration. The UK-based researchers could help to facilitate and support that process.

Further Creative Collaboration

Natan Itonga is enthusiastic about continued creative collaboration. Once the editing process has been completed, the current film could be shared with the communities that participated in its production, screened in the National Museum and local schools, offered as a digital heritage resource locally and worldwide. Feedback could be sought from this process to inform future approaches. Natan has indicated that he would to travel further during a longer time-frame to gather more footage, and to engage with more geographically marginalised communities. Implementing these ideas would need significant resources. KiriCAN believe that Natan's continued involvement could be important for their work too: helping to make indigenous knowledge more contemporary for young people through art and film, and this fits in with the emphasis on valuing indigenous knowledge and heritage in the Kiribati 2020 vision. "Traditional knowledge is one thing that will build our resilience." (KiriCAN focus group 2018)

Development of the Kiribati Cultural Sector

Future work with cultural organisations in Kiribati could include an offer to the government of Kiribati for a lengthier visit by experienced archivist/museum practitioners to scope work around emergency planning in greater depth and to develop specific basic collections care and documentation training programmes at the University of the South Pacific. Ideally these programmes would be taught by people from Kiribati, but at first there may be a need for external expertise.

The current governmental discourse in Kiribati emphasises opportunity and tourism rather than relocation and climate change. However, culture and heritage was indicated as something that any extension to the Kiribati National Climate Change Adaptation Programme *could* potentially engage with. The Kiribati Government relies extensively on support and aid from other countries and they may be open to future projects if genuinely collaborative and in line with the Kiribati 2020 vision.

Building upon the cultural exchange

The cultural exchange built new networks and increased capacity for Natan and the wider Kiribati heritage community, UK museums, i-Kiribati diaspora (we met as part of the visit), and the UK research team. These relationships can be built upon to widen access to collections, digitally and physically. The UK Kiribati museum collections catalogue is being updated to include more regional museums and will be returned to Kiribati Museum in Tarawa to support future community members' research and visits to the UK.

Visiting collections led Natan to think about how to widen access to the material culture: "I am... really happy the way the museums are keeping these. But I will be more happy if they can share these collections, if they have extra, similar items they have in store, if they can share also with our people back home by... repatriation." (Natan Itonga 2017)

We need to think about how the international heritage community can help build capacity and resilience in heritage organisations located in climate-threatened, indigenous contexts in a way which is self-reflexive, relational and genuinely collaborative. One challenge is to think about how to achieve this whilst avoiding the so-called 'salvage paradigm'¹¹ or notions of the West coming to the rescue. Building reciprocity into research is key to decolonising interactions and enabling longer term, more meaningful, exchanges that allow for deeper research and more useful outcomes.

7. Conclusion

These projects have enabled a rich and diverse approach to collaborative research. They have deepened understanding of local meanings for key concepts such as heritage and development, and informed interdisciplinary research methods in indigenous contexts. The research has empowered local communities to address their own development priorities in a practical way, whilst also enabling creative collaborative that value indigenous knowledge, language and perspectives. We have explored current heritage management in Kiribati and also facilitated international cultural exchanges which benefit all parties. There are three core conclusions:

1. The importance of reciprocity as a key element to build into all projects to avoid extractive and disempowering research
2. The need to develop ways to maintain relations, strengthen local partners to meet their own goals, give projects legacy, and plan for how to conclude and exit the field in a way that leaves all parties satisfied.
3. There has to be a supportive research environment and appropriate financial structures in place at research council and university level that acknowledge the particular challenges of working with indigenous partners on development projects. For strengthening the ethical practice of UK researchers in international development projects, we recommend full economic costings at 100% for local partners; seed grants (£15-30k) to develop ideas with partners, with all parties paid for their time; thought given to how to minimise paperwork and speed up payments and reimbursement; more flexibility in projects over their duration, with potential access to additional budget and time extensions; consideration given to support family relocation to support in-depth fieldwork; true accounting for 'invisible' labour; and more flexibility in how researchers are professionally evaluated. These researchers are currently pressured to de-aggregate individual contributions to collaborative projects.

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¹ 'Troubled Waters' Project website: <http://www.corddiryfroedd.org>

² 'Enduring Connections' Project Website: <https://enduringconnections.com>

³ The focus of Co-investigator Professor Kate Rigby's research on the role of religion as part of the cultural context shaping understandings of climate change and responses is not highlighted in this case study. A report on this aspect of the research can be found online: <https://enduringconnections.com/kiribati-case-study-the-role-of-religion/>

⁴ Onciul, B. (2015) *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice: Decolonizing Engagement*. New York: Routledge.

⁵ See Bergold, J. and Thomas, S., 'Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion', *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2012), pp. 191-222, and Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (2011). *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. Los Angeles: Sage.

⁶ See Leavy, P. (2015). *Method Meets Art*. Guilford Publications and Nelson, R. (2013). *Practice as research in the arts*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

⁷ 'The Art of Listening', Brody, A. (2018): <https://enduringconnections.com/the-art-of-listening-making-a-difference-through-enduring-connections/>

⁸ 'Troubled Waters'(2016), Film by Penrhyn Jones,S., Woodham, A., Onciul,B., Rigby,K: <https://vimeo.com/130445697>

⁹ This video was made for our new partners, the International National Trust Organisation, for screening at two United Nations Climate Change Conferences(2016 and 2017): <https://vimeo.com/199817541>

¹⁰ Schorch, P., McCarthy, C. & Hakiwai, A. (2016). Globalizing Māori museology: Reconceptualizing engagement, knowledge and virtuality through mana taonga. *Museum Anthropology*, 39 (1), 48-69.

¹¹ Rudiak-Gould, P. (2017) "'Peoples who still live": The role of museums in addressing climate change in the Pacific', In Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner (eds.) *Curating the Future, Museums, Communities and Climate Change*. Routledge, 67-76.