

**TOWARDS AN EMERGING “COCONUT TREE
MISSIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION”:
AN ENQUIRY INTO CLIMATE CHANGE AND
ITS RELEVANCE FOR MINISTERIAL
FORMATION AT
TANGINTEBU THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE**

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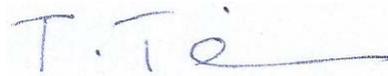
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DECLARATION—PLAGIARISM

I, **Tioti Timon**, do hereby state unambiguously that:

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As candidate co-supervisor, I hereby approve this thesis for submission



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11 February 2019

LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATION

We, the undersigned, do solemnly declare that we have abided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal policy on language editing. The thesis was professionally edited for proper English language, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and overall academic style. All original electronic forms of the text have been retained should they be required.

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DEDICATION

I respectfully dedicate this research work to the people of Kiribati, and other low-lying atolls, the victims of sea level rise and global warming, who are undergoing the impacts of climate change.

I also dedicate this work to Tangintebu Theological College on Tarawa, in the hope that this work will inspire and prepare its ministerial students and other church leaders to be missio-ecologically knowledgeable in their understanding of the salvation of all creation and thereby be more proactive in dealing with the issues of climate change and global warming.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the various Pacific Region theological seminaries in their ongoing work of preparing ministerial students for church ministry and mission. It is my sincere hope that they will be a prophetic voice for justice, peace and integrity of the environment within the Pacific Region.

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ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS

This study examines the ways in which the phenomenon of climate change is affecting the people, indigenous culture, and environment of the Micronesian island nation of Kiribati, in the South Pacific. Even though climate change impact is a global issue, this study focusses on the mission of the Kiribati Uniting Church in Kiribati in the context of global warming and sea level rise. It utilised the emerging indigenous missional concept of coconut tree theology to interface with the realities of climate change within the context of Kiribati. A missiological lens is therefore employed to interrogate the relevance of the ministerial formation curriculum at Tangintebu Theological College that is used to equip local ministerial students of the Kiribati Uniting Church and how they can respond to the life-threatening challenges of climate change.

The study argues that when the church fails in its mission in developing a proactive and indigenously-informed approach to addressing environmental issues, then the fullness of life that is embedded within its missio-ecclesial identity and vocation that is bequeath by Jesus (John 10:10) will not be realised. In the context of climate change where people's future on this planet is being negatively compromised, Christians, especially within the vast Pacific Region,¹ must focus more on developing a theology of creation to respond to the contemporary environment threats to life rather than giving a very narrow evangelising focus to classical theological themes such as sin, redemption and judgment. Serious attention must therefore be given to addressing the wider environmental concerns, and to developing a vision of justice and human equality that needs to be embedded, in the wider theological educational curriculum (Conradie, 2009:42-43).

The significance of this study is that it brings into conversation indigenous knowledge perspectives that have evolved through an emerging coconut tree missional and the

¹ Pacific is a foreign prescribed name and not one given by the local people. According to the National Oceanic Service, the term Pacific was coined by Portuguese navigator Ferdinan Magellan who in 1519 on a journey across the Atlantic Ocean seeking a western route to the Spice Island via South America came across the ocean and its calm and peaceful nature, leading him to designate the name (National Ocean Service 2017).

local narratives of the Kiribati people through a qualitative study which included questionnaires, in-depth interviews, observation and a collection of songs in which indigenous express their eco-relationality and interpretation of the environmental challenges of climate change. This study therefore necessitated an in-depth examination of the role that the church and the Tangintebu Theological College plays in equipping clergy leadership to respond to environmental and human challenges of climate change, and the extent to which the environmental and ecological issues are integrated into the development of the overall theological curriculum (PCC Report, 2007:107-108).

KEY TERMS:

Church; Climate change; Coconut tree theology; Curriculum; Environment; Global warming; Kiribati Protestant Church; Kiribati Uniting Church; Ministerial formation; Missiological lens; Paris Agreement; Pacific Islands; Sea level rise; Tangintebu Theological College; Western missionaries.

DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The definition of the key concepts that support this study is specifically aimed at attaining coherence in the way they function throughout the work. Understanding the meaning of the concepts as described and analysed is therefore focused towards achieving the aims and objectives of the study.

The coconut tree: The coconut tree is the main tree that the Kiribati people rely upon for their daily living as it provides a wide range of needs in many areas in the life of an I-Kiribati (Thaman 1990:6). The Kiribati people see the coconut tree as a tree of life because it provides food and drink, thatching for roofing and timber for homes. It also provides local medicine and traditional dress, oil for the body and at the same time it is the main source of income of the people. It is the main source for the well-being of an I-Kiribati.

Climate change: Climate change² refers to the changes in the climate pattern, which the majority of scientists and climatologists argue is as a result of anthropogenic activities of burning of fossil fuel, deforestation, and certain types of farming methods that are done on a large scale with animal and plants that destroy the environment and leads to “global warming”³ (Deane-Drummond, 2008:5). Laczko and Aghazarm (2009:14) state that the change of climate is expected to make the world hotter and will cause factors such as rising sea level, frequent floods, droughts and storms that threaten all of life. The impact will affect, “the ecology of both human and non-human communities” (Dean-Drummond, 2008:5). It is within this brief definition scope that the above scholars have offered, that the term ‘climate change’ will be used in this study.

² Climate change in the Kiribati language is translated as, *Bibitakin kanoan boong* (lit: “change in weather over many days”) where the phrase is used to speak about weather conditions that are no longer predictable.

³ Global warming in Kiribati language is translated as, *Rikiraken te kabuebue ae tieuataake* (lit: “the increase in surface temperature of earth that affects everywhere.”)

Missiological lens: Missiological represents the systematic study of the discipline of mission studies in which the concept *missio-Dei* is used as a lens to find out how and where the church is engaging in God’s mission in the world. A missiological lens thus constitutes the theoretical foci through which the subject of climate change will be interrogated to identify and determine its connectivity with the ministry and mission of the church.

Kiribati Uniting Church (KUC): The Kiribati Uniting Church (formerly, the Kiribati Protestant Church and earlier, the Gilbert Islands Protestant Church) is the only Protestant denomination in Kiribati that serves approximately 40 000 members (KPC Strategic Plan 2014-2018) The Kiribati Uniting Church is the second-largest religious group in Kiribati after the Roman Catholic Church (2014-2018). It has a theological training institution, the Tangintebu Theological College, that serves as the main academic training centre for the training of its ministers. The church also owns and operates five secondary schools. The church relies mainly on the financial contribution of its church members in meeting its ministry and mission costs.

Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC): The church was previously called the Gilbert Islands Protestant Church. The name automatically changed to Kiribati Protestant Church immediately after the Gilbert Islands received Independence from the United Kingdom in 1979. This followed the change of the country’s name from Gilbert to Kiribati.

Tangintebu Theological College: The term, ‘Tangintebu,’ which literally means, “*the sound of the horn,*” was traditionally known as a gathering place of the spirits from different places and was used as a traditional meeting ground/place for the community who would gather whenever they heard the sound of the horn. Eastman, the first principal of the Tangintebu Theological College selected this site for a theological college to contextualise the traditional belief that the spirits of the islands who used to gather in that place for a meeting are those who have responded to the call to be trained as pastors in the mission of the church. The college serves to train ministers for the Kiribati Uniting Church as well as ministerial students from other Micronesia countries

such as the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia Tuvalu and Nauri (TTC Handbook, 2016).

Curriculum: According to Dharamraj, (2014:352) “the theological curriculum, comprehensively understood, embraces all those activities and experiences provided by the school to enable students to achieve the intended goals.” He further states that the theological education curriculum serves to teach and equip church workers with “the missional task of understanding and relevantly communicating God’s truth in every cultural context.”

Ministerial formation: The ministerial formation in the context of this study is related to trained pastors in the Tangintebu Theological College where pastors are trained and equipped for the ministry of the church in Kiribati and abroad. The ministerial formation of students at the college is critical in this study as they are the only strong voices and powerful leaders in the church that can shape the lives of the people and communities to which they serve.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABCFM	American Board Commission for Foreign Mission
CWM	Council for World Mission
CWME	Council for World Mission and Evangelism
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
GEIPC	Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protestant Church
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GIPC	Gilbert Islands Protestant Church
KCCN	Kiribati Children Campaigners Network
KPC	Kiribati Protestant Church
KUC	Kiribati Uniting Church
LMS	London Missionary Society
MELAD	Ministry of Environment Lands and Agricultural Development
MFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
MFMRD	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource Development
NIFEA	New International Financial and Economic Architecture
PCC	Pacific Conference of Churches
PTC	Pacific Theological College
SPATS	South Pacific Association of Theological Schools
TTC	Tangintebu Theological College
TTL	Together Towards Life

WCC World Council of Churches

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY AND ITS UNDERPINNING

*“E bon ngae ngkana tao e na iekaki abara ma ti onimaki ba te Atua
are te Tia Karikibai e bon teimatoa n raoniira ni karokoa tokin
kawaira.”*

*Trans. “Even though our low-lying islands will one day be underwater,
we still have hope in God the creator that He will be with us until the
end of time” (Kiito, 2015).*



Figure 1.1. Present generation in Kiribati in the context of climate change surrounded by coconut trees⁴ (Source: ABC News, 2015)

⁴ The new generation in Kiribati are confronted with the negative impacts of climate change, bringing fear and uncertainty for their future; they nevertheless still have hope as coconut trees are surrounding them with provisions expressing the love and care of God in their situation.

1.1. Introduction

The phenomenon of climate change describes how the different human and environmental factors bring about changes in the earth's climate (Deane-Drummond, 2008:5; Braun, Hellwig, and Byrnes, 2007:6; Collins, 2012:31; Laczko and Aghazarm, 2009:14). Scholars such as Nunn (2013:143) have pointed out how climate change constitutes a life-threatening reality that is affecting the people and the environment in the Micronesian island nation of Kiribati. Many contributions on the subject of climate change in the media, in environmental workshops, policy papers, scientific journals, and in the eco-theological tradition, offer projections that suggest that the "liquid continent" of Oceania is crossing the threshold towards becoming a new spatial disorder of land, sea, and sky, to the detriment of both human communities and the wider environment (Nunn, 2013:143-144; Deane-Drummond, 2008:5). Nunn (2013:157 *cf.* Braun, Hellwig, and Byrnes, 2007:8) expresses his concern for the Kiribati islands which are low-lying atolls that are extremely vulnerable and may not survive into the twenty-second century.

It is in this context that this present study seeks to examine the ways in which the phenomenon of climate change is affecting the people in Kiribati, their indigenous culture and environment and how it is addressed in the ministerial training programme of Tangintebu Theological College (TTC) on behalf of the Kiribati Uniting Church (KUC).

This chapter introduces the study, highlights the keys issues and explains their importance and interconnectedness. The overall aim is to examine and understand the phenomenon of climate change in Kiribati and how the approach of the KUC recognises the issue of climate as a strategic component in its ministerial priorities.

1.2. Motivation

1.2.1. Personal and pastoral motivation

The motivation for this research study is shaped by the researcher's experience of living and working within local communities of the Micronesian island nation of Kiribati as a

pastor. The issue of climate change was not considered part of any preaching or discussion in the church since the church's focus was apparently on spiritual matters (Timon, 2013). Coastal erosion has become a common phenomenon across the subregion of Oceania in the Western Pacific Ocean. Ever-rising sea levels have begun to encroach human settlements, contaminating fresh water and destroying food crops that people depend on for their daily living (Nunn, 2013; Biribo and Woodroffe, 2013; Collins, 2012; Donner and Webber, 2013; Gittins, 1999).

Although this scenario has affected the inhabitants of Micronesia, and the Kiribati Islands as a whole, particularly their drinking water from groundwater wells, pastors have not taken the issue of climate change seriously in their preaching or other pastoral responsibilities within their communities. In her reading of the Accra Confession,⁵ LengkaBula (2009:128) has highlighted the church's silence in its prophetic role as well as its failure to take responsibility to address the issue of injustice and discrimination that threatens the life of vulnerable communities. In the Accra Confession, churches were called to be transformed in order to "promote God's household of life and reflect on the ways God gives life and protects justice in creation and human society" to care for the earth for present and future generations (2009:128). While climate change represents the most urgent threat to the future wellbeing of the poor and vulnerable communities around the world, it nevertheless occupies a low priority in the church's ministry and mission.

This present study is also motivated by the keynote speech of John Doom at the Ninth Pacific Conference of Churches General Assembly of 2007, that identified "climate change and the threat that poses to our way of living" as a critical issue that challenges churches to urgently rediscover their ecumenical formation and mission to the people of God in the Pacific region (PCC Report, 2007:14-15). This present study thus argues

⁵ The Accra Confession was adopted by the delegates of the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, a predecessor of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in Accra, Ghana (2004). The Accra Confession states that matters of economic and ecological justice are not only social, political and moral issues, but are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church.

that climate change is a challenge to the prophetic role of the Pacific churches that needs to be urgently addressed.

The people of these island communities struggle to cope with life and to protect the landscape, seascape and the groundwater wells from which they obtain their potable water. However, in this context, the focus on climate change has been isolated from the total community life of the people as an exotic agenda item for selective environmental enthusiasts and not integrated into the missional identity, vocation and witness of the church because of its focus on meeting inner ecclesial needs (Timon, 2013). This present study thus argues that although Christianity makes up the largest religion within the nation of Kiribati and the KUC being the second largest denomination, the church has not been able to adequately address the phenomenon of climate change and environment management (2013). As stated in the national statistic on the population census 2015, Christians in Kiribati population is made up of 105,864 out of the total population of 110,136 (Kiribati National Statistic Office, 2016). Talia (2009:12) expresses the same concern that although there are movements addressing ecological issues, it is still not reflected in the life of the church.

This present study therefore seeks to examine the ministry and mission of the Christian church and how it bears witness to its message to give more attention to the current environmental context of the people and to communicate an appropriate theology that can bring hope to the people in the context of the current threats posed by climate change.

1.2.2. Academic motivation

The researcher's interest in this study is also heightened by his previous academic study and experience as a theological educator at the TTC that raised questions about the relevance of life-threatening events to its theological education curriculum, including those that relate to climate change. In an earlier Master's Degree study, the present researcher discussed the failure of the KUC in its mission to address ecological issues affecting the people and ecological environment of Kiribati Central. This failure was

linked to the ways in which its clergy leaders were formed for missional responsibilities within their local communities (Timon, 2013).

Being a lecturer at the TTC, the present researcher observed that the theological college which is tasked with equipping its ministers for the KUC ministry has neglected such ecological issues in its teaching curriculum. The current curriculum was introduced by the first missionaries and has remained unaltered over the years. According to Talia (2009:2), the legacy has focused on theologies that are not making sense in the context that people are living. It has disconnected the people from the realities of that context. For Kaunda and Hewitt (2015), any curriculum that is not responding to the contextual needs of people needs to be transformed and redesigned in order to serve the fundamental necessities and common good of the people and the environment in which they live (Kaunda and Hewitt, 2015). Wright has earlier argued:

Development is people doing things for themselves but not people having things done for them. Facts and figures can look good on paper but what count more is what really benefits the people. And what benefits the people most is what the people do for themselves (2010:5).

This present study will therefore present an in-depth examination of the role the TTC plays in equipping clergy leadership to respond to the environmental and human challenges of climate change, as well as the extent to which the environmental and ecological issues are integrated into the development of the theological curriculum.

1.3. A brief background to climate change

Climate change refers to the changes in the climatic pattern, which some climatologists argue is as a result of anthropogenic activities of burning of fossil fuel, deforestation, and agriculture that leads to global warming (Dungard 2012:410; Kuruppu and Liverman 2011:1; Deane-Drummond, 2008; Biribo and Woodroffe, 2013). Byrnes understands climate as the composite of “the long-term prevailing weather patterns in a particular place; it includes, for example, variations in temperature, precipitation, and wind patterns” (2007:7). He further states that in the last century, the changing climate has led to global warming and sea level rise. The increase of global warming refers to

the “progressive gradual rise of the Earth’s average surface temperature that is being caused by an increase in concentrations of GHGs (mainly CO² and methane) in the atmosphere” (Byrnes, 2007:6). This is validated by the IPCC which reported to the Doha Climate Change Conference that the melting of the ice cap would contribute to a significant rise in sea levels, affecting regions like, “the Ganges delta where some 135 million people live” and will also submerge low-lying islands (Collins, 2012:32; Le Treut, Somerville, Cubasch, and Allen, 2007). If the earth temperature increases to “3.4°C model projections suggest extinctions ranging from 40 percent to 70 percent of species assessed around the globe.”

The Cable News Network (CNN) announced that failure to control greenhouse gas emission in the following fifteen years, global temperatures could increase as much as three degrees (Strickland, 2017). This creates a great concern that even if we aim to decrease the heat of our planet, temperatures will increase by “two more degrees by 2100.” Due to sea level rise, some reports warn that low-lying islands like Kiribati will be underwater by that time (Northcott and Aid, 2007:27). The World Health Organisation (WHO) has also reported that the global consequences of climate change on human health and livelihood will be profound, estimating that some 12.6 million individuals worldwide will be affected by climate-related diseases and death rates will increase prodigiously due to ecological pollution and extreme weather conditions (Strickland, 2017).

Within the Pacific region, for the past two-hundred years, the impact of rising sea levels is associated with changes to coastal environments that, “in return reduces the useful bio-productivity mainly by shoreline erosions, direct inundations and groundwater salinization” (Nunn, 2013:147). In the atoll island nation of Kiribati, waves crashing across the lagoon side of South Tarawa, the capital of Kiribati, swamped everything in its path, flooding the hospital in Betio, destroying homes, food crops and fouling an already severely limited freshwater lens. Similarly, around one-hundred homes were destroyed on the island of Tamana, while the rest of the islands faced similar damages (Uekera, 2015, No. 3). This has created fear in the island populations, the majority of whom have nowhere to go as the islands are very small, with them lying on average

one to three metres above sea level (Collins, 2012:31). In January 2016, four Kiribati young men were reported dead after being crushed by a strong wave that rose and smashed into their car on Kiritimati Island (Uekera, 2016, No. 3).

Because there is much uncertainty and insecurity among I-Kiribati people, this present study argues that the anthropogenic activities are the main causes that must be addressed for the survival of climate-change victims (Braun, Hellwig, and Byrnes, 2007:8). Small island nations have often been the most outspoken countries in the world in calling for action to address climate change. However, it is rare to hear leaders from these countries publicly discussing worst-case scenarios where sea levels rise to the point where low-lying islands become uninhabitable and entire nations need to relocate (Keating, 2015)

This present study therefore seeks to examine from a missiological perspective the Kiribati real life experience in the context of climate change and to explore the possible actions that could facilitate the protection of the islands and restore the health of the ocean. The study will use contemporary data on the effects of climate change to assess the global impact on economic injustice that is affecting the lives of the most vulnerable and poor in the developing world. The study also aims at examining some of the causes and effects of climate change and to seek for a missiological paradigm that can help to promote an effective response from the church in Kiribati.

1.4. The Kiribati Uniting Church

The KUC was until recently the only Protestant denomination in Kiribati that represents about one-third of the Kiribati population and is active in its pastoral ministry for youth, women, Sunday school and chaplaincy work. However, the church's national numerical strength is declining because of a schism that took place when the church sought to change its name from the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) to the Kiribati Uniting Church (KUC) during the General Assembly of 2014.⁶ Even with its decreased

⁶ The schism in the KUC took place when the General Assembly in 2014 at Arorae Island changed the name of the church from the KPC to the KUC with a poor consultation to its general membership. The

membership, it is still considered to be the official representative denomination of the historic Protestant mission in Kiribati. Although this division created much unhappiness among the general membership, this present study argues that the mitigating effects of climate change poses an even greater life-threatening risk to the nation which necessitates an urgent missional response from the church. This present study thus seeks to examine the extent to which the theological education being used to prepare its clergy leadership for missional engagement in the nation adequately addresses the challenges of climate change which is the main issue affecting the lives of the people (Timon, 2013).

1.5. Tangintebu Theological College

Theological education was first established as a strategic pedagogical tool when a mission training college was established at Rongorongo Beru⁷ in 1920 (Jones, 1917:9). It later moved to the capital of Kiribati, Tarawa in 1961 and was located in a place called Tangintebu, where the college was renamed, Tangintebu Theological College (TTC Handbook 2016). The TTC offered certificated studies from 1961 to 1982. In 1983, the TTC was equipped with more lecturers with Bachelor of Divinity qualifications, offering a Diploma in Theology until 2016. The TTC is the only theological college in Kiribati to equip ministerial students for the pastoral ministry. It serves not only Kiribati but also other countries in the Micronesian region, such as Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Nauru and the Federated States of Micronesia.⁸ The lack of qualified teaching personnel is a major problem in the TTC, including the library that is poorly stocked and facilitated to meet the criteria to upgrade the theological college to Bachelor of Divinity level (TTC Handbook, 2016).

split coincided with this thesis work and is further discussed in chapter three as to the affect it has had on the life and mission of the church.

⁷ Beru is one of the outer islands in the southern part of Kiribati where the London Missionary Society (LMS) first landed and built its headquarters.

⁸ One to two students from each of the Micronesian Island States attend the TTC for theological training every year, beginning in the 1970s. In the ten-year period 2006-2016, there was an increase of students from Kiribati, but no more from other Micronesian islands as they send their students for higher theological education in Fiji, Samoa and Tonga.

Within the contemporary environment, this present study aims to discuss the important issues that need to be explored about the role of the TTC and the quality of theological education that it offers to respond to the contextual challenges of climate change. In particular, the study will seek to address the following two questions:

- i. How can a missiological interrogation of the issue of climate change contribute to a better understanding of what is taking place in people's lives and the environment in which they live within Kiribati?
- ii. How relevant is the curriculum of the TTC in equipping the clergy of the Kiribati Uniting Church (KUC) to respond adequately to the issues of climate change and environmental management?

Since theological education plays an important role in ministerial formation within the context of Kiribati, strategies to address the phenomenon of climate change are very necessary to ensure that a relevant curriculum and associated pedagogical process is available to equip ministerial students to respond effectively to these important challenges. This present study thus argues that a theological education that is responsive to the urgent challenges of climate change within the Kiribati context necessitates curricula changes to ensure the effective theological and missional formation of ministerial students that are being equipped as leaders to serve the island communities.

1.6. Statement of the problem

Climate change and associated rising sea levels are threatening to submerge the Pacific island nation of Kiribati, potentially turning its people into 'climate refugees.' The former president of Kiribati, Anote Tong expressed his deep fear that the country was sinking and that the island would become uninhabitable in the next few decades if the rising sea levels were to continue unabated (Chandran, 2018). Accordingly, Northcott and Aid (2007:27) state that the sea level is predicted to rise by more than 0.7 mm by 2100, even according to the most conservative modelling. On average, they report that the present global sea levels are rising at a rate of 3.3 mm per year.

In the past, floods were experienced one or two times a year. Now they seem to come every high tide. The people are understandably concerned about their future security, which is under serious threat due to rising sea levels and dwindling ground water reserves. As a result, they look to the church for guidance, but its ministers are inadequately equipped for ministry and mission pertaining to the results of climate change. The failure of its pastors to provide guidance is directly due to them being inadequately equipped to engage in the face of such ecological crises during their ministerial formation at theological college. The church's documents on its theological education indeed reveal that it has not explicitly articulated the missiological implications of climate change for the ministerial formation of its students. Neither has it reflected upon its missionary ecclesial heritage and associated theological legacy to converse with indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) that are embedded in the contextual coconut theology that has emerged which seeks to offer a more effective response to the challenge of climate change.

The significance of this present research is that it brings into theological reflection and conversation, IKS perspectives that have evolved in coconut theology, as well as the local cultural narratives of the Kiribati people through their songs, in expressing their understanding about the environmental challenges of climate change. According to John Doom, the key speaker in the 2007 PCC General Assembly, the Pacific people need to collect the coconut theology and live it out (PCC Report, 2007). This study thus argues that there is an inter-dependency of life on earth and that this is best observed in the traditional skills, wisdom and culture of a people.

1.7. Location of the study



Figure 1.2. Map of Kiribati in the Pacific Ocean (Source: Government of Australia, 2015)⁹

The Republic of Kiribati located in the South Pacific is to the west of the International Date Line and constitutes an archipelago of thirty-three atolls, of which twenty-one are inhabitable, while twelve are uninhabitable (van Trease, 1993:3). When overlaid by the map outline of the United States of America, it illustrates the vastness of the seascape that encompasses Kiribati. The islands are small and have inadequate above-ground containers of fresh water resources and the people therefore must thus rely on ground water wells (Storey and Hunter, 2010). In 2016, Kiribati had a population of 101 998, against a land mass estimated to be only 811 sq.km (313 square miles) (Kiribati National Statistic Office, 2016).

The current climate change impact constitutes a high risk to the life, health and physical safety of the inhabitants of Kiribati and the future viability and existence of their island nation because of rising sea levels and its concomitant negative impact on the

⁹ People's impression of Kiribati as just a very small island atoll belies the length of the outer-islands stretched in terms of distance from one island to another on a map. For example, it is obvious that the islands although small in land mass are in terms of ocean mass vast, covering the length and size of Australia. Indeed, out of 810.5 sq.km of the 33 low-lying atolls is a wide ocean of over 3.5 million sq.km (1.4 million square miles) (Thomas, 2002:164).

availability of clean potable water that is necessary to sustain life. The rising sea levels also lead to environmental erosion, which results in reduction of land area. Because of this, the islands' economy and agriculture and even the vitality of the culture as a whole are all affected (McIver, Woodward, Davies, Tibwe, and Iddings, 2014:5229).

Finally, this empirical study was undertaken within three of the Kiribati islands namely:

- i. Abaiang in the north constitutes the most populous islands of Kiribati;
- ii. Aranuka represents islands in the central part of Kiribati;
- iii. Tamana in the south.

Accordingly, these three islands and their experiences together served as a fair representation of the wider nation.

1.8. The central research question

The central research question of this study is as follows:

What are the curriculum implications of the phenomenon of climate change in Kiribati for the renewal of theological education that fosters ministerial formation of students at Tangintebu Theological College?

The main objective of this study is to engage in an examination of the phenomenon of climate change and the ways in which it affects the environment and people of Kiribati. Secondly, it seeks to interrogate the missiological implications for the ministerial formation of KUC students.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. To analyse the phenomenon of climate change and its effect on the peoples and environment of the Pacific region, particularly the nation and indigenous cultures of the Kiribati;

- ii. To engage the religious and cultural relevance of the coconut tree in the context of climate change in Kiribati;
- iii. To examine the ways in which the theological curriculum is used to equip the ministerial formation of students belonging to Kiribati Uniting Church which has dealt with the phenomenon of climate;
- iv. To critique the religious and cultural significance of the coconut tree contextual theological approach and its utilisation in the *missio Dei* to adequately respond to climate change as a major threat to life in Kiribati.

1.9. Literature review

The literature review focuses on scholars who have written from and for the context of the Pacific region and its island nations. The literature review permeates all chapters in this study. The literature is integrated at all strategic points in the different chapters of this study. This means that the exclusion of a detailed literature review as a separate section in the study is deliberate. Accordingly, this section will be restricted to a brief review of the key scholars that have interrogated the subject of climate change in the Pacific Islands.

1.9.1. Kiribati in the context of climate change

Paul Collins in his (2012) article, “Climate view from a nation doomed to drown,” discusses the smallness of Kiribati, vulnerability and the present situation of the islands. He demonstrates an urgent concern about the reality of climate change and its effect on the islands. However, he does not provide practical ways as to how indigenous people can handle the challenge. Storey and Hunter in their (2010) article, “Kiribati: An environmental perfect storm” present the same argument concerning the future survival of the island state and its inhabitants. These authors not only attribute climate change to sea-level rise and its threat to associated ecosystems, but also to the anthropogenic activities of the inhabitants of the atoll low-lying islands such as unmanaged urbanisation, continued inadequate sanitation, lack of solid waste disposal controls and fresh water management. They attribute the changing landscape in Kiribati to be a

critical element of the climate change problems the island is facing; hence, they call for strengthening the “resilience of communities and their ecosystem.” The article does not however dwell enough on how people can be informed and transformed into becoming resilient communities and how they can be part of sustainability developments. A similar argument is presented by Patrick Nunn (2013:149) in his (2012) article, “The End of the Pacific?” where he observes that the rise in sea level has had some widespread effects over the past two-hundred years, particularly affecting low-lying atolls. He is concerned that islands, especially low-lying atolls, may not survive this century. He supports his argument with the lamentation of the Prime minister from Tuvalu and the president of Kiribati (Nunn, 2013:149). In his comment, Clive Pearson (2004:23). argues that ‘the rhetoric of climate change and global warming, rising sea levels, carbon trading schemes, and various timelines and projections point to the present being a Kairos moment.’ The underlying assumption of this argument is that the threat of climate change needs to ‘become arguably the most talked about issue of our time.

1.9.2. Challenges to the church

Manfred Ernst in his article, (2012) “Changing Christianity in Oceania: A regional overview,” provides a background on how global changes in the broadest sense—political, economic, cultural and social—have affected the region in the context of globalisation. This global system of trade has spread throughout the Pacific, with the inevitable consequences to commerce, industry, culture, and social stability, and also religion to keep pace (Ernst, 2012:36). The result was that in the region, cash economy became the norm; family stability broke down and crime rates rose leading to community fragmentation and instability thus severely compromising social cohesion. Life became more complex and more confusing. Ernst (2012) argues that it is important to consider the significance of globalisation and why religion is so central to the Pacific way of life. The first missionaries that came to the region to spread the Christian message were motivated not only by altruistic endeavours, but were also influenced to serve as, “agents of the colonial powers that took the leading role in bringing Western culture to the Pacific Islands” (2012: 33). While the study provides materials that speak

about the failure of the church in its mission being affected by Western influences. However, Ernst did not focus his critique on theological education as a platform to transform the society through the introduction of appropriate curricula strategies that give attention to the contextual challenges the face ministerial students who are in training. The contributions of Ernst (2012) and other scholars are helpful in creating an awareness of climate change impact and the symptoms of the human destructive activities to the environment. However, their contributions have failed to provide a clear solution that can inform people how they can live in solidarity with their environment. For this reason, this present study posits that for small and vulnerable island states, such as Kiribati to survive, it is necessary to explore the significant role that eco-theology should play in ministerial formation within the curriculum of theological education that is offered at the colleges. While several studies have also been carried out on climate change, there are very few that have explored the role of the church in the context of climate change. Neither have they focused on the role of theological education and the need for curriculum renewal and development that facilitates ministerial formation which creatively responds to the challenges of climate change.

1.10. Structure of the study: Outline of the chapters

This study is developed in nine chapters that are structured along the following conceptual approaches.

- i. **Chapter One:** This chapter presents an introduction to the entire study, highlighting the key issues that will be studied and explaining their importance and interconnectedness. This chapter identifies the background of the study with a brief overview of the climate change impact that is currently affecting the Pacific islands and the livelihoods of the people. It is the life-threatening reality of their situation that triggered my personal, pastoral and academic interest to pursue this research project. In my motivation, I shared what I have experienced among my people who are enduring hardships to protect their lands and lives in the context of climate change.

- ii. **Chapter Two:** This chapter provides a broader picture of the theoretical framework using the Pacific coconut tree theological imagination as a lens to inform this study in order to interrogate the central research question the study aims to answer.
- iii. **Chapter Three:** This chapter serves to provide broader information of the nation of Kiribati, namely, the islands of Kiribati, the ocean, the people, their culture, traditional knowledge and how they live with their environment. The chapter also highlights the impact of climate change, globalisation and missionary influences that have affected and continue to affect the livelihood and indigenous culture of the I-Kiribati.
- iv. **Chapter Four:** This chapter presents information of the impacts of the first missionaries' legacy which is one of the critical factors affecting the mission of the KUC to address the contemporary situation and context of the people. This chapter argues that the continuing effects of Western-style Christianity shapes the church's theological thinking and social engagement and must be urgently addressed.
- v. **Chapter Five:** This chapter discusses the phenomenon of climate change globally and regionally particularly in respect to the island nation of Kiribati. This chapter presents a critique to the Paris Agreement and challenges world leaders to unite and tackle the problems of climate change. Consequently, it argues that people have their own ways to solve their own problems that must not be ignored in the mission of the church.
- vi. **Chapter Six:** This chapter outlines the methodology that explains how the empirical data was arranged. The method that was used to meet the requirement of this study was a qualitative method of data collection based on the key research questions that were engaged by songs, questionnaires and interviews.

- vii. **Chapter Seven:** This chapter presents the first part of the research findings using songs as a source of local meaning making and interpretation of climate change. Songs are critical to the Kiribati worldview as music articulates their cosmology and eco-relational understanding of reality.
- viii. **Chapter Eight:** This chapter analyses the responses of the participants and postulates the missiological significance for the identity and witness of the KUC. This chapter further argues that the KUC should read the signs of the times and consider the value of cultural approaches from below to enable people on the ground to become involved in strengthening the mission of the church through their cultural understanding.
- ix. **Chapter Nine:** This final chapter provides a general conclusion to the study and suggests signposts of how best the TTC and the KUC can strengthen their missional identity and vocation to better equip their members to respond more effectively to the challenges of climate change. The chapter also suggests some fresh perspectives concerning how the KUC and the TTC can better respond to the missional needs of a context ravaged by climate change in which they serve.

1.11. Chapter summary

In this chapter an attempt was made to present a general introduction to the study. The interest of this study is motivated by the existential threat to the researcher's home, land and nation of Kiribati and other low-lying atolls of the Pacific region that are at risk of disappearing because of the effects of climate change. The background of this study was explored to give clarity to the research problem of this study and to draw out the key question and sub-questions that informed this study. In referencing the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) with the concern that climate change is an urgent issue to address, this study argues that other related issues such as economic injustice, the impact of globalisation and the destruction of indigenous knowledge, are issues that raise the question of the role that the church should play in the context of these issues. Consequently, this study argues that the strategic institution of KUC can play an

important role in giving leadership to equip and mobilise the people of God to reduce the threat of climate change upon their environment.

The chapter which follows will provide the theories to be incorporated in this study using the Pacific theological framework of a coconut theology.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RELEVANCE OF COCONUT THEOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE



Figure 2.1. The Coconut Tree: The main tree of life for people of Kiribati (Source: Seychelles News Agency, 2016)¹⁰

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the background to this study, touching briefly on what climate change is, and how it is affecting the low-lying islands and the people of Kiribati. The value of culture was examined within the context of modernisation through globalisation and its Western dominating culture which have subjugated and controlled the lives of the people, especially in the nations of the Global South who are suffering the impact of climate change. As a consequence, this chapter provides theories

¹⁰ Every nation has a tree of life. In the Pacific-island nation of Kiribati, the coconut tree to some extent is almost like a tree of life because it covers all aspects of life. It provides food and drink, accommodation, protection, medicines and financial needs as it is the main source of income of the people.

from the coconut tree theology to examine ways of how the KUC could revisit and transform the curriculum of its theological college in order to be more effective and relevant in its missional response to climate change.

The Pacific landscape reality of a ‘coconut tree’ is employed as a missiological theoretical lens that informs this study in order to interrogate the central research question of this study:

What are the curriculum implications of the phenomenon of climate change in Kiribati for the renewal of theological education that fosters ministerial formation of students at Tangintebu Theological College?

However, the coconut theology communicates with selective components that contribute to the main research question. These components are: missio-formational eco-missional, eco-relational, all of which will be integrated in this present study. The rationale of this theory is to interrogate the existing theology in the Pacific region that is Western in nature and does not correspond fully to the context of the Pacific needs, aspirations and challenges (PCC, 2007:177).

The theory of coconut tree imagination employed in this study is used to examine the phenomenon of climate change and the ways in which it affects the environment and people of Kiribati. It examines the impacts of globalisation and the missionary legacy that affect the indigenous cultural ways of living and the mission of the church today. It identifies and critiques the missiological quality of the theological education used in the ministerial formation of students of the KUC and identifies the sort of knowledge that should be incorporated in the TTC curriculum to address issues of climate change and its environmental effects.

2.2. Theoretical framework

This study is informed by a tripartite theoretical framework of the “coconut theology of life” as articulated by the Pacific scholar, Sione Amanaki Havea which enters into conversation with Chammah Kaunda and Roderick R. Hewitt’s, missio-formation perspectives on theological education, and Ernst M. Conradie eco-missional Earth-keeping ethics that focuses on God’s loving care for creation.

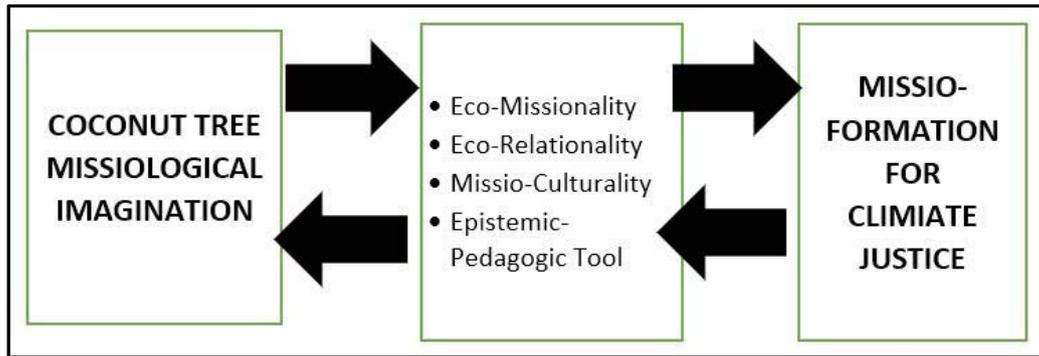


Figure 2.2. Interaction between Pacific coconut theology and missio-formation for climate justice (Source: Author)

Figure 2.2 illustrates the constant interaction between the Pacific coconut theology and missio-formation. It demonstrates how coconut theology is informed by missio-formation through constant interaction. In particular, it forms a wheel of mutual transformation where what is happening in the classroom has a direct effect on climate justice. This theological framework is employed as the missiological lens to interrogate the central research question of this study:

What are the curriculum implications of the phenomenon of climate change in Kiribati for the renewal of theological education that fosters ministerial formation of students at Tangintebu Theological College?

The study uses the phenomenon of coconut theology to converse with missio-formation and eco-earthkeeping perspectives as the foundational theoretical lens to interrogate the study.

The significance of coconut missiological imagination serves to highlight the following:

- i. Coconut theology as missio-cultural is employed to interrogate how the coconut tree is understood to describe the coconut theology of life from the perspective of Kiribati;
- ii. Coconut theology as mission-formatational interrogates the theological curriculum skewed towards a Western colonial form of education to be redesigned to serve the fundamental needs and common good of the people and the environment;

- iii. Coconut theology as eco-earthkeeping is used to address the contemporary challenges and points to the theological education to engage in its curriculum eco-theology. This theory makes the point that the world is to be recognised as the household of God, and the church needs to provide a great deal of thought on a relevant contemporary subject about personal, local and international accountability. All actors in the climate change debacle have guilt on their hands but are unable to find the political will to solve it (Conradie, 2016:104) Thus, theological education and church mission need to develop a deep relationship between ecclesiology and ecology in the world—the household of God;
- iv. Coconut theology as an eco-relational theory is employed to integrate with the social, economic and political transformation and action that responds positively to the felt needs of people. Palu (2018) argues that humanity and nature are not separate entities. Therefore, this theory assists the church that shares this separate entity attitude, and so must stop simply training disciples for mission, but must train them to realise they are part of the natural world.

To accomplish these aims, there is a need to identify the sort of knowledge that should be incorporated into the TTC curriculum. Since the curriculum ought to reflect the needs and aspirations of the people and society for which it is designed and developed, the key question for the church is clear: “How will the TTC’s curriculum development ensure that the needs of the people are met?” At this point, Maton’s (2013) notion of the epistemic-pedagogic device is of assistance in how to develop the TTC’s curriculum.

2.2.1. Pacific coconut theology

For Palu (2012:68, 71), the development of a distinctive “Pacific theology” began at the Consultation of Pacific Theologians in Papua New Guinea in 1986, where John Havea (1988/1989) of Tonga urged the meeting to direct the theological enterprise in the Pacific to “Pacific Theology” as a theme. This suggestion was accepted among

Pacific theologians, who adopted his idea enthusiastically. In particular, it was used in a geographical sense, to distinguish the theology from that of other regions. Havea (1988/1989:297) encouraged all Pacific theologians to develop a theology that would be relevant for the Pacific context and asserted that if Jesus had grown up in the Pacific, he would employ what people have in their context. Within the Pacific world view, it will be very meaningful if Jesus describes himself as being a true coconut tree of life—an ecological presence of God with the people, rather than to be a vine, because grapevines do not grow or are seen in Kiribati.

According to Fedor (2012:68), the coconut tree embodies the culture and cycle of life that shapes the environment and the life of the people of the Pacific islands. The coconut tree is more than any other plant in Kiribati because it produces all of the key elements of life and thus the life of the people is constructed around it (Thaman 1990:7-8). This plant sums up the culture of life and discloses the knowledge of who God is and what God has done in the islands and peoples of the Pacific. When people depend upon the coconut tree as the source of life it reveals the Christ who is the source of all life and upon whom all should rely. In the presence of the coconut tree, the people are always reminded that they are living in full connection with the source of life. In the Passover meal, Jesus, as an I-Kiribati, could have essentially referred to the coconut's meat as his flesh and juice as his blood.

Citing Havea's theological insights, Charles Forman (2005:116) can write:

In many ways the coconut could symbolise Christ, since it gives life to human beings, and when it is broken new life springs forth.

For Tielu (2012), coconut theology recognises that God speaks to the Pacific people through the world in which they live and delegates human beings to look after the entire creation (Genesis 2:14-15). It is on this basis that this study engages the coconut concept to provide a better understanding of the church in Kiribati, through ministerial formation, which can respond to the environmental degradation through climate change that is threatening their lives. Forman (2012:120) goes on to affirm that Pacific scholars should interpret the Christian message in its context and Christ should be perceived as a Pacific islander. Accordingly, the inclusion of coconut concepts in the ministerial formation curriculum, as understood in Kiribati, would epistemologically and

pedagogically equip future church leaders to effectively respond to climate change and environmental issues. Mairara (2007:193) has observed that even though our lives involve various influences that challenge us, changing our cultures and ways of living, the coconut tree stands strong as a living message showing us the way to respond to these changes.

Palu (2012:68) points out that Havea frequently emphasises that Pacific theologians should contextualise their theology by looking to their history, culture, and customs, to show, “in the light of the Good News, what God is like and is doing to us in His saving acts of revelation and salvation.” There are other theologies emerging in the Pacific region apart from the coconut theology that was introduced by Havea. For example, Tuwere espoused, *Vunua: A Theology of Place* (Nabobo-Baba, 2013; Tuwere, 2002) which was embraced by Tofaeono. Using Samoan traditional concepts of land (*aiga*), Tofaeono (2000:252) argues that the Samoan worldview incorporates the whole creation as part of the family. In his writings, he shares his concern on the ecological crisis and encourages humans to live with a filial love for all created things to live together on earth, the household of life where God the Creator is the head.

Using the Solomon worldview, Bird (2008:195) speaks about the inclusiveness as a natural processes and cycle of the land. He points out that, “all life is intricately interwoven together in the land, and every life-form, whether human or no-human, is important in the overall wellbeing of the household” (2008:195). Similarly, Rumaroti (1994:25) argues that it is in the land that the people could understand theologically the connectedness between God and the people, as reflected in the *bangota*, a holistic traditional sanctuary surrounded by stones where people could meet with their gods.

While all these theologies shed light on how people can theologically deal with issues of the environment, coconut theology is more relevant to the Kiribati context because of the central role that the coconut tree plays in the lives of I-Kiribati. According to Havea (1988/1989:14), the coconut plant is not just a physical plant, but it is a theology of life. It is almost like an earthly presence of God of life. In human form, Jesus, in Pacific theology, is presented as the sign and symbol of God’s presence with the people.

In the environmental life, the coconut tree is a sign of the God who sustains life in the Pacific region (Palu, 2012:79). This means that God has been involved in the cultural ways of living in their context, thus people are sources of cultural experiences and knowledges that must not be ignored in the mission of the church.

In this regard, coconut theology as pedagogical epistemic-device is employed to collect data from the people on how they understand God through the coconut tree. Their stories assist the TTC and the KUC in their prophetic role to move beyond their human circle with a transformative presence of God that provides not only for humankind, but also for the environment and the surrounding ecology. As Steve de Gruchy has noted, the fact that ecology is the product of God's *oikoumene*, the household of God seeks not only the unity of Christians, but for all the people of the earth to fight for justice, peace and the integrity of all creation (de Gruchy cited in Hewitt, 2012a:212).

2.2.2. Coconut theology as missio-culturality

According to Havea, God exists in the lives of the people through their culture, lands, and context. Having given the background introduction of a coconut tree theology, it is imperative to interrogate how the coconut tree is understood to describe the “coconut theology of life” from the perspective of the I-Kiribati. It is the aim of this section to describe how people of the Kiribati understand the importance and use of the coconut tree to provide a theoretical basis on which coconut tree as missional lens is formulated. From the Kiribati's perspective, there is no other source of life that people can rely on beside the coconut tree, which serves almost every need of the people, be it a source of income, food, shelter, medicine as well as many other domestic needs (Whincup, 2010:16; Kwong, 2013a). Tony Whincup elaborates more on the value of this plant:

The coconut tree has been a vital factor in the development of Kiribati as we know it today. This is the ‘tree of life,’ providing a range of coconut flesh at different stages of development, drink, copra for export, wood for many uses, fronds for weaving, fibre for making string and even the basis of an alcoholic drink (Wincup, 2010:116).

In this context, the green colour of the islands, reflected by the coconut palms trees, is a sign of God's hovering care and blessings over the land and the community of living

things on the islands. The continuous provision of the coconut tree that satisfies the hunger and thirst of the people from time immemorial to the present day reflects the ever-present mission of God enfolded in God's endless love and immeasurable care in the culture and context of the people.

The coconut tree is not only helping people physically, but also spiritually. The leaves and coconut oils are holy elements whereby people connect to their gods. The coconut tree is a medium that provides holy elements to facilitate people worship their gods (Macdonald, 2001:24). In Christianity, the coconut serves to provide holy elements for the body and blood of Jesus. As Havea (1988/1989:298) states, bread is not native to the region and vineyards are not cultivated in the Pacific—they are foreign to the people of the Pacific and very expensive to buy:

Bread is made from wheat and wine from grapes. The coconut is more relevant when we remember that the blood and flesh of Christ come from the one body. The coconut, its juice and meat are in the one same nut (Havea,

Coconut tree theology however as missio-cultural serves to connecting the church to with indigenous culture that has been destroyed by the early Western missionaries. It serves to guide the church to see that in their island and context, God is there with them—a God who is part of culture and the context where people live (Havea, 1988/1989).

This theory points to the value of indigenous culture and knowledge that the TTC needs to incorporate in its curriculum to equip pastors to become more practical in their ministry and meaningful in their preaching. People must live with their own culture because it is their identity and dignity (Lawrence, 1992; Tenten, 2006; Etuati, 2011). The missio-cultural theory used in this study is to help the church to focus more on the lives and contemporary context of the people. Jesus' mission was not focussed on the pulpit but reached out to those who were in need. Therefore, the church as the body of Christ must always focus its concern itself on human suffering in the present day and must initiate a move to reach out to the people in their situation as Jesus did.

The coconut tree theory as missio-cultural model provides the notion of the intimate existence of a living God who continues to provide life to the people in whatever

context people are going through. This theory calls the people of Kiribati to acknowledge the presence of God in their lives and culture in order to be part of the ongoing *missio Dei* in their context. In his keynote address at the colloquium of CWM member churches in the Pacific on New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA), CWM General Secretary Collins Cowan addressed the culture where the church theology is of personal salvation that promotes heaven with all its gold, as a futuristic phenomenon reserved for the sufferers of this world, is convenient for the free market consumer ideology (CWM, 2017). This theology suggests that it is acceptable for the poor to remain in their present misery, since their reward (for suffering?) is to be found eschatologically in heaven.

While the church is busy promoting this theology, an unregulated free market economy wreaks havoc on the world's resources; excessive greed multiplies, and the few continue to prey on the many (CWM, 2017). Therefore, coconut theology as a missio-cultural model, challenges the church to explore together a language by which it can help with the process of mobilisation of the people in its context to take seriously the invitation to life. This theory also informs the church leadership to be part of the problem of the oppressed and the poor in order to be part of the solution (Sheerattan-Bisnauth, 2009:37).

2.2.3. Coconut theology as eco-missional

To have a better understanding of how Ernst Conradie's (2009) theory of Earth-keeping could converse with the Kiribati context, it is imperative to listen to Pacific voices. A key individual from the Pacific who has articulated the impact on climate change on the islands is that Tafue Lusama of Tuvalu who called climate change an ethical issue that needs the moral commitment of the international community to respond in a way that can protect the existence of small island nations and that the life-stability of their inhabitants (Lusama, 2011). Citing the lamentation of the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Nunn (2013:157-158) can state:

For a highly vulnerable country like Tuvalu, we cannot just sit back and watch our homeland slowly disappear ... time is running out fast. Climate change could well be the greatest challenge that humanity has

ever known. I make a very strong plea to all to act quickly and responsibly, to ensure that countries like Tuvalu do not disappear.

The concerns that the Prime Minister of Tuvalu were also expressed by the State President of Kiribati, who added his concern for the well-being, security and future of his people by calling upon international community to work together for the global victims of climate change. He is cited by Nunn (2013:157) as saying:

Over the years, we have convinced ourselves that there is very little we can do as a small island states to influence global events even though they will affect our lives so profoundly....The challenge of climate change has been the severest test of the international community's genuine desire and ability to redress imbalances wherever they occur; to ensure that democracy is truly applied universally not only when convenient; that the rights of all citizens of this planet to a good life is guaranteed.

In addition, Nunn (2013:158) refers to the claim of Pacific island leaders, that "climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific Islands" The call of the leaders in these most vulnerable countries, has given stark warning about the destruction of the small Pacific islands if the issue of climate change and its environmental impacts are not appropriately dealt with (Nunn, 2013:165).

Even though the Pacific islands, especially Kiribati, are enduring the greatest threat due to sea-level rise, the coconut tree produces an eco-relational theology of mission pointing to the source of life through God the Holy Spirit. As Palu (2018) can state:

One that is able to link the suffering of the vulnerable to poverty and ecological annihilation, and that is transformative and subversive to promote the 'economy of life' that is Spirit driven.

This section of the chapter will employ Ernst Conradie's (2009) view of Earth-keeping. Conradie is a South African theologian who has successfully linked issues of climate change and environmental degradation to that of theological education and the mission of the church.

Conradie's theory of eco-missional Earth-keeping ethics aims to address the contemporary challenges by pointing out that salvation must be explored not only in terms of the resurrection and the cross, but on the life, parable wisdom and suffering of Christ (2009:48). He points out that Christians must focus more on a theology of creation rather than on themes such as sin and redemption (2009:42). According to Conradie, for a moral formation to take place, it is imperative to challenge Christians to proclaim the Word of God at a time when it is most needed, where it hurts most (2009:40). Coconut theology is thus employed as an eco-missional lens to challenge the TTC to be more eco-missional in its curriculum so as to transform a society that has been ignorant of their eco-responsibility to the land and the environment.

Seen in terms of the gradual move away from a narrow to a much broader concept of the place of God, the church and humanity in the world, and the importance of where we live as well as the increasing importance of attempting to address environmental challenges, Conradie (2016) admits that he has not been able to incorporate and examine the links between these three major themes. However, he examines the responsibility of the church and Christianity in general, regarding the growth of climate change and the need for action to try to avert our ways of living, not to undermine "indigenous knowledge systems and traditional way of living sustainably" (2016:103). Conradie (2016:108) uses the root metaphor of the household of God to indicate that the deep relationship between mission and ecological destruction calls for the care on the part of the members in the household that everyone is well-accommodated.

Holding to the point that the world is to be recognised as the household of God, Conradie asserts that the household of God is controlled by the same rule to which the house is managed, and it is to be treated according to which the household is structured, by humans and other forms of life. According to Ayre and Conradie (2016:7), the world can be:

Re-described as God's household while God's economy, God's acts of house-holding, includes God's work of creation, salvation, and consummation, but also the formation, up-building governance, ministries, and missions of the church.

Ayre and Conradie observe that the failure of mission is that of being witnesses. Therefore, the theory of Earth-keeping reminds the church of the need for social change

in its mission to proceed in collaboration with other religious traditions for effective action on climate change. As explained above, this present study uses Conradie's perspective as the key linkage between issues of climate change, environmental degradation, theological education and the mission of the church to offer the best lens by which to interrogate the conversation. Although he speaks from the South African context, his use of the term 'Earth-keeping' speaks aptly to the Pacific worldview in which the whole creation must work in unity to sustain all of life.

2.2.4. Coconut theology as eco-relationality

In his article, Palu (2018) is responding to a paper delivered by Mutale Mulenga-Kaunda on *Transforming disciples: Transforming the future* that was delivered at the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) World Mission Conference held at Arusha in Tanzania in March 2018 (Pavel and Buda, 2018). In his response, Palu (2018) agreed that spiritual transformation cannot exist alone, but must integrate with the social, economic and political transformation and actions that respond positively to the felt needs of people.

Palu (2018) points out the problems of "the economy of one," in which the church shares, where the neo-liberal economic narrative has given rise to inequalities and the growing desire for personal gain. This in turn has led to a rise in negative relationships, which have even affected the church. When the church talks about the "fullness of life for all," Palu raises the crucial question, "who is all?" Is it just humanity? And is ecology excluded? He points out that the church for centuries has used the phrase solely to refer to people, and that "ecology" references only the environment. Accordingly, the two are separate, and have thus given rise to the phrase "eco-theology." This concept justifies people in developing economies that wreck everything around them.

His argument is that this breakdown in relationship between the two entities has helped to give rise to gender inequality and economic injustice. As Palu (2018) goes on to point out, "all of us are meant to exist in an "eco-relational household," where harmony of life is upheld and resources are meant to be shared. In such a household, despite there being differences in race, gender, and identity, all of humankind is diversely connected through an "ecological reference." For Palu, all of humanity is connected to the world

and to God, through eco-relationality, giving rise to what is called “relational ecumenism” (Palu, 2018).

In “relational ecumenism” it is the Holy Spirit that is important, where the Holy Spirit’s role is in mission. Disciples are drawn into the world around us; we are part of this, not outside it. When we become disciples “moved by the Spirit,” we enter into a life of activity to sustain “the economy of life.” Without the Holy Spirit, he suggests, we could drift into becoming a tool to support “the economy of one” (Pavel and Buda, 2018). In practical terms, Palu (2018) argues that because rationality was not part of policies and economic frameworks, because colonialism took everything without giving anything back, Pacific women became the victims of social and economic developments. In the Pacific indigenous worldview, the land and ocean are closely interwoven with people; women reflect eco-relationality. The damage done to the environment both damages the interconnectedness of the whole, and also leads to the slow death of vulnerable communities.

Palu (2018) then goes beyond what Mulenga-Kaunda had proposed, which was a radical mission formation for disciples, and suggests that the church should not concentrate its theology of mission on people only, but needs to critique what he classifies as the “economy of one.” He believes that this is at the heart of ecological destruction. In order to restore eco-relationality and harmony for the “fullness of life for all,” the church must resist all individualistic economic theories. Palu thus argues that the greatest challenge for Pacific churches today is to produce an eco-relational theology of mission that is Holy Spirit driven. It must be able to promote the “economy of life” and fight the “economy of one” by fighting poverty and ecological annihilation and become transformative.

2.2.5. Coconut theology as an epistemic-pedagogic device

According to Karl Maton (2013), knowledge-blindness is the attempt in which the knowledge is left under-researched. He is of the view that “knowledge is the basis of the education as a social field of practice—it is creation, curricularisation, and teaching and learning of knowledge which make education a distinctive field” (2013:3). He further argues that knowledge-blindness in research, tends to pay attention to the

“process of learning and whose knowledge is being learned.” He goes on to argue that such an approach eclipses “what is being learned and how it shapes these processes and power relations” (2013:7). By developing knowledge that is relevant and meaningful to the context, Maton proposes that knowledge-blindness can be overcome. To accomplish this, there is a need to identify the sort of knowledge that can be incorporated in the TTC’s teaching curriculum. Since the curriculum ought to reflect the needs and aspirations of the people and society to which it is designed and developed, how can the TTC’s curriculum development ensure that it can indeed be met? At this point, Maton’s notion of the epistemic-pedagogic device could be of help to explain how to develop the TTC’s teaching curriculum. Accordingly, the inclusion of the coconut theology concept of the eco-presence of God who sustains and provides should be engaged in the ministerial formation curriculum to epistemologically and pedagogically equip future church leaders to effectively respond to climate change and environmental issues.

To resolve this dilemma, Maton developed an epistemic-pedagogic device. This model was built on Bernstein’s notion of a pedagogic device. According to Maton (2013:47), Bernstein’s notion of pedagogic device comprises three fields, namely:

A field of production where new knowledge is constructed, modified and positioned; A field of production where pedagogic practices occurs; and A field of re-contextualising where discourses from the field of production are selected, appropriated and transformed to become pedagogic discourse available to be taught and learned within the field of reproduction (2013:47).

Duly modifying it, Maton pointed out that the three fields are hierarchically related. He explained that the reproduction of educational knowledge relies on the “re-contextualisation of knowledge which, in turn, depends upon its production” (Maton, 2013:48). Figure 2.3 illustrates how this works.

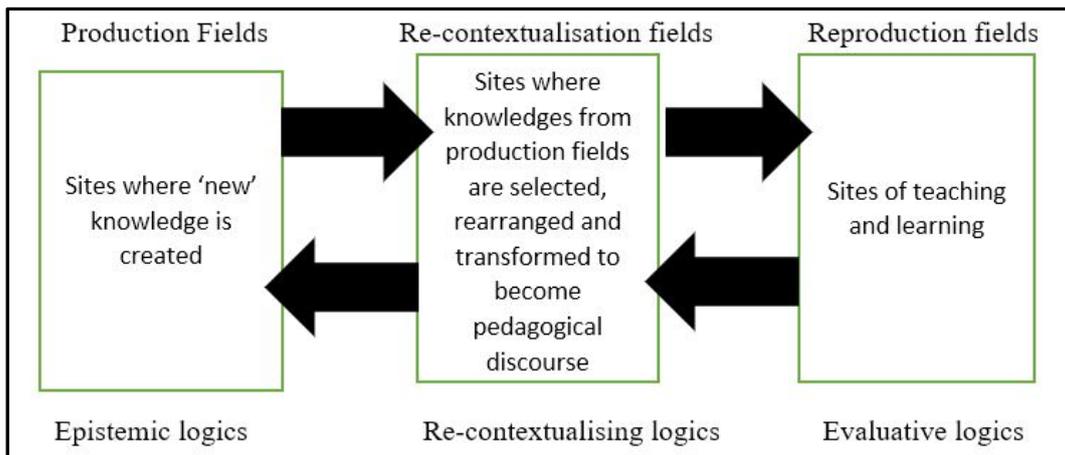


Figure 2.3. Karl Maton's notion of a pedagogic device in relation to knowledge production (Source: Author)

In Maton's notion as depicted in Figure 2.3, the TTC—as will be explained below—is the production field while the church and Kiribati community, as well as the TTC will be regarded as re-contextualisation fields. Maton (2013:51) explained that the arrows that point to the right show how knowledge can be curricularised from production to re-contextualisation fields, and pedagogise from re-contextualisation to production fields. The arrows that point to the left highlight that curricula products from re-contextualisation fields may be intellectualised or absorbed into production, as part of the antecedent knowledge that serves as raw material for creating new knowledge (Maton, 2014:51). Maton's contribution is that raw knowledge known or newly developed, should then be adapted to the particular context under discussion (TTC Curriculum), and then taught. As an example, information on rising sea levels and ecological care be adapted to the Kiribati experience, which is then studied, taught and discussed by lecturer and students alike. Any new information/discoveries developed from this can then be channelled back into the wider context, to be received and worked on by those who distributed it originally.

Based on this reasoning, the TTC will act as the production, re-contextualisation and reproduction field while the church and the community of the low-lying atoll islands will be the reproduction fields. This will help to develop a curriculum that captures core issues on and about climate change and environment management in the Pacific Islands. How will the epistemic-pedagogic device model help to incorporate issues of climate

change and environment management in the TTC curriculum? Maton's (2013:61) model can be employed to:

- (a) locate the analysis as exploring practices in production fields, enabling this focus to be compared...with [existing curriculum]; (b) delimit its conclusions not as necessarily reflected within the disciplines' re-contextualisation and reproduction fields; and (c) raises questions of how these breaks and continuities might be reflected within the curricular and teaching artefacts generated by practices in those fields.

This process will help to incorporate issues of climate change impacts across disciplines offered by the TTC, in its attempt to equip ministerial students with the appropriate information and knowledge on and about climate change and environment management, as understood in Kiribati.

2.3. Chapter summary

This chapter articulated the tripartite theoretical framework of coconut tree theology and how it can be employed as a lens for the critical issue of climate change impacts in Kiribati. Through the use of the coconut tree as a missiological lens, this chapter discussed how the people of Kiribati describe God in their daily lives as living with the coconut tree. It explains how the concept of a coconut tree is engaged with the theological education to seek for a relevant knowledge and a quality curriculum at the TTC. This was followed by Maton's (2013) notion of the epistemic-pedagogic device that was used to help to explain how to develop the TTC's teaching curriculum. With this in mind, the chapter turned to Conradie's view of Earth-keeping which is linked with the issues of climate change and environmental degradation and the view of Kaunda and Hewitt on theological education and the mission of the church. Finally, the chapter discussed theories pointing to the mission of the church as the only place of God to fulfil God's mission in the context of climate change thus the church is regarded as God's household that is extended to cater for all creation.

The chapter which follows will introduce the socio-political context of Kiribati and how the culture of the people can inform their cosmology.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ISLAND NATION OF KIRIBATI AND THE PEOPLE'S COSMOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the nature of climate change impacts in Kiribati which sets the background to this study. It describes the experience of the people which is consumed with fear and confusion that needs effective guidance and teaching for people to cope in their cotemporary context.

The focus of this chapter is to present a broad understanding of the people and the islands of Kiribati, their culture and how they live with their environment. The chapter will also discuss how their culture was originally developed and how it shapes their communal ways of living, with particular emphasis on their reciprocal and hospitable culture and why their life is so connected to the land and the sea. This chapter shows why people have shifted from their traditional ways of living—from life sustaining talents and skills they had from the beginning of their life on the islands, to a new culture with modern ways of living that has changed their subsistent ways of living. ”This chapter finally discusses the impact of globalisation and the first missionaries’ legacy that has influenced the life and indigenous culture of the I-Kiribati.

3.2. The island nation of Kiribati

The name Kiribati is derived from the name of the “British Captain Thomas Gilbert who entered and crossed the archipelago in 1788.” Accordingly, the name “Kiribati” (pronounced Kiri-bas), is the “local Gilbertese pronunciation of the name Gilbert” (Iuta, Kirata and Ratieta, 1980:1). In 1872, Captain Davis set foot on the island of Abemama, raised the Union Flag and declared Kiribati a British Protectorate. Ellice Islands, which is known today as Tuvalu were united with Kiribati under the British Protectorate and later became a British Crown colony in 1916. In 1975, the two countries were separated,

and Tuvalu was granted internal self-government, while Kiribati became independent on 12 July 1979 (Macdonald, 2001: viii; Parnaby, 1957).

Kiribati is a group of 33 scattered low-lying atolls, “dispersed in the central Pacific covering an area of over 3.5 million sq.km (1.4 million square miles)” (Thomas, 2002:164, van Trease, H. V. 1993). However, the people speak one common language, a Kiribati language which has made communication more convenient in the islands (Bingham, 1908:Preface). The tiny land area of Kiribati is only (810.5 sq.km) in proportion to its ocean area, “and is spread across four island groups, Banaba, Gilbert Islands, Phoenix and the Line Islands” (Thomas, 2002:164; Iuta, Kirata, and Ratieta, 1980:1-2).

When considering climate change, except for Banaba, all the islands are low-lying coral atolls, no more than three metres above sea level. This lack of elevation can be a problem when facing rising sea levels (Loughry and McAdam, 2008). Many of the islands are also extremely narrow, and this presents its own problems when coping with the natural resources (Collins, 2012:31, van Trease, H. V. 1993). Kiritimati Island in the Line Islands is one of the largest island atolls in the world with a land area of 320 sq.km and accounts for almost half of the country’s total land mass (Morrison and Woodroffe, 2009:401). However, the island with an elevation of only three metres above sea level is also subject to the impacts of sea level rise.

The Phoenix Islands which is another island group and also part of Kiribati contains the world’s largest marine protected area (PIPA) and features coral reefs. PIPA covers twelve percent of the country’s entire territory of 408 205 sq.km (157 626 square miles) (Stone and Obura, 2013: ix). PIPA is now called “underwater Eden,” the last coral wilderness on earth. The government has offered PIPA to UNESCO to demonstrate to the world that everyone can make a difference through caring for creation. If everyone does their part to protect and care for the ocean, the land and the environment, then we all can make a difference to our planet (Timon, 2013). In 2010, the UN Environmental and Scientific Committee (UNESCO), “inscribed PIPA on the World Heritage list as the earth’s largest and deepest World Heritage site” (Stone and Obura, 2013:ix).

The importance of conserving biological diversity is recognised by the Kiribati government and has become “a State Party by ratifying the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on 16 August 1994 and the Treaty on Plant Genetic Resource for Food and Agriculture (ITPGFRA) on 13 December 2005” (Kwong, 2013a:35; Macdonald 2001:4). The government of Kiribati has set a good example to the KUC to pursue a deeper meaning of its prophetic role for ministerial students at the TTC.

3.3. Oceania or Pacific?

‘Pacific’ is a foreign prescribed name and not one given by the local people. According to the National Oceanic Service, the term ‘Pacific’ was coined by the Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan who in 1519 on a journey across the Atlantic Ocean seeking a Western route to the Spice Islands via South America came across the ocean, whereupon its calm and peaceful nature led him to designate the name (National Ocean Service, 2017). In his dissertation, Upolu Vaii a Pacific scholar states that different lands are defined as politically independent from each other and, “ideological in the sense that foreign countries have political and economic interest in their region” (Vaii, 2006:21). Vaii raises the argument that Oceania is not a large number of small pieces of land representing nations in a huge ocean, but that the lands and the ocean are the nation (2006:21). The islands according to the European are regarded as individual island states, with boundaries, to be dealt with accordingly; while Pacific islanders themselves see the Pacific Ocean and even other Pacific Rim countries as their home (Hauofa, 2008:5-6, Havea, 2010:342). It is against this term that the term ‘Oceania’ emerged by the Pacific theologians to define their identity of “‘ours’ or ‘us,’ —we are the sea; we are the ocean” (Vaii, 2006:21). In this regard, Epli Hauofa (2008:3) sets out his basic argument that there is a gulf of difference between viewing the Pacific as “islands in a far sea” and as “a sea of islands.” The first descriptor emphasises dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centres of power. This focus stresses the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second descriptor represents a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships.

Hauofa points out the difference between the two names—Pacific Islands (small areas of land in the ocean) and Oceania (a large world in which people linked together)

(2008:3). According to Vaii, Oceania is related to the feeling of belittlement, being intellectually and academically overwhelmed by the dominant culture and theology that has suppressed and diminished the indigenous culture and traditional religious understanding of God (2006:20). With their identity as people of Oceania, ‘people of the sea,’ Pacific theologians were motivated to write their own history, expressing their culture and traditional ways of thinking and living. They were also enthused to constitute their own agenda, to reclaim their lost cosmos, which Tuwere denotes as the loss of their “cultural concept and symbols as well as their oceanic thought systems that have been rejected by European missionaries” (Vaii, 2006: 21).

Palu critically opposes the view that the people of Oceania are divided by the ocean. On the contrary, the people are not divided, but connected by the ocean. For centuries, the ocean has connected and sustained the people of Oceania, where the Pacific Ocean has been “a great catalyst for working together” (Vaii, 2006:21). Oceania connotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants as the home of the ancestors with “people raised in this environment are the nation of both land and sea.” The essential part of Palu’s argument is that the people of Oceania have always regarded the ocean as part of their living space—that travel between islands was a way of life for thousands of years, and that more importantly is still the same today (Vaii, 2006:21). He anticipated the problem that, “academic and consultancy experts tend to overlook or misinterpret grassroots activities because these do not fit in with prevailing views about the nature of society and its development” (2008:1).

3.4. We are the sea of islands

In the Pacific setting, people are very much connected to their land and ocean because their lives depend heavily on land and sea and each family’s home is for the living and a resting place of the dead (Havea, 2010:347-8; Tenten, 2006). Kiribati being poor and isolated, its islands support a rich culture that relies heavily on a diverse and healthy marine environment for its survival. On the other hand, it “actually owns one of the largest Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the world with 3.5 million square kilometres,” the same size as India (Campbell and Hanich, 2014:4). According to Campbell and Hanich, (2014:4; *cf.* Kwong, 2013b:10). Kiribati most valuable resource

is its tuna stocks. In view of this, the Pacific Ocean is at the heart of the Kiribati culture where their lives depend on it for food, income, employment, transport, and economic development. The 33 islands that make up Kiribati are scattered and surrounded by a mass of Ocean area which houses the Kiribati only natural resource, its marine life (Thomas, 2002:164; van Trease, 1993).

In his presentation to the United Nations, the minister in the Ministry of Environment, Land and Agricultural Development (MELAD), Nakara (2017) stated that Kiribati was the sea of islands among the world's largest and major fishing grounds for tuna. Nakara further affirmed that on the atolls, the terrestrial environment is more limited with resources, but is essential for water, food and shelter. However, the ocean is an important single resource for Kiribati because it "contributes 80 percent of the Government's revenue each year, and for the world it contributes 25 percent of the global world demand in 2014" (Nakara, 2017). In support this presentation, Kwong maintains that the people of Kiribati are highly dependent on the ocean, not only as their home, but also because it provides them with food and resources to sustain their livelihood and well-being as I-Kiribati (2010a:11).

In his argument, Hauofa (2008:3) points that, "the Pacific Ocean is part of the islanders" world; not simply islands in the sea, but a "sea of islands." He used the term "ocean peoples" as referring to indigenous Pacific people who had lived in their islands for "over 2000 years" who never viewed their world as "islands in the sea but a sea of islands." Even though their islands are surrounded by a massive ocean, that ocean is not different from their lands. Land and ocean are part of their lives, both individually and collectively (2008:7).

Geographically, Kiribati is classed as one of the big ocean stewardship states, where the Pacific Ocean is at the heart of its culture and from whence it depends on its depth and breadth for food, revenue, employment, transport and economic development (UN Chronicle, 2017). The picture of the Pacific Ocean and the islands are made clear in the following by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat:

Ninety-eight percent of the area occupied by our Pacific Island countries and territories is ocean. The ocean transcends our national borders and

as a result it impacts many of our shared development aspirations (Taylor, 2017).

Likewise, the Pacific Ocean is:

Our Sea of Islands, Our Livelihoods, Our Oceania. We are a blue continent. We are the blue Pacific (Taylor, 2017).

Taylor makes this even clearer in the following statement:

The Pacific Ocean is in us—it has long been a teacher for our people. For generations we have observed and respected its mana, sharing what we have learned from our ancestors with our children. In saying that, we recognise that our traditional knowledge can be complemented by the science and technology that offer new approaches to the sustainable management and conservation of our ocean, as we adapt to a rapidly changing environment. It is vital that we actively participate in and support the innovations and insights that are emerging (Taylor, 2017:1-2).

Taylor observes that life connected to the ocean generates traditional knowledge which is appropriate to maintain the life of the ocean. This is traditional knowledge from the ancestors that should be maintained by every generation because the ocean is the foundation of the very existence and culture of the people of the Pacific. It is connected with their traditional skills of navigation, fishing, cultivating and building skills. It is also connected with their values of mutual respect, reciprocity and sharing. Sadly, humanity has angered the ocean, disrespecting the important role it plays in life, by using it as a dumpsite, overharvesting its riches, ever-increasing its acidity level (Nakara, 2017). Nakara thus calls upon the world for immediate action to restore this bond by respecting and restoring the health of the ocean. There is no more time to wait, humanity must act now. This is why this present study proposes that traditional knowledges and cultural ways of living should be embedded in the training of theological students at the TTC. A generation without a culture is a generation without identity and dignity.

According to Talia (2009:14) “the land, sea and sky are the backbones of life and the main resources of religio-cultural heritage. It is like the blood that flows to nurture and maintain life as regarded by people of Oceania.” Therefore, indigenous people of

Oceania are connected to their lands and ocean and thus know every consequence of what they do. This interconnectedness is evident in the way the people regard their land as *te aba* people or nation (Timon, 2013), whereas in Fiji it is called “a mother” (Tuwere 2002). Understandably, the loss of a mother is the most hurtful experience to a child, whose life is entirely dependent on a mother. However, the loss of a nation is more than that. *Te aba* is the source of life that gives meaning of life to all who live on it. “To be cast out from one’s *vanua* is to be cut off from one’s source of life ...” (Tuwere, 2002:36). The essence of nation-land that is fading is as if the people are being cut off from the source of life. Kiribati is not just facing the loss of its land, its traditional culture is based on a communal lifestyle that is also already suffering and will suffer even more in the years to come as growing pressure from the loss of the land by the rising oceans force the I-Kiribati to live in smaller areas of land.

Timothy Gorringer states that land is more valuable to global materialism and the global market. He points to the global market having contributed destructively to climate change. Empires fall, and capitalism built on paper will crumble, but the land will remain (2011:73). Whatever picture and image that is given to the earth as a form of respect, Siwatibau contrasts those views and envisions nature as more like a wondering female, ever vulnerable to being raped and dominated. A mother who shoulders all burdens for her children is now identified as a wandering, “female to be subdued and enslaved.” The new era with the power and influence of modern science and technology has taken control and dominate nature, “without the submission to impregnation of the mind by God’s truth” (Siwatibau, 1997:164).

The role of God who rules the earth has been overtaken and has disappeared. This is why this study interrogates the mission of the church as it has a powerful word to notify people of ecological sins and also to transform lives to be more concerned with ecological destructions and pollutions. To return to God and to live with “environmentally sustainable development,” Christians need to use the “basic philosophy” of new technology and science to “envision nature as a nurturing mother to be respected, rather than a wandering female to be raped and dominated” (Siwatibau, 1997:164).

Bird (2008) stresses the concept of *oikos*, or home/house, as an integral part of the Pacific Islands cultures. He demonstrates how this concept could be linked with that of “the fullness of life” to produce a true Pacific theology in which this life as lived today is equally as important as the purely Christian concept of individual salvation in the next life. Havea makes a plea for a Pacific contextual theology that should convey its meaning for the benefit of everyone in the community of faith in the global and universal context. Theology must not exclusively compartmentalise into one region, but should rather be seen as a vehicle to convey to the believer the quality and richness of humankind’s quest to know God in God’s hiddenness (Havea, 1988/1989:11). To meet the challenges of the contemporary Pacific theology, the mission activity of the church is called to move beyond the zones of comfort and familiarity. As Bird (2016:518) can state:

All of this means bringing the church into the lived experiences of people rather than expecting them to turn up in church. This is one way of being church that takes seriously God’s mission to bring fullness of life to all people.

Even though people can see their identity and dignity in the land that God has provided for them, the church is there as a link to this understanding that through the Word of God the people may live and experience fullness of life in their land.

3.5. Contesting identities from the Kiribati perspective: My culture and land

3.5.1. Land as identity, dignity and wellbeing of an I-Kiribati

The Pacific Conference of Churches expresses its concern for the increasing problems affecting the lives of the Kiribati people, their land and their ocean. John Doom reminds the Pacific church leaders that they must stand strong in order to face the challenges of the present time in order to appreciate and safeguard the Pacific identity. This concern is summarised in their Statement on Climate Change:

We invite the worldwide community to work with us. We are part of the whole body of Christ. When our low-lying atolls of Oceania are affected

by the effect of climate change we all suffer as a result (PCC Report, 2007:63).

The adverse impacts of climate change have brought Kiribati to the condition of being the most vulnerable of the Pacific Islands, due to the fact that the atolls only rise to an elevation of no more than three metres above mean sea level and are on average only a few hundred metres wide (Longépée, 2011:8; Collins, 2012:31). These small atolls which accommodate upwards of 110 000 people (2010 Census) are struggling with inundation and erosion of ever-rising sea levels that destroys key areas of land and storm surges that contaminate the fresh groundwater wells (Kwong, 2013a:26; Longépée, 2011:8; Collins, 2012:31). In the worldview of the I-Kiribati, the people and the land are closely connected in many ways, where the land gives identity, dignity and wellbeing. Rumaroti Tenten maintains that in the Kiribati culture, a person who owns much land is regarded with a dignity as *oi n aomata* (lit: “a true human”), while a person without land is called *te rang* (lit: “inhuman” or “entirely poor”) (Tenten, 1994:25; Timon, 2003:6-7). The land is conceived of as *te aba* or “people,” not one person, but a community of people. The land is more valuable than one person. This is why people treat the land as holy because of their interconnectedness with their gods. However, the change in the traditional culture of the people contributes to a way of life that denies the essential holiness of the land. If the people of Kiribati lose their country, they also lose their identity, dignity and well-being. That is the end of their world. It is this cultural concept that gives emphasis to the tragedy facing the islanders as they see their land literally being washed away (Kwong, 2013b:2).

The Fijian scholar Sevati Tuwere (2002:36), labels *fanua* (land) as the “womb or placenta” in terms of a mother’s unquestionable waiting-presence. This speaks about the connection between place and person. As a mother who always wait for her children, the *fanua* is always there to receive back her inhabitants. However, land in Kiribati is more than a mother or a father, it is *te aba*—of a society, a nation, or a community of people. When it refers to *te aba* without people is like a body without a soul (Tuwere, 2002:35). *Te aba* is always there; hence, when anyone leaves the island, the land which is the people exists forever to accommodate those who remain and receive all who return (Nikora, 2009:2). Accordingly, in Kiribati, the people of every island have their

own local anthems for their homelands, containing stories from their origin. It is sung by the people and on special occasions to shape and sustain the community's connection with the land. One example is a song from the island of Tamana, "My beloved Tamana" or "My beloved mother," or "My beloved nation."

*My beloved island that I truly love the most,
With honesty and good deeds from my heart,
My strength, to be your pride will be my purpose,
My beloved island you will always be.
Stormy winds and lightning storms
will thunder in a stormy ocean.
These will not prevent development ideas.
Sons of Tamana, be patriotic in your dealings.
Do not budge, endure the storms of life.
Raise your island in all you do.
So, it will shine like the brightest light ever (Nikora, 2009:2).*

Even though people did not write books about their homelands, their songs are more than books. The songs are written in the people's hearts and minds. They are remembered through generations not only by those who are able to read and write, but also by everyone who can talk and sing.

The song as Nenem has shown is a living message that keep people moving with their historical awareness of their origin and ethnicity (Kempf, 2003:36; Teaero, 2004). When individuals migrate elsewhere, the song retains a living memory of their origins and homeland (Kempf, 2003:49). In addition, land is also highly significant because it is the home of the people's ancestral spirits. The land is the only place to connect and communicate people with their ancestors. Despite their Christian beliefs, to the I-Kiribati the land is the place where the gods of the I-Kiribati indwell (Bird, 2008; Timon, 2013).

To treat the land as *tabu* is to adorn the land with a kind of respect. When there is a new building that will disturb the land, the ground-breaking ceremony will begin with a prayer to the gods for blessings upon the building and the land. In such a process of ground-breaking, a *unimwane*, the eldest man of the village is the only one responsible

to call upon the gods from all corners of the earth to receive the building and bless the work. As Tenten (2006) has shown, the land according to Kiribati cultural belief is inhabited by the spirits of the ancestors; hence, when something is done without acknowledging the gods, it can result in a curse.

From this cultural belief, Christians have adopted this way of respecting the land as holy. Consequently, at the commencement of a building programme, a pastor is called upon to recite a prayer and to call for a God's blessing upon the work. With the cultural connection to nature, the I-Kiribati respect both the land and the ocean (Tenten, 1994:23). It appears that God was already involved in people's life and culture, shaping how they live and connect their ways of living with their land and ocean (Havea, 1988/1989:12). As WCC member churches in the Pacific, they too acknowledge their interconnectedness to the land and their concern with the emerging destructive impacts of climate change:

We deplore the actions of industrialised countries that pollute and desecrate our Oceania, our Moana. Our Moana, our oceania is our gift from God and as a part of God's creation, it is our duty as dwellers of this ocean to be stewards of this gift. It is our theology and our covenant with God and with one another. We invite the worldwide community to work with us. We are a part of the whole body of Christ. When our low-lying atolls of Oceania are affected by the effects of climate change, we all suffer as a result. We stand at the *Turanga Wae Wae* (place of ownership /guardians of the gift) of the Pacific Ocean and as guardians of this Ocean, it is our duty to protect and safeguard this gift for our future generation (Kerber, 2008:20)

Traditional knowledge inherent in the peoples of Pacific is identified as a divine gift of the creator to enable humankind to have sufficient for their present needs, but also for the future needs of the generations which follow. This is obvious in the traditional knowledge designed to preserve and care for the environment and marine resources (Kwong, 2010b:11). According to Tenten (1994:114), the early Kiribati islanders could never be termed "simple natives" living hand-to-mouth on their shallow soil-poor atolls. They were clearly a people who understood their environment, both land and sea, and used accumulated knowledge to live, not only day-to-day, but also with knowledge of future events such as droughts and rainy seasons, for which they were able to prepare in advance. Their navigational knowledge, food storage methods and

their cultural habits of sharing, all contributed to a security for both today and tomorrow. This was and still impacts strongly on the livelihood and culture of the islanders.

3.5.2. Kiribati culture

The people of Kiribati possess a dynamic culture, governed by their land and the ocean that surrounds them. It is from the natural characteristic and features of the land of Kiribati, “island size, land quality and rain/water resources” that the natural habitat, skills and way of life of the people was shaped before European contact (Thomas, 2007:43). Dating back to the nineteenth-century, historical records refer to severe droughts that affected both the trees and food crops (Lawrence, 1992:271-272). Although “there was very little surplus production, but wherever possible non-perishable foods were stored against drought and other hardships” (Macdonald, 2001:13). Older people still refer to the “traditional and cultural ways” of adapting, of preparing for anticipated events such as droughts. Although Kiribati islanders traditionally had a well-defined culture of living in the present (today), and not worrying about the future (tomorrow), they did have ways to prepare for known events such as droughts.

Adger, Barnett, Chapin III, and Ellemor (2011:5) define culture as a product of “what people think, what they do, and the material products (and landscapes) they produce; culture is shared, learned, symbolic, cross-generational, adaptive, and integrated.” In Kiribati, the term ‘culture’ is translated as “*katei*” meaning “a mode, a method, a way” (Bingham, 1902:127). Therefore, the Kiribati mode, method and way of life as translated by Bingham are integrated in one phrase: *Katei ni Kiribati* (lit: “Kiribati culture”) (Jones, 1917:1-2).

Satish Chandra provides one of the best examples to illustrate the word, *katei*: First, *katei* as a mode of life is based on that of the people’s identity. Traditional dancing, dress code, songs, homes, etc., epitomise I-Kiribati identity *kateira ni Kiribati* (lit: “Kiribati mode of life”) that characterises the people’s identity as I-Kiribati. Second, *katei* as a method of life is rooted in the traditional knowledge passed on from generation to another. *Te rabakau ni korokarewe*, (lit: “skills of cutting toddy”) *te*

rabakau ni akawa (lit: “skills of fishing”) *te rabakau n ununiki* (lit: “skills of cultivating”) are skills that are rooted in the traditional knowledge of the ancestors (Chandra, 1998:48-19). The people are recognised as I-Kiribati in the mode of life that they inherit from their ancestors. It is a culture that leads to the *toronibai* (lit: “well-being”) of an I-Kiribati. Third, *katei* as a distinct way of life is an expression of how the people live life as I-Kiribati. This is rooted in moral principles such as *te karinerine* (lit: “respect”) *te kakairua* (lit: “hospitality”) *te kakaomata* (lit: “preservation of dignity”) which is the Kiribati *katei* that an I-Kiribati is to be brought up with.

As a consequence, there is a sense of responsibility in any culture that parents and elders should pass on or teach their younger generation about their cultural values. Adger et al., argue that “knowledge is often integral to a traditional community’s culture, and is a large part of its repertoire of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct their livelihoods” (2011:5). Uriam (1999:84) further argues that modernisation has resulted in the fast-changing culture of Kiribati—a contributing factor to the disturbance of the cultural way of living that contributes to the decline of subsistent living, such as fishing and agricultural development. It was not only, “the change of man's new understanding or interpretation of himself, the world around him, and the universe,” but contributed to the decline of people’s ways of connecting to their land and sea, escalating hard life to the majority in Kiribati (1999:84). Uriam goes on to remind the people of Kiribati to conserve their culture and traditional values as they are needful for the survival of future generations. He further argues that even though people are evolving and adapting to modern ways of living, they must not lose their traditional values entirely, because the skills of their ancestors are effective when facing the environmental challenges because these skills were known long before the interruption from the outside world.

These methods were many and varied. Some islanders would preserve food or store coconuts, or grow certain vegetables, which could last a long time (Lawrence, 1992:268-269). The sea was always there with its abundance to source food for a hungry family, especially a family with a good understanding of a traditional knowledge of navigation. Then there was agriculture. Thomas and Tonganibeia (2007:43) state that:

Despite, or rather because of, the limited potential for agriculture, traditional cultivation techniques on the atolls exhibited a high degree of sophistication.

This includes growing root crop, *te babai* (lit: “giant swamp taro”) which when grown in a particular manner can supply food when all else fails (Lawrence, 1992:268).

Due to the small size of the islands, land was always a valuable commodity. Accordingly, the islanders devised a way, called *bono* to extend it, by building a rock-walled extension from their beach-fronting houses into the sea. This was eventually filled with rocks and soil, providing an artificial platform for living. As the islands are narrow, most people live on the coast where there is no fresh water. Therefore, on coral atolls where there are no streams or lakes, water is a precious commodity and must be preserved in as many ways as possible. Rainwater drains quickly through the coral to form an underground layer of water which islanders have tapped into through shallow wells for generations to supply their needs. This was not the only way to store water. According to Frank Thomas, “the most common way of accessing water was through the digging of wells, but water could also be collected from coconut palm fronds and trunks and empty giant clam shells” (2012:135).

Kiribati is as an atoll nation, possessing a biodiversity that includes all terrestrial and marine ecosystems, all plant and animal species and varieties found in these ecosystems (Kwong, 2010a:6). From ancient times, “the people of Kiribati have strong traditional links and connections with nature, in particular the biodiversity-based resources that support local livelihoods within their surrounding environment” (Kwong, 2010a:11). Bird places considerable emphasis on the land-sea-total-life concept, which is an essential part of all Pacific cultures, and argues the Bible’s fullness of life, God’s creation, humankind’s involvement in it and the Pacific cultures all resonate together into a Pacific theology and Christianity, divorced from early missionary Western Christian conceptions. As Bird (2016:510) goes on to state:

The realisation, especially on the part of later missionaries, was/is that meaningful communication of the gospel cannot, and indeed must not, be done outside the cultures of a people.

This points to the role of theology to care for the entirety of human life, where natural resources are essential to express and articulate the Christian faith.

3.5.3. Inclusiveness and interconnectedness

Talu et al. (1979) argue that the interconnectedness of the I-Kiribati to the land and the sea, is related to the way people live and socialise with their environment, cultivating and producing fruits from their land and their way of fishing (1979:31-33). Even though the Kiribati people live in their context of the harsh Kiribati environment, the people were able to adapt to nature in the environment in which they lived (Lawrence, 1992:271). Talu et al. (1979:18) thus point out that, “before European times, the main social group in Gilbertese society was the “*Kaainga*,” a small group of extended families, “*Utu*” related to a common ancestor.” The Kiribati worldview senses the inclusiveness of humankind, their ancestors and every creature in the land. When a person dies in the family, s/he is buried in the home to connote their relationship with their families in the spiritual world, as they are still part of them (Etuati, 2011). Bird indicates that within the land, a community connects people together, connecting them to other creatures and linking them to their gods. In terms of the land, all life is interconnected and interwoven together, “and every life-form, whether human or no-human, is important in the overall wellbeing of the household” (2008:195).

The fullness of this inclusiveness was fulfilled in the mission of Jesus, when he entered the homes of sinners and invited everyone into his kingdom. No one is excluded. All are welcomed. At the point of death, Christ is seen as part of humankind, the earth and earth communities to form another new life. For Tofaeono (2000:252), “traditional convictions state that the whole creation cyclically moves through propagation, growth, decay, and regeneration.” Similarly, Anthony Balcomb (2004:68) has shown that the African worldview of inclusiveness where human, ancestors and every creature area are not separated but interconnected and interdependent in their existence. In the Pacific, the land is an expression of God’s inclusiveness. The land does not welcome humankind only, but all members of the earth’s community are seen as part of one family—the

stars, fish, animals and trees interdependently living together as brothers and sisters (Tofaeono, 2000:252). As Kaunda (2010:24) can state:

This means that human beings, nature and the spiritual world were inseparably involved in one another in a total community or in a unified whole. In short, the African concept of human and nature was—cosmically holistic.

3.5.4. Unity: The strength of community life

Kiribati culture centres on the control exercised by the *mwaneaba* system under the hierarchal leadership of the *unimwane* elders representing their clans and working together for the welfare and wellbeing of the whole village. Hence, for Whincup (2010:113):

The *mwaneaba* is central to the I-Kiribati way of life, defining, maintaining and reflecting attitudes to spirituality, age, hierarchy, communality, patterns of expression and hospitality.

It is the largest building in every village, “the social and political centre of its district and served as a temporary residence for visitors who had no close kin in the district” (Macdonald, 2001:7). Through the leadership of *unimwane*, the entire village is united and engaged in every decision. It is the participation in the decisions made by the elders that gives reality to the lives of the people as individuals and as a group (Macdonald, 2001:7). The *mwaneaba* thus plays an important role in bringing the community together under one local government. It is a democratic system of government where *unimane* (lit: “elders”) from each clan are united as a ruling governing body for the village community. This political structure is best described in sociological terms as the traditional “indigenous model” (Talia, 2009:32). Shutte (2001:12) presents the nature of a community as relational based on social and interactive support of one another. In terms of an African perspective, such a structure forms a community-based worldview where individuals are all accommodated in and through other persons in the community. No one is left behind. This means that the life of the community is influenced by individual relationships and the interaction with others.

The *mwaneaba* (lit: “meeting hall”) is the heart of any Kiribati community, the centre of village life and the basis of island and national governance. In such a local government system, all persons are regarded as being equal. The self-expression and self-definition of the main role of this building symbolically comes from its name *mwaneaba* from two Kiribati words *mwanea* and (*te*) *aba-manea* (lit: “to accommodate or take care”) and *te aba* (lit: “people” and “land”). The word *mwaneaba* embodies in its meaning therefore into two categories of existence: “the people who live on the land and the land on which people live” (Timon, 2013:6; Whincup, 2010:113). Thus, the Kiribati word *mwaneaba* stridently reminds the people of their cultural existence being recognised in their role to *mwanea te aba* (lit: “to care for both the land and people”).

It is in this regard, that the interconnection of care and responsibility is echoed in what the word *mwaneaba* means. People are called to care for the land as the land is there to care for the people. For Whincup (2010:18), the building of *mwaneaba* is based on the inclusiveness of the effort, skill and knowledge of the community. It involves the community’s involvement to contribute and work together as a social group, to provide string, thatch, tree-cutting, weaving and other general work. The design and purpose of *maneaba* is to strengthen the traditional culture of inclusiveness and care for every member of the community. No one is to be excluded. A positive feature of this model is the approach that it brings the community to participate and be responsible for the common good of the community.

According to Gittins (1992:2), under this system:

All parts of a given society are affected—there are no atomistic, individual persons, autonomous social classes or groups, sharp separation between functional religious beliefs and the regent leadership.

Under this system, individualism is not encouraged but rather communal ways of living, where sharing and hospitality is practised within the life of the community. The decline of a *maneaba* system is also a decline in a community relationship and traditional way of living.

3.5.5. Reciprocity: Life in the community

According to Lawrence (1992:271), the natural characteristics and features of the land of Kiribati shaped the way the people lived and behaved in their own natural habitat where reciprocity became part of community life. This is evident because life in Kiribati was based on subsistence farming and fishing on a day-to-day basis, and thus made it easy to maintain a culture of reciprocity. The close ties in a family and community constructed the basic economic principle of a barter system where the sharing of resources was common, first within the family circle, and then extending to the rest of the community. Talu et al. (1979:18) note that the nature of this interconnectedness is rooted in the culture of reciprocity, influenced and reflected in the way of life of the people, starting in small close-knit kinship-based village communities. Talia (2009:34) from the island nation of Tuvalu shares the similar culture of reciprocity as a care and share concept based upon the principle that, “life is lived for the betterment of others, to ensure that neighbours are well taken care of.” This has been central to the indigenous culture for centuries before the arrival of Christianity and the Europeans. This system of life can be described as the free exchange of goods without expectation of return. According to Talia, “the exchange of goods goes beyond the concept of the market and the buying and selling concept” (Talia, 2009:34). The culture of reciprocity is a culture of sharing local resources that strengthens a community of caring and fellowship that leaves no-one to live in poverty.

3.5.6. Traditional knowledge

Adger et al. (2011:5) state that indigenous society has a traditional ecological knowledge of their own environments that enable them “to monitor, observe, and manage environmental change.” They further argue that the sea, the land and even the place are traditional, “symbols, products, and containers of the various cultures that value them” (2011:4). Traditional knowledge is not only about what indigenous people understand and connect to their environment and all therein, but also their interaction with their natural resources, and through worldviews where they see their place in the natural world. Such traditional knowledge consists of systems of conservation that include, “controlling access to or banning resource extraction” (Adger et al. 2011:8).

According to Tiarite Kwong, traditional knowledge controls access to or forbids resource extraction, thereby enabling life-harmony with the environment. Within the context of Kiribati as an atoll nation, the biodiversity includes all terrestrial and marine ecosystems, all plant and animal species and varieties found in these ecosystems and the traditional knowledge, “uses and beliefs and local language that people have, in relation to these ecosystems and species.” These knowledge systems have enabled the people to live harmoniously with their environment (on land and at sea) and “enabled them to survive in these limiting environment conditions for many generations” (Kwong, 2010b:11). Kwong further argues that:

This link and connections are vital element in natural resources conservation and sustainable development. Kiribati recognises and promotes the practice of traditional knowledge and practices and integrates these in the management and conservation of biodiversity (2010b:11).

Havea (2010:350) makes it clear that the people of Oceania have a close connection with their environment, and this connection feeds them with traditional knowledge to cope, relate and respond appropriately especially, “during the hurricane seasons and the dry and sunnier months.” The government of Kiribati recognises and promotes the practice of traditional knowledge and rehearsals that, “integrates these in the management and conservation of biodiversity,” because it is central to traditional community life (Adger et al. 2011:5). According to Adger et al., most resource management practices are underpinned by traditional ecological knowledge that is “integral to the governance of atoll societies” (2011:8). They also note that in the islands, people live with techniques for growing swamp taro, coconuts, and other native plants upon which they depend for their survival. They also have the knowledge of “fish locations and fishing techniques that are finely attuned to seasonal and wind patterns, and knowledge of plants and birds and their temporal and spatial patterns.” (Lawrence, 1992:268-269). As noted by Havea (2010:347), the people know the right time to plant or to go out fishing:

The people who are native to Oceania understand that what happens on land and in the ocean, is connected to, and the consequences of, their actions and attitudes. On the other hand, people’s thoughts and actions are conditioned by what happens around them, both on land and in the ocean, which are influenced by the cycles of the moon. Islanders

understand themselves, and act accordingly, as parts of their environment, and there is a strong connection between humans and the rest of nature (2010:347).

Their ecological knowledge consists of systems of conserving fishing grounds, placing prohibitions in certain areas and controlling excessive ways of fishing by restricting certain fishing techniques that could harm the life of the coral and fish (Adger et al. 2011:9). According to Havea, the people of Oceania call their land and the sea holy (*tapu*) as their lives are rooted in natural resources from these two sources of life, the land and sea since it was first settled. The Kiribati word *tapu* comes from the English word 'taboo' which is also spelled out as "*tabu*."

To say that *tapu* is in the land and ocean reminds islanders that plantation and fishing grounds are also burial and ceremonial grounds, the resting place of the ancestors and the sites where islanders learn the customs. This requires them to observe certain rituals, even in connection with activities that non-islanders might consider mundane (Havea, 2010:348).

The sea is also called *tapu* (lit: "holy") as it is also the source of life and the home of their ancestors. In the Kiribati language, the name of the sea is called "*taari*" or brother. Living in a watery land, the marine environment sustains the people with food, transport, traditional practices and economic opportunities (Nakara, 2016).

3.6. Influences of globalisation in Kiribati

The term 'globalisation' was presented as a world economy in terms of the extension of capitalist principles across the globe that affects all people on earth in different ways (PCC Report, 2007:175). For Celia Deane-Drummond (2008:30-31), globalisation is a term coined to describe how small the world has become (i.e., the global village concept) through the invented new technologies which allow people to access things and communicate easier and faster through telecommunications, media, transportation, the internet/world-wide web, and so forth. She further states that the fundamental factor that promotes the campaign to change the way the society lives and acts, is the influence

of globalisation. Everything that was local and regional are therefore vulnerable to be transformed globally.

Ernst points to the end of World War II as the beginning of rapid change in the culture and lives of the people in the Pacific—the world intruded, and almost overnight, the islands became part of the world. The interaction of soldiers from Western countries with indigenous people was associated with the introduction and development of new ideas of equality and self-determination, forcing Western culture into the lives of the people (2012:36). According to Macdonald (2001:14), the arrival of Europeans in Kiribati from the nineteenth-century has brought a “new material culture, a new technology and new ideologies.” Ernst (2012:36) further adds that European contacts during World War II associated with the economic boom and “the forced implementation of capitalism” has brought the islanders to live in a new world, causing the massive internal and external migration of people. The cash economy became the norm, family stability broke down, and crime rates rose. A destructive consequence of this change was that cultural values that were incompatible with those of the Western world were banned as part of the community life (Macdonald, 2001:14).

LengkaBula (2009:18) argues that, “globalisation is tantamount to a global pillage of exploitation, domination and dependency syndrome” She further states that the influence of globalisation is not apparent in its domain by any single nation, but in a “coherent network of powerful economic interests held together by the ideology of neoliberalism” (2009:18). This is the reason why globalisation is undermining the traditional structures of nation states using the power of the widespread technologies available and convenient to the present generation (Deane-Drummond, 2008:30-31).

It is impossible to escape from the impacts and effects of globalisation. This is obvious in Kiribati in the way people communicate, eat, dress, and the list goes on because of globalisation. Even in developing countries such as Kiribati, people can be seen drinking Coca-Cola, using cell phones and adapt to ever new ways of living. Globalisation is its doorstep and therefore every state and religion must maintain their roles and priorities in relation to this issue. This is obvious in the transition from, “a traditional subsistence lifestyle to a contemporary market-based economy” that has

brought with it, key environmental challenges that badly affect the overall health of the environment and the life of the people. Some examples of key environmental challenges include, “the loss of island biodiversity, waste and pollution and the unsustainable use of natural resources” which are further magnified by the impacts of global climate change and the transition from a subsistent style of living. According to Kwong (2013a:2), Kiribati is under pressure of globalisation and in particular the pressure of global climate change.

The Kiribati have suffered heavily the impacts of globalisation as many people come from the rural outer islands to the urban centre of South Tarawa seeking better education for their children, hoping to find jobs, for a better life or for health reasons (Tebano, 2010:7; Kwong, 2013b:3). It is obvious in modern development that people focus more on the profit-making cash economy bringing people to live in large agglomerations. According Siwatibau (1997:165), “this has resulted in the growth of large settlements and rapid urbanisation.” The migration of people from the outer islands to the capital Tarawa has increased the population in the capital to more than 50 000 people (Tebano, 2010:7; Kwong, 2013a:3).

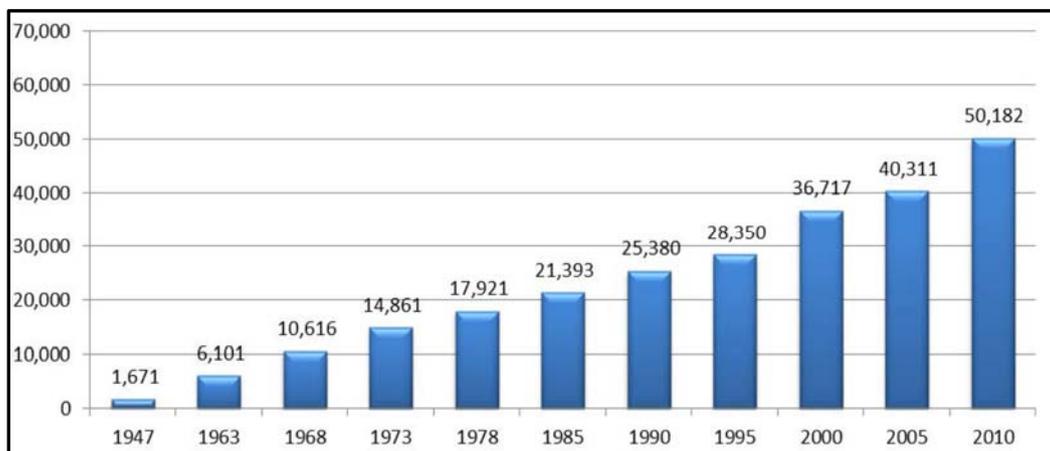


Figure 3.1. South Tarawa Population 1947-2010 (Source: Tebano 2010:7).

As Tebano goes on to note:

The gross land area for South Tarawa excluding the airport and causeways is 1,157 hectares, and the amount of land committed to non-residential use or which is not developable is 473 hectares (2010:7).

In the capital island Tarawa, the indigenous adopt the lifestyles of these foreign people regarding it as far better and an improvement compared to their own existence. Their identity is beginning to tarnish through the influence of this globalisation. Ernst (2012:7) notes that, “the decline of traditional social and political structures leads to social mobilisation and urbanisation, which are breaking traditional structures of families, clans, and villages...” The cultural transition from a traditional subsistence lifestyle has brought half of the population to the capital Tarawa causing more destructive impacts to the overall health of the environment, since “the loss of island biodiversity, waste and pollution and the unsustainable use of natural resources are further magnified by the impacts of global climate change” (Kwong, 2013b:3).

For Storey and Hunter (2010:168) support the hypothesis that overcrowding with “a growing share of housing in informal and unplanned settlements,” is one of the main causes of disagreement about housing and conflict over land; it also contributes to high levels of pollution on the land and in the ocean. Hence, the contamination of the lagoon due to human waste, failing sanitation systems has led to the pollution of the ground water which people depend upon for their drinking water (2010:168).

The increase of fishing licence permits to international fishing fleets and the disturbing docking processes in Tarawa has led to a few groups of local women turning to sex work among foreign fishing crews (McNamara and Westoby, 2014:53). McNamara and Westoby state that it is a sign of poverty in the changing economic conditions and difficulty in securing employment that leads to the rise in sex work (2014:57). The capital island of Tarawa is crowded with young people without jobs and therefore leads to a rising crime rate including theft, rape, and sex work, or as it is termed *Korekorea* now but then known as *Ainen Matawa* (McNamara and Westoby, 2014: 58).

This dramatic change in the Kiribati culture has led to early pregnancies as well a rise in sexually-transmitted infections (STIs). It has also introduced new movements in the life of uneducated young women who boards these ships and sell their bodies for money

as a means of survival. Most of these young women become pregnant at early ages, with a concomitant rise in one-parent families (McNamara and Westoby, 2014:58).

Tabai (1987:46) argues that there is nothing more insulting to us than, “the insinuations that because we are so poor, we are available to be bought.” He admits that even though we are definitely poor, but as humans with our own traditional knowledge and culture, we can make the greatest and best out of what we have. We should not accept that we are for auction to sell out our indignity and integrity as a nation—we must be vigilant against the corruptive approach of powerful nations who seek to manipulate or bribe us against what we believe. According to Tabai (1987:46):

The healthy development for life is to encourage the people to be more independent in spirit despite their acknowledged lack of resources and other economic problems.

To be independent in spirit is found in the way of life of our ancestors who were deeply rooted in their cultural ways of living connected to the land and the ocean.

3.7. The Kiribati Uniting Church

The KUC is the second-largest religious group in Kiribati after the Roman Catholic Church. It operates a theological college that serves as a training centre for ministerial formation as well as five secondary schools. The KUC is a church that functions according to the formality and traditions of the LMS and is currently active in pastoral ministry in 139 congregations in the whole island complex of Kiribati (KUC Strategic Plan, 2014). As the second largest denomination, the KUC serves approximately 35 000¹¹ members which is about 31.5 percent of the overall Kiribati total population of 107 000 people (National Statistic, 2016:32). The church has 203 active pastors serving in pastoral ministry, in local congregations, in the department of youth, Sunday school, women’s affairs, and in the main office, including those serving in the theological college. According to Tenten, the Protestant Church in Kiribati which is now the KUC,

¹¹ As this writing was coincident with the schism in the church, the current number of KUC members, pastors and congregations will slightly decrease as almost one tenth of KUC population have moved out to remain as the KPC. See, 3.8.1 Schism in the church: The Kiribati Protestant Church and the Kiribati Uniting Church.

is an indigenous independent church because it does not follow any one Protestant tradition, but is a united church of Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and Anglican denominations (Tenten, 1994:45).

According to Macdonald (2001:213), the KUC was originally the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protestant Church (GEIPC) because the Gilbert Islands (later Kiribati) and the Ellice Islands (later Tuvalu) were at that time British Protectorates. In 1968, the LMS withdrew and the GEIPC became an independent church under the title, Gilbert Islands Protestant Church (GIPC). At this point, the Ellice Islands had become separate. In 1979, when both Kiribati and Tuvalu became independent nations and changed their names, the church again changed its name to the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) (Tenten, 1999). In 2014, the name was again changed to the KUC, a decision which led to a tragic split between members of the church. What followed was a period of anger, confusion, rejection of decisions made by people in authority, a failed reconciliation meeting, court cases, and the eventual permanent division into two church denominations—the KPC and the KUC.

3.7.1. Schism in the church: The Kiribati Protestant Church and the Kiribati Uniting Church

Although it is a valuable exercise to analyse the Western missionary legacy of the church, it is equally important to see how I-Kiribati Christian leaders have fared in the post-missionary era. It is worthwhile to note that instead of addressing core issues affecting the church and the society to which they are called to witness Jesus—such as the effects of climate change—the church leadership is wasting its time and effort on peripheral matters. For example, the schism on account of changing the name of the church from the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) to the Kiribati Uniting Church (KUC).

It is this debate that dominates the ecclesiastical debate rather than issues of global warming and climate change that are real and present threats to the existence of the church and its people. The main argument concerns the issue of the Constitution as claimed by KPC members who felt they had the right to know and discuss the issue before any official decision was taken by the General Assembly. According to Terubea

(2016), when the name of the church was changed, there was a poor communication from the church officials to explain why the name was to be changed. Accordingly, the split in the KUC was an indication that the name-change was actioned without proper preparation taking place on the ground. The church hierarchy thus disappointed the general membership by failing to follow the Constitution as stipulated in item 15, section 96, subsections 2-3, which states:

Changes to be made in the Assembly should all be sent to the General Secretary for distribution three months before the assembly (3) Motions which followed this procedure will be approved and taken to the assembly for discussion. If the assembly approves and passes the motion, then it will be included in the Constitution and will be adopted as soon as it is changed (KUC Constitution, 2006).

Changing the name of the church without notification was like a cultural cyclonic storm system—proving exceedingly destructive to the identity and faith of the people. Members felt that their being ignored in the process of changing the name of their church was the same as having no rights as church members. The failure of the church leadership to follow the Constitution created confusion and aroused the anger of the people where argument, criticism and reluctance to accept the name change led to the schism in the church.

Uriam (1999) notes that the leadership in the church today has been influenced by the Western missionary's legacy where the local subjects were expected to accept their authoritarianism. In such a context, the leaders sometimes do not care for the society; instead, they make decisions that suit themselves without are real concern for the possible impact it may have on the lives of the local people. It is an indication of superiority that never cares and concerns about the people, but instead is focused on its own agenda. As argued by Uriam, many people in society have, “mistaken ideas about the nature of the church and her mission, and unless these misconceptions are ‘corrected,’ the church will never realise or fulfil her mission and will always be in conflict with the laity and the rest of society” (1999:35).

This concern is also voiced by Darrell Guder:

We must admit, however, as heirs of the Western tradition, that we have developed ecclesiologies that never mention the fundamental missional purpose of the church. Our theologies of the church can focus entirely upon the church's inward functions as though they were its exclusive purpose. We can define the church's worship as an end in itself, with no regard for the ways in which Christ encounters his people in Word and Sacrament in order to equip and send them into the world for which He died (Guder, 2009:69).

Hewitt (2009) states that this amounts to a deification of “individual and consumerist ethics” that always ends up in societies with foundations built on fragmentation. This phenomenon reflects the lack of true spiritual practice in the church, “to communicate the qualitative difference that Christian spirituality offers in seeking to give people fullness of life” (2009:32). It is through such concerns that this present work aims at challenging the KUC to revisit its mission to develop a curriculum in its theological college that focuses more on the life of the people and their environment rather than on its own agenda.

In contrast to the KUC Constitution, the approach of the KPC patriots to oppose the decision of the General Assembly (GA) was not accepted because they did not go through the procedure and did not bring their argument to the right legislative forum. Instead, it opposed the church leadership from the outside. The correct procedure for any complaints brought by a member or members of the KPC is set out clearly in its Constitution:

To the *kabowi n Ekaretia*, the church meeting of the village from which the complaint arises from, but if the manner is not resolved therefrom,

To the *Kabowi n Abamakoro* meeting of the Island district from which the complaint arises from, but if the matter is not resolved therefrom,

To the *Minita n Tararua* (lit: “Bishop”) who is responsible in overseeing the island district from which the complaint arises from, but if the matter is not resolved therefrom,

To the *aia kabowi taan onimaki*, (lit: “Officer’s meeting”) but if the matter is not resolved therefrom,

To the *Kauntira* (lit: “Executive Council”), but if the matter is not resolved therefrom,

To the General Assembly (KUC Constitution, 2006).

However, few people who have gone far without respect and humility have influenced the people to stand against the GA and the church officials. This is also another impact of the Western culture of individualism where people lose the cultural norm of respecting the elders or pastors—their individual rights now overtaking the cultural value of community rights. The presentation prepared for the PCC General Assembly supports community values that:

Most Pacific societies have a strong sense of social responsibility for actions for their members. If a member of another village offends a member of our village that person offends our whole village. The idea is that we are responsible for each other, even if our sense of responsibility is limited to our own kind. When we do something, there are others we are representing. Whatever good or bad we do, it reflects on our own community. In theological terms, salvation is not individual but communal (PCC Report, 2007:177).

The *maneaba* culture as part of the Pacific society, and especially that of the Kiribati culture, fortifies community rights when decisions are made by the *Unimane* (lit: “the elders”). They are then deemed final and the entire village gives their agreement. The *Unimane* were paramount; they retained control over the land and the people. Once their decision from the *maneaba* was confirmed, the entire village will have no say, but must carry out the decisions as instructed (Macdonald, 2001:73). Even though some people may disagree with the decisions, they must still give their agreement because the *Unimane* are deserved unquestionable respect because that is the only way to maintain the traditional *status quo*. This tradition has carried over into the GA. Each island church has its representatives in the GA assembly. First, a matter is discussed at village level, and the representatives take the village decision to the GA. After a matter has been discussed in the GA and a decision reached, everyone is expected to agree.

The understood fact that the villages must obey the decision of the GA whether they agree with it or not is a direct result of the legacy of the first missionaries and in fact echoes that of the *maneaba* system. Uriam (1999) notes that the leadership in the church today has been influenced by the first missionary’s legacy where the missionaries/ministers made the decisions and the people were expected to always

accept what was decided for them and on their behalf. This of course is directly opposite today's culture of the individual. In the missionary context, leaders never care for the society, but can easily make decisions without caring about the impacts on the lives of the people.

In all of this, the issue of the schism in the KUC, reflects the consequence of the missionary legacy that is still a matter of high priority affecting the role of the leadership and the general membership of the church. The leadership role in the church is affected by the legacy that what pastors say, people have to follow. This expectation of implicit obedience has led to an abuse of power in some places, where corruption and misuse of power is beginning to take place in the church (Uriam 1999:35). On the other hand, the legacy of Western individualism has affected the cultural values of respect to the *Unimane*, with respect to decisions made in the community. In the *maneaba* culture, community rights are valued when the decision made by the *Unimane* is final, the village will all agree and receive it. The *Unimane* were paramount, they retained control over the land and the people. Once the decision from the *maneaba* was confirmed, the entire village will have no other recourse, but to carry out the decision as the only way to maintain *status quo* in the society (Macdonald, 2001:73). However, the new generation of I-Kiribati are more Western in their approach and are thus more willing to boldly challenge the highest authority in the church, i.e., the General Assembly.

3.7.2. The church in the context of globalisation

The Pacific Islands are not only critically affected by climate change but also globalisation, where their interconnectedness to the world is another contributing factor to the impact of climate change. In this, poverty eradication is not going to be achieved by simply handing out charity to the poor, however helpful that would be (CWM, 2017). Instead, what is required is the well-organised systemic rearrangement of how resources are accumulated and distributed. In the report of the CWM meeting in the Pacific, 2017, Cowan made a strong attack on the free market economy, stating that it had had a devastating effect on the world's resources because it links personal salvation with a free-market economy:

The few continue to prey on the many. The current Financial and Economic Architecture has not addressed poverty eradication, inequality and ecological destruction particularly in developing countries. People living in poverty are denied and deprived of basic human rights to the gifts of God's creation, by the social systems, designed to feather the social appetite of the few at the expense of the many (CWM, 2017).

According to the colloquium:

The dire climactic challenges faced in the Pacific islands, geographical isolation, and the vulnerability of island nation financial structures to the world markets are just a few cues that their own communities are affected by policies that do not support an economy of life, but instead continue to oppress the majority and advance the few (CWM, 2017).

As a result, the participants registered their support for the promotion of an economy of life through the Suva Statement and committed itself to call upon the church, "to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God with the hope of being agents of peace and seeking justice in establishing the reign of God" (CWM, 2017). Gorringer has challenged churches to think theologically and explore new themes of modern theology and ethics that can serve the common good of all humanity and the built environment, as a whole (Gorringer, 2011: ix). Gorringer develops his understanding of the common good from that of Clement of Alexander (c.150-226 CE) when he states:

It is God himself who has brought our race to a *koinonia* by sharing himself first of all, and then by sending his Word all alike, and by making things for all. Therefore, everything is common, and the rich should not grasp greater share. The oppression then, "I own something, and I have more than enough, why should I not enjoy it? is not worthy of a human nor does it indicate any community feeling (*koinonikoni*) (Gorringer, 2011:19)

Even though Hewitt does not address the Pacific Islands in particular, he reflects on the social and economic realities facing many countries in the Global South that threatens life in diverse ways (2016:473). Utilising the three key terms of, "global south," "changing landscape," and "Christianity," Hewitt examines the situation by posing a question: "What are the ways in which the urgent issues that give shape to the realities of life in the Global South converse with the missiological affirmations of the Together Towards Life (TTL) document?" (2016:474). In a stinging denunciation of what the

North has done to the South over the centuries, he proceeds to demonstrate how the powerful have subjugated the weak to their advantage. Hewitt further argues that countries in the Global South are essentially agricultural economies, dependent on the wealthy North, both economically and politically (Hewitt, 2016:476).

In support of Hewitt's perspectives, Bird (2016:515) argues that because capitalism is being promoted at the expense of ecological safety, the concept of *oikos* as home in the Pacific has now become a theological issue. He emphasises that climate change is probably the greatest threat to the *oikos* of Pacific people today, especially to their *oikos*, because:

Pacific peoples have a deep sense of attachment to place, to home; even now with migration, Pacific people continue to have a strong sense of belonging to their motherland, and to their particular place in it (2015:515).

If therefore, the indigenous peoples have been living with a deep connection to a land as their only home on earth, then any dislocation and/or disconnection from their homeland by powerful external imperial forces constitutes a form of genocide or human rights violation.

As Koch and Slatter note, the indigenous I-Kiribati in pre-colonial times had respect for their environment, viewing it as sacred and believing it to be the only place that connects them with their gods and ancestors. Their lives were heavily dependent on what their lands and ocean could produce for them. Their life-patterns were based on hard work to get their daily necessities, rather than planning for future investments (Koch and Slatter, 1986: xvi). Today, local people seem to have lost their sense of being connected to their environment. The land is no longer regarded as sacred and no longer conferring on them any sense of well-being, identity or dignity.

3.8. From traditional to modern ways of living

Before the contact with the West, people were strongly controlled by their traditional principles, dependent on their land and sea and were linked to their environment as part of their lives, even though the Kiribati islands comprise the most infertile soil on the

planet (Thomas, 2007:43). However, their ancestors were hardworking people who enjoyed a good life and health on their islands. Skills were developed to cultivate the land that required a gift of *nanomwaka/makuri korakora* (lit: “hard work and perseverance”) to cope with life on the low-lying islands.

To be an I-Kiribati is to have the *nanomaka* which comes from two Kiribati words, *nano* (lit: “the inside or mind of a woman/man”) and *mwaka* (lit: “having supernatural power” or “bright as a fire”) (Bingham, 1908:40). Koch and Slatter argue that one who lives as an indigenous I-Kiribati will be identified as someone who has a strong heart brightened with fire—one who can exercise perseverance to cope with life in an otherwise harsh environment. Therefore, the features and characteristic of the I-Kiribati are strongly focused on the gift of perseverance and endurance because the lifestyle patterns were based on hard work to get life’s necessities on a daily basis, rather than planning for future investments (1986: xvi).

Today, people who are living in the context of globalisation no longer value their cultural strength and their land. According to Macdonald, the political and social systems in pre-European times which evolved in the Gilbert Islands, “reflected the limits inherent in the environment as well as the blending of the principles and practices introduced by the original settlers and by subsequent arrivals” (2001:6). Likewise, Thomas (2002:166) utilises the argument of Thaman that:

Modernisation and urbanisation of Pacific Island populations have resulted in an increased incidence of several non-communicable diseases, including diabetes, obesity, gout, hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke and certain cancers.

Ernst (2012:7) supports this argument stating that the decay of traditional social control and flexibility of the indigenous by adopting Western ways of living has contributed to an increase in criminality, drug abuse, domestic violence, etc. This is a consequence of adopting the Western culture of individualism that focuses mainly on money and wealth creation and abandons traditional social and political structures that promoted sharing and reciprocity that once held together the people’s traditional way of living.

Modern globalisation enables people to live a life which is much easier than it was in earlier times when there were no technologies. However, they adopt it as part of their daily living without knowing the destructive impact it can have on their culture and traditional way of living (Ernst, 2012:34; Lawrence, 1992:281-284). Today, people in Kiribati, especially the young, rely on imported goods such as rice, sugar and flour for their survival. It is obvious today that people will queue for these goods if they think there will be a shortage. The reason is that these are the main dietary items for the Kiribati people. While they are no longer relying on their own food crops, those processed foodstuffs imported from overseas goods are causing chronic health conditions such as sugar diabetes due to the abnormally high levels of sugar (glucose) in the blood. Most of those who succumb to this disease die young or become physically disabled and thus find it hard to work and often need someone to care for them.

Biribo and Woodroffe (2013:346), support this concern by arguing that the consequence of over-population in the capital island Tarawa has prompted the reclamation and rebuilding of seawalls and causeways, taking soil and stone from the coastal areas for such construction work. This has contributed considerably to the widespread erosion around the islands caused by sea level rise (2013:352). Biribo and Woodroffe further assert that the impact of climate change is associated with the effect of human activities in the Kiribati low-lying atolls. This has never been experienced before but because of the contamination of globalisation, people have flooded to the capital and contribute more problems that impact climate change. Biribo and Woodroffe (2013:352) thus provide a cautious reminder that without serious consideration given to reduce the negative impact of human activities and failure to promote ecological concern, the future security of the islands will be in the balance.

Kiribati is an isolated Pacific micro-state country with the location and physical geography of that lead to several serious development difficulties due to inadequate and poor soils, thus limiting agriculture options. In addition, its isolation increased its environmental vulnerability, which in turn was exacerbated by population growth (Thomas, 2002; Korauaba, 2012:16). Thomas argues that the change in the islands and the context of living in Kiribati caused people to leave their traditional foods and depend rather on processed food. As the population relied more and more on imported

foodstuffs, the negative impact it had on health and wellbeing was further exacerbated.

Hence, as Thomas can state:

Dependence on nutritionally inferior food imports among growing segments of island populations is largely responsible for declining health standards. In Kiribati, between 1992 and 1998, there has been a steady increase in the number of reported hypertension and diabetes cases, whose incidence appears clearly related to rapid urbanisation (Thomas, 2002:166).

With the limitation of resources and few opportunities for economic expansion, Kiribati, together with other small island nations in the Pacific embraced the MIRAB¹² approach for their economic development. As Thomas (2002:163) elucidates:

In a MIRAB economy the indigenous population maximises their material well-being by means of globalisation.

It is obvious that the government of Kiribati has leaned more on economic growth than it did to analyse and examine how the population's health had been affected by modernisation. According to Hauofa, as the islands began to depend on the strength of those large countries in the developed world, so they started to move into what one social scientist called "MIRAB societies," that is, pitiful microstates who sought development based on real economic productivity (Hauofa, 2008:4).

Thomas (2002:163) reminds microstates that relying on external support and outlets for migration is not a long-term solution due to the increasing economic downturn and competitiveness of hosting countries that is leading to the "cut-backs in foreign aids and changes in immigration policies." He further argues that while low lying atolls are constrained in terms of agricultural potential, "there is still room for improvement of both traditional and exotic crop production to help reverse the trend of increasing imported food dependency and the rising incidence of nutritionally related non-communicable diseases" (2002:163).

¹² MIRAB stands for Migration (of factors of production), Remittances/Aid (financial transfers) and Bureaucracy (non-tradable production), thereby referencing an economic development approach that small islands in the Pacific rely upon (Tisdell, 2014).

Rimon (nd:26-27) observes that the arrival of Europeans was a form of superiority among the people that brought with it a negative approach. They introduced the idea of the “global village” which sets the old patterns of lifestyle under pressure, often at a very fast rate against people’s culture and way of life. However, people were influenced and forced to shift from their traditional culture and aligned themselves with Western culture. They have been convinced that Western values are better, with more advanced development essential for life than that of indigenous systems. It seems that people have been blinded to avoid the values and well-being in their culture and to adopt a culture that has been measured in these days as the most expensive and destructive to people who are living in a poor country such as Kiribati. For example, the Kiribati community observances with respect to marriage and birthdays and other social forms of celebration that were culturally-oriented are today being rapidly changed towards a Western-oriented form of celebration.

Rimon (nd:27) further notes that traditional village ways are fast vanishing and people are moving from their traditional ways to adopt Western culture, where life is more dependent on money and wealth and not the ability to raise food crops or catch a good haul of fish for the village. A subsistence lifestyle has given way to a money economy. Money, not only land, now represents power, identity and status in community life (Ernst, 2012:34). The effects of globalisation have been one of the main concerns of the PCC, reminding the churches to look at the current realities and the effects of globalisation on societies, economies, culture and religion (PCC Report, 2007:175).

People are immersing themselves in this culture and conservatively own it as their culture but did not know that they had been taken captive by globalisation to become agents for development by the dominant world powers. LengkaBula (2009:26). The Accra Confession reminds the people to reject the current, “world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system including absolute planned economies, which defy God’s covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole creation from the fullness of life” (2009:26). It is a great concern, as noted in the Accra Confession, that people need to be aware of how they are living in the context of globalisation. As LenkaBula (2009:59) can observe:

Increasing inequality in income distribution within countries, which is masked by the economic statistics that indicate economic recovery, but do not show how the urban poor and rural communities were pushed even further into misery and despair, carrying the burden instead of the affluent sectors of society and business.

It is clearly stated that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agenda dominated by the US and other industrial countries, does not care for the economic sovereignty of all nations, or environmental protection and, “the right of indigenous people to maintain their way of living in their natural environment” (LengkaBula, 2009:59-60). Gorringe (2011:72) argues that the dominant control of the global market and new technologies that make things convenient and easy is a great influence to bring people to be totally under the control of the empire of global markets. As a consequence, this has forced people to live without their identity and cultures. Being colonised by the global markets, people have been deprived of their civil and political rights.

Gorringe makes it clear by referring to what George Ritzer says about “McDonaldizatio” as part of a global market spreading across different cultures that bring people together in a culture of dependency on “fast foods.” Gorringe compared the global market to a destructive force that uproots people from their history and identity to live in meaningless places (2011:72). Gorringe (2011:2) regards this meaningless place as a new world where people live without their rights as landowners, but instead own the rights that belong to an absentee landlord. The concern about the changing society that has been established as a cultural standard of living is evidenced in the migration of people from their islands to the capital island. It is a migration from the traditional village to a global village where life is heavily dependent on money. Adding to this argument, Kwong (2013a:10) remarks that:

The transition from a traditional subsistence lifestyle to a contemporary market-based economy has brought with it key environmental challenges. These challenges are most apparent in the heavily populated urban centres of Betio, South Tarawa and to a certain extent Kiritimati Island. South Tarawa is also where over 50 percent of the population live.

Uriam (1995:96) notes that the culture of the people should not be affected and discarded by the influence of other cultures because it is the gift of life to every nation

to safeguard the well-being and identity of the nation. According to Uriam, the life of the Gilbertese islanders is bound up with their tradition and culture, maintained through the oral tradition which are its teachers, guiding the community in the “right way” to live. For him, the oral tradition in all its forms are important, for “they offer explanations for social processes and cultural activities as they are or should be” (1995:96). Through the *Unimwane*, wisdom is orally passed on from one generation to the next so as to ensure that the I-Kiribati culture and lifestyle is observed and maintained in the future.

3.9. The legacy of Western culture

3.9.1. Missionary attitudes towards indigenous

According to Ernst (2012:33), “it can be argued that Christianity in particular has been the single most powerful globalising force throughout the Pacific Islands.” To understand why religion contributed to globalisation in the Pacific, it is important to understand that the first missionaries not only came to spread the Christian message, but also as “agents of the colonial powers that took the leading role in bringing Western culture to the Pacific Islands” (2012:33).

Prior to the arrival of the first missionaries; Western influence had already been introduced through contact with traders, sailors and other “beachcomber” types that reached the Pacific islands. Even these irregular contacts began to slowly transform the lives of the people. Hence, the period from pre-Christianity through to the advent of traders in island produce such as coconut oil and copra was the beginning of Western influence experienced in the islands. Followed by the arrival of Christian missionaries, the change in the culture and tradition of the people became more obvious (Ernst, 2012:33). This is evident in the new ways of living, new codes of dressing, and a shift from traditional food to that of Western food.

The involvement of the Pacific with war also brought more and more Western contacts (Ross, 2009:11). According to Ross, the powerful influence of the church was evident in eliminating cultural traditions that could conflict with Western cultures. Ernst supports this dramatic change that, “cultural values that were not compatible with those

of the Western world are disappearing. A system of cash and wages has almost everywhere replaced the traditional subsistence and barter system” (Ernst, 2012:36). People were obliged to conform and live according to a new culture brought by missionaries (Ross, 2009:7), who employed a top-down approach where people were treated as inhuman and there was no place for their culture in the Christian package. According to Vaii (2006:85) Pacific islanders were treated as “uncivilised, lacking the intellectual and moral means of survival. The missionaries’ language specified that the natives they encountered were uncivilised less blessed, condemned and doomed.”

The outlook towards pastoral ministry by the first missionaries was that associated with a colonial power which came to rule over the people but not to serve. They regarded themselves as people of the light and thus treated indigenous as people of the darkness. They commented that the indigenous were, “*A rangi ro, a rangi maiu n kainano, ao a matai*” (lit: “people without knowledge, extremely poor, and covertness”) (Jones, 1917:22). The culture of the indigenes was regarded as born out of darkness and paganism that needed to be wiped out or be converted.

In considering the treatment of the missionaries to the indigenous, it seems as if there was nothing good that could be seen in the islanders’ lives—even though the people had lived in their islands for many centuries with their cultural principles of sharing, hospitality and justice that guided the community. They lived strong and healthy lives using what they had from their lands and ocean because they possessed the knowledge and skills of how to live on their islands. This treatment from the West is contrasted by Havea (cited in Forman 2004:116) who claims that the Pacific people had already lived with Christ through the blessings of their islands, the values of their cultures, and the richness of their traditional knowledge. The first missionaries came only to make known the Christian message that was already present, being hinted at in the sharing and caring that was already common among the Pacific peoples.

3.9.2. The legacy of the first missionaries

Even though there was a detrimental effect because of the manner in which the first missionaries treated the people and their culture, the missionaries themselves were received well by the host nation due to the culture of hospitality and respect that was

present. Sadly, this in turn made the host nation vulnerable to attack from what was a more aggressive culture. As Etuati (2011:23) has noted, “I-Kiribati are very hospitable, especially to visitors from outside their basic extended family units, *te kainga*” (2011:23). Accordingly, their vulnerable led them to be easily victimised.

At the beginning of the Christian project in Kiribati, holiness was characterised in terms of whiteness, this being a symbol of cleanness and purity. This in turn was the preferred colour used during worship services by the first missionaries (Jones, 1917:36). Even though the indigenous people were poor and could not afford to buy white clothing, it was deemed a requirement for all Christian converts if they were to take part in Christian worship. Macdonald (2001:53) comments that with the arrival of Christianity, the new religion was merely, “part of a cultural package introduced by the Europeans. Unless modified to meet local needs...there was no place for a foreign ethos until other values were observed and adopted.” This indicates that the churches in the Pacific have been preoccupied in their religious tradition up to the present day with what has been embedded in the church as a legacy that they could not change. In other words, the church tends to take refuge in the theologies and theological interpretations of the past without paying attention to the present issues. According to Vaii, the effect this has on theological hermeneutics can readily be seen:

As contexts changes, the role of the receiver, whether individual or the Christian community, is concerned specially with continuing to understand the gospel disclosed in doctrines of the church in the same way as it was received in the past. In other words, the church is still faithful to the past interpretations, even though they can be seen as irrelevant to the present situation (2006:20).

Thomas (2012:30) supports this assertion when he states:

The fact that the gospel was brought by missionaries from Europe and the United States is today reflected in the variety of “historic” or “mainline” churches that are still dominant in the various islands of the region.

Although it is about two-hundred years since the arrival of the first missionaries, the people are still strictly observing what has been introduced in the church as part of their culture. The dress code, Sabbath observance and ecclesiastical rules are still very

strictly adhered to. Within society, the clergy take the leadership role as spokespersons and administrators of the church council matters as well as with secular authorities. In line with this argument, Uriam (1999:12) comments that the missionaries were expected to protect integrity of the poor; however, the clergy protected their own integrity and superiority by promoting themselves as having the power of God to do miraculous things. When the missionaries left, the missionary ideal or image was transferred to the local minister or priest.

Even to this day, the legacy of the first missionaries remains and is strongly observed. It can be seen that even though there is rapid change in the society, the church has nevertheless failed to correlate and adapt to any fundamental transformation in Pacific island societies and cultures (Ernst, 1996:48). Even though there are complaints from the congregation for the prolonged procession to partake in Holy Communion, it is the tradition that should be followed because it was instituted by the first missionaries. The domination of the Euro-centric Western culture in the church has systematically subdued the skills of local composers who could have composed Christian worship songs out of their own context. The legacy left behind by the first missionaries has always influenced the people; they insist that what the first missionaries had introduced are the most perfect and spiritual liturgies to follow (Talia, 2009:2).

In the context of the Pacific islands today, Ernst expresses that Pacific churches need to understand that the legacy of the first missionaries still controls them when they have to adapt themselves to their new contexts. As Ernst (2012:39) observes:

Since the introduction of Christianity and markedly within the Protestant mainline churches, organisational structures, liturgies, hymnbooks or dress codes have not changed much. It has been argued that in the process of decolonisation since the 1960s, the localisation of church leadership positions was often hastened with negative side effects as in many areas local ministers were not adequately trained.

The Western influence began from the training of its first indigenous ministers who were schooled not only to teach and preach the Christian message, but also to become “agents of the colonial powers that took the leading role in bringing Western culture to the Pacific Islands” (Ernst, 2012:32). It is clear that the people were locked up in a cell where they were forced to accept what was given to them without question or criticism.

According to Kim (2016:377), the traditional and symbolic life-worlds of the indigenous are necessary, “if the gospel is to take root in those different realities in such a way, the engagement and dialogue within the wider context would have discerned how Christ was already present with God’s Spirit who was already at work.” On the contrary, the association of “evangelism with colonial powers in the history of mission has led to the presupposition that Western forms of Christianity are the standards by which others adherence to the gospel should be judged” (2016:377).

From the beginning of the twentieth-century, Kiribati continued to be involved with an increasing number of global issues as more Europeans entered the country. During World War II, both the Australian and US soldiers brought more Western contact into Kiribati, introducing their unfamiliar culture to the I-Kiribati, including products of modern technology of communications, modern music, sports, cigarettes, beer, and chewing gum. The I-Kiribati themselves were astonished by the amount of money and goods that flowed into the country, something they had never seen before. Such new things have displaced the traditional culture, evolving it into a modern Western culture (Ross, 2009:1). In addition, traditional social and political structures are also gradually collapsing, where social mobilisation and urbanisation are breaking traditional structures of the family, clan, and village. The decay of traditional social control has also contributed to an increase in criminality, drug abuse, domestic violence, etc. (Rimon, nd:26-27).

3.10. A defence of cultural values

Hauofa (2008:3) argues that the attitudes of the European nations which came to the Pacific islands in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries were those of dominant civilisations looking down on what they considered were barbaric and uncivilised islanders. These attitudes soon had impact on the self-image of the islander peoples, despite their centuries-old civilisation. At the grass roots level, the residents of Oceania were not living in a world dictated by arbitrary national boundaries—lines drawn on the ocean—but in a world where crossing north to south and east to west was part of their heritage, and which is still part of their lives today. Hauofa calls this, “world enlargement” and argues that it must be acknowledged, otherwise the island nations are

going to be consigned to a lasting state of wardship where, “people are in danger of being confined to mental reservations,” if not already to physical ones (2008:3). Talia states that in the Oceanian setting, the land, sea and sky represent the backbones of life and the main resources of religio-cultural heritage—just like the blood that flows to nurture and maintain life (2009:14). The ocean makes the people of Oceania one, even though they are today separated in three regions: Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia (Vaii, 2006:21). As Vaii (2006:2) further observes:

According to this view, the small island states and territories of the Pacific, that is, all of Polynesia and Micronesia, are much too small, too poorly endowed with resources, and too isolated from the centres of economic growth for their inhabitants ever to be able to rise above their present condition of dependence on the largesse of wealthy nations.

He further argues that a group of islands can be “small” to a social scientist, but to a Pacific Islander their nation was both ocean and land, the skies above and the gods of the world below. “Their world was anything but tiny. They thought big and recounted their deeds in epic proportions” (2008:3). This is the view of experts who are using their skills and knowledge to control small and poor nations so that they do not stand independently on their own, but instead remain immature, constantly living and relying upon others. As Tabai (1987:47) has noted:

I believe they are wrong because they ignore totally one very fundamental factor—our determination to make it on our own, something that cannot be expressed in crude economic terms.

This means that no one country can be contingent on itself totally as we are living in a world of increasing inter-dependence. However, Tabai reminds his people to be careful with development that is detrimental to their cultural ways of living. Hauofa (2008:7) shares the same view and criticises the developed nations of the world, saying they need to keep the narrow view of small island nations for their own convenience, while the grassroots world of the islanders plays out in the broader worldview, which they live in. They are, “ordinary people who are busily and independently redefining their world in accordance with their perceptions of their own interests, and of where the future lies for their children and their children's children” (2008:7). This concern is reflected in the wisdom of the Spiritual People of the Earth, of the four directions, working in unity

to restore peace, harmony, and balance for our collective future and for all living beings (Wright, 2016:255). It continues:

All Creation has a right to live and survive on this Sacred Earth and raise their Families where the Creator placed them to be.

It goes on to state that the Creator gave humankind a way of life, which has been abused by people living without regard for the welfare of the earth or the future of its inhabitants (Wright, 2016:255). This is the right that needs to be addressed in the TTC to help the I-Kiribati maintain their identity and dignity and to fight for their rights as indigenous who being victimised by the ignorance of powerful nations.

3.11. The cosmology of the coconut tree

Unfortunately, in today's world the value of the coconut tree in island culture is being reduced and even ignored, and for that reason the cosmology of the tree is being forgotten (Baru, 14 August 2016). This is primarily because buildings are now made of imported materials, although many people still prefer to construct small building in their yards made from the coconut tree materials. Even so, the cosmology and significance of the coconut tree is being forgotten in the critical context of climate change. According to Ross (2016:62), the church-centred mission also appears to be in crisis, rapidly losing its identity, to the point that "we have to be ready to see the day of missions as we have known them" (2016:62).

The cosmology of the coconut tree designs the life and culture of the people in Kiribati as it covers the landscape on each island and becomes the major source of life, income and diet of the villagers—not only the nuts, but also the sap (Macdonald 2001:4). The gathered sap, or 'toddy,' is the source of a natural drink and it is used in cooking and as a sweet beverage; fermented, it becomes an intoxicating drink. The coconut meat taken with fish, was the main diet of the ancestors, who lived healthy and long lives. Very importantly, the meat and milk of the coconut can act for substitutes of the bread and wine used in the celebration of Holy Communion.

Why then are the people of Kiribati are not using it, and why do they still cling to the piece of bread and watered-down wine or red cordial? Why do we reject this essential

part of the coconut tree cosmology for use in the most holy part of our Christian ritual? Is it due to the lingering legacy of Eurocentric Western Christianity that even today still makes us deny the value of indigenous culture, which looks instinctively to the coconut as a Eucharistic material? Do we, with that background, regard the use of the fruit of the coconut tree as being wrong and degrading if used in the celebration of Holy Communion? As noted above, the key objective this study is to seek to understand the curriculum implications of the phenomenon of climate change in Kiribati, and the role it should play in the renewal of theological education that fosters the ministerial formation of students at the TTC. In other words, how the KUC through pastoral ministry can respond effectively to climate change and develop religious resources to care and protect the values of the indigenous culture and life in the islands of Kiribati.

In relation to the coconut tree, its cosmology is found in its architectural features. Because the coconut tree serves heavily as materials for buildings in Kiribati, it thus provides one core symbol that identifies the church as the building. In Kiribati, every part of the coconut tree is used as building material, and when a church is constructed from the trees, their cosmology becomes an integral part of the building and thus of the church which the building represents. The leaves of the tree provide roofing to give protection from rain and sun, its timbers create walls for security, and seating materials provide places to rest. The nuts provide food and drink and can also offer medicine. In the early days of Christianity in the islands, the coconut tree provided the food and drink for the sacrament of Holy Communion. Importantly, it also connected them to their ancestors, their traditions, and their existence as I-Kiribati.

With reference to its architectural structure, everything in a church building is symbolic of the coconut tree and its cosmology (Raoui, 2016). To a great extent in the Pacific region, but especially in Kiribati, there is a strong link and identification between the church as a building and the coconut tree. That is why the coconut tree is one of the significant symbols in the emblem of the church.¹³ The building/church is to a certain extent a living cosmology of the tree (Adger et al. 2011:5).

¹³ See KUC letterhead: Appendix A.

There is no more a comfortable home than that which a church provides in accordance with coconut cosmology, because in it, peace, comfort, healing, joy and fellowship is found. Apart from its cosmological associations, the coconut tree is a renewable resource. The fact that it is renewable means that it regularly renews itself with new plants springing from the nuts. Likewise, when a building made from the tree grows old or weak it can be easily replaced. The TTC has a mandate to equip pastors for their work in the ministry. It too needs to be regularly renewed in order to meet the contemporary context of the people (SPATS, 2016). The cosmology of the coconut tree is a living message of the Christian journey of life that needs to be renewed at all times, because a renewable resource is the strength of the church.

The thirty-three islands which comprise the Republic of Kiribati are thousands of kilometres apart, but they are still one nation speaking one language and living one culture, as characterised by the movement of the coconut tree connecting the different islands together as a nation. It can travel with people when they move from island to island; it never sinks, but puts out new seedlings when it comes to land. According to Havea, (1988/1989) the cosmology of the coconut is moveable, adaptable and grows anywhere, thereby pointing to the mission on the move, connecting the islands together with their traditional culture and their belief in God. The cosmology of a traveling coconut is the symbol of being church. It floats peacefully because there is life in it. When it lands, it brings the fruits of life. From the cosmology of the coconut tree, the people of Kiribati are on the move by letting go of dominant symbols that require importation to more embracing symbols that are indigenous as a part of their ritual of the closest identification that people had with Christ in the Sacrament.

The coconut tree as a resource material provides symbols of its cosmology which were understood in the early days of Christianity in the islands.¹⁴ Although today this is being lost, the coconut tree still represents, through its cosmology, an essential link between the islanders and God. Consequently, this study aims to make the church understand and accept the cosmology of the coconut tree as being more fitting and appropriate in

¹⁴ From my own cosmological experience as being an indigenous living in the islands where the coconut provides the main source of food for life.

our islands for use in the Sacrament of Holy Communion and in the mission of the church that will be more interactive, connecting to people's situation and context. Human-made forms of sea transportation such as cargo ships, luxury cruise liners and naval vessels such as cruisers, frigates and destroyers, all have their limits and boundaries. They will sink in the sea as human bodies will be buried in the soil but the simple charisma of the coconut will never sink in the sea nor fear any storms of life. If it is buried, it will sprout from the soil to bring new life, because it carries in itself the fullness of life as it was from the beginning of creation. The cosmology of the coconut speaks about God who became flesh and lived among God's people—the man Christ Jesus who slept peacefully during the storm on the Sea of Galilee, who never sank below the waves when he walked on the water, the Christ who sprouted victoriously at the resurrection when buried in the tomb. The cosmology of the coconut portrays the image of the church as a floating coconut in the changing world, a fruit that brings life and culture as it was from the beginning that cannot be prevented. Even if it is buried, it will sprout with new life again.

3.12. Chapter summary

This chapter is important in that it contrasts the pre-missionary traditional cultural life lived by the I-Kiribati together with that of the modern lifestyle that many today share. Indeed, they have had little choice but to adopt in the wake of globalisation and modernisation which has swept into the Pacific in the opening decades of the twentieth-first century. It is easy to see how the traditional culture, which once held the islands firmly together, and offered answers for all problems and events, had little chance of surviving against the tsunami of modern civilisation, which is strongly based on Western culture, ideology and lifestyle choices. Even the church, to a certain extent, has failed its congregations, where the various denominations, including the mainline churches, have clung to Western Christianity in their liturgies and ways of thinking. It is only recently that this is beginning to change. Yet, the modern lifestyle that has permeated Kiribati and its people will not change; it is too deeply rooted and brings with it the problems of the modern Western lifestyle—crime, corruption, overcrowding, lack of employment, moral decline. The old culture, that had answers, has been pushed aside, in favour of a lifestyle that does not have answers. Finally, the chapter concludes

with a coconut cosmology reminding the indigenous that God is always there in their lives and situations as with their cultural heritage right from the beginning of creation.

The chapter which follows focuses on the legacy of the first missionaries, which still exists in the mindset of the church leaders and in the curriculum of the TTC. It will examine the mission of the church in the current situation that it is facing. It will also analyse the identity and vocation of the KUC and the curriculum of the TTC which is offered to equip ministerial formation students—the future leaders and preachers in the mission of the KUC.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LEGACY OF THE FIRST MISSIONARIES: THE MISSIONAL IDENTITY AND VOCATION OF THE KIRIBATI UNITING CHURCH AND THE TANGINTEBU THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter identified the impacts of globalisation and modernisation sweeping across the Pacific islands. In particular, it detailed the traditional culture that was more responsive to the problems people faced, but which has now been displaced by a modern civilisation model based on Western culture, ideology and lifestyle choices.

This chapter will analyse the missional identity and vocation of the KUC, with particular emphasis being placed on the format and design of the current TTC curriculum. It will trace the role of the first missionaries with their Western-style Christianity and its continuing effect on the church in Kiribati, its theological thinking and social engagement, as well as how it informs the teaching of the current curriculum of its local pastors. It will also analyse how the church understands its mission to the world and the importance of involving the people who suffer, and not merely those who speak on behalf of them. Underlying this will be the KUC's attitude towards its inherited Christian theology and the problems it has caused both for the church and for its pastors trained at the TTC.

The TTC presents a strong missional platform for equipping ministerial formation students at the KUC. To explore the core of the college's mission is to examine how it offers its curriculum. Before considering the role of the college it will be necessary to ask some important questions: What is the task of theological education and reflection in the current context of the people particularly in the context of climate change? How can a missiological interrogation of the issues contribute to a better understanding about what is happening in people's lives and the environment in which they live within

Kiribati? How suited is the curriculum of the TTC in helping the KUC to adequately respond to the issues of climate change and environment management? In other words, to what extent, can the KUC effectively contribute to climate change and environmental management debates? This particularly applies to ministerial students being prepared to be leaders in their own communities. The central focus of this chapter will thus be to analyse the eco-missional quality of the curriculum offered by the TTC especially where it is designed to develop the missio-formation of its students.

With respect to the TTC curriculum, it will be necessary to begin with the arrival of the first missionaries, and then move forward to observe how today's theological and social cultures have developed under the influence of both the missionaries and Western culture, and how both are still of paramount importance today. The teachings of the KUC within the current theological curriculum of the TTC signposts a closed religion having no place for anything that is not a part of their church. It is a church that aims for holiness, but limits that holiness to the world within the church's boundaries, and yet neglects to take its holiness into the land and ocean where the real lives of the I-Kiribati are being affected.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the I-Kiribati are closely connected to the land and ocean, which has been part of their existence from the beginning of their history, but which is now at risk of being destroyed. For many of the ministers and priests that came out of these theological colleges and seminaries, "their church was the centre of the world, and the world should listen to them for they know what is best for the world" (Uriam, 1999:63).

4.2. The first missionaries and the theological education

The KUC was born out of two missionary movements, one being the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in 1857 and the other being the London Missionary Society (LMS). The LMS came to the islands in 1870 (Macdonald, 2001:40). Hiram Bingham Jr. and his wife Clarissa were American pioneer missionaries from the ABCFM, who with their colleagues from Hawaii arrived at Abaiang in the northern part of Kiribati on the 18 November 1857. At the beginning of 1900, ABCFM withdrew and handed over the mission work to the LMS.

The coming of Christian missionaries to the islands had both positive and negative impacts on the indigenes, indelibly shaping their way of living. The LMS built the first theological college in 1900 that offered courses such as “English, arithmetic, book-keeping, church history, theology, Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) interpretation, the art of teaching, the office of ministry, sermon, singing as drill” (Jones, 1917:10). Because there were no government schools during that time, many of the young men went on to become pastors and others as teachers (Uriam, 1999:42). Apart from the courses offered in the first theological college in Kiribati, the students were encouraged to maintain their traditional ways of living. The college infrastructure was built locally, and students were expected to do the maintenance and building, as well as cultivating *babai* (a root crop) and fishing for their own food. According to Uriam (1999:55):

Life in the theological colleges before the Second World War involved a lot of manual labour. And in most colleges, there were only morning classes and the rest of the afternoon was spent in manual work—in the gardens or building more houses or homes to be maintained. Where there was going to be a lot of labour required in the compounds and in the gardens, more time in the classrooms were given to the teaching of carpentry skills or agricultural techniques than lessons in theology or biblical studies.

This certainly made students more conscious of living very close to the land and the people. It has equipped pastors and enabled them to cope more effectively with the challenges of the ministry. These manual work skills were taught by specialist pastors as part of what was considered Christian mission, and which all student pastors were expected to undertake at Rongorongo Beru. This training ensured that pastors did not have to depend on their own congregations for their survival, homes or food (Uriam, 1999:55). Student pastors in training were taught how to live on local foods such as *te tuae* and *kabubu*, dried fruit from the pandanus tree, *buatoro babai* budding, *takataka* dried coconuts, and fish at Rongorongo College at Beru. As some of the congregations had only two or three household members, the church premises built from local materials would rely on the pastor for its maintenance. According to Teua,

We don't fear anything because there is the land and the sea waiting for us and as we have the skill to live with the land and the sea is like our

cupboard where our food is preserved. In congregations where we were assigned to work, we till the land for gardening to get fresh food, my husband cut toddy¹⁵ every day and used to go out fishing and there is nothing we need for our everyday needs. We build better homes for us if the church did not provide us with good accommodation (Teua, 23 June 2016).

Even though the mission in some places was a challenge to pastors, those who were being equipped not only academically, but in traditional living, would never fear to enter the ministry because there was always something available to eat and drink if pastors lived more closely to their land and ocean. For Teua (23 June 2016), pastoral ministry needs to be traditionally orientated in order for pastors to better understand what they should address and preach to the people about life in the islands (Teua, 23 June 2016).

4.3. Missionary legacy as a contested site

The coming of the first missionaries brought positive changes in the way indigenous Christians came to understand themselves. However, they also brought negative consequences that are still today affecting the church on the low-lying islands. The arrival of Christianity through these first missionaries was perceived as a powerful force to change the culture and lifestyle. When economic globalisation invaded the Pacific Islands, people experienced and lived under a strong pressure to maintain their traditional community's values under the dominion of Western influences (Ernst, 2012:41). Even though the missionaries encouraged students to follow their own culture, they did so on the pretence that cultural values were perceived to be incompatible to their own. Instead of being agents of transformation, the first missionaries thus became oppressors by looking down on people's cultural values and

¹⁵ 'Toddy' refers to the coconut oil sap extracted from the coconut tree which is the main drink of the Kiribati people. In the morning, men cut their 'toddy' for fresh drink, placing a further container to collect the oil sap for the afternoon. One such sap tapping of the coconut tree can provide enough coconut oil for more than one month.

practices. Accordingly, the legacy of the first missionaries can be viewed as a contested site.

As the islands are formed from coral, the first missionaries found it hard to grow fresh fruits and other food crops. In his comment about the island and the people, the tone of language that Bingham used was harsh against the island, the people and their culture. He described the people as extremely poor, naked men and half-naked women, living with “extremely immodest manners and customs, great licentiousness, unbounded lying, covetousness, theft, warlike spirit and bloody warfare” (Macdonald, 2001:33; Eastman, 1917:12-13). This form description of the people one has come to witness Jesus not only paints a bad picture, but it also demotivates the evangelised. Indeed, it sounds as if the missionaries thought nothing good could possibly come out of the people, their culture, or out of the islands themselves. It even appeared as if the first missionaries thought it not worthwhile to live on the island and be part of its people (Macdonald, 2001:16). As the result, their treatment of the people was harsh, the traditional culture was destroyed and a new and different one put in its place in which the people found themselves subordinated and enslaved.

According to Campell (2006:85), this was an approach of the first missionaries and showed how they looked upon the people in the Pacific. He specified the tone of their language was one of condemnation, stating that, “the natives they encountered were uncivilised, less blessed, condemned and doomed.” Because of this attitude, the approach and treatment of the first missionaries to the people and their culture was dictating, directive and harsh as reflected by Jones about the work of Bingham in the following:

During the first preaching of Bingham, the people were noisy and when Bingham prayed and closed his eyes the people shouted *matu matu*, – sleep sleep. When he opened his eyes, the people shout again *uti uti* – wake up wake up (Jones (1917:20)).¹⁶

Bingham was frustrated with the shouting of the people, but he did not know that people were referring to what he did. During his preaching, one old man came smoking a pipe,

¹⁶ I have translated this quote from a booklet written by George H Eastman in the Kiribati local language entitled, “A Day of the Good Tidings.”

saying, “*ngkana ko kan teme ao aei te moko*” (lit: if you want to smoke this is smoke”). During this time in Kiribati, pipe smoking was considered one of the most precious gifts to offer an honoured guest. Bingham’s response is quoted as saying, “*ao ngai I anaia ao I tewenakoa*” (lit: “I took the smoke and draw it away”). Then another man came with a coconut, “*ngkana ko kani mooi ao aio te moimoto*” (lit: “if you need to drink, this is a coconut”). Bingham responded, “Thank you, I do not come to drink, and smoke but I come to preach the gospel” (Jones 1917:25).

The response to the first offer was harsh and rude in comparison to the second response which was polite and showed appreciation. This indicates the character of a dominant culture that is ignorance of the culture that it is dealing with. Because Bingham was not smoking, he drew away the gift of smoke given to him. Because he needs to drink *moimoto*, he said thank you. In the PCC General Assembly, it is argued that such culture was un-Christian both in foundation and orientation, “it is the domination of and imposition of one culture on all, and has infiltrated every gift of life and has devastated like a wild fire the whole Pacific islands” (PCC Report, 2007:154).

The people were completely ignorant as to why these strangers, the missionaries, were giving such an offensive response to their cultural values of care and generosity. It is very offensive in the island culture if someone gives a gift and that gift is withdrawn in the presence of the people. The islanders were treated as rude and lacking manners and their culture was treated as contemptible.

4.3.1. Western dominant culture

The islanders lived in their home country before the arrival of the first missionaries with their well-defined culture of reciprocity, caring, respect and hospitality (Tenten, 1999:24). This culture was pushed aside once the first missionaries arrived because it did not appear to them to be compatible with their European culture. The Samoan missionaries through the LMS in Kiribati were very powerful and influential, as agents of a European culture that could be seen and still exists in the life of the church and island’s theological institutions today (Uriam, 1999:13).

Ernst states that, “Christianity in particular has been the single most powerful globalising force throughout the Pacific Islands” (Ernst, 2012:32). Through the

influence of the church, the traditional *maneaba* system has led to the pastors taking over the role of the *Unimane* with their position of respect. Pastors are now called *Unimane* (lit: “an elder”) and *Unaine* (lit: “a female elder”). These attributed names are expressions that denote pastors have assumed a position in the village identical to that of the traditional *Unimane*. In addition, church leaders also enjoy a status of high authority so that ordinary people are required to always agree and obey (Macdonald, 2001:173).

An expectation of implicit obedience has led to an abuse of power in some places, where corruption and the misuse of power is beginning to take place in the church. Kaunda and Hewitt (2015:12-13) acknowledge that today things have changed and that a new language has emerged in the concept of missio-formation. However, the modern concept of “missionary” is often aligned to the Eurocentric, “one style fits all” style of the old-world order that was Eurocentric and hegemonic in nature.

Uriam (1999) further argues that the strong leadership and mission of Christianity in the Pacific was successful, not only because the indigenous were kept in a place to be controlled, but because the Christian message was wrapped in a fearful message of curse and blessings, heaven and hell, to imprison the people to rely on the missionaries for their life rather than God. Because people are brought up in this pattern of leadership, then those who take roles of leadership follow the same pattern to control the people. Accordingly, Uriam can state:

Christian morality and laws (many of them adopted by governments) helped a lot in maintaining order and peace in the Islands but were not always enough, and the Christian leaders were sometimes forced to gamble on the terrors of the fires of hell, excommunication, and the curse of the church that invokes the wrath of God to maintain order and peace (1999:110).

In such a context, people were influenced by a culture that was dictating and exerted power over their lives, where the people found themselves compelled to listen and follow what they were told.

4.3.2. Impacts of Western culture on cultural values

In Kiribati, the culture of giving and serving the anointed or ordained pastors has a strong influence over the lives of the people and this has become part of the culture and outworking of faith. Such a culture is rooted in the theology of the first missionaries as a sacrificial giving that has influenced and misled the people, leading them to offer high respect to pastors and regard them as sources of blessings (Uriam, 1999:110; Vaii, 2006:112).

For Vaii, the Western legacy is rooted in a theology that to live by faith is to live in total obedience as a Christian. This theology has been misinterpreted and now carries a dreadful message that any disobedience of humanity can result in the wrath of God. In addition, such wrath is subject to change only by humanity becoming obedient. As Vaii can state:

This view entails a strong sense of supernaturalism in which injuries, sickness and death are treated as divine judicial ultimate regarding a lack of obedience (2006:107).

This theology upholds the understanding that the more one gives, the more favour one will receive from God. It becomes part of people's faith, "whereby God's response is determined by the activity of the people." In other words, "Christian service is seen as an obligation and duty to be fulfilled rather than a work of faith" (Vaii, 2006:112). These foreign conceptions and ideas are part of the influence of Western colonisation in which the first missionaries acted as agents of a Western ideology, which emphasised the need to control the people to always give their ascent without resistance (Hauofa, 2008:4).

Havea states that it is a "dominant non-island culture" where the culture of the people was discarded as well as their integrity and dignity (2010:350). Its lasting impact subverts the people's self-image, "and on their ability to act with relative autonomy in their endeavour to survive reasonably well within an international system in which they have found themselves" (Hauofa, 2008:4). Havea gives an example in the context of climate change where, "some people take advantage...to prescribe what other people's perspectives and attitudes toward aspects of the environment should be" (2010:352). Havea (2010:352) further reveals:

There have been instances where, for instance, someone who lives in Canberra (as at the 2009 Copenhagen meeting), or in other capital cities, speaks on behalf of the plight of Tuvalu and Kiribati, Maldives and Marshalls, and beyond, when the voices of representation are controlled and censored, coerced and robbed, I am obliged to question whose interests are served in the talk about climate change.

In this, Havea (2010:352) stands against the language used by the dominant nation that leads the people to, “seeing and fearing the ocean as enemy rather than as context, home and who we are.” The effect of such ideological benefit embeds the fear of rising sea levels contrasting the connection of the Pacific islanders with their ocean, their home, their refuge) and their *taari* (lit: “brother”).

Seong-Won visualises human beings as “part of a larger web of life.” As he further states:

The post-1492 European missionary enterprise had an imperial theology which included human domination over creation, Christian domination/conversion/destruction of all non-Christian peoples, and a focus on an afterlife of hell or heaven rather than on justice and peace for the current lives of all earth’s beings, including humans (Seong-Won, 2016:151).

Before the arrival of Christianity, people in the Pacific lived at ease with their land and ocean as part of their ordinary lives. As their home and refuge, the land and ocean are interconnected and sacred, with the entire community being responsible for their *tapu*. *Tapu* has a more spiritual connotation, signifying a connectedness of the community with their environment that can be classified as eco-relationality. Divinity is present in land and ocean and people live in respect of this divinity. Survival in terms of life-space requires each member of the community to be connected with her/his environment and to observe *tapu* (Havea, 2010:347, 349). However, the harsh condemnation of the Pacific people and their cultures, “as savage, lascivious and barbaric” by Christian missionaries has impacts on “people’s views of their histories and traditions” (Hauofa, 2008:3).

The Pacific people need urgently to become aware that the dominant Western thinking they have adopted has contributed to the current climate change and especially with the misperceptions and social-political problems that people are facing today. The effect of

the dominant Western culture runs through the veins and lives of the Kiribati people who are taking leadership roles in the church, government and society of today (PCC Report, 2007:154). Havea demonstrates this Western influence as rooted within the language of the first missionaries who planted the Christian message in a Western pot-plant and “nurtured under European conditions” (1988/1989:297). This approach was destructive in nature because it led to local pastors and church leaders inadvertently becoming agents of the colonial system and thereby turning out to be enemies of their own people and their own culture. Accordingly, as Havea can state:

The fish of the sea and the trees of our islands have a great deal to teach us. Our cultures and history, together with the Bible, are the measuring rods (1988/1989:297).

All these were destroyed as being akin to paganism. For Wright (2016:255), the Creator gave to the indigenous people the responsibility to be guardians and caretakers of the created order, with an obligation to maintain and care for it. In this, each nation has been given a way of life which has been abused by people living without regard for the welfare of the earth or the future of humankind.

With respect to this perspective, Christianity should approach the people with a guiding spirit and not with a destructive force against the culture and ways of life of the indigenous. For Havea, Christianity in the Pacific is a religion that still exists as a foreign religion, “not really taken root in the country” (1988/1989:296). This is the result of Christian misunderstanding, where the KUC in its mission was never monolithic, but dynamic and adaptive to dynamic periods and cultural contexts. Bird (2008) makes the point that because capitalism is being promoted at the expense of ecological safety, the concept of *oikos* as home has now become a theological issue, because climate change is probably the greatest threat to the *oikos* of the Pacific people today.

People understand themselves, and act accordingly. As part and parcel of our environment, “the fish of the sea and the trees of our islands have a great deal to teach us. Our cultures and history, together with the Bible, are the measuring rods” (Havea, 2010:297). The power of this Western influence was so strong that most of the indigenous cultural values were wiped out, especially cultural values that closely

connected the indigenous with their “environment and kin-relations intertwined in the cosmologies of Oceania, which tenderly hold geography (earth-oriented) and oceanography together” (2010:347). Havea therefore suggests that, “the flower of Christianity must be removed and planted in the local soil,” because people in the islands have a strong connection with the rest of nature and “people’s thoughts and actions are conditioned by what happens around them, both on land and in the ocean, which are influenced by the cycles of the moon” (2010:347).

4.3.3. Western legacy impacts on the people’s mentality

At the 2007 PCC General Assembly it was argued that the administration of the colony in the Pacific destroyed, “traditional political structures by the introduction of a way of life that crowns individualism and which is safeguarded by such principles like democracies, equality of all and freedom of all.” When colonialism was ended, the legacy continued to exist and was inherited, “in a way which mixes tradition and modernism” through those who stepped in to take a place of leadership role (PCC Report, 2007:152). The God of this foreign dictator is still existing as a legacy that hinders the KUC to move beyond its border to bring life in the context of climate change where life is currently destroyed. In today’s conversation on the issues of climate change, the question is why the KUC remains silent in addressing this key issue that is affecting the lives of the people of the region. The power of Western culture is holding the people to strictly observe what they have been given without caring for what is happening in the current situation of the people (PCC Report, 2007:154).

In the belief and understanding of the people, a pastor being ordained is considered a holy woman or man of God. In Kiribati, an ordained minister is called Minitan Kiribati (MK), a title that is very highly respected because it identifies the character of one who represents the most Holy God (Uriam, 1999:110; Vaii, 2006:112). One who has the title of MK always deserves respect and according to the people’s understanding, in her/him resides both the power to bless or curse. Hence, whatever, the MK says, the people must obey. According to Hauofa, the dominant power of the “aristocratic cultures” in the Pacific has kept, “the ordinary folk in the dark and calling them ignorant made it easier to control and subordinate them” (2008:4). This form of belief was, “structured around the understanding of the God of the colonisers” (Vaii, 2006:66) where some

experienced, “tighter control over them by their colonisers” (Uriam, 1999:142). Lenkabula regards this as part of the global capitalist project that changes places with humans being that to be human, “it has become the creator of human beings who created it. It usurps the sovereignty of God [by] claiming a freedom that belongs to God” (2009:56).

Vaii views this legacy as the means to keep people under control and to be willing to sacrifice their lives to receive blessings from God. It also influences the people who see pastors as sources of blessing, whereby the more that is given to them, the more blessings and favours a person will receive from God. Therefore, one who gives more to the church, “anticipates a return of power and position in the church. When one gives more and does more work, one can assume the right to do more talking and make most decisions” (2006:113). The Western culture of money and wealth has caused much havoc and mayhem among the indigenous people. As Uriam (1999:35) has stated:

Money and wealth could get one almost anything—respect, privilege, and even power in the community. A wise person was one who invested his time and energy not in the activities of the church but in activities that bring home a lot of money. But although money and wealth were beginning to occupy the central place in the life of many Islanders, many people still believed that if they continue to be faithful to the church, give their time and energy to church activities and functions, even give the meagre 'wealth' that they have to the church or to the minister, God would reward their faithfulness and “good works.”

This becomes an article of faith that leads people to believe that serving and giving to pastors will bring blessings from God, and opposition can bring *te kamaraiā*—a curse from God. With this mentality, the privileged pastors and those taking leadership roles are easily tempted into corruption and the misuse of power.

This theology has caused people to be dependent and under the control of pastors and leaders who are regarded as sources of divine blessings and curses. This theology points to the focus of the people, which is that their lives can be blessed in this world and later in the heavenly realm (Tenten, 1999). Uriam insists that the most “notable result of these developments was the demarcation or redefinition of the clergy’s areas of influence” (1999:14). Therefore, the people’s belief could be perceived as being focussed more on the pastor than on God, because a pastor is regarded “as a religious

and a man of God, his authority was acceptable and justified only when he spoke on moral and religious matters and about God” (1999:14). The impact of this theological perspective can lead people to place heavy regard on what a pastor says or demands and at the same time allows pastors to take advantage of, and misuse, their calling as servants of God. The theology of the first missionaries and their culture can thus be regarded as a top-down approach which creates a gap between the people and the church leaders.

Longchar (2010:413) reminds the church that theology should not only be the work of experts or those theologically trained, but also of the whole people of God. The clergy must move away from the Western model that is no longer effective to address the current circumstances the people are facing. In his comment, Wati Longchar says of the theological education that pursues a “professional clerical paradigm” will create a “hierarchical distinction between ordained clergy and laity in the church and gives a notion that Christian ministry strictly belongs to the ordained clergy, but not to the whole people of God” (2010:43).

The KUC needs to understand that this is the result of the past legacy that needs to be revisited in order for the church to be more responsive to the needs of the people on the ground and of the current situations that bring about much human suffering. This is the role that needs to be effective to meet the cry and suffering of the people in the context of climate change. Most Kiribati people want the church to be more responsive and proactive to address the effects of climate change, environmental degradation and impact, and to mitigate the situation.¹⁷

The ACCRA Confession highlights the past failure of the church in remaining silent in its prophetic role to address the issue of injustice and discrimination in the lives of the vulnerable. This confession was formed to retrieve the life and commitment of the church to counter injustice that has caused the suffering of God’s people as well as the oppression of God’s creation. The theme “Choose life, Act hope” was a challenge to

¹⁷ See Appendix E.

African States to take up actions on its own soil to expose injustice, “building more just communities as an expression of faith in God” (LenkaBula, 2009:6).

4.3.4. Impacts on the form of worship

The mind-set of the people perceives the first missionary’s institution of the Christian faith as a holy entity that cannot be altered. This observation has caused the KUC to improve the form of worship and liturgy beyond that provided by the first missionaries which was regarded as the only appropriate form of worship to follow. Nevertheless, North American hymns translated into the local language are still in use today, even though there are professional local composers who can produce spiritual songs and hymns (Uriam, 1999:131). Hence, while there is need for a new liturgy to reflect the culture and way of living of the new generation, conservative Christians who are mostly *Unimane*, still hold the church to traditional forms of liturgy and worship which they consider to be the most holy way of worship. As Uriam can note, Protestants in Kiribati are still, “prisoners of the puritanical legacy of the missionary era, something that would remain in their liturgy forever as major changes in their form or style of worship would only be taken as experiments in expression” (1999:130).

Understanding that the liturgy and hymnology of a previous generation does not accommodate the interest of the new generation of Christians, Ernst puts forward several suggestions that can challenge the mainline churches to act decisively and immediately to improve the situation. For Ernst, a clear sign of decline is when the church cannot make changes within its own boundaries and move, “beyond the reef instead of repeating hymns and liturgy introduced by the missionaries two-hundred years ago.” To meet the manifold challenges, Protestant mainline churches need to be prepared for their society to encounter the “danger of becoming a static force in a very dynamic social, political and economic environment” (2012:41). As Conner (2016:251) states, in order to be a true “Christian witness,” the church needs to “prepare Christians to be responsible and ethical in their various callings and thereby to be faithful witnesses. Christians must be trained so they can ‘see the meaning of faith for social problems.

4.4. Tangintebu Theological College

The theological college in Kiribati was first established in 1900 at Rongorongo in Beru by the LMS under the leadership of George H. Eastman. In order for everything to be centralised and more accessible to the people, the college was transferred from Rongorongo in Beru to Tangintebu on the main island of South Tarawa in 1960. In 1961, the LMS missionary, Rev. Emlyn Jones was the first principal at Tangintebu supported by Amara Makaea who took over as the first I-Kiribati principal in 1967 (Tangintebu Handbook, 2016). The Tangintebu Theological College (TTC) was opened with only six single male students in attendance because there was no accommodation for married students, but was soon increased as more students were added in subsequent years. In 1976, Tangintebu began for the first time recruit and train women for the same purpose. In 1979, married quarters for students were completed through the support of local churches, thereby allowing married couples to attend.

In the period 1961-1981, the TTC awarded a Certificate in Theological Studies. In 1982, more graduate lecturers from the Pacific upgraded the TTC to offer a Diploma in Theology. From the 1980's, other neighbouring islands in the Micronesian region, including Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Nauru and the Federated States of Micronesia were attracted by the development of the TTC and thus began to one or two ministerial students to be trained at the TTC from their countries each year. In 2005, two PhD lecturers taught at the TTC, thereby qualifying the TTC with a higher standard to offer the Bachelor of Divinity (BD) degree. Unfortunately, the TTC offered the BD degree for only six years in 2005 to 2010 respectively, and reverted the following years to a Diploma in Theology, when the two lecturers with PhDs left the college to work elsewhere. In addition, library resources decreased and failed to meet the requirements of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) to offer BD degree programmes (TTC Handbook 2016). The TTC is a member school of SPATS. This means that the college strives to meet the accreditation requirements of the SPATS.¹⁸ The requirements are twofold:

¹⁸ The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) is a product of the ecumenical movement advocacy—an independent non-profit interdenominational (ecumenical) organisation,

- i. To be a transformative witness that upholds the revelation of the Triune God in word and action;
- ii. To strengthen the mission that upholds the Great Commandment that we love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and our neighbour as ourselves (SPATS, 2016).

Today, the TTC is now administered by lecturers with Masters and BD degrees and only offers a Diploma in Theology as its highest qualification.

4.4.1. Theological curriculum, purpose and aim

It is essential to examine how the theological college, which is a strong missional platform for equipping ministers, offer its curriculum for ministerial formation students at the KUC. Its purpose and objective is to equip future ministers and church leaders to become more competent biblically, theologically, historically and pastorally in their ministry as pastors (TTC Handbook, 2016). As the TTC curriculum does not address issues in the current contexts of the people, this seemingly maintenance approach to ministry invites questions about the theological curriculum of the college and the extent to which it equips the students to respond to ecological issues that affect not only the environment, but the livelihood and future of the people. According to the TTC Handbook (2006), the students are offered the following curriculum.

responsible for improving the quality and effectiveness of the 23 colleges and college universities across the region.

1.	Courses for First Year Students	
1.1.	Biblical Studies	Introduction to the Bible
1.2.	Theology	Theology of Christianity
1.3.	Pastoral Ministry	Homiletic and Christian worship
1.4.	Church History	Expansion of Christianity
2.	Courses for Second Year Students	
2.1.	Biblical Studies	Old Testament Pentateuch
2.2.	Biblical Studies	New Testament: Synoptic Gospels
2.3.	Theology	The Doctrine of the Church
2.4.	Ministry	Evangelism and Church Growth
2.5.	Church History	Medieval Period
3.	Courses for Third Year Students	
3.1.	Biblical Studies	Old Testament: History of Deuteronomy
3.2.	Biblical Studies	Exploring Paul's Letters
3.3.	Theology	Christian Ethics
3.4.	Ministry	Pastoral Counselling

Table 4.1. Courses offered at the Tangintebu Theological College

According to the course description provided in the TTC Handbook (2016), biblical studies offered an introduction to the Bible, its nature, origin and overall structure as well as the development of the biblical canon. This course had the aim of equipping the TTC students with biblical knowledge of how to communicate its message in relation to how people can understand their faith in God. The TTC also offered a course on the Pentateuch to introduce students to the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). There was also a course on the Four Gospels to familiarise students with their content and witness to Jesus Christ. The course on Christian Theology aimed to help students to understand what and who God is to bring together in a coherent manner the great truths about God's historical, redemptive acts, completed in and through the Holy Trinity. A course in Christian ethics served to equip students with behaviour and conduct based on a biblical point of view. In regard to Christian ministry, the TTC offered courses which focused

on homiletics and Christian worship. This latter course explored the traditions and theology of Christian worship to equip student to respond to the issues that can affect worship within the contemporary context. The course on “Evangelism and Church Growth” was aimed at equipping students with various models of evangelism to meet the requirement of the church to be effective evangelists for the development and expansion of the church. The course on Church history dealt with the beginning of Christianity, the expansion of Christianity and the history of the first missionaries in the Pacific, with particular attention to Kiribati. This course aimed to equip students to understand the spread of Christianity in the apostolic age and how it reached the Pacific island nation of Kiribati. It also helped students strengthen their mission work through their study of the strengths of the first missionaries.

The above courses which are still on offer at the TTC are clearly a continuation of a Western classical curriculum categorised in four departments—Theology, Biblical Studies, Christian Ministry and History. These courses serve to equip pastors to become biblically, theologically, historically and pastorally competent in the diverse skills necessary for Christian ministry. As can clearly be seen however, the TTC does not offer eco-theology and this is why many graduates of the TTC going into the Christian ministry never appear to be concerned about ecological issues as part of Christian mission and ministry. Yet, coconut theology can serve to interrogate this curriculum as to whether the existing Western classical curriculum is life-giving to the context in which people are living?

4.4.2. Theological education and climate change

Because of humankind’s failure to fulfil the purpose of God to serve, nurture and care for the land as suggested in Gen 2:15, Conradie (2016:108) challenges Christians to acknowledge their sense of guilt for ecological damage and to admit it as ecological sin. Countering theological education without ecology and eco-missional concern, Conradie (2009:43) recommended a vision of justice and human equality (moral formation) to be embedded in a wider perspective that is necessary to converse with and facilitate life-giving theological education. He pointed out that theological education must focus more on a theology of creation rather than on themes such as sin and redemption (2009:42). The TTC has existed as a Euro-centric institution—a college

without missiological imperative, which has created a gap between pastors and the people, their qualifications as trained pastors being created from a top-down approach. Maeland (2016:559), in citing Hewitt's criticism of seminary and university theological education, argues that it has become clergy-centred rather than laity-centred. By so doing, it has thus become separated from the church's overall missional task. Maeland (2016:559) goes on to argue that the church must become concerned with humanity and with religiously pluralistic societies, rather than saving individual souls.

For Steve de Gruchy (2010:42), the first praxis is "an orientation toward the world" that points to God who is at work in the world "(rather than just the church)." It is not the purpose of the church to be dominant in the curriculum, but the dominant factor should be that the purpose of God is alive in the world and followed by the curriculum. Furthermore, the church does not exist on its own, but exists to follow and respond to the *missio Dei* (de Gruchy, 2010:42). This is reflected in the weakness of the KUC through its theological college that aims to produce ministers who are only capable of taking a narrow view of Christianity, in which maintaining their numbers and if possible expanding their membership by attracting members from other Christian churches is the aim of their ministry.

Coconut theology as eco-missional informs the church to equip pastors as being physically and spiritually oriented. As noted by Uriam (1999) the theological college of the KUC had taught pastors well, but they have taught them narrowly. This means that students are taught biblically with little to no concern for people in their contemporary situations and contexts. The direct fallout "from this important function" of the church, theological colleges and seminaries was expected to produce "great evangelists," disputants, and apologists to expand and defend their particular brand of Christianity' (Uriam, 1999:65).

As discussed above, the TTC curriculum represents a continuation of the Western classical curriculum that fails to respond to the current situation of the people. Therefore, utilisation of the 'why' and 'what' questions raised by Jones (2014:33), could further deepen discussion on the development of a more fruitful and meaningful approach towards theological education. This is a challenge to the TTC to make sure that the content and process of the curriculum for missional formation students responds

to and is guided by missiological imperatives. In its curriculum, the TTC is challenged to teach because God is at work in the world. Hence, there is no point in studying the theological curriculum without the “missiological imperatives” because it will “guide the both the content and process of such education” (de Gruchy, 2010:42).

Coconut tree theology points to God who was and is still working among the people, providing for them and protecting them. A theological curriculum that is offered without this missiological imperative will thus lose touch with the world where God continues to work. Jones (2014:33) also argues that the present generation with their modern way of living has ignored and lost “the best wisdom of the past” and the only place to retrieve past wisdom for effective change in theological education is that it should be rooted in indigenous innovation. For Jones this, “is a biblical way of thinking, it is a way of thinking desperately needed in theological education today” (2014:33). This will cause a problem in the mission of the church if theological students do not understand effectively the meaning of being a Christian and being church. Accordingly, de Gruchy (2010:42) argues that the church will fail in its mission if it is not missionary in its character, and theology without a missionary character will be a dying theology.

Christian traditions of learning theology and practicing Christian life and ministry are the basis of why Christian education matters, if it is to address the urgent challenge of the current context. The failure to develop an orienting purpose for the TTC could end up creating a crisis of people and a church that questions what is wrong, but does not know where to turn (Jones, 2014:34). Hence, the Kiribati people are still holding on to Noah’s covenant that a flood will never again destroy their earth.

Accordingly, Robert Doornenbal insists that from time to time in missional communities, Christians are anticipated to address the following question: “How can we remain oriented to God’s mission in this time and context?” From this base, he presents his argument—that churches are facing an “adaptive challenge” and must move forward to meet it (2012:207). He is basically arguing what has been said many times before in the history of Christianity—times are changing, and the old must move to meet the new, or the institutions clinging to the ‘old’ will be left behind, and more importantly, will lose their followers. It means that if a theological college remains silent, then it will be left behind and the people will encounter their situation without

knowing where to go and what to do. While acknowledging this requires institutional change at all levels, Doornenbal's main concern in this argument is about the importance of training leaders to face the challenges that lie ahead for them, and that training a person to become a minister does not necessarily equip them to be leaders in the twenty-first century missional church (2012:207).

This present study therefore makes an urgent call to the churches to equip their pastors with an eco-theology that fully comprehends the link between God, the environment and the people, and that calls upon, "the PCC [Pacific Conference of Churches] to produce, provide, and share theological resources that focus on prayer and reflection related to climate change through consultations and workshops" (Rubow and Bird 2016:7). Palu (2018) also maintains that, "in the beginning was relationship" all of life was an "assemblage of relationality" after the image of the relational God "through Christ who wills for us to be relationally distinct and distinctly relational." He goes on to argue that "man [*sic*] is part of nature/the world and not its master" which is being so strongly argued these days. Therefore the "eco-relationality" is to be engaged in the all forms of life, in the home, in the community and in public places. Theological colleges must also be eco-relational in their curriculum to indicate that humanity and nature are related and not separate.

De Gruchy (2010:42) demonstrates the point that a church and its theology that is not missionary oriented does exist, but will only be effective to its own agenda but not the agenda of the missionary God. The practice of mission is therefore fundamental to what it means to be Christian and to be church. According to de Gruchy (2010:42), "we are in need of a missiological agenda for theology rather than just a theological agenda for mission."

This means that humankind needs an agenda of mission that is developed in the context where life is being threatened because mission will not be meaningful if it fails to address the context and situation where people are living to form a theology, but not a curriculum. Scaer (1999:273) attacks both ideas. For Scaer, dividing each subject can result in taking us away from the essentials and deciding on a curriculum based on people's needs also take them away from God (1999:273). Essentially, theological

education is not effective for the mission of the church if its curriculum is not engaged with missiological practice.

But how can this perspective be adopted as part of mission and ecumenical fellowship if the theological curriculum that equips pastors neglects what is taking place in the world where people are living? For de Gruchy (2010:42), the practice of mission will only be effective and meaningful if people or specifically, theological students, know the meaning of being a Christian and being church. As the TTC does not offer missiology and ecology in its curriculum, it therefore lacks an important part of its mission which is to be missiologically-oriented so as to be more aligned with the purpose of the *missio Dei*. However, we can argue that in order to make a qualitative missional difference in our contemporary world, such engagement must transcend structures or systems that are limited to facilitating fullness of life, especially for those who live on the margins of life (Hewitt, 2009:3; Bevans, 2016:212).

Without a missiological imperative there is always a gap between pastors and the people—their qualifications as trained pastors having been created through a top-down approach. Hewitt criticises seminary and university theological education, arguing it is clergy-centred rather than laity-centred and has become separated from the church’s missional tasks. He argues that the church must become concerned with humanity and with religiously pluralistic societies rather than saving individual souls. In this, Maeland concurs:

The church must recruit, train and form persons who are willing to operate without the “comfort zone” of majority churches, and to earn respect through sacrificial service (2016:559).

4.5. From a rural to an urban approach

The transfer of the theological college from rural area to the urban environment meant a dramatic change in the lifestyle of the TTC students. From a rural, traditional lifestyle, they had to change to an urban environment in which “money and wealth had become important and were usually the determining factor in the life and relationship of many

people” (Uriam, 1999:66). Since the time of the move, the TTC appears to have gradually caught up with the modern Christian mentality that the strength of the church was the theology that it offered within its institution. According to Uriam, a former principal of the TTC, it was, and still is, imperative that the church frees itself from the bonds of this mentality and the theological positions that have sustained and idolised it. Instead, the TTC is faced with the changing context in which it operates. Accordingly, the church and the college must risk moving forward and accept a lifestyle that can address the new Pacific context (1999:66). The question therefore concerns whether the TTC has managed to practice coconut tree imagination suited for the I-Kiribati lifestyle even in the new environment and context-shaped world in which people live today.

In briefly reviewing the courses offered at the TTC, two important subjects are clearly missing that connect to the issues involving the present life of the people—missiological and ecological. The classic Western theological curriculum taught at the TTC is producing ministers of the Word, but not of the people, because missiology that “should provide the orientation for all other subjects” is being neglected (de Gruchy, 2010:42).

According to Havilah Dharamraj (2014), classroom teaching is not enough. Instead, teaching must encompass the “real world”—the world the students will encounter when they are teaching and preaching in their parishes. As Dharamraj contends:

Our course outlines are the manifesto of what we think is critical to the Christian faith, and its practice and ministry. So, if we want engaged pedagogies, it helps to consider what we don’t use when we teach. Or even, what we don’t offer on our course listing (2014:355).

Dharamraj thus argues that what is being taught should be brought into the real world, not just leaving it in the classroom to be totally biblical or theological.

Coconut theology challenges the church to bring life-giving hope to people who live in the hopelessness of their situation. Carroll (2010:28) speaks about the cultural value of weaving and the importance of the pattern and the equal importance of the care required when changing the pattern—ensuring the change was smooth and not obvious with joins and lumps. She goes on to mention how her mother would not let her move on with weaving a pattern until any mistakes had been unravelled and put right. All of this

resonates with me—our pastors must be able to weave words, just as island women weave materials into a mat. Our pastors must be able to smooth away misunderstandings (“joins and lumps”) and make sure people understand what is happening, where they are going, how they are going forward, and most importantly, where God is in all of this. Just as the women weave a mat, our pastors must be able to weave a cloak of understanding, of assurance, of faith, among people who at this point are deeply frightened of what the future may hold for them and their children, or if there is indeed any future for them!

Without a distinct missiological orientation, the TTC is run without a strong theological foundation to provide relevant teaching for pastoral ministry. Practically, its curriculum is going in one direction when people are going in another. This can be seen in the context of Kiribati, where people are suffering the impact of climate change and the church is preaching a different theme. In examining the reasons why the church has no concern for the critical issue of climate change that is affecting the life of the people, this present study points to the place where pastors are equipped for pastoral ministry. It indicates the fact that the TTC has nothing to do with missiological and ecological issues.

Dharamraj (2014:360) states that, “we reap what we sow” in “the spirit of the place.” In other words, in the institution where the students are trained. Accordingly, the training offered by the TTC must be recalibrated to match the ecology in which its graduates will be living when in their parishes. He warns that our institutions are like a deciduous tree—powered down to survive cold blasts from the real world outside their gates. Hence:

Engagement with the world is too much of a risk, and even if not so, far too much trouble. We are a tree that survives and that’s what matters; never mind if we are not a tree of life (Dharamraj, 2014:360).

Scaer 1999:270-271) appears to be arguing that theology, instead of being about God and Christ, has become a purely academic subject in many universities, included in the social sciences department (1999:279). Curriculum is a theological and not really an educational task. Education degrees may produce administrators, but they do not

guarantee the quality of teaching or provide the unifying structure that the teaching of theology requires if it is to be a churchly discipline.

Another weakness of the TTC is that it relies too much on academic studies by ignoring traditional skills in which the previous theological education encouraged students. In villages where there are very few church members, the pastor was expected to be active to maintain their traditional local homes, churches and *maneaba* (lit: “halls”). But how can a pastor motivate the people to do the work when s/he is also unskilled in such practical work? The value attributed to traditional skills is also lacking in the TTC and thus reflected in the ministry of pastors who always rely on their church members to do the work.

According to Aiki (12 August 2016), theological education that ignores cultural values, traditional skills, and the traditional way of life of the people produces pastors for the pulpit but not for the people. This means that preaching is meaningless if it produces pastors that function solely as specialists called to the proclamation of the Word of God, but have no practical engagement in missional transformative work. The lack of concern for traditional knowledge in the TTC produces pastors that are foreigners to the people, culture, the land and ocean—pastors who do not know how to fish, till the land, or do manual work on their homes and buildings (Aiki, 12 August 2016). This is obvious in small villages where pastors have no-one to rely on, but must do the work themselves. Uriam voices the growing concern that ministerial candidates graduating from the TTC are incapable of satisfactorily addressing many of the urgent challenges affecting the islands. Indeed, it has become clear that many people, including several church leaders, continue to think that the theological college, despite its transfer to the main island, seems to be irrelevant and out of touch with real life issues that concern the rapidly changing realities within the islands (Uriam, 1999:59).

Comments from the research participants highlighted the obvious differences between the life-context of the Rongorongo Theological College that was rooted in the traditional village, and that of the Tangintebu Theological College that is rooted in an urban environment which articulates an academic interest. Academic theological training has produced a big gap between new pastors and their people. Their qualifications have not taught pastors how to live with people, with the land and the

ocean. The difference that can be seen is that older pastors that graduated from the Rongorongo Theological College were well-equipped in all aspects, beginning with their spirituality, traditional skills, and their commitment in pastoral work. For Uriam (1999:59), the TTC set in the urban area cannot produce the quality of traditional life in the land that is both rural and modernised. As Uriam can state:

Today, one of the things that really distinguish the old ministers from the new is their industriousness; and many of the old ministers usually boast that they, during their ministry, would have built more houses or buildings and planted more gardens than the “idle” young ministers. And for many of the old ministers who have retired they always look at the churches or the schools they had built, as well as the huge plantations they had started in several of the places where they had worked as some of the highlights of their ministry (1999:55).

According to Uriam (1999:63), “these ministers were experts in religion and in the affairs of their own church interest.” In other words, they are very “religious” and ecclesiastical relevant to their own faith and congregations, but irrelevant in the sense that their mission was not extended to others. Pastors are closer to those who have committed themselves to the mission of the church, but not to those who are inactive in the church. Unfortunately, their mission is more directed towards the interests of the rich and affluent who give more to the church, than towards the poor who give less (Vaii, 2006:266). This is evidenced that through the structures, teachings, authority and growth of theological colleges in the Pacific, where the main priority is to produce “religious” people, whose principle concern is that things related to their own religious communities and the life of their own churches are what matter most. What is outside of these matters is neglected (Uriam, 1999: 63).

Theological colleges have been controlled and haunted by the “Christendom vision and mentality, a legacy of missionisation, which was very exclusive and self-centred, authoritarian and definitive, apologetic, local and sectarian, and dogmatic and hierarchical” procedure of thinking and acting (Uriam, 1999:63). Most of the people have failed to realise that these approaches are no longer relevant in today’s world, but are, “simply acceptable only to those that agreed with them” (Uriam, 1999:63). The church today utilises the institution of the theological college by producing church ministers, but they have failed to realise that these ministers are simply ‘acceptable’

only to those who agree with them, but are no longer relevant to society outside of the narrow confines of the church. In the questionnaire, 94 percent of the respondents noted that the church through the TTC has failed in its role to include ecological issues in its curriculum. The consequence of this was seen in the failure of pastors to preach relevant messages to people in their difficult current contexts.

Concerning the question of the content of the TTC curriculum, the argument is the same. If the church fails in its mission to see its significant relationship with the people, then how can the church go beyond its mission to move away from its narrow view of the church and its theology, to a theology which embraces the changing contexts of the world, such as climate change and rising sea levels? Until it does so, how can it embrace a relationship respectful to “creation” or “Mother Earth?” (Rubow and Bird, 2016:2). One of the reasons we disagree with climate change is because we believe different things about our duty, “to others, to Nature and to our deities” (Rubow and Bird, 2016:2). However, the church has an obligation towards its members to support them in these life-changing issues, and not simply push ahead with its narrow view of its responsibilities.¹⁹

The mission of the first missionaries centred on the church’s agenda, which has been carried on by the church to the present day, has an impact on its current mission because people and their importance can easily be neglected, especially the wisdom and values of their cultures. Kaunda (2017:37) clearly feels very strongly about the power of the West dominating the marginalised, who are regarded as weak and easily manipulated:

A capitalist research approach seeks to separate knowledge and intellectual elements from the local people and incorporate them in the means and methods of control to increase Western hegemony, thereby

¹⁹ Rubow and Bird (2016) explore eco-theological responses to climate change in Oceania: First, they review central texts in the contextual theological tradition in Oceania, focusing on recent responses to climate change. This points to a body of theological texts integrating climate change into a broader effort to reform classical theologies and church practices. Second, they identify challenges facing contextual theologies, among them recent claims about climate-change-denying responses by Christians in the Pacific region, and that recent eco-theology appears to remain within the confines of a liberal academic theology. Third, they suggest that seeing climate change as an inextricably intertwined phenomenon in terms of both place (in transcending a distinction between nature and culture), and time (in transcending a linear conception of the past, present and future) makes the churches potentially important actors in the cultural modelling of climate change.

reinforcing an ever-widening chasm of inequalities and knowledge injustice (2017:37).

For Kaunda (2017:37) capitalism is a “vampire research approach feeding on the ever-changing landscape of knowledge production, science, and technology.” He goes on to refer to capitalism as a “vampire worldview” that exploits the marginalised and delivers more and more power into the hands of the Western researchers:

We live in a world where everything is commercialised, from human trafficking to traditional knowledge (2017:37).

Consequently, the church needs to stay away from Western hegemony to effectively incorporate local people as part of its missional development. This is what it is failing to do, both in the practice of its pastors in the villages, and in the TTC curriculum. As shown by the contribution of the respondents, 88 percent of the research respondents claim that the church has a role to play in issues of climate change and environment management.²⁰ This indicates the silent and inactive image of the mission of the KUC that needs to be considered and revisited.

4.6. Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the background of the KUC and how the first missionaries had worked among the indigenous inhabitants of the Pacific islands. There were positive things that they brought to improve the lives of the people and there were also negative impacts of the legacy which they have left in the life and culture of the people.

This chapter focused more on analysing the negative side because of the continuing impact the legacy of the first missionaries still has on the lives of the people, church leaders and theological education. The chapter also examined these negative impacts as they were experienced through the leadership role of church leaders and in the lives of the people in the new generation of members, all of which eventually contributed to the schism in the KUC. The leadership role that neglects the people and the new generation with the new culture of individualism that has led to the rise of attacking the GA

²⁰ See Appendix E.

decision and the church officials are regarded as continuing the missionary legacy in the life of the KUC. The decision reached by the GA ably demonstrates the paternalistic tendency that has prevailed in the church leadership from the time of the first missionaries; an attitude which does not help the church sharpen its missional approach in combating the effects of climate change and global warming. This legacy also reveals how the curriculum of the TTC is predominantly pro-Western and is unwilling to embrace Kiribati cultural norms, values and practices. As discussed in the chapter, the existing teaching curriculum does not capture indigenous knowledge and concepts, yet it is the place where its ministers are trained. An important question therefore arises: To what extent can someone equipped with Euro-centric knowledge respond to issues emerging in a context where that form of knowledge has no room? Students are academically trained without the concerns of the people to whom they will minister.

In the chapter which follows, the methodology employed in this study will be discussed in depth.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PHENOMENON OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN KIRIBATI

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter argued that the KUC must overcome the legacy of missionary enterprise and rethink its missional engagement to embrace those of God's creation who are always neglected and forgotten in the mission activities.

The present chapter will discuss in depth the effect of climate change particularly on Kiribati, but also more broadly on the Pacific islands. It will begin with an overview of the global effects of climate change and its implications for all low-lying countries in general and will then discuss the 2015 Paris Agreement, its advantages and disadvantages and the reactions of Oceanic leaders—both government and church—to the threat that climate change bring to the region. The chapter will then survey Kiribati in detail, and examine how the phenomenon of climate change within Oceania more broadly affects the economy and ecology of the people, the landscape and seascape. Following on from this, attention will be drawn to issues around the impact of climate change in Kiribati, emphasising the vulnerability of the islands. The chapter concludes with the call from island leaders for world unity to tackle the problem of climate change and rising sea levels, and the preparations the Kiribati government is making for the long-term decisions that must be made. It also prefaces a cultural activity which has become popular with the Kiribati people—writing and performing a collection of songs about their plight directed at the major nations and the various meetings and conventions being held around the world.

5.2. General perspective on climate change

5.2.1. Global perspectives

To verify the reality of how climate change is affecting the world, scholars state that the climate change is making the planet hotter, and will cause factors such as rising sea level, frequent floods, droughts and storms (Laczko and Aghazarm, 2009:14; Collins

2012: 31; Storey and Hunter 2010:168). These changes will affect “the ecology of both human and non-human communities” (Deane-Drummond, 2008:5). The attendant changes in the interconnected weather elements will create wide variations in climate throughout all world regions. The increase in global warming refers to the “progressive gradual rise of the Earth’s average surface temperature that is being caused by an increase in concentrations of GHGs (mainly CO₂ and methane) in the atmosphere” (Braun, Hellwig, and Byrnes, 2007:6). Northcott and Aid (2007:29) maintain that the sea level is predicted to rise by more than 0.7mm by 2100—far greater than most conservative modelling, which, “presently, average global sea level is rising at 3.3 mm a year.” It is further argued that if the ice shelf in the “Greenland and West Antarctic” slips into the sea, sea-level will rise to around 25 metres. If this occurs, then Kiribati together with all other low-lying islands in the world will become submerged.

According to Carrington (2017), the prediction of the UK Meteorological Office on climate change impacts states that the hottest year on record was 2016, “inching ever closer to the 1.5- degree maximum agreed upon by international consensus in Paris at the end of 2015” Carrington further raises a concern for the increase in ambient temperatures that affect humankind’s cultural habitat and threatens the life of all mammals, coral reefs, flora and fauna alike. Climate change in Chile is said to be responsible for the death of some 337 whales due to the increasing heat in the ocean. The experiment of the frog being put in warm water and slowly dying is factual, providing indicators that “our habitat is about to boil.” Johnson (2016:5) expresses the concern that “worldwide 25 percent of mammals, 33 percent of reef corals, and in some cases entire animal taxa are threatened.” Laczko and Aghazarm (2009:9) point to the era of climate change as an era of enormous human mobility, estimating the “increase of 25 million to 1 billion people, to be displaced by climate change fallout over the next 40 years” while “200 million people” in African countries are expected to live with increased food and water problems (2009:9).

According to Carrington (2017), natural disasters in 2015 have swept away 5 000 homes in Chennai, India, claiming the lives of some 400 people and responsible for 60 000 Indian farmers who have committed suicide because their farms have been affected and destroyed due to climate change. Even though the problem is very disturbing, “the intensity of the heat waves can be reduced considerably if global society takes action”

(Carrington, 2017). Paul Collins (2012:31) shares the same experience with respect to the Pacific islands, where the islands have been badly eroded, and “unprecedented long and severe droughts are affecting fresh water supplies and the vegetation on which people depend for food.” This points to the fact that climate change is a global issue that affects all forms of life on this planet and thus calls upon the international community to seriously consider this global issue.

In the Pacific, visible signs of climate change are already experienced through regular and severe cyclones (Nguyen and Walsh, 2001). This leads to the fear that the island may sink, resulting in environmental refugees from the Pacific who are already migrating to other countries such as Australia and New Zealand. Accordingly, sea level rise is becoming a great threat to many of the low-lying atolls in the Pacific. As affirmed by the IPCC, low-lying and small island states are the world’s most vulnerable to the threat of this phenomenon (Le Treut et al. 2007; Collins, 2012:32). Accordingly, the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) has held a number of workshops on climate change, educating the people on how to cope with the impacts of climate change and sea level rise (PCC Workshop, 2016). Scholars such as Biribo and Woodroffe (2013), Collins (2012), as well as Donner and Webber (2013) are unanimous that Kiribati, like many other low-lying atoll islands in the Pacific, are at high risk of disappearing beneath the ocean because of global warming that is causing sea levels to rise. This is particularly so in the case of islands such as those of Kiribati which are low-lying coral atolls, seldom rising more than three metres above current sea levels (Biribo and Woodroffe, 2013; Collins, 2012; Donner and Webber, 2013; Gittins, 1999). While Fiji and Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea have mountains and hills to offer some escape options, islands such as Kiribati and Tuvalu are almost level with the sea and can offer nothing in the face of rising sea levels.

5.3. The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement follows other similar international accords aimed at establishing some control over rising earth temperatures. It is probably mainly notable for the withdrawal of the US under the direction of President Donald J. Trump, where the consensus appears to be that it considered various options, rather than coming to enforceable decisions. Judging by the degree of criticism levelled at it, it is difficult to

believe that it was an outstanding triumph. The Paris Agreement is pursuant to the “Durban Platform for Enhanced Action established by decision 1/CP.17 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its seventeenth session” (Okereke and Coventry, 2016:11). Although there were few specifics agreed to in the Paris Agreement, the accord did consider some critical matters within the framework of sustainable development (Focus, 2015:1, Okereke and Coventry, 2016:16).

5.3.1. Issues considered: Positive elements

Among the key issues considered in the Paris Agreement are the following:

- i. Countries will pursue their self-determined emissions targets from 2020 onwards. A long-term goal of keeping the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels is to be aimed at;
- ii. The national target will be reviewed and strengthened every five years to aim at limiting the increase to 1.5°C, since this would significantly reduce risks and the impacts of climate change;
- iii. Global emissions should peak “as soon as possible.” This will increase the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production;
- iv. By the second half of this century, greenhouse gas emissions should be balanced out by sinks, processes that remove them from the air. Make finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development (Paris Agreement). To undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with the best available science (Focus, 2015; Wilhite and Hansen, 2016; Okereke and Coventry, 2016);
- v. The plan, acknowledged as COP21, did succeed in one thing; it identified one major goal which could be accepted by all parties as a step in the right direction towards saving the earth from ultimate destruction. As noted in Focus, “it limits

average global warming to 2°C Celsius (3.6°F) above pre-industrial temperatures and strives for a limit of 1.5°C (2.7°F) if possible” (Focus, 2015:1).

5.3.2. Perceived weaknesses of the Paris Agreement

There has been serious criticism of the Paris Agreement covering several aspects of its decisions. These include:

- i. National pledges not sufficient;
- ii. Countries can set their own goals;
- iii. Several serious objections by the Oslo Academy of Global Governance;
- iv. No prior negotiation, leading to serious deficiencies in agreement;
- v. Disagreements based on system flaws;
- vi. Omission of agriculture;
- vii. Compensation to countries affected by rising sea levels;
- viii. Failure to provide motivation to honour the agreement;
- ix. Lack of a strong global ambition and motivation to address climate change.

It is obvious from this list that the Paris Agreement could not be considered an outstanding success. The criticisms are too numerous and too serious to be ignored, and they were made, like the criticism by the Oslo Academy of Global Governance, by organisations and commentators far too important to be disregarded.

Even though the Paris Agreement is a follow-up to overcome the division of countries that marked the Kyoto agreement, some of the leading commentators remarked, “the risk is that the Paris Agreement remains a shell without sufficient action and support. It

thus remains to be seen whether the Paris Agreement is the right framework through which to address the collective action problem of climate change” (Streck, Keenlyside, and von Unger, 2016:3). Wilhite and Hansen contributed to the general pessimism of the critics with Hansen’s comments about attitudes “veering between pessimism and cautious optimism” (2016:69-70). Nor was the Paris Agreement helped by the withdrawal of the US.

Eckersley (2015) has argued that the national pledges were in his opinion, “well short of what is required to prevent dangerous climate change.” He perceives the “good news” of the five-yearly plan of what nations have determined to contribute; however, the “bad news” was the fact there was no compulsion to evaluate their pledges before 2030. He points out this means that nations are free to increase their pledges, which could make it “harder to reduce the risks of dangerous warming.” For him, the success of the Paris Agreement will therefore turn on how quickly the parties are able to ratchet up their ambition over time (Eckersley, 2015).

An important point as argued in Focus (2015), is that the agreement set up a system in which each country set its own goal—what the agreement calls a “nationally determined contribution —and then must explain how it is planned to reach those objectives (Focus, 2015:1). In other words, each country was not committed to a specific reduction in its greenhouse gas emissions. The conclusion of Focus (2015:6) was that “the Paris Agreement remains a shell without sufficient action and support, unable to address the collective action problem of climate change.”

The Oslo Academy of Global Governance working paper workshop conducted at the University of Oslo, 15-16 February 2016, specifically to analyse the Paris Agreement, made several comments. These were as follows:

- i. The vague wording in the text allows nations room to back out anytime in the future from the agreement regarding the degrees of warming to be achieved;
- ii. The global growth economy would not necessarily parallel a decline in emissions;

- iii. The proposed 1.5°C cap might not be sufficient to avoid serious climate change rise (Wilhite and Hansen, 2016:2; Streck et al. 2016).

Several critics attacked the fact that pledges need not be increased over the next fifteen years. “A lack of mechanism for a deeper emission cuts over the next decade, no reflection on new realities, and consolidating the progress was weak” (Hamilton, 2015). To reduce the risks of dangerous warming would require much more heroic efforts in subsequent cycles and make it much harder was the opinion of several writers (Eckersley, 2015; Streck et al. 2016).

A more in-depth criticism came from Wilhite and Hansen (2016:33), who noted what they considered to be several critical general themes of the Paris Agreement and disagreement based on system flaws:

- i. Governance and accounting;
- ii. The role of emerging powers/emerging economies;
- iii. Consumption versus production and the role of civil society.

Their arguments were based on several points, including:

- i. Attempts at reduction have not worked so far because the energy saved has been switched to energy used by developing countries;
- ii. There is no firm guarantee that the planet’s biggest emitters, the US, India and China, will co-operate;
- iii. That member countries may be unwilling to reduce their emissions
- iv. The issue of global inequality, where small nations already seriously affected by climate change are dependent on the major emitters to co-operate to reduce emissions.

Wilhite and Hansen go on to point out current capitalism requires huge amounts of energy, and emerging nations in particular need energy, while possible alternative

forms of climate adaptation were ignored in the Paris Agreement. A weakness in the Agreement was its general looseness—necessary to get all the nations on board. Enforcement was not included, and the fact climate governance was a social issue rather than a separate one was ignored. Also ignored was a reporting issue, since countries used different measurements and timelines (Okereke and Coventry, 2016).

Wilhite and Hansen (2016:66-67) also drew attention to the problem of the major emitters such as India, China, the US and the EU, which caused a high proportion of emissions, but at the same time were taking concrete actions to lessen it, though not always. The authors felt the Paris Agreement at least offered a basis for discussion. They also noted the problem of consumption versus production, with emerging nations needing energy to develop their societies, while major emitters are supposed to be reducing their outputs (2016:69).

Commentators clearly considered the role that civil society in global climate governance should not be overlooked. This was because there were so many groups involved or likely to be involved, and they would not all be pro-environment, for example the green community versus China's environmental policies. Other criticisms included a comment by Wilhite and Hansen on the "huge pledge gap between what is needed and what is promised by the nations involved" (2016:69-70). Commentators also noted that agriculture was not mentioned, despite its importance, beyond saying that adaptation measures adopted by any country or countries should not affect food production. Food scarcity must be avoided. Compensation to countries which were the unwitting victims of climate change would obviously be very helpful to small nations such as Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu, but the lack of a definite commitment in the Paris Agreement suggests they would find it difficult to obtain such assistance.

Added to the criticism levelled against the Paris Agreement was an emotional and spiritual declaration by the Indigenous Elders and Medicine Peoples Council delivered to the Agreement Convention. This stated that "all creation has a right to continue to be part of natural community on Sacred Earth." The statement continues with the basic message that, "we have gone too far in despoiling the earth and that we are now in a state of survival." Wright (2016) linked his comment with this statement, stating that because of our ecological ignorance, the sacredness of life is disappearing. "The truth

is we have moved beyond climate change to survival” (2016:255). The argument being put forward by supporters of the “state of survival” situation is that we have been so busy focussing on our own survival that we have ignored the most important aspect, which is the survival of the planet.

The supporters are not the only ones raising their voices against destruction of the planet; there is also the voice of the victims, including the people of Kiribati and the other Pacific islands, who are forced to migrate to other countries as rising sea levels erode their islands. Some islanders can move their villages inland away from the rising water, but groundwater is being contaminated by the seawater, crops are dying and drinking water vanishing. Migration may ultimately be their only answer.

In general terms, commentators felt the Paris Agreement was not specific enough, that it did not go far enough in pinning countries down to definite promises, and that the scientific aspects of climate change were not utilised to assist the smaller and poorer countries which are already victims. Okereke and Coventry (2016:29) added to this criticism that:

The inability of the international regime to impose or encourage the application of one or a limited set of justice principles remains a perennial constraint on the regime’s effectiveness and a challenge when translating justice concerns into practical action.

This clearly points to the fact that the concept of “climate justice” is to be taken on board in every discussion on climate change in order to address the global phenomenon.

5.3.3. Future conference

Even though there are criticisms about the Paris Agreement, the COP will hold its twenty-third global climate talks in November in Bonn, Germany, and will be led by Fiji, representing the P-SIDS (Pacific Small Island Developing States). With Fiji’s Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama, as president. It is the first time one of the P-SIDS countries will provide the president for COP, and according to climate change negotiator Clifford Mahlung, the incoming president, the Fijian PM, is planning a strong focus on adaptation, which is critical for P-SIDS countries:

It is hoped this will focus attention on climate change adaptation, rather than mitigation, particularly for the small developing countries who are especially susceptible to the dangers of climate change (Williams-Raynor, 2017).

In geographically small nations like Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu, adaption is of vital concern, even more so than the option of migration, since P-SIDS countries are particularly vulnerable to ocean-based occurrences like tsunamis and rising sea levels.

Bainimarama said in a statement released last February 2017 that the impacts of climate change were more obvious and were happening more often in countries such as Fiji and the other small Pacific nations. He pointed out that, “our concerns are the concerns of the entire world, given the scale of this crisis. We must work together as a global community to increase the proportion of finance available for climate adaptation and resilience building” (Williams-Raynor, 2017). Bainimarama said he planned to work with all organisations, from governments and NGOs to the business community, to secure adaptation finance towards creating a safety shield against climate change, especially in the various P-SIDS communities.

5.4. The Pacific leaders and climate change

The Pacific Ocean is a tropical warm ocean, and scientists have pointed to an increase of cyclones in the South Pacific. Science has given clear evidence that small islands are the world most vulnerable to tropical cyclones (Folland, Renwick, Salinger, and Mullan, 2002; Nguyen and Walsh, 2001). This has awakened the concern of the Pacific leaders to counter these critical scenarios with most destructive impacts affecting the very survival of the people and putting at risk the communal ways of life, the culture and livelihoods of people in the Pacific. They complained that their islands are the most exposed and most vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change. In the Moana Declaration, they address the threat of climate change that is affecting communities in various ways and increase the risk of climate induced migration.

Ensure that all persons and communities affected by climate induced catastrophes in the Pacific as well as other affected world regions, in particular those who are forced to flee their homes and lands, are afforded the respect and protection of the full spectrum of rights

enshrined within the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and subsequent human rights treaties; (WCC, 2009).

The voice of the Pacific people is now heard from the people on the ground to the parliamentarians. In Kiribati, young people are crying out through their songs, “we want to live on our shore and not victims of climate change, we are small we are vulnerable” (KCCN, 2014). This is the voice of people who are human faces of climate change impacts in the context of sea level rise, cyclones, storm surges and ocean acidification forcing people to leave their homeland.

In the context of climate change affecting the Pacific people, the Pacific parliamentarians raise the voice of their people for key actions implementation to be taken urgently for the life, culture and islands in the Pacific. The UN Ocean Conference aims to “make the long to-do list” of tasks to fix the ocean considered the problems facing the small island nations who depend on the oceans for their very existence. The conference, the first large-scale one, is devoted to protecting and saving the oceans (Roth, 2017). In the UN Ocean Conference, the pleas of Pacific island nation leaders expressed their fear that their ocean which is an essential part of their daily living becomes their real-life enemy.

For islanders, the ocean can be an imposing and valuable friend, but increasingly, because of climate change, pollution and overfishing, humankind has transformed the gigantic oceans of the planet into rising, junk-filled threats. For them, the Pacific Ocean has become a real-life large enemy. This is because global climate change, according to most scientists, causes oceans to keep rising, temperatures on land to get hotter, and the waters to turn more acidic, thereby seriously disturbing fish life. Their lamentations are all reflected in what the Prime Minister of Fiji says, “it pains me deeply to have witnessed the rapid deterioration during my own lifetime of this precious resource, the economic lifeblood of our people” (Roth, 2017).

The Prime Minister of Tuvalu, roasted the US president for his obsession with coal, and called out the US president, Donald J. Trump for his parochial views on coal and climate change. He argued that “...no country is seriously interested in fossil fuel expansion anymore. The US is going to be left behind. The guy in the White House

doesn't understand that, as there are more than a thousand energy experts and political leaders embracing renewable energy at this moment" (Roth, 2017).

Without drastic reductions in fossil fuel use, the entire nation will drown. The island nations in the Pacific also appealed to the US, which has withdrawn from the current climate pact, to act, rather than sit back and do nothing. They complained to the UN that climate change, trawlers poaching in island waters, and overfishing of large predatory fish stocks has placed the islands at risk. The prime minister of Nauru does not have the people, the boats or the technology to apprehend illegal fishing ships and police the zone. The Prime Minister of Tuvalu, blamed illegal and unregulated fishing for stealing an estimated 26 million tons of fish from the ocean annually. Tuvalu called for human solutions to the ocean problems. "It's a matter of survival" (Roth, 2017). UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres presented his support that:

The health of our oceans and seas requires us to put aside short-term national gain to avoid long-term global catastrophe (Roth, 2017).

As mentioned above, land is being washed away, villages are being moved, wells are becoming contaminated, and fruit trees are dying. The Australian Foreign Minister, Senator Bob Carr in his visit to Kiribati in February 2013 stated that "the Pacific Island Nation of Kiribati is living the reality of the dangers of climate change." (Media release, 2013).

Even though the land is at risk of disappearing, the people will never agree to leave their ancestral homelands. At the World Climate Change Conference, held in Paris, 2015, the Kiribati president, Anote Tong delivered a speech during the opening ceremony indicating that his country is the most vulnerable to the impact of sea level rise. As pointed out by Burson (2010:78), it is small island nations that have often been the most outspoken countries in the world in calling for action to address climate change. He went on to argue that the voice of the poor is a full story of what is happening in their context—the context that the rich will never understand. Accordingly, the rich and developed nations should listen to the voice of the poor and to reflect on the consequences of what they have pursued for their own economic development.

In this complaint, Tong calls upon all nations to deliberately work together as this could be what he considers as “last chance.” If we do not act now, Kiribati and other low-lying atoll countries may not survive in the near future (Keating, 2015; Kwong, 2013a:43). However, the president of Kiribati argues that even if major polluting nations stick to the commitments made in the Paris Agreement, the small island of Kiribati is still likely to become uninhabitable in the coming decades (Keating, 2015; Burson, 2010:78).

Pacific island nations are among the countries likely to be most severely affected by climate change, particularly concerning sea level rise. The Paris indigenous wisdom statement attacks the way humankind has lived up to the present, saying this is what has caused climate change. It points out its message has been sent before but has been ignored. Now the world lacks leadership; people are too busy living greedy, destructive lives to care about saving the planet:

This has brought us to the state of survival, threatening the collective future of all life. Leaders meeting in Paris have a responsibility to create real solutions and do something right for the future of all life (Wright, 2016:257).

Accordingly, there has been a good deal of postulation about the likely need for relocation as an adaptive response by these communities

5.5. The vulnerability of Kiribati

As far back as 2004, at a World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting on Tarawa (the main island in Kiribati), with representatives from all the main Pacific island nations, the *Otinataai* declaration was drawn up concerning the hungry seas crisis:

Here on the small island atoll of Kiribati, the impacts of human-induced climate change are already visible. The sea level is rising. People's homes are vulnerable to the increasingly high tides and storm surges. Shores are eroding, and the coral reefs are becoming bleached. The water supplies and soil fertility are being threatened by the intrusion of salt water. Weather patterns are less predictable posing risks to fisherfolk and farmers. Kiribati is not alone in its plight. Many other island nations in the Pacific are experiencing similar impacts of human-induced climate change. Our peoples, who number about 7 million, are

already suffering and are vulnerable to more impacts in the future (WCC, 2004)



Figure 5.1. Map of Tarawa: the capital island of Kiribati (Source: Wikimedia Commons, 2005)²¹

It does not take five minutes to walk from one side to the other. As the country's islands represent a very small landmass, there is no place for the people to resettle because all areas are affected. The effects of inundation through coastal flooding, especially during storm surges, continue to have increasingly severe effects as sea level rises. Such effects are likely to be compounded by increases in the incidence of the strongest tropical cyclones (Knutson et al. 2010). The extent of salinized groundwater within coastal lowlands will increase. Overtopping by sea level of near shore coral reefs and associated increases in lagoonal sediment mobility will impact reef-lagoon ecology and bio-productivity.

Climate change is nothing new to islanders as it is part of their daily discussion from the past. While they could not read accounts of what is written about islands and lands being disappeared, it is no secret they were voyagers from island to island and from

²¹ Map of Tarawa representing the feature of all scattered islands of Kiribati, except for Banaba, a phosphate high island with the Highest elevation: 81m and Kirimati Island which is extremely big of 388,4 km² but in the same height with the other islands comparing to other island (Wikimedia Commons, 2005).

lands that are now unknown (Havea, 2010:342). Havea makes the further point that although climate change is global, our response to it is not, and should not be, because if we accept a global response then we are giving the dominant nations the right to define the perspectives of climate change. In addition, the fear created by those who talk about rising sea levels, often do not reflect the reality of life in Oceania.

Based on IPCC report, the impacts of climate change put at risk, “a wide range of phenomena that people value, ranging from ecosystem services, species, and economic sectors to landscapes, homes, and human health” (Le Treut et al. 2007; Folland et al. 2002; Nguyen and Walsh, 2001). In his concern for the increasing destructive impacts to the livelihood of his people, the president of Kiribati, Anote Tong appealed to the sixtieth session of the United Nation General Assembly in 2005 to consider the option of relocation as the ultimate form of adaptation to climate change (Loughry and McAdam, 2008).

5.6. The weather in Kiribati

Kiribati and several of the “line and Phoenix Islands are in the dry belt of the equatorial oceanic climatic zone where prolonged droughts are common in those islands” (Tonganibeia and Thomas, 2007:40). These islands are badly eroded, where unprecedented long and severe droughts are affecting the availability of fresh water supplies and the vegetation on which people depend for food. Wind directions have also changed, and unseasonal and more violent storms are lashing the twenty-one inhabited islands. ENSO is a dominating weather system that affects Kiribati, leading to two major systems that affect the climate in Kiribati—the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) and the South Pacific Convergence Zone (SPCZ). The ITCZ influences rainfall in the northern islands, while the SPCZ influences rainfall in the southern islands. Typically, during El Nino periods, the ITCZ moves closer to the equator and then away during La Nina episodes (Cati, 2010:9; Storey and Hunter, 2010). According to a Kiribati environmental report, annual rainfall is extremely variable, annually and between islands, with annual averages in the Gilbert group ranging from about 1000 mm for the drier islands in the south near the equator, to 3000 mm, and for the wetter islands in the north and 1550 mm in the capital island on Tarawa (North Tarawa, C.A.P, 2001).

Kwong (2013a:142) underlines the features of what is happening within the contemporary context of climate change that is known in Kiribati as *bibitakin kanoan boong* (lit: “change in weather over many days”). Water supplies in the islands are obtained from subterranean (ground water) wells. Rain falls through the porous limestone of the atolls, creating underground reserves which are easily reached by wells dug a few metres into the soil, but at the same time can easily be affected by the rising sea level. The local people also have “their cultural knowledge to assess changing weather and climatological patterns” (Farbotko and Lazrus, 2011:382). Lawrence maintains that the people could predict the season of rain or dry weather, but nowadays the traditional skills and knowledge to predict their normal weather are being lost and no longer practised (1992:271-272). The well-known seasons that could easily be predicted in the whole of the Kiribati islands are no longer existing in their customary timeline and thus creates confusions and causes problems, as people are no longer certain about what to do to ensure a reliable food supply and when and how to do it. Traditional knowledge is no longer accurate.

In their world, it is important to consider the traditional knowledge regarding the prediction of weather and climate. This is the knowledge that appears to “astronomical factors as principal drivers of the climate of Kiribati” (Kwong, 2013a:16) Traditionally, there are two distinct seasons in Kiribati, the *te Au meang* (wet) which lasts from September to March and the *te Au Maiaki* (dry) from April to August. The dry season is characterised by steady easterly trade winds, lower rainfall and regular currents. With this knowledge, the Kiribati people knew when rain usually falls in its timeline, however, there have been, and still are, many occasions when the rains have failed to arrive (Lawrence, 1992:271-272).

5.7. The effects of climate change on the landscape of Kiribati

Kiribati is in the front line of countries that are vulnerable to climate change, and of them all, it is the most vulnerable. In this, it is already the victim of climate change. The people of Kiribati are thus suffering from extreme hopelessness, fearing they will lose their island sometime in the future (Collins, 2012:31; Nunn, 2013:147; Braun, Hellwig, and Byrnes, 2007). There are four other countries around the world which are made entirely of low-lying islands. These are: the Maldives, Marshall Islands, Tokelau and

Tuvalu. According to Longépée (2011:1), these in the context of climate change are among the most exposed to coastal hazards. The Maldives are in the Indian Ocean, while the other three are all in the South Pacific. This demonstrates how rising sea levels are affecting countries worldwide.

These five countries are also in the front line of countries that are vulnerable—already suffering from the environmental fallout of climate change (Longépée, 2011:1). Because of this, it is not just the I-Kiribati, but the peoples of other low-lying land as well, who are facing what seems to be a hopeless future with the threat of losing their lands to the rising sea levels (Collins 2012:31; Nunn, 2013:147; Braun, Hellwig, and Byrnes, 2007).

It has been noted that the changing landscape and seascape in Kiribati constitutes a critical part of the climate change problems that it is facing. Biribo and Woodroffe (2013:346) support this perspective that the widespread erosion around the islands is not only the impact of sea level rise, but also the consequences that are created from human activities of reclamation, from building seawalls and causeways and taking soil and stone from the coastal areas for construction. This is especially the case in the capital island of Tarawa, the commercial capital. It can thus be argued that people who are struggling to cope with the destructive impacts of climate change are at the same time contributing to the effect without knowing it. Nunn argues that sea level rise would have such a devastating effect on low lying atolls that within the next twenty to thirty years people living in coastal areas will need to be relocated because “frequent flooding that threatened livelihood sustainability, and even in some cases, the habitability of entire islands” (2013:165).

The Ministry of Environment Lands and Development (2013:43) reports that all of Kiribati is coastal, therefore all the people are living in coastal areas and are observing extensive coastal erosion taking place, not only of the beach but also of the land. Such erosion is increasingly, “displacing people from their traditional house plots since the early 1900s” (2013:43). This argument is affirmed by various scholars stressing that climate change is already destroying the livelihood of indigenous communities living on the margins (Kuruppu and Liverman 2011:1, Collins, 2012; Donner and Webber, 2013; Gittins, 1999).

Macdonald (2001:3) argues that as sea level is rising, it brings more destruction to “the main trees that people are relying on for their survival—coconut trees, *babai* root, papaya trees and other varieties of vegetation at the coastal areas.” Because of the poor coral soil in the islands, *babai* (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis*)—a plant which is similar in appearance to the giant taro is the only root crop, planted and grown in pits deep enough to excavate fresh water (Macdonald 2001:3, Chandra, 1998:48). *Babai* is the most important stable root crop of the people in Kiribati, but it takes several years to mature and needs commitment over an extended time to cultivate it with composted leaves at appropriate times (Macdonald, 1982:3; Thomas, 2002:169). This means that people are not just experiencing climate change, but are struggling and living daily with its impacts.

According to Helvarg (2010), the president of Kiribati Anote Tone explained to everyone that in the next century, his country will be under water and the country is already suffering because of the severe weather problems. When Cyclone Pam hit, they were not supposed to experience cyclones. Many buildings were badly damaged and a hospital that was recently completed was destroyed. There has also been a dramatic increase in king tides, which flood the underground water wells and agricultural land. This has resulted in a lack of fresh water and dying crops, including trees aged around sixty to seventy years old, which can no longer bear fruit.

One of the actions President Anote Tong has taken was to request a moratorium on investments in new coalmines. He stressed that if we do not survive, it will be due to the international community not coming to our assistance. Kiribati will not be the only country to disappear. We will be one of the first, but others will follow (Worland, 2015). This reality creates lot of fear and uncertainty about the future among the I-Kiribati people. Tong advocated around the world for bold action to address climate change. For the government, the future of Kiribati will be in the collective concern of the international community to do something about reducing carbon emissions (Worland, 2015).

With regard to the church, members and congregations must be endowed with a meaningful theology through the teaching of pastors with an appropriate curriculum that addresses the contexts in which people are struggling for life. Rubow and Bird

(2016:2) postulate religion as one of the potential cultural forces to play an effective role in adaptation processes and to model motivations and norms. They further argue that religious beliefs and practices are powerful tools to protect the values, attitudes and politics concerning ecological issues (2016:2).

Even though the islands are sinking due to rising sea levels, the courage of the people must not fail. Havea (1990:197) insists that there is an urgent need for an effective theology and a commensurate sustainable adaptation of livelihoods to help the people learn to live in the context of climate change and to be prepared for future sea level rise. There is need for a theology from the Pacific context to encounter the life-threatening situation in a more meaningful and practical way. This necessitates learning from the contextually appropriate resilience of coconut trees that grow well in the islands to provide appropriate models for contextual living. The coconut tree not only provides for human needs, but also represents a school of knowledge from which we can learn to live in connection with our world.

Nunn (2013:143) suggests that there are also lessons to be learned from past failures, including the need for adaptive solutions that are environmentally and culturally appropriate, those which appropriate decision makers are empowered to design and implement. Nunn argues that climate change is still a reality, so far not only obvious, but with more power and acceleration boosted by “the greed and selfishness of the few people and industrialised countries who treasure their comfort no matter what” (Teuatabo, 2002:12-13). He goes on to argue that the high vulnerability of Kiribati, due to the rapid growth of its population versus the limited of lands and resources, has been exacerbated by global warming and the rise of sea level.

Deane-Drummond (2008:30) argues that the free market system is a root cause of environmental issues that affects human survival as well as the survival of all creatures and our planet. Richer nations which have contributed a lot to greenhouse gases for their own benefits have imposed environmental problems on nations who contribute little to greenhouse gases (Deane-Drummond, 2008:15). The small nations, low-lying atolls and the poor are paying the cost of global warming. Deane-Drummond states that the fundamental factor that threatens the campaign to change the way the society lives and acts, is the influence of globalisation undermining the structures of nation states

using the power of the widespread technologies available and convenient to the present generation.

Miller (2010:23) adds that the fundamental factor is the worldwide market failure to control the enormous untold cost of pollution that is leading to the widespread destruction of all forms of life on this planet. Both Deane-Drummond (2008) and Miller (2010) blame the developed countries as the main players of climate change and global warming. With their selfish industrial development, they never care for the impacts that proportionately fall upon the poor and small island nations such as Kiribati.

For Conradie (2009:34, 37), climate change is an issue of justice and should be addressed to the wealthiest countries to have more concern for climate victims who are the poor the marginalised and vulnerable. He further points out that climate change is a global issue with so much of information available, but lacking moral formation. With a moral formation, Conradie challenges Christians to proclaim the Word of God at a time when it is most needed, where it hurts most (2009:40). For Conradie (2016:108), this aspect of moral formation particularly draws attention to a spiritual problem that exposes the human capacity of knowing what is wrong within its community and what is needed to fix the problem, yet for some reason people lack the willpower or imagination to fix the problem, and therefore, it constitutes an intractable spiritual problem

5.7.1. The effect of climate change on the Kiribati seascape

Kiribati's economy depends on its fish stocks and the Pacific ocean's extensive biological diversity. Since the islands are often dry with poor soil and variable weather, the one constant advantage of the people was, and still is, the ocean resources, which provides food for every family. Collins reflects on IPCC reports that, "approximately 20 percent to 30 percent of species are likely to face increased risk of extinction if temperature rises exceed 1.5°C to 2.5°C above 1980-1999 temperatures." The report provides a stark caution that if the rise, "exceeds 3.4°C model projections suggest extinctions ranging from 40 percent to 70 percent of species assessed around the globe" (Collins, 2012:3).

The people's lives revolve and depend upon the health of the coral reefs. The protection of corals from destructive ocean waves is thus very important to the protection of the Kiribati livelihood. However, an already "unhealthy stressed coral will not be able to withstand the brutal impacts of global warming and the consequential sea level rise" (Collins, 2012:32). Fishing and marine resources not only provide a protein source in the people's diet, but it also serves as an important source of employment that provides much needed finances to purchase other necessary products.

Macdonald (2001:4) points out that:

When food became scarce on land, the Islanders became even more dependent on the sea" (and that) the Government also depends on the marine resource for its economic and social development in terms of items that can be produced for trade.

The people's reliance on marine resource for their survival has resulted in a well-developed local skill in building canoes and navigating into the deep ocean. With their traditional knowledge in navigation, the people "managed to live a reasonably comfortable existence, adapted to the rhythms of nature" (Aiki, 2010:14).

Changes in the life and culture of the people is taking on different forms. For example, the population increase in the capital island has contributed significantly to the pollution of the land and sea. According to Teauatabo humankind has angered the ocean, "disrespecting the important role it plays in our lives, by using it as a dumpsite, overharvesting its richness, increasing its level of acidity" (2006:13). Accordingly, an already "unhealthy stressed coral will not be able to withstand the brutal impacts of global warming and sea level rise" (Talia, 2009: 14). Kwong expresses the fear that because everything that belongs to the state, "including common and public resources such as in-shore fishery resources are open to over-exploitation," Kwong goes on to state that:

The marine environment and resources, in particular are seen as the commons (entities) that is open for unsustainable exploitation and utilisation, thus, vulnerable to the "tragedy of the commons" issue. Unsustainable harvesting and utilisation is one of the many threats facing marine and coastal biodiversity in Kiribati. Similarly, there is a national need to undertake strategic resource management measures that

would safeguard the deteriorating status of natural resources for future generations of I-Kiribati (Kwong, 2010a:12).

The people who are relying on their land and ocean for their subsistence living are at the same time contributing to destroying it. Accordingly, there is a need to help the people to understand how they contribute to the destruction of their environment and yet how they can adapt to live sustainably with their environment in the context of climate change.

The government of Kiribati has mobilised the people to take responsibility to care for their environment and ocean. According to Stone and Obura (2013:5), the offering of Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) which covers 12 percent of the entire size of the country's territory with 408 205 sq. kms (157 626 square miles) is a commitment of the Kiribati government's call to the world to contribute to the safety of the ocean. The PIPA is called an "underwater Eden," and is the largest marine protected area in the world today. It is now called the last coral wilderness on earth that the government of Kiribati offered to the world and had been inscribed on the World Heritage list by the United Nations Environmental and Scientific Committee (UNESCO) "as the earth's largest and deepest World Heritage listing" (Stone and Obura, 2013:5). The offering of PIPA to the world was as a powerful message to demonstrate to the world that everyone can make a difference. If everyone does their part to protect and care for the ocean, the land and the environment, then it will be for the good of the planet (Timon, 2013:12).

In his speech to the UN, the minister of MELAD affirmed that the ocean is the foundation of the Kiribati people's very existence and culture, as the ocean is linked to the indigenous traditional skills and values—navigational and fishing skills, values of mutual respects, responsible custodians and harvesting only what we need (Nakara, 2016). With his concern about critical impacts of global warming, he went on to state that the temperature variation in sea water as well as the varied climatic conditions affect marine life and resources, not only the fish stocks, but also the living corals and fish habitat (Nakara, 2016). Aiki (2002) argues that the life of important fish species and their movements during spawning depends mainly on the "availability of food, moon phases, and climatic variations." However, the rise in sea level and temperature

can have visible effects on “coral and adverse impacts can be damaging to the marine ecosystem”

5.7.2. Climate change and the livelihood of the people

The ready availability of potable water has always been a problem as people depend on ground water obtained from wells in all the islands that collect the water after rainfall. Therefore, rainfall at regular intervals is essential to the islanders because there is no alternative to obtain water, as the islands have no rivers. Therefore, if the rains are late, or fail to arrive, the lives of people are put at risk. To get fresh potable water for drinking means moving away further from the coastal area (Macdonald, 2001:3).

Wells for other general purposes such as washing, cleaning and gardening are dug next to households for convenient use. According to Nikora (2008:40), “the fresh water wells, however, are subject to brackishness during times of drought.” In the capital island Tarawa, the last remaining sources of groundwater (freshwater lenses), are at Bonriki and Buota that the government has protected and conserved for sustainable usage. The Kiribati Report to the Sustainable Development states that, “both of these two villages cover “an area of 382 acres (155 ha)” (Teuatabo, 2002:24). In the neighbouring island of Tuvalu, most families depend on rainwater collected from rooftops into their water cisterns. During the 1999 El Nino, there were prolonged periods of drought and a state emergency was declared in November of that year due to the shortage of drinking water as the wells had turned salty and undrinkable (Talia, 2009). The same issue in Kiribati was raised in parliament in 2017, where the cry of the people for fresh water was heard after their ground well water became contaminated by sea-level rise. MP Tenaua of Abaiang raised the following:

Nuotaea is one of the highly populated villages in Abaiang—experiencing over the years—limited potable water for human consumption, which get worse during the periods of draughts. Can I ask the Minister concerned are there tentative plans to mediate or put an end to this health risk situation to Nuotaea community? (Order Paper, 2017:OQ37)

The government’s response by Hon. Minister Ruateki Tekaiara stated that there was a solar pump for the village of Nuotaea, but that it had been out of service for some time. The minister therefore committed his department to repairing the pump (Order Paper,

2017:OQ37). However, can this solar plumb save the lives of the people if the whole low islands cannot stand the impact of sea level rise? Ioteba Tebau, an MP from Marakei island, raised the following important question related to the issue of land and livelihood of the people:

What is the status of the construction of a sea wall at Rawannawi Marakei? At the last House I raised and requested that it be considered an issue since the impact has affected homes and livelihoods. This time I ask Government to address this problem as soon as possible. Could this be resolved and attended to immediately? (Order Paper, 2017: OQ9)

The government's response by Hon Minister Tekaiara was as follows:

I am glad to advise that my Ministry is ready to collaborate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to finish the project (Order Paper 2017:OQ9).

In looking through the government response to both questions, it is evident that the government works only for short-term solutions, such as protecting the islands with sea walls and helping people with solar pumps. However, the solution to build sea walls causes more problems to other part of the islands which are not protected. Biribo and Woodroffe (2013:352) thus comment that a sea-wall is one of the contributing factors that increase further erosion in other parts of the island. Collins (2012:31) expresses his first-hand experience of the vulnerability and narrowness of the islands making them susceptible to erosion and the people losing their lands. Outer island communities have also been affected, where some villages have been abandoned and several communities where the sea water has broken through into the freshwater ponds have had their food crops decimated.

A shortage of land means there is very little agriculture and the population is now heavily reliant on imported and predominantly processed foods (McIver et. al. 2014:5228). The critical impacts of sea level rise have caused a steady flow of migrants as people depart the islands to seek better economic security for their families because the loss of land to the sea has limited the space available to build homes and plant their crops (Thomas, 2002:166). However, the islands which are narrow strips of coral atolls, which take only five minutes to walk from one side to the other, would not be a reliable place to accommodate the people (Macdonald, 2001:3; Collins, 2010:31).

Moving further inland for a more secured place creates more problems of overcrowding because the islands are small in length and narrow in breadth. The internal migration of people has also created other social-related challenges especially in the capital Tarawa where they are experiencing problems such as domestic violence, land disputes, sex-work, pollutions and many other issues as the consequence of overcrowding society in a small island (McNamara and Westoby, 2014:58). The same experience is also heard in the neighbouring country of Tuvalu. Hence, it is noted by Talia that:

Visible signs of rising sea in Tuvalu are more than enough to show the danger that people encounter. The danger and the effects of rising sea level influence the lives of the people and disturb their cultural ways of life (2009:2).

Thomas also notes that the impacts of climate change coincide with the influence of globalisation on the cultural and traditional ways of living:

Investment in a limited range of cash crops (export crops), together with urbanisation, has contributed to a decline of traditional crops and thus, a balanced diet (2002:166).

This information points to the reality that the modernisation and urbanisation of the Pacific island populations have resulted in the people paying a very high price. For Thomas (2002:166), depending heavily on imported foodstuffs has begun to affect the health of the people through a steady increase in a number of “hypertension and diabetes cases” being reported that are also “related to rapid urbanisation.” In addition, there is also “an increased incidence of several non-communicable diseases, including...obesity, gout, coronary heart disease, stroke and certain cancers” (2002:166-167).

5.8. The government and church response

5.8.1. Unity to deal with climate change

Some scholars see the fundamental factor in climate challenges to be the worldwide market failure to control the enormous untold cost of pollution that is leading to the widespread destruction of all forms of life on this planet (Collins, 2012:12; Miller, 2010:23). Miller responds from the Roman Catholic perspective on climate change that

the church in its prophetic role should not remain passive but rise and tell the truth, demonstrate and protest against industrial injustice that never cares for the future of this planet. He further argues that, “we need to wake up and speak out today, tomorrow, and for the foreseeable future.” As Steven Chu, the U.S. Secretary of Energy and Noble Prize winner has said, “from here on in, every day has to be Earth Day” (Miller, 2010:23).

Conradie (2008:101) is of the view that even though climate change is a global issue which dominates all other agendas and is prominent in the public imagination, it is also a challenge that can only be addressed through a collective, indeed a global effort. The MELAD minister, Kwong believes that a unified international fight against ecological destruction is the most effective approach to deal with the problem. Even though the government of Kiribati has called upon the powerful nations to work together to save the planet, each nation can act to make a difference. Kwong (2010b:13-14) suggests that the different forces of government and non-government organisations need to work together to tackle the root causes of pollution in order to ensure the health of the environment and the coral reef

To unite as one nation is an initial step to fight against the challenges of global warming-related sea level rise. Therefore, all nations need to be engaged and work together for effective solutions to save the planet. According to the Spiritual People of the Earth, to work in unity means to, “restore peace, harmony, and balance for our collective future and for all living beings” because, “all creation has a right to live and survive on this sacred Earth and raise their families where the Creator placed them to be” (Wright, 2016:1). It goes on to state that the Creator gave humankind a way of life which has been abused by people living without due regard for the welfare of the earth or our future. However, the most dangerous thing to happen is when one of the largest contributors to global warming does not respond. This is the case with the US. In response to this concern, the government of Kiribati held a national discussion for the first time in Kiribati history where the entire nation including I-Kiribati living in other countries were brought together to discuss the critical issue of climate change. The theme of this national discussion was: “Let’s work together to build national resilience against climate change impacts” (OB Press Release, 2004). In the public hearings, panel members from the government addressed the nation on the issue of climate change as

well as responded to questions from the public. Rimeta Beniamina, MP and vice chairperson of the Select Committee on Climate Change stated that the overarching aim in conducting the public hearing was:

a) to keep citizens informed and b) to consolidate “a national shared hope and vision for a better future of the people of Kiribati while c) adapting to the impacts of climate change” and d) to enhance the understanding of the general public about the issue of climate change and their responsibilities as citizens to complement the Government’s efforts to implement adaptation programmes and also to encourage national leaders to jointly work together to prepare their people to be able to adapt to the impacts of climate change (OB Press Release, 2004).

The issue of climate change has brought the nation of Kiribati together to renew their commitment to serve their islands and the planet as a whole. The positive aim for this gathering was to call upon all nations to unite with them to save their island and the home planet.

5.8.2. Climate change: An invitation to renew creation

It can be argued that the people of Kiribati are facing not so much the end of their world, but the beginning of a new life in a new creation. The climate change crisis has resulted in the coming together of the government, non-government organisations (NGOs), and all churches in Kiribati, as a united voice against injustice in the world and at the same time a challenge to their own people to assess their way of living that has also contributed to the destruction of their environment. According to the Roman Catholic Bishop, Paul Mea from the Kiribati National Council of Churches (KNCC), the people of Kiribati may not be able to save their own country entirely, but they nevertheless have a responsibility to do their part to live in solidarity with creation that will be a living message for later generations (OB Press Release, 2004). In his presentation, Mea asked the public to declare where they stand on the issue of climate change because “climate change was a social issue caused by human interference who continued to contribute to the impacts of climate change” (Timon, 2013:10). He called upon the people to learn from their past, where building causeways took too many of the resources of sea and land and therefore also contributed to the problem.

Miller (2010:23) has urged the churches to be faithful in their moral teaching so that the people understand what constitutes justice in the relationship that exists between human beings and that of the creation. The people should therefore stand against injustice and keep praying for world leaders to be filled with compassion and consideration for the victims of global warming. He encouraged the people to act and do something to save their islands by planting mangroves, help to reduce and prevent selling gravel and sand from the coastlines of the islands, as well as initiate other environmental sustainability programmes.

In response to climate change, the Kiribati government agencies and the churches held workshops to educate the population on how to mitigate and adapt to the challenges they are facing. People were informed and encouraged to plant mangroves and coconut trees for protection of their lands from soil erosion. Talia (2009:15) argues that more steps should be undertaken because, “the complex multi-faceted challenges of climate change requires much more comprehensive, integrative and in-depth response to the problem.” The climate change challenges faced in the neighbouring country of Tuvalu are similar and according to Talia the challenge goes beyond national boundaries because climate change has created a global ecological crisis that needs a global plan of action for the life of the whole planet (Talia, 2009:26). He therefore challenges all nations to work together to fight against the injustice that is oppressing and destroying all forms of life because if the people are divided in their views. He argues that the climate change challenge for Pacific people requires, “... a total shift in the people’s mentality toward the present life” (2009:4, 26). Talia therefore suggests that the only way the fragmented community in the Pacific can be united is through, “the employment of traditional and cultural practice best understood to them, not only to educate them but to create a positive consciousness that compels them to act and respond” (2009:4, 26).

According to Conradie (2015:6), the global issue of climate change needs “cooperation between the full array of social movements and organisations, especially amongst religious traditions, to protect our common home.” In addition, the challenge of climate change is the missional responsibility of the church because it is also a spiritual issue. This is specifically recognised by Pope Francis in his 2015 *Laudatio Si*, where he states:

If you know what is wrong and you are able to fix it, but for some reason lack the will or imagination to go ahead and fix it, then you have a spiritual problem (GOD, A.C.O., 2015:6-7).

There are strong Christian roots to environmental degradation which lays the blame on Christianity for its part in the crisis, both in general terms, as leaders in the industrial revolution, and in the development of capitalism and consumerism. In specific terms, Christian countries are among the those that contribute the most to climate change (Conradie, 2016:104), irrespective of the reality that many of the smaller and poorer Christian countries are the ones that suffer the most. While Christians in some contexts contribute disproportionately to carbon emissions, Christians in other contexts are or will increasingly become the victims of climate change. Capitalism, consumerism and preaching the prosperity message are all aspects of Christian Western countries (Conradie, 2016:105). Conradie further suggests that the church should acknowledge its failure to address issues of climate change affecting life as a “confession of guilt” (2016:108). For Conradie however, there is little hope at “bridging divides” or finding a “common public witness” among the churches:

The ministry of reconciliation may be more relevant for dealing with ecological destruction than is sometimes assumed—especially given tensions between international power blocs positioning themselves to protect vested interest in the context of climate change (2016:108)

Conradie (2016:108) further argues that Christians in defended their own interests in the context of climate change, have done so without caring for the victims of climate change victims. Instead of confession of faith, these Christian nations and churches must declare their confession of guilt

5.8.3. Future preparation

As Kiribati and other low-lying atolls are experiencing the impacts of climate change and sea level rise in their everyday lives, they are also struggling to save their home country and preparing and planning for their future. The Government of Kiribati in this regard has already taken some initiatives by purchasing land in Fiji for agricultural use and economic development, but also to accommodate the nation if the time comes for relocation. The land bought in Fiji can grow food crops to supplement local production, which is declining in Kiribati. The good news is that Fiji has offered to take the people

of Kiribati when the time comes that their islands become uninhabitable and when the people are ready to relocate. The former president of Kiribati, Anote Tong, stated that an island nation in the Pacific Ocean that 100 000 people call home, is much like a canary in the coal mine because their future is uncertain (Zakaria, 2014).

Concerning the land purchase in Fiji, President Tong has commented that:

It's about 6 000 acres. And that is a lot of land, very good land. And the question you would ask me, which I probably would not answer you, is [that] do you propose to relocate your people there? And my answer, at this point in time, is not immediately, but I think it's an investment. It's going to provide food security. But let me make this point. Early this year, I had a state visit to the president of Fiji. And he was kind enough to speak on behalf of the Fijian people, to say that in the event that Kiribati does need to relocate their people, then Fiji would be willing and ready to accommodate them (Zakaria, 2014).

According to Burson, Tong played a key role at the Paris Climate Summit where he publicly thanked the nation of Fiji for agreeing to assist in any wholesale relocation of I-Kiribati residents should the worst come to pass. In his speech at the Paris Climate Summit in November 2015, he expressed his appreciation for the Fijian gesture of hospitality to accommodate the people of Kiribati because of climate change (Burson, 2010:78; Keating, 2015).

The Kiribati Adaptation Programme launched in 2003 is another response of the government to the climate change challenge, by recommending the collection of rainwater, planting mangroves, and taking other steps to reduce Kiribati's vulnerability (Stone and Obura, 2013: ix). The government policy states that the "priority is to serve the needs of our people today and steer the country to the path of sustainable economic development," (OB Press Release, 2014). There have been other actions to upgrade education in Kiribati—especially technical and vocational education—to an international level, specifically designed to equip the younger generation before possible migration, to ensure that they can migrate with dignity with the necessary skills to work:

They need to find employment, not as refugees but as immigrant people with skills to offer, people who have a place in the community, people who will not be seen as second-class citizens (Tela 08 July 2016).

In addition, the government of Kiribati has also launched an Education for Migration programme, aimed at up-skilling its population to make them more attractive as migrants. The University of the South Pacific, jointly owned by twelve Pacific island countries is an institution of higher education where young people are supported by their different governments to study for their degrees. Bruce Burson argues that the movement of people across borders being affected by the impacts of climate change is increasingly becoming a “security threat” and its consequences are increasingly causing violent conflicts (2010:14; see also Adger et al. 2011). This unstable situation suggests a strong politics of security, that for migration it should be constructed as a positive policy solution in the context of climate change. In other words, migration is perceived as part of the problem, not part of a solution. However, it is beyond doubt that individuals, and sometimes even entire communities, have adopted migration as an adaptation strategy in the face of environmental degradation and climate change for millennia.

5.8.4. Migration

The people of Kiribati are among the world’s most vulnerable to changes in rainfall and extreme weather events such as storm surges and king tides. Projected increases in sea-level rise and the intensity of natural disasters such as cyclones, Civil Society Action on Climate Change in the Pacific say will exacerbate these vulnerabilities (Burson, 2010:62). Burson has stressed the spiritual and cultural devastation that comes when indigenous people are forced to leave their land, because it is a matter of people with both land and culture. The land and the people go together. You cannot exist without your country, so the question of displacement becomes a question of your very existence as a human being. Therefore, Pacific churches have reaffirmed the idea that the *moana* (ocean) and the land are God’s creation over which we have stewardship—a responsibility to act to preserve the environment (Burson, 2010:77).

According to the former President Anote Tone of Kiribati, relocation is a long, thought out, and planned process. He reaffirmed this statement in his address to the opening session of the 2011 United Nations General Assembly that migration is a great threat to island communities especially the relocation of the whole nation of Kiribati (General Assembly of the United Nation, 2011). It means that the solution of relocation is not met when you are taken to another place to live. For example, when the Kiribati population are relocated to Fiji or New Zealand, they are not reaching their solution, but starting to encounter more challenges.

According to Burson (2010:78), to settle in a new place is just the beginning towards experiencing new and real problems. Proper planning is thus needed to ensure that people do not encounter more difficulties during relocation. In developing countries, the failure of resettlement takes place not just from, “inadequate inputs of resources (money, staff, and political will), but from the inherent complexity of resettlement as a social process involving human beings with hopes, dreams, aspirations, and, especially, memories” (Burson, 2010:78). This indicates that human security approaches focus on the individuals, groups, and communities who are affected by climate change and insists they must be given the opportunity to participate effectively in decisions that affect them. The church also needs to seriously consider climate change as a matter of human security because it undermines people’s welfare, wellbeing, security, food, water, health, shelter, and culture.

Climate change has the potential to affect almost every area of life. It is linked to poverty and development in the Pacific. In a real sense, it exacerbates the vulnerabilities of already “marginalised sections of society, including women and indigenous communities, and threaten the sustainability of traditional subsistence lifestyles” (Burson, 2010:62). The impacts of climate change in the region must therefore be considered in the context of enduring poverty and vulnerability. Burson further suggests that responses to climate change impacts in the Pacific requires a human security and human rights approach that, “demands effective civil society and community involvement” (2010:67).

Havea’s solution concerns both migration and remaining on their islands. He acknowledges migration will be popular with many, but that equally many will want to

remain on their home islands. The concept of “land,” of “place,” and the deeply inbred sense of belonging to a “home island” makes many people determined to remain at whatever cost, and they quote their church’s message from their latest Sunday sermon as proof that it can be done. Because even though the land is at risk of disappearing, many people will never agree to leave their ancestral homelands. A person’s “home island” is part of their DNA, it cannot be eradicated (Talia, 2009). Havea sees *talanoa* as being of extreme importance here, for both groups. The weaving of stories into a telling and a conversation is vital so that both can retain their roots and their sense of who they are. Focussing on his original discussion on *talanoa* and its value, he argues that whatever option is taken, people must cling to *talanoa*, “to engage in the interests of identity-forming and agency-affirming” (Havea, 2010:345).

5.9. Chapter summary

The previous chapter introduced the background of this study, touching briefly on climate change and how it is affecting the low-lying islands and the people of Kiribati. This chapter discussed in depth not only the effect of climate change on Kiribati, but also more broadly on the islands of Oceania in general. In Kiribati, all areas of life are affected, including their lands, homes, food, drink and even their culture. The chapter described how people are struggling to live in the context of climate change and sea level rise, and how they are living in hopelessness for the next few decades knowing that their islands are going to be submerged. The Pacific island nations are also affected and have worked together to speak out with one voice calling on the international community to be united to tackle the problem posed by climate change. The fear for the home of the next generation is one of the greatest concerns for the government of Kiribati; however, the government has also taken preparatory steps to make sure that its people are well accommodated when the time comes for relocation. This chapter express the troubling response from the US, one of the largest carbon emitters who has recently pulled out from the Paris Agreement.

The discussion in the chapter which follows will focus on a research method design that provides a guide for data collection.

CHAPTER SIX

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented a brief background of the missional identity and vocation of the KUC, whereby its theological education through the TTC has been influenced by legacy of the first missionaries. This present chapter focuses on the methodology based on the theoretical framework that uses tripartite supporting theories—a theoretical framework that was formed around the issue of climate change in conversation with the missiological and ecological care, all of which served to guide this research project. The chapter justifies the methodology used to analyse the impacts of climate change upon the lives of the people and the destruction of their islands and how the church carries out its responsibility to cater for ecological concern and the cry of the people. It provides an overall plan in which all the components, steps and processes involved in the conduct of this study fit. As is stated in the topic of this study, which focuses on the impacts of climate change destroying the island nation of Kiribati, a qualitative method of data collection was used to meet the requirement of the study.

This chapter begins with the research method design that provide a guide for data collection and the method to be used to analyse the impacts of climate change and other related issues, to help the TTC in its curriculum to address issues affecting the lives of the people. It is followed with the research process—the study sampling and method of data collection and how the primary data collection is processed through interviews and focussed groups. The chapter concludes with the method of how secondary data collection is processed.

6.2. Research method and design

The research method and design comprises a road map that provides a guide to the process of data collection and also a guide that “protects the process towards reaching the right destination (result) to answer the chosen research question(s)” (Pokol 2016:57). The chosen methodology must be the most suitable for the desired result.

Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin and Lowden (2011:3) argue that research involves a “systematic enquiry, where the outcomes of which are made available to others.” This present study aims to work alongside the people who are suffering the impacts of climate change in order to arrive at an outcome that would help them in their condition and situation. The systematic plan of this study involves a research question that determines what the research components and processes were. This is critical for this study because it incorporates areas such “sampling, data collection and data analysis” (Harding 2013:15). In this regard, the design processes to be followed in this study will begin with document analysis, interviews, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussion. This includes the discussion of the philosophical position of the researcher in initiating the paradigm of the research based on this study, the appropriateness of the research focus, and the data collection process.

6.2.1. The qualitative research method

The study engages the qualitative methodological approach to analyse the situation and impacts of climate change and the role of the KUC to address this issue through its theological college that serves to train pastors for the ministry of the church. Sherman and Webb (1988:3) state that the qualitative approach is, “an attempt to understand ourselves in relation to the larger world” which included “human experience ... the social, linguistic and historical features which give it shape” and how research participants construct meanings from their daily living experiences in the context of climate change. Qualitative methodology is employed for this research to understand issues affecting the lives of the people in order to explore possible ways for the theological college to address these issues in its curriculum.

Punch (1998:124) argues that in qualitative research, the in-depth interview method is used as an effective tool to understand the context in which people are living. This approach is employed in this research because it guides the researcher to examine how people maintain their lives and their culture in faith in the context where people are suffering the impacts of global warming and sea level rise. The qualitative approach is appropriate to this study because it helps the researcher to discover the context of people living on the margins, through listening and interacting with the situation they are facing and to work towards possible solutions. The practice of the qualitative approach in

many disciplines guides this study to use different of data collection methods (Walliman, 2011:131). Given that the researcher's investigations will be centred on interviews, discussions, observations and other face-to-face style information gathering procedures, he has chosen a basic qualitative methodology for his work.

6.2.2. Phenomenological study

As part of qualitative approach, the study engages phenomenology as a method for data collection. Phenomenology is understood as “an approach to research which aims to understand human experience in context” (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999:481). It indicates, “a commitment to understanding human phenomena in context as they are lived, using context-derived terms and categories” (1999:481).

With the above approach, the researcher planned to use his experiences as a theological lecturer, a minister of the KUC and a citizen of the Kiribati nation as appropriate tools. These experiences are used to conduct a religio-cultural examination into the deep insights of the local people and their stories/experiences based on the phenomenon of climate change. This method was helpful in gathering the data regarding the perspectives of research participants about climate change in Kiribati. It was designed to suggest a curriculum that addresses a missional identity and ministerial formation at the TTC with conscious insights on environmental management. Having stated what qualitative method of research is, the following steps were employed to achieve the objectives of this study.

6.3. The research process

6.3.1. The research participants

Participants in the research process were KUC officials, theological college lecturers and students, and congregation members from three islands, Abaiang in the northern, Aranuka in the central and Tamana in the southern part of Kiribati, A total number of fifty-two individuals participated in this research study.

6.3.2. The study sample

A stratified random sampling method was used where the research population is divided into groups (strata/cluster) and a sample of interviewees were randomly selected from each stratum (Kothari, 2004:16); church executive officials, TTC lecturers, students, pastors, politicians and congregation members. Creswell (2007:62) suggests that the “participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question.” Therefore, a careful selection of the participants will make the outcome more meaningful. To be certain of the willingness of participants to be involved, before each interview, each participant read and signed the informed consent form. To do a credible sampling for this empirical work, three out of the seven church top level executive members in the church administration were selected, one female and two males. From the theological college, lecturers were selected among the senior members with higher qualifications, three out of seven lectures—one male and two females. Politicians were selected among those who have qualifications on ecological issues, four out of sixteen, all were males. The theological students were selected among the final year students or outgoing students, six out of twenty-four, three females and three males. Pastors were selected between young and old pastors, six out of fifteen, four males and two females. With questionnaire, eighteen out of fifty-five were selected from different categories of research participants. With semi-structured and unstructured interview, sixteen out of forty-five were selected also from congregation, TTC students, staff and politicians. In the focus group, this research target eighteen out of forty-eight members from the two congregations, from Abaiang in the north and Tamana in the southern part of Kiribati. Participants were selected from among deacons, the women’s association, young adults and elders. No young people under the age of nineteen years were involved in the interviews.

KUC Officials	TTC Lecturers		Politicians		TTC Students		Pastors		Congregants					
									Tamana		Aranuka		Abaiang	
F	M	F	M	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
1	2	2	1	4	3	3	2	4	8	8	5	3	8	8

Table 6.1. Research participants

From Table 6.1., 18 participants were involved with semi-structured and unstructured interviews, 26 in the focus group and 18 with the questionnaire. The total number of participants for this research study numbered 62. The number of participants selected were to represent their age groups, gender and people of different background who live in different part of the islands. In order to ensure reliability and justification for the generated data, the names of the respondents were withheld in this research work.

6.3.3. Access to empirical work

Following approval from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethical Committee, the fieldwork began among church leaders, pastors, theological lecturers, students, politicians and congregants in the capital island of Tarawa, including three other outer islands, Abaiang in the north, Aranuka in the central and Tamana in the South. To access these sites and islands for research, a letter of request was sent to the General Secretary of the Kiribati Uniting Church (KUC) who represented the whole congregation of the KUC as a “gatekeeper” to grant permission to carry out the research in the sites requested.

After permission was granted, the General Secretary advised his office to send letters to the island churches and to the theological college on behalf of this research project. The Secretary for Mission was the one responsible to send the letters and organised the researcher’s visit to the selected sites and participants. It was through her official letter with an introduction of the researcher to the congregations and those to be visited that ensured the research data collection was successful. All letters were written in the

Kiribati language, *Tatae n Kiribati*, as the most appropriate language to be used in a form of communication. After the dates for visitation and interviews were fixed, the researcher sent questionnaires and questions for interview by way of prior preparation. The process of this research was organised to make sure that the respondents were well-informed both of the research visit and of the questions that were to be asked, in order to prepare them for the interview. This was done in order to follow Kothari (2004:19) who suggests that the research process must be well-organised and that it is the responsibility of the interviewer to arrange for a suitable time with a comfortable venue for all participants. For individual participants who were not under the administrative work of the KUC office, the researcher made individual appointments by contacting them by telephone and personal contact. In order to promote and strengthen the theological college in its curriculum, all respondents willingly agreed to the request for interview.

6.4. Method of data collection

This section describes the methods of obtaining both primary and secondary data in order to engage in an examination of the phenomenon of climate change and the ways in which it affects the environment and people of Kiribati. It will also interrogate the missiological implications for the ministerial formation of the KUC students. The key question based on data collection as stated in chapter one and addressed in this study was as follows:

What are the curriculum implications of the phenomenon of climate change in Kiribati for the renewal of theological education that fosters ministerial formation of students at Tangintebu Theological College?

To obtain relevant information for this research, the study used four methods of data collection. These methods of data collection guided the researcher to examine the existing curriculum of the TTC to identify and examine the present curriculum that the TTC is using in the theological and ministerial formation of its students. The researcher assessed its relevance in response to the environment challenges and threats to life that climate change poses to the people and environment of Kiribati. Song elicitation is also

another method used to collect songs that focus on climate change to demonstrate how climate change has become a daily reality of the people.

6.4.1. Primary data collection processes

This present study utilised semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, a focus group, questionnaires and song elicitation as a process to collect primary data. The interview was chosen to match the approach of this study and to generate relevant answers regarding the research questions. The questions used in the interviews were open-ended questions to give “freedom of expression and allow the respondents to qualify their responses” (Walliman, 2011:98). Open-ended questions were critical to this study for they did not confine the research respondents to simply answer set questions, but rather they provided space for the participants to respond with whatever comments they wanted to make.

6.4.2. Questionnaire

This present study utilised the questionnaire as a data collection method which is particularly used for obtaining quantitative data, “but can also be used for qualitative data” (Walliman, 2011:97). This method was utilised because it is more flexible and easier than other methods of data collection (Peter, 1994:64; Walliman, 2011:97). It is also convenient to the respondents to share and answer the questions freely in their own words without a personal influence of the researcher (Walliman, 2011:97). Walliman states that it is the cheapest method to use especially, “to administer to a large part covering large geographical area” (2011:97). There were nine questionnaires sent to people comprising of both males and females in different islands and places. The questionnaires were sent to three students of the TTC, three pastors and five congregants from the island of Tamana. This study used this method to obtain a wide range of people’s perspectives to assist in addressing issues of climate change. It was also designed to assist the church to be more active to intervene in the situation of fear and hopelessness (Kothari, 2004:36) which people are experiencing in the islands at present.

6.4.3. Semi-structured interview

This present study utilised the semi-structured interview as a data collection tool because it, “contains structured and unstructured sections with standardised open type questions” (Walliman, 2011:99). There were nine selected participants for the semi-structured interview, where each was interviewed to investigate how they, “have all experienced the phenomenon in question” (Creswell, 2007:62). The semi-structured interview involved interaction between the interviewer and the participants on the phenomenon of climate change. It also allowed the participants to share their stories that arose out of their own personal experiences. This data collection tool provided a more comfortable environment for the participants to share more information with the, “freedom to follow up points as necessary” (Thomas, 2009:164). It also provides space and opportunity for the research respondents to be open in sharing their stories as it is an individual discussion rather than a community gathering. In order for the researcher to obtain information about the impacts of climate change and to hear the responses of the people as to how the church can be active and responsive to issues of climate change, nine respondents were involved in the semi-structured interview.

The interview was conducted face-to-face. As Walliman (2011:100) states, it can be carried out both singly and in groups in “a variety of situation: in the home, at work and outdoors.” The interview was conducted personally at a predetermined time and place, in both homes and offices. This data collection tool was helpful to this study because it guided the researcher to follow the number of topics prepared for the respondents to answer (2011:164).

6.4.4. Un-structured interview

According to Thomas (2009), this data collection tool acts as a form of conversation without a format of questions that can guide and control the interview. It is different from the structured interview method because it allows the participants, “to set the agenda” or to “determine the important issue to be covered” (2009:163). The un-structured interview was used in this research to cover other issues that were related to the destructive force being inflicted on the lives of the people and the mission of the KUC. Because the interviewee was the one to lead the discussion, the researcher first

introduced the reason for the interview with a few questions to help the discussion be more interactive. With this data collection tool, the researcher made his own appointment with the participants who as politicians and other congregation members were identified as appropriate participants to contribute to the key question of this research. For the un-structured interview, there were nine participants selected from among politicians, pastors and TTC students and staff alike.

6.4.5. Focus group

According to Walliman, research participants are to be selected from among those who have, “a particular experience and knowledge about the subject of the research” (2011:100). Accordingly, for the focus group, sixteen participants were selected, eight from each of the two islands (Tamana and Abaing), comprising of elders, men and women and young people who had experience of their islands, climate change and the mission of the church. The focus group interview engaged people who had lost their homes and lands, having been severely affected by the destructive consequences of sea level rise.

To obtain information in a more natural environment, a researcher needs to use the focus group interview method to collect data because participants and the researcher can then exchange their stories to influence each other from their real-life experiences (Krueger and Casey, 2000). The life experiences of the research participants were collected to help the church determine mission areas that it has never reached or touched the lives of the people.

Kelly (1999:389) states that if a focus group is to be effective, then it has to be heterogeneous. The advantage in this is that the researcher is able to obtain data that cannot otherwise be obtained through other strategies because of the interaction between the research participants. The questions revolved around the issue of climate change and how the mission of the church can be enhanced through the training of theological students who would go on to become ordained pastors. The congregation members were valued in this study because the Emmaus conversation is a two-way conversation that transforms the researchers as well as the marginalised. It also affirms their struggles for justice and requires respect for the humanity of the people on the

margins and for their cultures. Therefore, researchers should not provide answers to questions, but rather point both the church and the marginalised in the right direction so they can find their own answers (Kaunda, 2017:48).

The focus group was conducted on the two islands which represent the two districts of Kiribati—northern and central district. This was because the three districts are distinct in their culture and ways of living. Accordingly, the data collected was expected to be, “representative (or typical) of all the rest” (Walliam, 2011: 93). The participants were randomly selected as Kothari (2004:16) has proposed and were engaged in small group discussions of issues based on the topics of climate impact and the missiological identity and vocation of the KUC.

Kelly points out that the “facilitator needs to be aware of the personal and interpersonal dynamics at work within the group” (1999:389). The primary role of a researcher is to listen to the debates and take notes. Unlike other strategies, this strategy will allow the researcher to have access to data that cannot be generated without interaction with the research subjects (Punch, 1998:177). This research method is more convenient and allows the researcher to examine perspectives and collect data from people of different ages and genders more quickly than compared with the semi-structured interview method (Berg, 2009:165).

6.4.6. Song elicitation

Allett Nicola (2010:2) maintains that songs can be effective research tools that serve to produce data links to places, issues, and feelings that characteristically, “remain unspoken or that are difficult to uncover in a conventional qualitative interview.” In order to collect data from selected participants, the present researcher utilised this tool to collect the feelings and voices of the voiceless in which songs are the only places for them to publicly share their cries, joy or experiences in public gatherings, in the print media, the internet, or radio. Many cannot share their feelings of joy or pain other than through the means of a song, which is the only place they can speak publicly. Accordingly, this present study used song elicitation as a tool to collect data from the people because songs in Kiribati are part of people’s daily life (Teaero, 2004). Every event is accompanied by song, every announcement is accompanied by song to express

the feelings of people in the circumstances in which they face. A song is a place to advocate and spread news of those circumstances to the wider community and the world. In regards to the issue of climate change, songs are used to express the contemporary feelings of the people, their fears, their cries for justice and their hopes for the future. It is used in this study as a tool to reach out to the world and hear the voices of the poor whose voices are always neglected. Accordingly, this study uses song elicitation as a research tool to seek ways for protection and security against injustice in the context of climate change that is destroying the lives of the people. This research tool is also used to collect data in songs that keep alive the people's oral tradition and historical awareness of their origin and ethnicity (Kempf, 2003:36). Songs are regarded as strong tools to bring healing and revive the strength of those who are not feeling well.²² Allett (2010:3) further verifies that music is a valuable source within qualitative methodologies to discover different aspects of life in the society. In this, the present researcher used song elicitation to collect data from different aspects of the life experiences of the people to bring out what was in their context. It is a powerful tool that keeps reminding people of who they are and what they ought to do. When the song is sung it is with a powerful voice that can change the heart and minds of its listeners. Songs were downloaded from the internet as well as collected through interviews with their composers.

6.5. Secondary data collection

Walliman (2011:71) states that, "all research studies require secondary data for the background of the study." It is critical to this study as this, "major aspect makes an assessment of the quality of information" (2011:71). This present research accessed the following to collect secondary data:

- i. Reviewed sources on climate change in the Pacific and in particular Kiribati;

²² See 1 Samuel 16:16 where the people of Israel experienced the power of music that could bring healing, peace and comfort.

- ii. Employed online sources and search engine that link with the Pacific Conference of Churches, Pacific Regional Government Offices in Fiji, University of the South Pacific, and United Nation on climate change;
- iii. Accessed archives of the Regional Government and ecumenical bodies in Fiji and in Kiribati.
- iv. Employed supplemental searches as well as consulted books and journals from the Kiribati National Library, PTC TTC and UKZN library for relevant literature.
- v. The researcher also collected data from church documents, minutes and other published and unpublished information, that could contribute to this study.
- vi. Finally, a critical analysis on the literature identified the research gap that was to be addressed in this study.

6.6. Data procedure

The next step during the empirical data collection was to analyse and subscribe the data. Following the suggestion of Walliman, data from each interview was analysed immediately to provide a better understanding of the situation and to help to “determine what further data collection is required” (2011:128). According to Walliman, it is important to analyse data immediately after being collected because it gives the researcher time to check on uncertain categories with the interviews that follow.

To ensure the validity and reliability of this research, reflection and analysis of the data was undertaken immediately and was given to the research participants to prove what they had contributed to this research. The researcher found that the participants appreciated this and respected the researcher’s actions since it proved that their contribution was not manipulated. To make sense of the data, the concept formation is to be integrated in the process of data analysis. According to Neuman, a researcher needs to organise “new data into conceptual categories and create themes or concept” to analyse data (1999:407). In the following, thematic and comparative analysis are

used as methods of data analysis to describe what work this study went through to produce new knowledge out of the data on how to address issues of climate change in the mission of the church especially in the theological training of student pastors at the TTC.

6.7. Comparative thematic analysis

This study engages comparative thematic analysis, following Thomas (2009:198) who insists that after the “constant comparison you researcher emerge with themes that capture or summarise the contents of your data.” The purpose of comparative thematic analysis is to develop the quality of theological education that was sorted out from the key research question. Comparative thematic analysis allows for comparison between two situations, both dealing with climate change, one in the TTC and the other in the whole world surrounding it. The world acknowledges the crisis; the TTC, in its curriculum, does not. Should the curriculum change, does it need to change? A simple comparison between the two.

The comparative thematic analysis is also used to examine and compare the value of the culture of the people, one in the past and one in the present. As Walliman (2011:11), this method of data analysis looks, “at situations at different scales macro (international, national) or macro (community and individual).” Comparative thematic analysis was also used to examine and compare curriculum discussed by different scholars, transcriptions of the data collected from interviews, articles from the Pacific Conference of Churches with comparative analysis to see how they are related to the mission of the church.

Within comparative thematic analysis, the transcripts generated from these interviews were analysed, assessed and compared based on the questions asked and the responses given. The purpose for using thematic analysis is to assemble the thoughts that emerged together with meanings about stories and experiences being collected from the research participants in order to build blocks of analysis (Thomas, 2009:198). The process of analysing the data began by utilising a carefully coded sheet showing the key themes and sub-themes that would be used to analyse the interview transcripts. This was used

to test the clarity and the consistency of the category of definitions, as well as to ensure that validity and reliability was attained (Neuman, 1999:277).

Themes	Sub-Themes
Effects of climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts on homes and livelihood • Land • Food and health
Cultural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture for the well-being and livelihood of the people • Culture connects people with people • Cultural values connect people with their lands and environment
Missiological identity of KUC and TTC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KUC on its own agenda • TTC without ecological concern • Mission without a concern for people's current situation
Nature of theological curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Euro-centric • Curriculum without ecological concern • Curriculum that silent to address current issues • Curriculum without a traditional knowledge
Suggestions responding to climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TTC to provide a life-giving curriculum • Curriculum to address ecological issues • TTC to engage traditional knowledge and cultural ways of living • Mission to be life-giving

Table 6.2. Analysis of key themes and sub-themes

In order to undertake a thematic analysis of the works of relevant scholars, this research identified the relationship that they postulate between climate change, theological education and mission of the church. The aim was to compare and evaluate the trends and changes in their relationship in order to focus on their contextual relevance for the context and people of Kiribati. After the completion of the data analysis, the report was returned to the interviewees to prove that what they had contributed has been considered as part of the thesis. This process was taken to avoid “research fraud” and to ensure what the participants had said was correct. Some respondents who had comments on the full report were allowed to add more to their contributions.

6.8. Ethical justification

This research study was carried out with the approval of the university ethical committee to “secure clearance from law enforcement authority” because “ethics define what is or is not legitimate to do or what “moral” research procedure involves” (Neuman, 1999:428, 433). Having ethics is significant to every research because “ethical research depends on the integrity of the individual researcher” and the values guide the process of selecting and approaching the participants (Neuman, 1999:429). To follow the ethical guide, the researcher sent the consent form to the participants to read and understand. During face to face contact, the researcher also helped the participant to understand the purpose and nature of the study and how the participants could freely share their own perspectives. The consent form which was written in English for ethical clearance was translated into the local language as most of the participants in the outer islands were not fluent in English. The participants were identified by pseudonymous names in keeping with the ethical requirements of this study.

6.9. Limitation

According to Walliman (2011:47), the participants should be treated with ethical consideration, giving them freedom to choose freely whatever they may prefer to do or decide with the procedure of the research. As per the research requirement, the researcher conformed by giving freedom to the participants to freely select what part they needed to contribute in the research process. Some participants agreed to take part in answering the questionnaire, some in participating in an interview. Because most of the participants did not want to be recorded, the collection of data did not use recordings. This meant the researcher had some difficulty during the semi-structured and un-structured interviews since manual notes had to be taken. Because of this, the researcher read his notes to the individual participants to ensure that they were satisfied with their contributions.

In the focus interview, an assistance was employed to take notes of the discussion, while the researcher focussed on conducting and guiding the discussion. Because of the desire of the participants to promote the mission of their church and to help in developing the

TTC in its curriculum, all but four of the participants were willing to participate and contribute to the research process. When these four dropped out, the researcher selected another four who were willing to participate in the study to replace them.

Neuman (1999:43) suggests that the researcher who seeks ethical guidance must not stand alone in the research process but should seek guidance from “a number of resources, professional colleagues” and ethical advisors to safeguard the ethics of research. In following this counsel, the researcher sought the authority of the church to conduct the interviews and thus worked through the control and support of the General Secretary and Secretary for Mission. The consent forms are attached in the appendix with the letter of the General Secretary and Secretary for Mission who were working alongside with the researcher.

Another challenge the researcher faced during the fieldwork was that of finance, Visiting the three islands was a big challenge financially because if he took a boat, which is cheaper, it would have taken months to reach the islands. The only option therefore was to fly by aeroplane, which was much more expensive. In this, the researcher sought non-compromising third party institutional financial support to facilitate additional transportation costs so that the research could proceed without further interruption. Accommodation on the islands was with local pastors, who offered their hospitality in providing rooms and meals.

6.10. Chapter summary

This chapter presented a discussion of the chosen research methodology, namely the qualitative method. This methodology was used as a roadmap to guide the study because it provided critical research tools to answer the key research question of the study. It served as a guiding tool in the field of research, assisting the researcher to keep moving in the right direction, especially when aiming to engage people in the research process. This chapter also provided an outline of how the respondents were sampled and how the research obtained primary data from the selected participants. The methodology also served as a directive to find relevant resources and provide tools for analysing the data collected during the empirical work. In addition to being a methodology best suited to the research requirements of this project, it also met the

requirements of the university, and served to protect both the integrity of the researcher and the rights of the participants selected for the interviews.

The chapter which follows, is purposefully placed after the methodology because it will articulate the Kiribati worldview and thus serve as a theory of missio-epistemic pedagogy within Kiribati theological education.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SONGS IN KIRIBATI CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

LEARNING

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology that guiding this study on how data was to be collected to respond to the main research question:

What are the curriculum implications of the phenomenon of climate change in Kiribati for the renewal of theological education that fosters ministerial formation of students at Tangintebu Theological College?

This chapter is placed after the methodology chapter as the first chapter in the process of analysis. Songs as a way of knowing and learning within the Kiribati context are analysed within a missio-epistemic pedagogic framework as contextual resources for the re-contextualisation of knowledge. This chapter has selected several recently composed songs which best illustrate the arguments, feelings, fears and determinations of the islanders towards the future of their homeland.

To emphasise the place of land in the community, this study begins with a poem about the frigate bird, which is the Kiribati national icon, the story of the poem and the reality about what the poem says. The poem will be followed with songs being placed in three groups of subtitles: “Cry for the Future,” “Voices to Climate Change” and “Songs as Theology.” The researcher considers that of all the songs composed around the climate change theme, these best represent the feelings and sentiments expressed of the islanders. A Fijian song concerning the response of the US on climate change will also be discussed due to its relevance to the Kiribati situation.

7.2. Traditional perspectives on songs

Songs are an essential part of the Kiribati culture. They speak of earlier times, the time of the traditional gods and humanity’s place in the universe, of the coming of the

missionaries and the new world. They speak of the future, seeming to suggest migration, loss of land, and questions about God's role in all of this. The fact of belonging to land, a village, an island, is one of the deepest and most entrenched parts of the culture of every I-Kiribati. To express their fears, their anxieties, perplexities, and their need for assurance, they turn to song. In Kiribati, the composer or the one who composes songs is called, *te tia kario or te tia ototo* (Koch and Christensen 1980:276; Teaero, 2004). Likewise, a traditional composer who works with the power of the god is called, *tia kainikaman*.

In her study of traditional ritual specialists in Kiribati, Mary (1989:197) stresses the role of the *tia kainikamaen* as that of a protector of the community. He is a protector of the community not because of his skills in composing songs, but because of his divine connection with God who makes the song powerful. Embedding missio-formation within coconut theology means valuing the significance of the songs within the Kiribati cosmology. Songs play an important role in keeping the people's oral tradition alive as well as the historical awareness of their origin and ethnicity. Kempf cites the perspective of a composer Ten Nenem,²³ "songs cannot die," when generation after generation keeps singing the songs:

The more we sing, the more we use it and the more truth will come out of this. I mean, the benefit will come out truly.... I expect the spirit of my word to work. The word to me is effective. Meaningful, and powerful and effective. I expect that my intention will come true (Kempf, 2003:48).

The power of songs can bring about what is sung in the song. The song is a powerful device to keep alive their history and to help secure the future of the people through their ability to remember their past and where they are coming from in order to know where they are going in the future. Coconut theology as missio-cultural formation employs song as a powerful device to communicate and advocate what the culture considers to be important and must not be forgotten (Kempf, 2003:33). The songs of the

²³ Ten Nenem is a well-known composer from Banaba who aims to compose songs to remind his people of their Home Island, origin, and identity. Indigenous Banabans were relocated to Fiji by the British colonial administration at the end of the Second World War in 1945, "in order to extend mining operations to all remaining untapped phosphate deposits" (Kempf, 2003:48).

people are also important missio-cultural tools for building hope within a depressed and fearful community that is afraid of threats to their lives. Wherever they go, they always take with them their songs and dances as the central vehicle for their history and identity (Nicola, 2010:2).

Coconut theology as missio-cultural formation uses songs because they portray people's feelings, they go to the heart of today's people as they see their land being eaten away by the hungry waves, as they move their villages inland, as their wells become polluted with seawater and their crops die because their roots are also in the salt water. Some people explain their traditional song or dances as "*bain abara*," a "thing of our land ..." or *katein abara* "culture of the land." In other words, something which originated with and was passed down from the "*bakatibu*, or ancestors" (Teaiwa, 2004:197-198). The word *abara* (lit: "land") represents the *bakatibu* ancestors because people are dying but their land remains forever holding their indigenous identity, culture and traditional knowledge that identifies them as I-Kiribati. However, if the land is facing a deep risk of disappearing because of climate change, what songs will be sung by the people? Songs of lamentations and mourning?

Songs that are performed in dances by the Kiribati diasporic community are very important because they are connected to the land and the culture. However, what is the meaning of "things of the land" or "culture of the land" in a new land and in a "new social, political and cultural environment?" Even in the new lands in which they settle, they recreate a small version of home. Islanders migrate to other places, but it is perceived as a temporary journey, because "there is no place like home." As Kempf (2003:58) stresses, culture is forever connected to the land. Living in a culture is like living in the land of your origin. This highlights the growing recognition that people travel and live with their culture and their songs remain a prime creative form of empowerment connecting them with their cultural roots and origins (2003:58).

Coconut theology as a theological framework utilises selected songs in this chapter to present the cry of the people for compassion and justice and to preserve the identity and origin of the people; more importantly, songs protect their livelihood and culture while continuing their struggle in the context of living with the reality of climate change. Life in Kiribati is becoming more and more difficult because the main source of fresh water

that people relying upon, namely, small groundwater wells, are gradually becoming contaminated with salt water (brine), and in many islands the water has become undrinkable (Collins, 2013:31; Longépée, 2011:3; Webber, 2013:2718).

The islands of the people and their homes are exemplified in the poem of the frigate bird. The frigate bird in the national flag of Kiribati symbolises power and strength at sea (COP15, 2009).

7.3. Poem of a Frigate Bird

Over the tree tops, in the branches

Is my home sweet home?

Now cut and destroyed

For your Home sweet home

Now I fly over the horizon to the setting sun

To the nowhere to find a new home (Timon, 2017).

7.3.1. Story behind this poem: The Lookout

Terns are seabirds normally found near the sea, rivers, or wetland. They love the old times when all the trees and their branches belonged to the birds. Today, Terns find it hard to find a tree safe enough to build a cosy nest. Terns now live on top of any tree on the crowded islet of Betio on Tarawa.

A certain old and frail Tern found it hard to fly freely to his heart's content. Whenever the Tern decided to fly out to the ocean to find food, he had to look out to see if any humans were around. The humans and their new machines were the most dangerous of predators. One day, the Tern decided to go out to the ocean to look for food. As always, he was on the look out to see if there was any danger around. When he saw that there was none, he flew out of its cosy nest on top of the great Alexandrian Laurel tree. As he flapped his wings he heard a loud noised. "Look Out" the driver of a large truck shouted and the Tern almost plummeted into the container the truck carried. Fortunately, the Tern flew away over to a field. "Look out" a small boy shouted. The Tern almost flew into a kite shaped as a bird attached to a string. The Tern flew away and decided to fly higher above the clouds. "Look out" the pilot of a passenger plane

shouted as it flew by. Eventually, the Tern reached the shore and flew out into the ocean. It dived down lower to the ocean surface to look for fish. “Toot, toot” “Look out,” the captain of a big ship shouted as the Tern flew right in front of the ship. Something black was oozing out of the ship and it is floating on the surface of the ocean water.

The Tern felt dizzy and nervous. Many fish were starting to float up to the surface of the shiny black water. The Tern decided not to touch any of these dead fish. Instead, he decided to fly away further into the ocean to catch live fish in a cleaner spot of the ocean. He flew and flew among the ships, coconut trees, over war shelters, fields and graveyards, towards his home on top of the great Alexandrian Laurel tree. What a surprise the Tern got when he reached his home. He saw his precious Alexandrian Laurel tree bulldozed down. The bulldozer driver shouted, “Look out” and the Tern sadly flew away to look for another home (Timon, 2017).

The story behind the poem is what is presently happening in the islands of Kiribati. The poem is a demonstration of how the people in Kiribati face an insecure future in regard to the reality that the Kiribati islands in the coming years will disappear under the waves as has taken place with Bikemaa or *Te Aba ni Uea* (lit: “Land of Kings”) islet which recently vanished out of sight under the waves.

7.3.2. The loss of two paradises

A story about Bikemaa²⁴ reads:

THEN....., was the day when a range of seabirds used its trees as their homes, its lagoon and reef populated with an assortment of tropical fish and marine creatures breeding in its clear warm waters and mangrove swamps. This piece of paradise commonly known as Bikemaa (Ancient Beach) but with a sacred name of *Te Aba ni Uea* / Land of Kings is an islet situated in the middle of the vast Tarawa lagoon can be seen from all angles of south Tarawa lagoon beaches. It is very beautiful with wide sandy beaches, fringed with coconut palms and Pandanus trees, it has lush vegetation of Alexandria Laurel trees protecting it from strong winds and fruit bearing fruits sheltering the

²⁴ Bikemaa has been proved to be washed away after the causeway between Betio and Bairiki was built, but sea level rise is another contributing factor as all islands are eroded and gradually washed away.

island all year round. Fresh well waters can be found around the islet (Simon, 2012).

In the mid-1990s, an amazing thing happened. Very slowly, the land mass became smaller. The beaches became thinner and thinner. In the late 1990s, when the Kiribati people had become fully aware of global warming and the dangers it was about to bring, vegetation on this beautiful islet began to die, leaving the islet barren. The once fresh water had become brackish to the point of becoming fully seawater. Sadly, the inhabitants of *Te Aba ni Uea* left the island knowing full well that nothing could survive on it any more. Now, in the new millennium of 2000, the islet is nothing but a small sandy beach of roughly 1 to 2 kilometre squared. This beach can still be seen offshore from every angle of South Tarawa lagoon beach during low tide. Formerly the home of about one hundred families, the breeding place to birds, and many marine creatures, it has now been destroyed by the effects of global warming with the rising sea level. The loss of this piece of paradise to the sea has victimised not only people but also creatures that depended on it as their home (Simon, 2012).

The second account is about Tebunginako (SOPAC Secretariat, 2006). In the far north of Abaiang, is the village of Tebunginako, with about 1000 inhabitants who once lived on its lagoon coastline. In the past, they had no worries about storms and erosion. A surprise came when the rainy season came. Accompanied by strong winds, their beaches began to be eroded away. Following the next rainy season when the same thing happened, the villagers decided to build a strong seawall. They built it on the lagoon side hoping to stop the erosion. By the next rainy season, the seawall was not strong enough to protect the land and soon fell apart. Determined to protect their village, they built an even stronger seawall with the help of concrete cement. Yet, all was in vain, their efforts proving worthless against the elements.

The sea had become their cruellest enemy. Little by little over the years, the erosion cannot be prevented with seawalls. The erosion soon came to the main road and slowly crept inland. The villagers slowly moved inland away from the eroded lagoon side. The erosion kept on eating away at the mainland, destroying vegetation, homes, plantations, fresh water milkfish lakes, bwabwai pits and anything in its path. The villagers started to build their homes inland, but the erosion seemed to come faster. Very soon, the

village turned to seawater and is now divided into parts. It is very hard to go from place to place and it is very hard to plant things and survive on this piece of Abaiang (SOPAC Secretariat 2016; Worland, 2015). Sadly, the villagers of Tebunginako moved away to find homes in other parts of Abaiang and with relatives on Tarawa and the other islands. The once joyful village, full of life with people has now become a barren land of dead trees and the cruel sea. The people are suffering extreme hopelessness fearing that their children will not have a viable future living on the islands. To some extent, their cries have been heard in regional and global meetings. The people have composed songs to express their feelings and fears as they encounter the negative aspects of climate change and thereby keep their stories for generations to come. Their climate change songs reflect this paradox; on the one hand, facing the end of life as they know it on their islands, and on the other, their refusal to be defeated in the fight to save their sacred land.

To lose the islands is like losing human life as *te aba* literally means both land and nation. Therefore, if the land is gradually wiped out, it means that the lives of the nation and people of Kiribati will also gradually be wiped out. Coconut tree theology as eco-missional uses this poem to analyse the responsibility of humans who have ignored their responsibility to care for the planet which consists of many small island nations. This poem is a challenge to the developed world to see their responsibility for other poor nations as part of their responsibility in the international community.

7.4. Kiribati as a British Protectorate

7.4.1 Song of resistance (COP15)

The song composed by Tom Toakai entitled, *I teitei I nukan marawa*” (lit: “I stand in the middle of the ocean”) is a well-known song advocating resistance against climate injustice (COP15, 2009). The song speaks of a previous time, and is used in this study as a way of knowing and learning within Kiribati context. Coconut theology as eco-relational uses this song to connect the past and present, the poor and the rich, to improve the future. The song is about the history of how people in Kiribati were ruled by the British empire for 87 years from 1892-1979 (Tabai, 1987:42). Even though it is a brief lamentation, it tells the history of how powerful countries take control and treat

poor nations to live in dependency on the rich. Coconut theology as mission-cultural employs this song to inform the church and its people to be cautious against the corruption of the world that arises to dominate and control all forms of life. The song is a strong voice to the people to stand strong in their own strength and ability and live in self-reliance rather than to live dependently on others. The song calls upon the church to improve the lives of the people independently and culturally to do the best they can in every situation they are facing, for that is where God works. This song provides a strong voice to every generation in Kiribati to embrace that value of their lands and ocean—the place of their origin where they were connected with their ancestors and their gods.

The song reveals that the islands in Kiribati have abundant resources for life that have been provided from the beginning of creation, but where greed and injustice have blinded and weakened people to have these resources. The song insists that the TTC be missio-formational to equip pastors, not only to be skilful in preaching but also practical in leading people to see the eco-presence of God in blessings from their land and ocean.

The song also presents a critical anti-colonial account that serves to inform the people of Kiribati how the British overlords left their country after mining their phosphate without helping the country with its economic development.

Coconut theology as missio-formational challenges the church through this song to be enriched with relevant teachings to enable it to be critical-minded and vocal against the existing powers and authorities that do not care for creation. Coconut theology as eco-relational uses this song of criticism to help the TTC curriculum to engage the history of the nation's oppression and ill-treatment as a way forward to building a nation that is capable to stand on its own and fight against injustice. This song is a critique of the dominant ruling powers over small nations, benefiting at the expense of the people's development. This song has been used by the government at the international level to critique injustice and the ignorance of powerful nations over that of the poor nations. This song tells of a bird flying in the ocean in search for food for its young. On returning, the bird found that her homeland had disappeared beneath the waves as being illustrated in the poem above. This song is regarded as a stern prophecy from the past reminding Kiribati to stand strong for itself, both as a nation and as a people.

I teitei i nukani marawa
Akea raou ae e na buokai
A katukai boong ririki
I a ukoukora mwengau.
Man tiriwetea arana
Kiribati, Ko mena iara?
Ongo banan au anene
Kuburake koburake ngkoe
Ae tunarin aonaba,
Routiko Rake Routikorake
mai Marawa,
Ba ana noriko akea a
mena Ike raroa
Mwemwe mwerake
Akea raou ae e na buokai
A katukai boong ririki

In the middle of the ocean
I stand without anyone to help.
Days months and years have left me behind.
I search for my home,
I call you by name - Kiribati,
Where are you,
Hear the voice of my song.
Rise up rise up you the centre of the world.
Arise from the depth of the Ocean
So, you may be seen from afar Be lifted
higher, and higher
With no friends to help me
They left me days and years ago (COP15,
2009).

as Webber (2013:2718) notes, Kiribati is an ocean nation stretching over, “an area of more than 3.5 million km² across the central Pacific Ocean, forming one of the biggest exclusive economic zones, and encompassing some of the world’s most diverse and productive ecosystems.” Kiribati among the microstates in the Pacific presents unique challenges in terms of its size that is not eligible for economic development and its elevation makes it more vulnerable to sea level rise. In all, Kiribati is a relatively isolated and “resource-poor atoll country best illustrates this limitation” (Thomas, 2002:163).

The first line of this song states, “*I teitei i nukani marawa,*” which literally means, “In the middle of the ocean, I stand.” The composer uses the word *marawa* which literally means “the deep sea” or “deep void” where feet cannot stand. Standing in the middle of the deep sea, means living without a grounding or strong foundation to stand on. The tone of this song harks back to the 1960s when Kiribati was still under the British Empire. With a limitation of natural resources, Kiribati relied on the phosphate island of Banaba as the only resource for its economic development. However, the phosphate was mined by the British and when it was exhausted, Kiribati was left behind with only

a small share. As noted by Tabai (1987:42),²⁵ “they left us with a very little for our economic development and very poor infrastructure.” Tabai (1987:42) further argues that:

During the eighty-seven years being under the British Protectorate, Britain did very little for Kiribati economic development. When they finished mined the phosphate, they granted us independence and left us with a legacy that ignored economic development.

The impact of climate change reflects the continuous roughshod treatment of poor and small island nations like Kiribati by the powerful nations of the developed world. They have been ignored and now they are paying the cost of what rich countries are doing for their own benefit, development, and security for their nations and countries. This song is used as a prophetic voice to the church to be liberating in its message and ministry in the context of injustice and greed that still exists. Palu (2018) notes Mulenga-Kaunda comment as how transforming disciples can get the church to engage in radical social, political and economic transformation within African societies. He points out the problems of “the economy of one,” in which the church shares, where the neo-liberal economic narrative has given rise to inequalities and the growing desire for personal gain. The church must not be silent, but must stand for the truth.

In the context of climate change, this song is used to enhance the TTC to be eco-missional in its curriculum to teach eco-theology practically to equip pastors to shape the life of the people to be more eco-logical oriented. Coconut theology as eco-missional informs the TTC to engage eco-justice in its curriculum to equip pastors to be vocal against the ill-treatment and injustice of powerful nations suppressing the poor and small island nations. A theological education that develops a vision of justice and human equality will enable pastors to address climate justice in respect to its wider environmental concerns (Conradie, 2009:42-43).

The second line “*Akea raou ae e na buokai; A katukai boong ririki,*” which literally means, “No one to help. Days and years have left me behind.” expresses the complaint

²⁵ The Frist President of Kiribati after the British Protectorate left the country to stand on its own in 1979.

of the people of Kiribati after being used and then left to stand on their own without a single viable industry on the island. Tabai (1984:7) thus asks why Kiribati:

...has always been dominated by developed countries, and with their political systems and ideologies our Pacific world has been influenced and under-controlled, because they provide most of the necessary finance.

He further comments on colonisation in the Pacific as being barbarous, hiding knowledge and skills of development, while still holding the nation to remain under its control and ever dependent under its power (1987:40).

The phrase, “*A katukai boong ririki*” refers to:

Britain limited hands to help and develop our country has given Kiribati many years to cope and struggle before it is well-established. Being left by the British with limited resources has given a hard time for the people of Kiribati to develop their country.

People during and after colonialism have always relied on the British government. This is evidenced in the mission of Kiribati’s first president who stood strongly against this way of life and reminded the people never to live and depend forever on the goodwill of others (Tabai, 1987:43).

Coconut theology as missio-formational uses this song to propose to the TTC that pastors are key players in shaping the lives and futures of the people and thus they need to provide relevant teachings to build up the lives of the people so as to be self-dependent rather than dependent upon others. Even though Kiribati is poor and constantly oppressed and victimised by the impacts of climate change (Zakaria, 2014; Vince, 2009.) the song encourages the people to fight for their land, their rights and their freedoms. This song is thus used in conference and meetings, both internationally and regionally as a powerful tool to invite nations to work together to fight injustice and ignorance in poor and small island nations.

The Kiribati phrase, “*ko mena ia?*” literally means “Kiribati where are you?” In this song, the composer reminds his people to call out the name of their country which seems to be lost in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Simultaneously, it was lost after being left helpless by the British and at the same time abandoned even by its own people. The

composer suggests that calling out the name of a country is a source of strength to enable its inhabitants to stand up for the country. This song insists that even though Kiribati was left with very little, we should own the name of the country and not accept that the situation is lost and hopeless, because we have, “our islands and we also have our ocean—our home and refuge, our well-being and our future” (Havea, 2010:353). The song says that people should not remain silent, but must call the name upon their islands to rise from beneath the ocean. This implies that they must not rely on other sources to build their lives, but rather to build with their own lands, culture, and ways of living.

The song goes on to say that islanders must return to their home, the home of their ancestors, their cultural ways of living, built by their own ancestral wisdom and knowledge and not by foreigners. According to Vaii (2006:20), at the grassroots level, people have a whole world in which they can live and operate, where they can stand up for themselves and not allow to be “belittled” again. The dominant attitude of European nations and their treatment of the islanders as second-class citizens has been so destructive to the connection of the indigenous people to their land, their ocean, and their home.

Havea (2010:349) states that the strong attachment of the people with their land is rooted in their belief that the land is *tapu* (lit: “holy”) because “*tapu* has to do with the relationship with the environment and the community.” Havea’s contribution to this song reminds people to remain strong in their cultural ways of living that connect them indelibly to their land and ocean as sources of physical and spiritual strength. Tabai insists that the islanders must return and maintain their culture and subsistence living, because it is the only source of living that can never be affected (1987:45). In this regard, coconut theology as eco-relational encourages the TTC to develop a theology of creation to respond to the threats to the contemporary environment brought on by climate change.

The composer had these views in his minds when composing the song and wanted to help his people see the value of their land, their ocean, their home, and their culture. He thus reminds the people to call out the name of their islands because the name of their island carries their identity and dignity. His use of *Koburake and routikorake mai*

Marawa, which literally means “rise, rise up from the ocean,” serves to remind the people to rise and stand on their own feet, utilising their own knowledge and skills to bring out what is there in their ocean. It is a wakeup call to the new generation who are caught up with the influences of a new civilisation that substitutes traditional ways of living. The importance of land and ocean with the importance of education for money—a new way of life that is more comfortable, relying on other people’s help and support, rather than do something for themselves. The composer had a concern for the new generation where many have neglected their traditional ways of living, fishing skills and the like, causing them to be more reliant upon imported food.

Coconut theology as missio-cultural uses this song to remind the TTC to engage its curriculum with indigenous knowledge and wisdom evolved in the coconut theology itself. This theory uses this song in order to help people retain their traditional skills for the land and ocean because God has provided abundant resources, which have been available for them from the beginning of creation. This song understands that the resource of the land can be affected and run out like that of phosphate, but the resource from the ocean is like a spring of water that cannot end. With a vast ocean, coconut theology as missio-cultural reminds the TTC to equip pastors who can promote the people’s sustainably with their land ocean. This song reminds the TTC to be ecological-oriented because land and ocean is the future of all generations to come. This song insists that if people wisely and economically use them, then Kiribati will rise above the sea and would be seen as part of the international community and will never be ignored again.

Coconut theology as missio-cultural with this song is pushing the church re-examine its prophetic role rooted in the TTC to equip clergy leadership to respond positively to the environmental and human challenges of climate change (PCC Report, 2007). Pastors should thus be empowered to provide relevant teaching to help the people live life to its fullness with the basic minimum of necessities of life and with a strong community spirit which forms and supports the basis of their self-reliance. Despite the absence of many modern conveniences, they have a stable independent community. In 1986, the Tabai government began to do away with external support and rely rather on what the country has been given by the Creator—its land and ocean (Tabai, 1987:44). So that the ocean can benefit the country, it must offer fishing licences to foreign fisherman.

Fishing licences remain one of the major sources of income for the Kiribati government. Life in Kiribati is centred on the sea and the various resources and habitats found therein result in 60 percent of government revenue relying on the granting of fishing license (Keen and Hanich, 2015, Cati, 2014:10). According to the 2016 report:

Revenue from fishing license fees was AUD 29.5 million, then increased to AUD 58.3 million in 2012, to AUD 141.6 million in 2014, and then AUD 197.8 million in 2015 (Kiribati Government, 2016:3-4).

According to this song, the coastal nation of Kiribati lives with resources that must be utilised and preserved for every generation that follows and for the world in general. Marine and coastal biodiversity is instrumental at providing the basis of local livelihoods, as well as the economic development of the nation, including revenue/income generation. “Arise, arise from the bottom of the ocean so that you will be seen by those from afar” is thus a challenge for the islands to rise up, not only to cry out for help, but to do something about it for themselves. It is a song that calls for action by the islanders themselves to rise up as lights to the world.

In the song, “We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it,” islanders have a freedom which must not be allowed to be taken away again. For Tabai (1987:46), the “healthy development for life is to encourage our people to be more independent in spirit despite their acknowledged lack of resources and other economic problems.” Dependence upon others is to allow others to dictate and control what you have and what you can do (1987:46). The people of the Pacific therefore need to be united if they wish to work together towards a hopeful future. They must not allow others to determine their own future, but rather create a future that matches their own plans and dreams.

With this song, we need to learn from our experiences, the impact of globalisation and climate change “to cherish our identities and rediscover ourselves as guardians of the best for the next generations” (PCC Report, 2007:17).

The second purpose in this song is lamentation. “*I teitei i nukan marawa*,” which literally means, “standing in the middle of the ocean,” serves as a prophetic message concerning what is happening today. The impact of climate change has left the people of Kiribati nowhere to go. “*Akea raou ae na buokai*,” which literally means, “no one

to help,” is a statement linked to the response of the developed nations of the world who have heard the cry of the sinking islands in the middle of the ocean but just pretend to listen. “*A katukai bong ririki,*” which literally means, “days and year have left me behind,” points to the fact that from the 1980s when climate change was beginning to be discussed and known, the people of Kiribati were and still are living without the right to determine their own futures. The worst-case scenario and the biggest fear of the Pacific communities is that people may have to leave their home island. This raises a number of concerns for the people, especially about their identity and culture because they are both tied to the land. To lose their land is considered as the ultimate price that the people have to pay because of climate change. Therefore, if the Kiribati people are to be relocated to Fiji or New Zealand, what does that do to them as a people with a distinct culture defined by their land? They lose their identity and connection to their land. For them, the island of Fiji will never be like the islands of Kiribati.

Coconut theology as a framework for this study uses this lamentation about God’s creation being destroyed without the concern of the developed world. As Kiribati is not presently submerging, it shows that the international community has never cared for small island nations. The song laments that destroying a person’s life is the same as destroying one’s own life. Therefore, as we live in this one world, we must live as one family caring for one another.

7.4.2. An uncertain future in the context of climate change

The context of hopelessness and fear within which this question is raised has become part of the many songs that are sung and heard every day. In his song, Taki focusses on a question that concerns our future as our islands are being gradually washed away and the rise in sea level is gradually creeping up more and more over the islands.

What will be our future, what will be the future of our children? Searching for myself, seeking a refuge as the world is getting worse day and night.

My day is so much pain,

My day is much struggle;

I cry to my Lord to help me through.

My people and children, my own country, stand firm and stay strong until the end of time, climate change is so strong.

What will be our future, what will be the future of our children? Searching for myself, seeking a refuge and as the world is getting worse day and night.

My day is so much pain,

My day is much struggle; I cry to my Lord to help me through.

My people and children my country of my own stand firm and stay strong until the end of time, climate change is so strong.

Angry sea will kill us all. So here I cry and there I cry till my Lord help me through.

Tomorrow I am not sure as I try to see the future,

As the world is getting worse day and night.

My brothers and my sisters sitting of the other side with the open hopes, open laughs and strong future,

Reality in the Context of Climate Change (Taki, 2016).

This song was composed to share the cries of people regarding the impacts of climate change that is now destroying their homeland and the livelihood of the people. In no time, most Kiribati islands will be nothing but a vast ocean. These kinds of calamities are not mere acts of nature. They are made from the ignorance of humankind and the inventions that are supposed to improve life for the better (PCC Report, 2007:63-64). The victims of climate change are struggling to protect their lands. At every high tide, they worry how strong their sea walls are to protect their lands. In this song, they declare their current situation that involves fear and pain and calls upon God whom they regard as their only refuge and future. Where will we go if our islands drown? Where is our future?

In this song, the composer considers his disappearing islands as the disappearing of his own body. The strong waves that are eroding the land are like whips bringing pain to the body. Once the land disappears, it also disappears with his whole body. The phrase, “*Searching for myself*” is a metaphor of being lost. This expression serves to challenge to “*brothers and sisters sitting on the other side with open hopes, laughter and future calling them to see their brothers and sisters who are struggling for life day and night.*” It raises a critical question as to how neighbours can enjoy their day, while others are suffering from what they have caused.

In his interview with the president of Kiribati, Helvarg (2010) has stressed that the public is talking, but not all the political leaders seem to be listening. Many political leaders are claiming that they need fossil fuels as it provides many jobs and keeps

people out of poverty. President Tong questioned whether they thought it was fair to allow people in another part of the world to lose their country in order to keep their people in work. If we all work towards a low carbon economy, we may be able to save the planet. Coconut theology as eco-missional uses this song to challenge the TTC to teach pastors about the eco-presence of God among the people—the Christ who has lived in the context and culture of oppression and injustice. This song professes a peoples’ faith that Christ has sacrificed himself, been whipped and beaten to die with the people in order to liberate and save them from the power of darkness and death. Despite the people of Kiribati’s fear for the future in the context of climate change, pastors must preach about the reality of God’s presence among the people as home, land and refuge.

7.4.3. Voices of victims of climate change

This is our song to the world—to country polluting the atmosphere we are crying and now all please we want to live on our shore and not victims of climate change.

Our voices to climate justice.

It our call to you, we are small we are vulnerable; we are the frontline so please save us and our island.

This is our calls to you.

We are small, we are vulnerable, we have no mountain we have nowhere to go.

Is that right to live in hell. children.

We call you to help us, and help our country.

Please rise and help, our country.

Please we need your help, we are calling from the Pacific Islands.

We are vulnerable,

We are frontline.

We have nowhere to go,

We have no mountain.

We have no way to hide when angry waves are coming.

So please hear our cries, hear our call.

Please we need you to hear.

We are calling from the Pacific nation.

We need you to rise and help us and our helpless children (KCCN, 2014).

The KCCN in their songs presents the voices of parents for their children in the future. As they are the best guardians for ensuring the security of the next generation, they have no more way to withstand the impacts of climate change, but to call upon the developed nations of the world for climate justice, to stop polluting the atmosphere. The song is an expression of vulnerability, as the highest point is only three metres above the sea level, “*we have no mountain, we have nowhere to go.*” The concern of parents focusses upon their children and that sometime in the near future they will end up as climate refugees. Out of the wellsprings of their hearts this song presents their cry, “*please help our children, help our county, we want to live on our shore.*” This song raises the voice of parents for their children to be heard by the developed nations to consider the smaller, vulnerable nations of the world and have mercy and help the people of Kiribati.

Even though they are the best guardians of their land and ocean for the next generation, whereby their traditional knowledge has connected them to preserving their land and the resources of their ocean, it can be completely destroyed by the negative impact of climate change (PCC Report, 2007). According to Adger et al. (2011), indigenous peoples have lived for generations with their traditional knowledge that connects them with their environment and that, “many subsistence and indigenous societies retain traditional ecological knowledge of their environments, enabling them to monitor, observe, and manage environmental change” (2011:5).

Bird (2008:197) indicates that land is, “the living link between the past and the present and the future and remembering vitalises this living bridge.” But what is the meaning of this theology of hope in the Pacific context where the land is gradually being destroyed and washed away? And how can the Pacific people of Kiribati be good guardians for the next generation when they are losing hope for the future? The song is therefore an expression of what affects the lives of the people and is a call for effective responses to the changed and changing context in the society.

The composer also notes that Kiribati is not alone as climate change is a global issue. As the song says, “*We live in one world, [and] we are brothers and sisters.*” The negative effects of climate change in one area of the world, affects the lives in other parts of the world (Tofaeono, 2000:234). In his definition of the earth, Tofaeono suggests that the earth begins with the household of relationship where all members are

connected through the web of intimate relationships as brothers and sisters, parents and children. Home is a place where everyone feels the warmth of care and relationships, where no one is excluded in the family or regarded as a stranger. This denotes that when a younger brother subdues an elder sister and treats her as a slave, exploiting her labour, the integrity of the home is violated. Each person has to support one another as part of one human family.

Puleng Lenkabula (2009:48) insists that the principle of equality and sharing is found in the African understanding of *Ubuntu*, “which encourages the distribution and sharing of resources and organisation of a community in such a manner that the dignity of the people is not undermined.” Coconut theology as eco-missional and eco-relational, calls upon the TTC to include within its curriculum the relationship between God, the Creator and God’s creation. Life is relational through the reasonability of human beings, right from the beginning of creation. In his response to Mulenga-Kaunda’s presentation, Palu (2018) argues that the “violence of normalisation” is promoted by conventional hegemonic patriarchal systems and policies. Therefore, while Palu agrees that spiritual transformation cannot exist alone, it must integrate with the social, economic and political transformation and action that responds positively to the felt needs of the people. This has led to a rise in negative relationships, which have even affected the church. The theological understanding of God the creator who is not disconnected with his creation. People need to know that where there is life, there is God. The church in its mission needs to be extended beyond the boundaries of the institutional church and care for and embrace the whole of God’s creation (PCC Report, 2009).

7.5. Voice of the Pacific against the president of the United States of America

A local paper reported that, “The Beat,” a local Fijian band, just a day before the US president, Donald J. Trump was going to break its international commitment to the Paris Agreement, had published a song that expressed their deep frustration towards the US president who pretended to know much about the science of climate change. Yet Trump demonstrated a total disregard for the suffering of climate change victims (Fijian Band, 2017). Coconut theology as eco-rational uses this song to critique how powerful nations such as the US through its political leaders often make decisions that pose threats to the lives of others, particularly the inhabitants of Pacific islands. Rising sea levels, driven

by human-made climate change, now regularly swamps these tiny islands. Thousands have been forced to flee to New Zealand. Without drastic reductions in fossil fuel use, the entire nation will drown. The author of the song identified that some world leaders that make such one-sided decisions are blind and the mistakes that they make are costly because they compromise the future generations of children elsewhere in the world. The researcher would like to quote this song because it has close connections with what is happening in his own country and surrounding islands in the Pacific region where the loss of land and the uncaring attitude of those in power poses not only a moral but also socio-political and economic dilemma. This song reads as follows:

*Take a walk with us and let's pretend that we are all just family Mr President;
That we got love and we got trust.
I'd like to show you why the Paris agreement was unanimous,
When you see the storm taking our lives how do you feel.
When you see us crying at Canadian pipeline how do you feel?
How about the fact that another coal plant just retired...change your mind and don't be blind.
How do you feel when you realise all of your mistakes?
How about grandkids behind you cleaning the mess you make;
How will you look at your investors in the eyes when there's no funding for new coal mines when you see the storms taking our lives.
How do you feel when you see us crying at Canadian pipelines how do you feel how about the fact that another coal plant just retired change your mind and don't be blind.
Can't you see that there is more to gain than there is no lose?
How could you think our survival is up for you and your friends to choose.
Now don't you imagine what front-liners have to say—we are going all the way.
The Pacific is here to stay.
When you see the storms taking our lives how do you feel.
When you see us crying at Canadian pipelines/how do you feel?
How about the fact that another coal plant just retired...change your mind and don't be blind? (Fijian Band, 2017).*

This song is a cry of frustration to one who enjoys life out of another's suffering. It is a challenge to the wealthy nations who have never cared for poor and marginalised communities elsewhere in the world. This song is a critique of the dominant ruling powers over the small nations they have ruled over for their own benefit without any

concern for the consequences that have destroyed many innocent lives. Coconut theology as eco-relational uses this song to help the TTC include eco-justice in its curriculum so that student pastors can stand for the truth against the developed nations oppressing the poor and vulnerable in the developing world.

According to this song, being oppressed and ill-treated is a way forward to build a nation that is able to stand on its own with boldness to fight against injustice. The line, “*Take a walk with us*” was directed at the US president so that he could put himself in place of a family of Pacific people to see how the impacts of climate change are affecting their livelihoods. The composer goes further to speak about people, “*crying at Canadian pipeline,*” thereby comparing the cries of the Pacific people with the cries of his own people.²⁶ The question to ask is whether President Trump can listen to the cries of the Pacific people when he has never listened to the voices of his own people? This is one of the serious challenges to the attempts being made to save the lives of those living in danger or impending danger due to climate change.

Storey and Hunter cite on Kristof, who states that the problem is not climate change impacts, but rather the lack of compassion and care for those who are living under the impacts of climate change. (2010:172). As Storey and Hunter (2010:172) can state:

Little ants making a home on a leaf floating on a pond. And the elephants go to drink and roughhouse in the water. The problem isn't the ants' behaviour. It's a problem of how to convince the elephants to be more gentle”

The expression “*grandkid cleaning the mess he made,*” simply means that the US president cannot see the suffering of the Pacific people when he has his own eyes closed to the suffering of his own people. The song speaks against the funding of new coal mine and the cry of the people at the proposed Canadian pipeline that runs from Canada through to the south coast of the US, but which goes through a large American Indian Reservation in the Cota, passing through where the American Indian population live. American Indians rebelled against the oil pipeline being built through their land. The

²⁶ “*Cry for his own people*” refers to the demonstrations that people in US held in 2017 against the attempt of the State to construct oil pipelines in an American Indian reserve, which its inhabitants have considered part of them and their way of life.

previous US President, Barack H. Obama opposed this decision, but since President Donald J. Trump came into power, he overruled the decision and allowed the oil pipeline to be built because this is the one of the sources that funded him in his election campaign for the presidency (William, 2016).

The composer likens the American Indians' scenario to his own people's plight whose lives are at threat because of the decisions taken by the rich and powerful. This is often what power does because it has no concern for the people on the margin (Davenport, 2015). The forceful removal of people from their land has become a contributing factor to the contemporary global crisis of migrants, on the move from fragile states, primarily in the Global South, whose economies are unable to provide the fundamentals of life to support their citizens: clean water, adequate health care, food sovereignty, good education and stable systems of good governance (Hewitt, 2016:1).

For Conradie (2009:36-37), people with the necessary political will, moral imagination, leadership and vision are needed to address the challenges of climate change in order to change destructive consumerist aspirations and attitudes that increasingly embrace the desire for prosperity at any cost at the expense of sustainable alternatives (2009:36-37). The phrase "*Take a walk with us*" arises from the Pacific context of community life where people live, walk and support each other in every circumstance they face. To walk together means to live together as part of a family, sharing the same home, context, concern and experiencing the same feelings of joy and suffering. It is embedded in the concept of empathy as Seferosa states, "the task of weaving in the Pacific is a communal activity—one does not weave alone or for oneself. One weaves together with others and for the community" (Seferosa, 2010:28). Coconut theology as eco-rational ironically reflects on the expression: "*Take a walk together with us*" within the Pacific context refers to the invitation towards a stranger who caused the problem of the people without knowing and caring for the consequence. This song as eco-relational indicates that life is relational if humankind acknowledges their failure, repents and fixes what they have destroyed. Palu (2018) states that we are all connected to the world around us and to God, through eco-relationality, this giving rise to what is called relational ecumenism. Accordingly, this song argues for the perpetrator of global warming to enter and live in the situation of climate victims to see how the inhabitants live and feel when the storms and waves come that are destroying their homes and lands. This has potential to help

reimagine the relationship between the poor and the rich, resulting in mutual understanding.

According to (Palu, 2018) the breakdown in relationship between the rich and the poor has given rise to gender inequality and economic injustice. As he points out:

All of us are meant to exist in an eco-relational household where harmony of life is upheld and resources are meant to be shared. In such a household, despite being different in race, gender, and identity we are all diversely connected through an ecological reference.

7.6. Theologising through songs or music

7.6.1. We are suffering with God: Reflecting on the impact of climate change

A popular song sung in the Kiribati church about climate change reads:

Ai kamimira taekan rabakau ake a tataekinaki ba e na iekaki aonabara ni korakoran te iabuti. *How astonishing predictions are to say that our islands are to be flooded by sea level rise.*

Bon te Atua e karika aonnaba ma kanoana ni bane ao e tautaeka iaon bwai nako ake a riki n te aonnaba. *It is only God the Creator who knows what is happening in our world.*

Ngkana tao nanon te Atua ba e na toki te ieka ao antai te tia rabakau ae kona n atai baikai (Kiito, 2015). *If it is God's will to end flooding, who is a scientist who to know these things*

The song literally expresses the strong faith of the Kiribati people in relying upon God as their home, refuge and future, where the song's tone strongly opposes what the scientists say about their islands that they will be submerged. It is a missiological understanding of God the creator versus the scientists who spread their news that the islands are submerging. The people do not accept this message in regard to their belief that, "God is the creator who rules the earth and all therein, even though their low islands will one day be underwater." This song brings the people's notion of God the creator as the only one who has the power or the last word to say about the islands. Coconut theology as eco-missional uses this song to point out that faith in God is a strong refuge, which nothing can destroy. The issue of climate change and sea level rise

is encountered with questions that arise out of people's faith: How can this be happening? Most people do not know anything about climate change—what they know is living in their home country with their strong faith in their God who was and is always there with for them. They often ask if climate change is happening, can it destroy their strong faith in our God whom they trust to be with them until the end of time.

This raises a serious theological question as narrated in Noah's account of the great flood narrative in Genesis 6-9. What about God's promise made to Noah that God would never again destroy life? Did this promise stop at Noah? Can it not be extended to the people of the low-lying Pacific Islands? The song is like an 'article of faith' in God the creator and ruler even though the sea level is rising. How does faith in God affect perspectives about climate change? Does singing this article of faith open the eyes of people to act in preventative ways to offset the challenges of climate change? Or does it make the people fatalistic by accepting the reality without questioning it? Could there be something behind this song that the Kiribati people have overlooked? Conradie's (2009:33) perspectives on "faith and good works," that faith is only important if it motivates the believer into actions of good works are important in this regard.

According to Talia (2009:70-71), a traditional reading of the Bible that was done "within a colonial framework regarded the local people and their land to be owned by the colonial government" not the local people. Therefore, the Bible was used to justify mis-educating the people about their identity and ownership of their land. This non-liberative approach meant that the local people failed to adequately inculturate the Christian message in a way that made it life-giving for all creation. Talia further states that a traditional reading can be used to deny global warming-related sea level rise because the Bible promises that there will be no more global floods sent by God to destroy humanity. When sea levels rise, they still express their faith that God will provide, save and protect them without being motivated into radical acts of resistance. It could be argued that Western missionary Christianity has bequeathed to the people a re-enforced passivity towards social action in defence of their environment because of the privatisation of their faith. When sea levels rise, they still hold on to the Noahic Covenant that God would not forget God's promise to never destroy humankind again (2009:71). Their faith has given them a false perspective that miraculous salvation is

derived from external sources rather than looking within their God-given potential to make a difference where they are. However, this is a strong faith that needs to be nurtured through the pastoral training of ministers at the TTC that will be discussed the chapter which follows.

7.7. Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the importance of song in the traditional culture of Kiribati and how it has been used to document the climate change and rising sea level crisis the people are facing. These are the songs of determination, but also of appeal. Kiribati and the other Pacific islands have all made strong representations at the global level through the UN and other international organisations for the major players in the climate change crisis to have the small nations of the world in mind and realise the consequences of their actions. To date there has been no real response, especially with the US pulling out of the Paris Agreement. Kiribati is of course not the only oceanic nation to be affected by rising sea levels, but it has been the most vocal, with its president, Anote Tong, speaking out strongly during world gatherings of the dangers Kiribati faces (Vince, 2009). The important words here are “voices crying out.” Kiribati has cried out loudly, but sadly with little success.

The introductory section of the chapter discussed the traditional perspective on songs and how they are employed as historical tools to keep the people’s history, traditional skills and knowledge alive. This was followed by a poem which highlighted the tragedy of the loss of land and what it meant to the people. This poem also served to introduce the songs that are be used to express the feelings and sufferings of the people living in the context of climate change. These songs range from a view of Kiribati as a previous British Protectorate and its legacy in those songs that cry out over the loss of the people’s future and in particular the future of their children.

The chapter ends with a song that forms the theology of the people, declaring that even though their island will be washed away, they will still never leave their God who is the Sovereign Creator who knows everything about what is taking place in this world. Despite this, many people still harbour doubts, facing the consequences of climate change, where their cry “*Where is God in all this?*” deserves an answer from the

Kiribati pastors. They deserve reassurance, they need to have their faith strengthened and nurtured with a theology that relates to the climate change crisis. This theology can only be effective to help the people if the TTC includes ecological issues in its curriculum and can offer answers to the people's cry.

CHAPTER EIGHT

COCONUT TREE IMAGINATION IN THE KIRIBATI CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE LEARNING

8.1. Introduction

This chapter is the second part in the process of data analysis, which seeks to demonstrate how a missio-epistemic pedagogic device can inform theological learning in the context of climate change. The previous chapter demonstrated the importance of songs as essential component of the Kiribati culture. Songs play an important role in keeping alive the people's oral tradition, historical awareness of their origin and ethnicity. Accordingly, they are used in the process of data analysis to help the church in its mission of training its future pastors.

This chapter seeks to analyse the central research question of the present study which centres on the missional implications of climate change for the church:

What are the curriculum implications of the phenomenon of climate change in Kiribati for the renewal of theological education that fosters ministerial formation of students at Tangintebu Theological College?

The question is considered in two parts:

- i. The attitude of the islanders themselves to the problem of climate change and what they are seeking from their church to help them cope;
- ii. Whether the current curriculum is adequate in the face of the climate change crisis.

This chapter will therefore discuss and analyse the views of the people through interviews and questionnaires. This is because, according to Kaunda (2017:50), the marginalised, their cultures and their other religious traditions must be at the heart of this conversation—bottom-up, not top-down. In the document, “to read the signs of the times and to challenge the churches from below,” the important reflection is to enable

people “from various marginalised communities to reflect theologically on their situation” (2016:3). This chapter therefore documents the voices of those people on the ground to reflect and share their cultural understanding of the coconut tree and suggest what the church needs to be aware of and take consideration of in its missio-formation.

8.2. Voices of the human face of climate change

Living in unity in a village community is one of the traditional values that is, “common in the Pacific where most societies are socially responsible for the action of their members” (PCC Report 2007:177). Once one member of the community is affected, all in the community are affected because each member is treated as part of one family. Accordingly, everyone in the community is jointly responsible for the welfare and safety of each other. In Kiribati, it is the *maneaba* system which preserves the social unity of an entire village and in this regard, several respondents argued that this system should be maintained as far as possible. In effect, respondents raised two matters:

- i. The *maneaba* system as a village ‘parliamentary’ system to maintain order and to ensure the village runs smoothly;
- ii. The traditional village community concept of people caring for one another.

The research respondents clearly argued that both ‘systems’ had broken down, largely because of climate change and what remained in their place was not beneficial. The research respondents agreed it was important to restore the *maneaba* system, because it was so deeply ingrained in traditional Kiribati culture, but that the community ties and relationships that were an essential part of village life had been rapidly vanishing. As one respondent, Tosa in Focus Group A explained:

When we were young, we used to have a cultural gathering where people come together with traditional food associated with traditional completion in sing and dancing. The purpose behind this is to maintain the culture and traditional ways of living, to maintain unity in the

community and to encourage people to live with their own traditional skills of planting and fishing (Tosa, 04 September 2016)

Etai, an elderly widow, expressed this in practical terms:

When we live in our culture of reciprocity, we live without hunger or thirst. As a widow who cannot go fishing, I never run out of fish because my neighbours never forget to give me some of their catch when they return from fishing. As a widow who cannot get a drink from a coconut tree, my neighbour used to give me some (Etai, 04 September 2016).

As Baru argues, the decline in cultural value is affecting present-day Kiribati community life:

Due to climate change impacts, the way we co-exist with our neighbours is changing rapidly because we are now fighting for our land boundaries and the limited number of coconut trees, breadfruits etc. that are available (Baru, 14 August 2016).

Baru further commented that due to meeting the high cost of living, the culture of reciprocity, sharing and support of others was at risk, thereby affecting the people's traditional way of life and family security.

Arare in Focus Group A pointed out that the reciprocal ways of helping and supporting each other as part of the community life was on the decline, as communities were constantly being broken apart under the influence of climate change and rising sea levels. Arare (04 September 2016) thus laments:

Our lands have been destroyed and it makes it difficult to rely any more on our local foods. Consequently, our life is heavily dependent on money that makes more problems for us to meet the high cost of living. With this problem, our culture of sharing and supporting others is no longer practical knowing that life is becoming difficult

Uati also expressed his concern that globalisation had gone hand-in-hand with the power of Western culture, and that this is what led to the breakdown of a culture based

on community life, being replaced by an individualistic culture where no-one ever cares for another person:

Supporting others is now regarded as a major problem because life is becoming difficult and each family have to care for his own family. For how we can share when we do not have enough for our family? (03 July 2016).

Deane-Drummond (2008:30-31) insists that the influence of globalisation associated with climate change impacts has promoted campaigns to change the way society lives and acts. Everything that was local and regional was thus vulnerable to be transformed into a global format, thereby destroying the essence of a caring community. Aken noted that:

In mountainous and large continental islands water is readily available. For atoll islands water is sourced from an underground water lens that is susceptible to seawater contamination through intrusion as sea-level rises” (Akena, 23 July 2016).

Consequently, low-lying atolls experiencing sea level rise are the first to suffer through the unavailability of safe drinking water. Water and vegetation, which are the main sources of life on the islands, have also been affected. As a result, islanders have been forced to move their homes in a search of safe freshwater sources. A respondent from Abaiang pointed out the reason for their relocation was to seek land that could sustain them with fresh water. But where is a safer place for an I-Kiribati living on these low-lying atolls? As Tela reported:

Sea level is gradually rising, and it is now difficult to find a safe place for fresh water. The pollution of our drinking water has also affected our vegetation for our daily needs” (Tela, 08 July 2016).

Land loss from erosion caused by rising sea levels makes the problem worse, as another respondent from the island of Tamana pointed out. Eli (30 July 2016) thus reported:

Our islands are getting smaller, while our coastal ecosystem which used to be so rich with the marine resources is now being exhausted. Our local and cultural trees that had sustained us and our forefathers for many generations such as te mai breadfruit, te bero and even coconuts are being ignored by the new generation

A respondent from the capital Tarawa agreed with this assessment:

Our local and cultural trees that had sustained us and our forefathers for many generations such as breadfruit and te beero and even coconuts are quickly gone. Our way of life in our homes is changing rapidly and hence our culture. For our food, we have to rely now on imported goods and overseas products which is making us even more vulnerable to exogenous shocks. Life is now becoming more difficult than before. We have to limit visitors and family visitation and try to avoid cultural ceremonies which can be very expensive (Beta, 22 July 2016).

Beta understood one of the most unfortunate consequences of climate change in Kiribati to be the impact it has had on food sources. With the loss of land and water, vegetation, both tree crops and vegetables, are suffering and are on the decline. This has given rise to a population that relies heavily on imported and predominantly processed foods (McIver et. al 2014:5228). Such negative interference on the part of humankind against the Creator's intention, brings destruction to our planet and to the health of its peoples. Thaman critically argued that the consequence has been to increase numbers of several non-communicable, "diseases, including diabetes, obesity, gout, hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke and certain cancers" (2002:166). It is due to this that the church is challenged to play an important role in addressing these issues. Again, people ask the important question: Where is God in all this? But as importantly: Where is the church? What is its role in this situation? What is its message? How can the church give us hope for the future?"

8.3. Coconut tree imagination

8.3.1. Coconut theology as missio-cultural

In chapter four above, the ocean and land were discussed as being at the very centre of the existence and culture of the people and are connected to their traditional skills and values of mutual respect, reciprocity and sharing (Beso, 30 September 2016). The people depend on the land and ocean and vice versa. One respondent despondently shared that the changing landscape in the context of climate change had also changed the cultural ways of living in the lives of the Kiribati people. Consequently, the voices of the people are critical to this study to share their situations and circumstances that lead to the changing of their culture. As one respondent was to report:

In the past our forefathers lived very close to their neighbours as well as to their environment. They gained their faith from the sacredness of the land and ocean and traditional knowledge through their interconnection with their land and sea. Nowadays our cultural relationship within the community and our religious connection with our gods are all affected (Bita, 21 October 2016).

This respondent indicates it was not only life of the people being changed, but their spiritual relationship with their gods was also affected.

Another respondent from Focus Group B reported:

People who were actively lived in their traditional culture, their attitudes toward their environment were always sensitive to caring for their land and ocean (Tabau, 21 October 2016).

This research respondent indicated that the connection to their lands and ocean was part of their life. They were brought up with the understanding that land and ocean were regarded as sacred, which leads people to live a respectful and caring attitude towards creation. Being brought up in this culture, the people understand their environment well, their weather, their land and ocean, the right time to plant and fish. Iuta, Kirata, and Ratieta (1980:45) thus point out that, “living more closely to nature, the land and

environment with natural foods will bring people to stay closer, happier and healthier.” They insist that even though we are struggling to survive in the midst of climate change impacts, the coconut tree nevertheless stands strong as a life-giving tree supplying most of our needs, presenting a living message reminding us of the living God who has gone through suffering and humiliation to exist among us as a life-giving God in the midst of fear and hopelessness. Utilising her traditional point of view, Arare (04 September 2016) can argue that the coconut tree always points to the traditional ways of living as the only place to attain the fullness of life, However, the people today pay no concern to caring for the coconut tree and its environment; likewise, the church which is the most powerful voice for the people, remains silent on this issue.

An elder from Tamana shared his concern for the negligence of cultural values that leads to destructive attitudes towards the environment:

We are living in a difficult context of climate change and with a lack of knowledge how to deal with it our people are contributing to the impacts of climate change. My example is that when people cut coconut trees around the coastal areas, they never concern of how destructive it is to coastal areas. When one throws a plastic in the sea, no one cares, as it is a pollution to the ocean (Bita, 04 September 2016).

This points to a lack of knowledge for the care and concern of creation as the new generation is moving away from their cultural values to a predominantly Western style of living. Without our culture, our connection with the world will decline. As Ibiti has commented:

When we care for our land, our land cares for us. When we care for the coconut tree, the coconut tree care for us. When we care for our ocean, our ocean cares for us. Our land and ocean are not alone and separate—they are homes of our ancestors and our gods. Therefore, we treat our ocean and land holy because they are sanctuaries that connect us with our ancestors and gods (21 October 2016).

This means that culture is seen as a vehicle for enhancing the connection between humankind, the creation and God. Because of these connections, culture was perceived

as the centre of Kiribati life. A student from the TTC in Focus Group A expressed the opinion that when we destroy the lives of creatures, pollute the ocean, or destroy the life of the coconut tree, every form of life is affected. And if life is affected, the God who gives life will also be affected (Bakati, 04 September 2016).

The research respondents expressed their concern that if people are living without knowing how to live with their environment, the future of the next generation will be affected. This is the weakness that people are encumbered with. People are living without acknowledging that it is an ecological sin against the creator. The biblical role for humankind in relation to the creation has been misinterpreted—from stewardship to rulers. Humankind was created to serve as stewards for creation, but instead have become exploitive and destructive as they now regard themselves as rulers of all creation. This points to the failure of preaching that has never addressed the destruction of creation as a sin against the Creator. Leal (2006) criticises Christians for not valuing and nurturing the earth. As a result, not even in our worship do we address our concern for the earth, which surely it should do. To this day, it is rare to hear a sermon on environmental issues in the church. Sunday services should include a Christian message for the well-being of planet earth. For how can we preach about salvation as eternal life when planet earth that produces resources for the well-being of humankind on earth is left out? The good news of salvation should include the earth (Leal, 2006:42). As ecological concern is not part of church discussion, ecological pollution and destruction is also not part of people's concern and care. The TTC is thus called to transform its curriculum to teach eco-theology to enlighten the people biblically concerning their responsibility as stewards for God's creation.

Ngaan made it clear that:

The ocean is a food container or a fridge that keeps our food. Drawing rubbish in the ocean is like drawing rubbish and kimpies inside our fridge, Destroying the life of the coconut is like destroying the life of our children” (21 October 2016).

But how can people understand when the church is silent and fails to acknowledge it as a sin against the creation and its Creator? The church focusses only on people's

relationship with God and ignores the value of people's relationship with creation. According to Oduyoye (1991:93), the beauty of creation and the survival of humankind depends on the "interdependence and interconnectedness" between creatures, the universe and the Creator. This means that there is a responsibility on the part of the church to maintain this interdependence and interconnectedness.

One research participant who was a pastor, thus reported:

The new generation have moved away from their traditional life that was more ecologically sustainable and at the same time they are also moving away from their responsibility to care the land and ocean (Tabau, 21 October 2016).

In this regard, Tiweri proposed that the TTC must focus more on a curriculum of the ecological relationship between God, people and creation, Life from the creator connects humankind with creation and thus the church needs to provide ecological understanding in the context of climate change. The African worldview is closely linked to the Kiribati worldview on the relationship between humankind, the universe and God. Balcomb (2004:68) notes that in the African worldview every creature including human beings, exist interdependently as part of the whole. This means that as part of the whole, human beings are as valuable as other created things. This worldview stands against the biblical understanding in Kiribati that positions humankind above all creation as rulers. This in turn is the cause of ignorance to care and save this planet. A respondent from Focus Group B reported that:

If students at the TTC are equipped academically and theologically neglecting ecological concern and care of their environment, then the mission of the church will fail to provide appropriate answers to the contemporary context of the people" (Raera, 21 October 2016).

Another research participant expressed their concern that:

People are limited in their understanding to see God in the gift of creation that sustains and bless them” (Beta, 22 July 2016).

This research participant raises the need for the development of a contextual theology that can explicate the gift of the coconut tree that speaks of the fullness of life that God has provided through Jesus Christ. Without the contextual understanding of God’s involvement in our world, people live without appreciating with gratitude the environment that provides them abundantly with all the necessary resources for life. It was discussed in chapter four above that the changing landscape of the Kiribati islands has led to the changing of lifestyle and culture of the people (Kwong, 2013b:26).

This is a challenge to the church and its theological institution to build a strong community of fellowship and sharing where no one is left behind. Water is life and pastors need to help people conserve and harvest water not for individual families, but for the larger community. It is in this context that the church needs to teach people how to care for one another. With this concern, a further research participant proposed that:

The TTC curriculum must be resourceful to teach students not only to become theologically and academically equipped but also to be physically aware of how they live with their environments and surroundings (Tabi, 21 November 2016).

An elderly respondent from Aranuka adds to the cause of anthropocentric exploitation that:

Pastors have avoided the most important part in their mission to teach people how they acknowledge and appreciate the gift of life that God has provided for them. As our lives depend on the coconut tree, the coconut tree also depends on us to take care of it Without a proper teaching on eco-logical concern, people never care how they pollute the ocean or destroy their environment (Ibiti, 23 July 2016).

Above all, the respondents express the need for theological students to be well-equipped culturally and theologically because the Christian message and culture are not separated. In the contemporary context of the people, the church must be prepared to

embrace good co-operation with people of culture as, “life-affirming spirits present in different cultures” (Maeland, 2016:555).

8.3.2. Coconut theology as eco-relational

McFague (2001) argues that the traditional story of God’s incarnation in Christ is a one-sided story showing care only for humankind, and yet not for all of humanity, but only those following Jesus Christ. According to this argument, it is spiritual but not physical. The sacrificial atonement and redemption of Jesus Christ is limited only to those who express saving faith in him. It is only a project designed to redeem humankind from their sins but not a project aimed at liberating all of creation and the entire earth. Accordingly, McFague (2001:160) asserts:

Salvation is not for the well-being of the whole creation and all its peoples, but is focused on a narrow slice of creation, just us, and moreover us as individuals.

The impact of such teachings allow people to ignore their responsibility to care for creation thinking that God relationship is only with humankind, but not with the rest of creation. Pearson (2004:25) argues that since the earth, the source of life that gives birth to all earth-living communities, humans can no longer think of themselves as totally different from other creatures. He believes that the traditional story about God’s incarnation in Christ should be an opened ended one for all that has life. He underscores;

... humankind is a creature and should no longer merely be seen in a vertical relationship with its creator. What it mean to become human should be situated inside an understanding of a fellowship of creation that extends in horizontal fashion to include the rest of the natural order (Pearson, 2004:25),

However, through the interviews the understanding of God through coconut theology, God is relational. God is life who reveals God’s-self in what is good and what is life.

A respondent from one of the focus groups stated that through the coconut we could understand the meaning of peace, joy and hope:

Because in our coral islands where vegetables are not growing well, but the coconut tree grows well, providing every need physically and spiritually. The coconut tree provides us with foods and also provides us with the oil the most holy elements to connect with our gods (Ibiti, 23 July 2016).

Within Christianity, the people in Kiribati still have the same provisions from the coconut tree. The fruit is representative of the body and blood of Christ. (Havea 1988/1989). The coconut tree as eco-rational calls upon the church to play a vital role in caring for creation.

According to one pastor interviewed, the coconut tree is an expression of God's abundant love. It is full of voices teaching human beings not only about the love of God but also about God's desire for humanity to be part of God's ongoing mission to save and maintain the beauty of the earth. (Tabo, 04 September 2016). Tabo further states that if the life of the coconut tree is destroyed, then the meaning of peace, hope and faith from that tree will also be destroyed. Therefore, he suggests that:

The TTC is to develop a curriculum of ecological responsibility of care. When the land-sea-people connection is close, God as the provider is known to be close. But if God is close, where is the church? Sometimes the people feel the church is far away from their problems (Tabo, 04 September 2016).

Iakob explained that:

When we live on our own food, we always have enough, because we depend on our land and ocean, the ancestral property for our everyday needs. We must not neglect this gift of life, because it is connecting us with the God who provides" (Iakob, 21 November 2016).

Another respondent, Nali, argued that:

the gift of the land and ocean is the best gift for life that humans should embrace with thanksgiving, but many have ignored it. Our subsistent way of living always makes feeling comfortably without worrying for

what will be our food tomorrow, and what we can share to our neighbours, because what the land and ocean provide is abundant for us (Nali, 30 September 2016).

The argument of the above respondents is that the land and ocean provide the life-connection between human beings and the Creator in the form of responsibility and accountability. The land and ocean are God's gifts for the people of Kiribati. Therefore, people must return to their cultural ways of living to give thanks for these gifts. According to the respondents, people are assured that their cultural way of life is a platform that can bring them closer to their relationship with the Creator. If people have turned their backs on their cultural way of life, this leads to them to face even more difficulties to meet the cost of living.

As being discussed above in chapter five, 'well-being' is interpreted in Kiribati as *torobai*, which translated means, "one who lacks nothing in her/his home." The traditional knowledge and skills of the I-Kiribati are the strengths that make and lead them to be *maiu n toron aomata* (lit: "real humans" or "to possess") *toronibai* (lit: "well-being"). The respondent Akena understands three things from *toronibai*:

The traditional skills that an I-Kiribati is born with—leads us to be hardworking people with these skills—to enables us to exercise moral principles of respect and hospitality (Akena, 23 July 2016).

With the purpose of *toro ni bai* or *toro n aomata*, an I-Kiribati is expected to always be well-prepared to meet any difficult circumstance in life. The above research participant noted that the gift of life given by God should be received with full commitment and faithfulness. With hard work, we can thus reap the fruits of life which are not only for us, but for the rest of humanity.

Cultural quality however has suffered, not only from climate change but also from globalisation. Concerned with such impacts, Tebano comments that the, "population growth and the move to Western lifestyles, are having a more immediate impact" such as serious problems of "waste disposal, sanitation, and environmental pollution unusual especially in the most populated capital South Tarawa" (2013:10). Together, they have

brought the islanders to where they are now. One research participant noted that the impacts have contributed to an important transfer taking place:

The shift from rural life to urban life which at the same time have added to the negative impacts to food security and sustainable livelihood, coupled with the challenges in the rise of the food price on the global level (Beta, 22 July 2016).

This is because the transition from a “traditional subsistence lifestyle to a contemporary market-based economy, has brought with it key environmental challenges that adversely affect the overall health of the environment” (Kwong 2013b:2). Imported foodstuffs have also led to an increase in diseases and early deaths, while the imported kava culture is the real cause or contributing factor to many family health issues and eventual family breakdowns (Tebano 2013:19).

All of us are meant to exist in an “eco-relational household” where the harmony of life is upheld and resources are meant to be shared (Palu, 2018) There is a responsibility that is relational between human beings and towards the coconut tree and *vice versa*.

Lack of understanding this relational responsibility, people will never realise and acknowledge that their destructive activities to their environment is a sin against the creator” (Raoi, 27 November 2016).

The failure of the pulpit to address this relationship is based on a one-sided message focussed on the relationship between humankind and God, and nothing about the relationship of humankind with the creation.

8.3.3. Coconut theology as eco-missional

Pastors must be sufficiently equipped and trained to understand their prophetic with respect towards creation and to help people acknowledge with repentance their past failures and sin towards creation. As the coconut tree is responsible to provide human beings with food and shelter, human beings must also play their part to serve and care for the coconut tree (Taria, 04 September 2016). Taria further suggested that:

We need to preserve the life of the coconut tree not only because we are benefited from it physically but because we are also benefited from it spiritually (Taria, 04 September 2016).

This means that when we preserve the life of the coconut tree, at the same time we honour and glorify God the Creator and other earth communities. On the other hand, when we destroy the life of the coconut tree, at the same time we will also destroy the life of other creatures and even creation itself.

Another respondent reported that:

Because the church fails to teach people how to live in harmony with their land, ocean and environment, people never care of how they destroy their land or pollute their ocean (Matema, 03 September 2016).

Raoi added to this argument that:

The new generation always focus on their current needs and never care for the future generation. When they cut coconut trees on coastal areas to build their homes they never concern for the lives of the coconuts that protect their land and cater for the next generations. Our ancestor planted coconut trees on coastal areas not only to serve people with the

fruit but also to protect the islands from erosions (Raoi, 23 October 2016).

Raoi proposes that the church needs to embed in its theological curriculum with an ecological understanding of God's relationship with creation and humankind. A former theological principal at the TTC supported this view when she argued:

The church has been imprisoned with Euro-centric views that the TTC still bounded with the nature of Western curriculum (Nali, 30 September 2016)

She further underlined:

It is through the coconut tree that we can see the love of God through Jesus who have entered in our human context with fullness of life and reminded us of our responsibility to reciprocally share this love not only to our fellow humans but also to all creation. It is through the coconut tree that we see Christ as the source of life who continue to speak to the church to be life-giving to the world. We cannot love God if we deny our responsibility to care for creation that our lives depend on. It is through our loyalty to fulfil our responsibility as caretakers for God's creation that life will be maintained in every part of God's creation (Nali, 30 September 2016).

This indicates the need to inform the people to acknowledge their destructive attitude towards the environment as their ecological sin against the Creator so that they might be reconciled to their environment and live closer to it.

8.3.4. The coconut theology as epistemic-pedagogic for mission-formation

The vision statement of the KUC states that, "the Kiribati Uniting Church is to be dynamic and effective in aspiring the fullness of life in Jesus Christ" (Kiribati Uniting Church Strategic Plan, 2013). Matema, a research participant lecturing at the TTC reported:

As the mission statement of the KUC call KPC members to live to the full, the curriculum must also serve to the full by means of addressing issues that threatening people's life spiritually and physically. Our curriculum is still euro-centric and must be transformed equip students not only for their present security but also for the ongoing security of their islands and ocean" (Matema, 23 November 2016).

A research participant in Focus Group B who works as a pastor could also comment:

The coconut tree reflects the image of God's love—the source of life that must be reciprocally shared. God in Jesus sacrificed himself to share his love in order for us to share that love with our fellow humans and to God's creation. It is through the coconut tree that people could see the fullness of God's love and provisions (Itinta, 21 October 2016).

The pastor further attempted to clarify that the coconut tree represents Jesus Christ who entered into our world to reveal the fullness of life that all of humankind needs to depend on. It is through the love of God expressed in the life, sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we are reminded of our responsibility to reciprocally share this love not only to the rest of humankind, but also to all of creation.

Another respondent was of the opinion that:

The coconut tree is God's gift of life full of messages—the messages that has been ignored by the people who have lived and benefited from the coconut. When it grows on coastal areas it speaks about its responsibility that is required to protect the land. When it bears fruits, it speaks about the life-giving God who never sleep but always available to provide what is needed by those who rely on him. When it provides shelter, it speaks about God as the only refuge for security and protection. When it provided medicine, it speaks about God as saviour who has come to bring healings to humans and to the world being

destroyed by the sinful desires of human's greed and selfishness (Arare, 21 September 2016).

Even though the TTC is silent in addressing ecological issues, they have nevertheless contributed theoretically about the need for a contextual theology of the coconut tree to learn from it who God is and what God requires them to do in response to the current context and circumstances of the people.

Another lecturer pointed to the coconut tree as:

A symbol of the church—the church is a flourishing coconut tree that must grow well in the poor coral soil of Kiribati. Even though life in Kiribati is difficult because of the poor soil and become more difficult in terms of losing hope in the context of fear and uncertainty, the church must stand as a strong and lively tree bearing fruits to sustain life and feed hunger and thirst of the people. The church must exist in the fullness of Christ as gift of life to maintain hope and security in the context of climate change (Nali, 30 September 2016).

It seems that there is a great need for a transformative curriculum to help people to be more responsible and adaptive as part of their daily lives and daily worship towards God the Creator. As Tietu could assert:

If the church fails to transform the new generation to live in harmony with creation, then the future of our planet will be under-threat and vulnerable (Tietu, 21 October 2016)

Tietu saw the new generation as more destructive and ignorant in their attitudes towards the environment because they are now moving away from their traditional way of life. Tietu thus points to the gap that the TTC should address, namely, the lack of traditional knowledge that is more responsible and concerned for the life and security of the land, ocean and the environment in general.

Bitu, a respondent from Focus Group A complained that:

It is not our people who created the destruction of our islands but the developed countries who have contributed to global warming and sea level rise (Bita, 04 September 2016).

All the participants in Focus Group A were to argue that the church and the government needed to work together to fight against the injustice oppressing small island nations like Kiribati and alert the international community to learn and understand the situation of the people who are victimised by impacts of climate change:

We are paying the cost of what others are doing for their own benefit, development, and security for their nations and countries. The international community should have to take responsibility for the victims of climate change like people in Kiribati. (Focus Group A, 04 September 2016).

The voice of the people could not be heard unless the church leaders and pastors are vocal and bold to fight against the injustice and ignorance of the developed world. Accordingly, the TTC that controls the messages of pastor must revisit its curriculum to equip its student pastors to be more life-giving in the context of the people and vocal against injustice where life and creation is threatened.

The research participants of Focus Group B put the blame on the church leadership and its theological college that trained its student pastors to become leaders in society. They argued that if the TTC fails in its curriculum to equip pastors with relevant messages against the contemporary challenges of the people, then people will remain blind and will take the wrong path in their everyday life. Many people are still living with the understanding that human beings have the authority to rule over the creation. They believe they are the crown of all creation. This in turn leads to destructive attitudes that never care for pollution and ecological destruction (Focus Group B, 21 October 2016). Tietu provided an example that:

The church contributes to this blindness as silent when people do funding raising by cutting coconut trees, build small houses (kiakia)²⁷ and sell them for their contribution to the church. In the capital island, people mine soils and gravels and sell them for cash. The church that lives among the people is silent to address these damaging activities because it focusses more its own agenda to be run by people's contribution (Tietu, 21 October 2016).

The above respondent based his argument on the failure of the church leadership to address ecological issues in the context of climate change. He therefore calls upon the church to revisit its prophetic role to build an ecologically-caring community. Reure in Focus Group A, presents a strong argument that:

The church has existed as a contributing agent to the destruction of the environment (Reure, 04 September 2016).

He further argued that:

The church has failed in its prophetic role to lead the people in the right direction to save our islands. The failure of the new generation to care for the environment and for the ocean is the failure of the church in her mission that never cares for the future of the people but only cares for their own programmes to be fulfilled (Reure, 04 September 2016).

Tiaka in Focus Group B added to this concern by stating that:

The church must focus more in her mission to equip the new generation that to care for the family is the same responsibility to care for creation. Because of our blood in our children, that our love is always there for them. But as mother earth is producing and provide what makes our life continue we must love mother earth as we love our children. It is in the coconut that we are informed about the God whose love never ends and

²⁷ *Kiakia* is the name of a common bird in Kiribati. The small house is called *kiakia* because this building is not fixed to the ground but can be moved to a new location. It is like a flying house that can easily move from one place to another. To build the *kiakia*, they have to cut a number of coconut trees.

whose love needs to be shared in the world in which we live, between us as human beings and all creation, which is part of all our lives (Tiaka, 04 September 2016).

Uati, the wife of a pastor shared her theological view as follows:

The church as the body of Christ on earth is a living Christ in the context where people endured difficult experience in their context. However, the church has failed to reveal the living Christ who was and is existing in the life-giving of the coconut tree that is living with us as part of our family. It is through the coconut tree that we can learn about God love and how we can share that love (Uati, 03 July 2016).

It appears from the contributions of the above research respondents that the society is in need of relevant teachings to understand God from their own context through their own traditional knowledge and understanding that the church needs to provide. Thus, the TTC should integrate into its curriculum teaching not only about cultural values but also a contextual theology where people can see God in their context.

8.4. Ecology for theological education

Tofaeono (2000:234) provided the concepts of *ainga*, or household of God for humanity's responsibility and relationship, "to the plants and animal and stars who are in fact our brothers and sisters, and as member of the cosmic-biotic community" Tofaeono further proposes that the love shared in the household between brothers and sister should also be shared between the household members of God (2000:234). This is a challenge for human beings to care for the ocean, land, and crops as the only way to bring abundant life. Reue, a respondent from Focus Group A, theologically supports such a perspective when he stated that:

...closeness to creation will bring life to both humans and creation as indicated by the coconut that grows well near the people but when it grows far, they are not growing well. Coconut is like members of our

family, because when it grows near us it is flourishing and bears good fruits.” (Reue, 04 September 2016).

An elder from Abaiang (Aiki, 20 July 2016) reported that the land and the ocean are parts of what it means to be human. That is why we call ocean *taari* (lit: “brother”) and land *te aba* (lit: “nation”). Aiki also shared his concern about the interconnectedness of life between creation and human beings, which if broken, then life itself will also be broken:

We cannot live without land because land is nation and we cannot live without the ocean because it is our brother. Without the coconut tree we cannot understand the meaning of life because it is in this true that we understand all meaning of life (Aiki, 20 July 2016).

This reminds us that we cannot live without Christ. As the Bible asserts, where we live we have to live with Christ. “*For in him we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28, NIV).

One respondent shared his coconut cosmological view that:

The coconut tree is a powerful image of God that reminds our people not to move away from their cultural ways of living. It is through life from the coconut that we have our traditional ways of living that we learn deeper about God existence among us, caring and sustaining life for us” (Tosa, 13 December 2016).

As McFague (1991:5) states, people need to understand that “human beings and other forms of life are interrelated and interdependent and they also need to understand their special responsibility for the planet’s well-being.” In line with this argument, a theological lecturer proposed that:

Theological colleges should revisit their curriculum to address this inter-relatedness and interdependent of humans with creation so that

people could experience life-giving from their lands and ocean”
(Matema, 03 September 2016).

Matema further reported that:

A theological curriculum that is life-giving always goes with responsibility to serve and preserve. A theological college that fails to serve and preserve will never be life-giving (Matema, 03 September 2016).

In order to maintain the life of every species on earth, it will be necessary to live alongside and integrate with other living communities; not to live in separation as a superior being or ruler, but to serve and preserve (Habel 2009:69). McGrath thus insists that:

There is thus no theological ground for asserting that humanity has the “right” to do what it pleases with the natural order. The creation is God’s, and has been entrusted to humanity, which is to act as its steward, not its exploiter (2003:29).

It is therefore of great importance that the TTC develop a curriculum of ecological responsibility and care. As the coconut tree is responsible to provide human beings with things they need, it also asks them to play their part in serving and caring for creation. It is a reciprocal form of relationship to extend the gift of life from the Creator. As life is rooted in God who creates, when we preserve the life of the coconut tree we also preserve the life of all creation and thus glorify and honour the Creator. Moreover, when we destroy the life of the coconut tree or pollute the ocean, at the same time we destroy the God who has revealed his love through the coconut and to all creation.

As one research respondent suggested:

Our responsibility for the life of our children and family should be considered the same responsibility to be applied to the coconut tree. Because if we don’t have a concern for the life of the tree that provides

us with life, then how can we care for other parts of creation? (Tela, 08 July 2016).

The coconut tree is a living message about the love of God that always cares for the creation that also brings life to the community. This perspective indicates that the coconut tree not only provides us with the things that we need, but it also serves to protect the land especially on the coastal areas. From this perspective, coconut theology being eco-relational, asserts that all of creation does not live alone, but lives for the life of others. Human beings also do not live alone, but live for the life of all creation. Accordingly, the coconut tree not only serves all of creation, but constantly reminds us of life abundant pointing to the One from whom all life originates. It speaks and at the same time plays an important role in maintaining and sustaining life for the people of the land and for birds and other living creatures. It is through the coconut tree that the church is informed how to speak and preach about the ecological relationship between human beings and creation and human beings and the Creator.

One respondent pointed to the coconut tree as God's gift of life, full of messages:

When it grows on coastal areas, it speaks about its responsibility to protect the land. When its fruits is always available, it speaks about the life-giving God who never sleep but always available to provide what is needed by those who rely on him. When it provides shelter, it speaks about God as the only refuge for security and protection. When it provided medicine, it speaks about God as saviour who has come to bring healings and wholeness to life that has been tortured by sinful desires of human greediness and selfishness (Kate, 23 November 2016).

The flourishing coconut tree in the poor coral soil of Kiribati is a symbol of the church standing strong and firm, flourishing in an environment of uncertainty and hopelessness. In this regard, the TTC is challenged to provide a curriculum that is sustaining to the environment. The curriculum should transform the mission of the church to be a caring and serving church. The church that serves as a strong refuge that never sleeps but is always available to provide answers to its members at all times and at every circumstance they face. It is through the coconut tree that sustains life that we

are always reminded to be sensitive of how we must live sustainably and responsibly for our planet and for the glory of our God.

Another related view is the coconut tree as the source of interconnectedness. The coconut tree enables people to live and at the same time protects the land from being eroded:

When our forefathers planted coconut trees on coastal areas, they planted them with their understanding that the coconut does not serve only humans but also serve to protect the land from erosion and protect other creatures that could be affected by the destructive forces of the sea,” (Iakob, 21 November 2016).

Similarly, a further research participant suggested that:

We are brothers [sic] of all creation in the household of God and we must live with the brotherly and sisterly love in the household of God (Tofaeono, 2000:34).

It is a life-going responsibility that no human being can deny or ignore. If we deny or ignore such a responsibility, we will at the same time deny our lives and the lives of the generations to come:

Even though our islands are affected but we are the people of Kiribati cannot be affected. Our understanding of God though the coconut cannot be destroyed. It is an eco-presence of God that maintains our identity and culture as Kiribati and always reminds us to live in solidarity with the environment (Matema, 03 September 2016).

The TTC therefore needs to incorporate and value God’s creation in its curriculum in order to build a community of strong believers who have a faithful responsibility for the earth and all of creation. According to the voices of the people captured in this research, they claim that the church has abandoned and ignored the value of traditional knowledge and cultural ways of life. From their argument, they call upon the TTC to be practical in indigenous cultural ways of living to equip TTC students in a culture that is more caring and connective to the environment. The TTC curriculum must integrate

traditional knowledge for future pastors so that they will be able to live on their own in pastoral ministry without depending of the support of the people. Engaging indigenous ways of living in the curriculum is an effective approach to transform the new generation who are adopting Western cultures that are expensive and destructive towards the life and land of Kiribati. People need to be transformed in the way they treat the earth and be critical of those Christian teachings that have contributed to the exploitation of the earth and nature. People are called to care for the land as a symbol of the fullness of life, because this is where their subsistence living and knowledge originated (Bird, 2016:518).

Bird calls for a broader theological understanding of the interconnectedness and relationship of God, the creation and humankind to be addressed in the theological curriculum of the TTC. Because the land, the coconut tree, and human beings serve each other, they need to maintain their inter-connectedness in a life-giving manner. The coconut tree is a living presence of God, speaking to humans to serve their mission faithfully as part of the web of nature. As Habel (2009:58) has noted, “because...we dwell on a living planet called Earth, and that we are an integral part of the web of nature.”

According to the comments from the research respondents, the TTC curriculum is Euro-centric in nature and thus was never concerned for the real lives of the people and their context. The curriculum helps to fulfil the missional agenda of the church. Accordingly, the respondents demand that the curriculum of the TTC needs to be transformed to interact with the context that the people are often enduring and lifestyles that are often destructive and negligent towards the life of planet earth. In the context of sea level rise where life in Kiribati is critically under-threat, the TTC is reminded to be proactive and life-giving in its curriculum to ensure that its theological students are well-equipped to be life-giving and proactive in their future ministry.

In the questionnaire, 88 percent of respondents suggested that the TTC should do more work in addressing issues of climate change.²⁸ This is reflected in the voices of respondents in the focus groups and interviews who demanded that the TTC be

²⁸ See Appendix E.

resourced with qualified lecturers so that its students can be well-trained to enable them to preach relevant messages of the Bible and share its correct contextual interpretation against the misinterpretation of the Noahic Covenant which has been the cause of much confusion to the people. The 88 percent of respondents also demanded that the church be proactive in playing a significant role in the critical context people are facing. If this role is practically effective, then more pastors will be faithful and practical in their ministry, not just as good preachers, but also as good examples. The research respondents suggested that pastors must set the light and be good examples of sustainable homes which live in solidarity with creation, to inform the people that the land where they live is holy as it is the home for God's agenda.

This means that everyone is responsible as tenants of the earth to cater for the environment and share its blessings with both relatives and neighbours. As Hewitt (2016:63) can argue:

The theology of the land realises that we as humans have been entrusted with this earth and we should do our best to use its resources in a responsible way.

This has been reflected by the above research respondents who indicated that those islanders who were heavily dependent on local resources for their food always lived with a concern to care for their land and ocean as the only source of their livelihood. Bird (2016:518) links the concept of *oikos*, or "home," as an integral part of Pacific Islands culture with the fullness of life. He argues that pastors need to be trained on the values of their land—the *oikos* or their home in which every need is met. The church should thus not wait for the people to come to the church, but it should intervene in the lived experiences of the people to equip them with ways to handle the winds of change blowing across their island. People need to be informed that abandoning their own culture and traditional knowledge leads to them neglecting abundant sources of life from both their land and ocean. Climate change has challenged this strong connection of the Pacific people with their land and ocean, rooted in their belief that land and ocean are sacred because it has also affecting their faith, their way of living, and their future (Havea, 2010:347-348).

People's ignorance about the value of their lands and ocean leads to the loss of all traditional gifts that God has provided them with. In line with the above concern, people need to know that one consequence of them abandoning traditional knowledge will be their obliviousness towards providing a caring responsibility for the environment. For traditional knowledge to be a central feature of community life, it must be integrated "in the management and conservation of biodiversity" (Adger et al. 2011:5). This is where it is important for pastors to understand where ecology and theology meet. Roger Gaikward (2010:266) argues that a theological education is challenged to implement and review its curriculum to address the current situation and the changing context of the church and society at large. In this regard, trained pastors need to be equipped with appropriate knowledge that addresses the current needs of the people. The TTC students should have to understand ecological degradation in the theological point of view to inform the church of its prophetic role to serve and care for the environment.

The people of Kiribati must be strong in their connection to the land and ocean because it their strong symbol and identity (Kwong, 2013a:26). It is the only source of their life because land is the people or mother (Tuwere, 2002:35; Timon, 2013) That is why the coconut tree of life is used in this study as a missiological lens because the coconut tree embodies the culture and cycle of life that shapes the environment and the life of the Pacific (Fedor, 2012:68).

8.5. The missiological vocation of the Kiribati Uniting Church and the Tangintebu Theological College

As is often argued that, "mission as an invitation to the feast of life has to focus on what it means to belong to the God of love and justice" (Hewitt, 2014b:147 *cf.* Kim, 2016:378). But this can be difficult in a context where Christian teachings are controlled or even overwhelmed by secularisation. The danger is that the broad missional outreach of the church can be lost sight of when it is concentrating too much on the internal elements of its day-to-day existence. Because of this, the vocation and identity of the KUC has failed to appreciate the seriousness of the main issue that is currently affecting the lives of its people and has thus failed to understand the impact this issue is having on their lives. This concern was noted by research participants in Focus Group A who argued:

We have been expecting our church to give us guidance and appropriate teachings about this critical issue of climate change. Some of our elders strongly held that according to the Noahic Covenant, there will be no further global flood to destroy the earth:

In the midst of confusion and hopelessness. We need the message that could maintain our life in hope and faith, but the church remains silent (Focus Group A, 04 September 2016).

These comments in the focus group were augmented by participants in the questionnaire who expressed the same concern about the church's silence. With the questionnaire 94 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that the church through the TTC had failed in its role to include ecological issues in its curriculum.²⁹ The consequence of this was experienced in the failure of its pastors to preach relevant messages to those who were suffering under difficult circumstances. Another respondent critically commented that:

Preaching is all about good life, blessings and curses, and encouragement for people to be committed in their responsibilities as church members (Kate, 23 November 2016).

In an un-structured interview, there was a poignant comment received about the missional identity of the KUC and the TTC:

Currently there is nothing that the church does to address this critical issue. The preaching about interconnection with creation is hardly to be heard in their preaching. The principle of moderation and God's mandate to humanity, to look after His creation responsibly, should be promoted and linked to climate change because people are facing

²⁹ See Appendix E.

confusion to understand the meaning of living in their islands (Akena, 23 July 2016).

Another respondent critical of the church's current teaching reported that:

The mission of pastors seems to focus mainly on the pulpit and not to reach out to see how people are living and how they are struggling in their everyday life in the context of climate change (Baru, 08 July 2016).

For Maeland (2016:553), discernment is the link between theory and practice to ensure a better understanding and practice of mission in today's world. In other words, the theological side of mission—God's side, so to speak—while ours is the practical side (2016:553).

Another research respondent was of the opinion that:

The church as the body of Christ cannot understand the situation of people unless leaders leave their pulpit and respective places inside the church and engage with the people in their situation (Raoi, 27 November 2016).

This respondent indicates that pastors who are to fill the gap to help the people are separating themselves or working on their own agendas with a poor visitation record to the people who need pastoral visitation and support.

According to Bird, mission without concern for people's current situation is dead because the church is an agent that brings life in its fullness. The church therefore needs to "move beyond the zones of comfort and familiarity to bring that life to where it is needed" (Bird, 2016:518). This is the reason why this study uses the coconut tree of life as a missiological lens because it embraces a sign of the God who sustains life in the Pacific (Palu, 2012:79).

Coconut tree missiological imagination is not only used to analyse the missiological quality of the KUC and the TTC, but also to propose that the voices of both the land and the people should be integrated in the mission agenda of the church. The coconuts which are falling into the sea after the land has been eroded have their own voice, crying

out not only for their own lives, but for the lives of those who depend on it—the people and the land. The land that is eroded has its own voice crying as it is being destroyed. Their cry for justice will not be silenced nor submerged as the people are also crying for their lives (Timon 2013). According to the missiological imagination of the coconut tree, silence is a great threat in the mission of the church, hindering the voice of the people and the land so that it cannot be heard.

8.5.1. The Kiribati Uniting Church and the Tangintebu Theological College in the *missio Dei*

The failure of the KUC was reflected in the voice of one respondent who criticised the church as being active in holding workshops and advocating issues of climate change but doing nothing to help and teach people manage in the context of their struggles caused by climate change (Tabi, 21 November 2016). Another respondent in Focus Group A supported this criticism:

Most KUC pastors do not understand the notion of Climate change and they do not believe in its existence, even though it is practically seen in Kiribati. Also, they go against climate change advocacy because they strongly believe that it is God's punishment against the sin of humanity' (Beta, 04 September 2016).

This indicates that there is something lacking in the mission of the KUC because the TTC did not integrate ecological issues within its curriculum. Therefore, one research respondent expressed the opinion that the church should teach people about the value of the land and its connection to the ancestors and their gods:

If the church fails to maintain the people's connection with their land, the people will also fail to maintain their connection with their God (Weiti, 04 September 2016).

Coconut theology as eco-relational reminds the church that people can understand God in the context in which they live. The church should therefore be more vocal in teaching the people how the coconut tree provides them with a living message that connects them to their Creator. For Beta (23 July 2016), preaching aimed at the lives of the people

cannot be separated from ecological issues surrounding the land. Land is the very essence of human life and the church needs to maintain the connection of the people with their land. Without our country, we will lose our culture, our identity and all that we have.

Another research respondent stated the following:

As people of Kiribati have lived with their traditional culture before Europeans, it was found that our ancestors were very strong and healthy. They lived to a hundred years. Their strength was found in their way of life that is very much connected to their land and ocean. People in the past ate their own food and they worked hard in their plantation to get food from their land and fish from the sea. Everything was going well with nature when people lived in their own traditional way of living (Tabo, 21 October 2016)

This statement calls upon the TTC to revive traditional knowledge and culture, where our people have lived and experienced fullness of life. This points to the traditional way of life as being an influential and effective approach to acknowledge the existence of God in the creation which has been provided for the benefit of humankind. Such should be incorporated into the ecological perspectives contained in a new curriculum.

A further respondent proposed:

An introductory course on climate change issues could be introduced at year 1 level. Debates, panel discussions, competitions or online discussion on climate change issues could also be tried out. Projects at higher level (say 3rd year level) could focus on climate change issues where recent data on greenhouse gases, sea level rise, air temperatures, etc. could be presented (Baru, 14 August 2016).

God has given humanity the gift of the world as a beautiful home in which to live forever. God's connection with the creation is reflected in the life-giving provision of the coconut tree. Therefore, those who rely upon the provision of the coconut tree are reminded that their lives must be indelibly connected to it. In this regard, Tofaeono

states that there is no place for superiority and dominance, for all are connected: human beings, the stars, animals and trees as sisters and brothers (2000:234). Human beings cannot attain their connection with their God unless they have a close relation with the coconut tree and the environment.

Some research respondents made a clear call for the church to reclaim the traditional ways of life. For example, one research participant argued that:

[The] traditional way of living is the way of living that will never leave anyone behind in a stage of poverty. Traditional way of living is a way of life that provides the understanding that humans are not separable with other parts of creation, the land and the ocean. Traditional way of living is a way of life that can solve the problem of climate change if all nations are geared to adopt it (Iakob, 21 November 2016).

Depending on the coconut tree provides a theory that centres on the cultural connection. People's connection with their cultural ways of living will improve the connection between the people and their environment, the people with their neighbours and the people with their faith. The above respondent provided some guidelines as to how the TTC could begin with those teachings concentrating on recent updates on issues around climate change. He believed once the TTC made such a move, there would soon be something good coming out of it for the people. He commented that it was surely a sign of great weakness when the church remains silent on issues that threaten the certain destruction of life. The church in this context is called to address the critical needs of the people and stand in solidarity with them so as to provide the right guidelines and teachings from the Bible. Clearly, the people are confused in finding no answers from the KUC. They are now prepared to challenge the KUC to put people as a priority in its agenda.

The suggestion of Conradie to deal with climate change issues backs up this need for the church to stand with the people when they turn to it in their need. His argument is based on a moral formation that challenges Christians to see the meaning of proclaiming the Word of God at a time when it is most needed, where it hurts most (2009:40). This concept challenges the silence of the church in the critical context where people need

help and support. The suggestion posited by the above scholar is an urgent call to the church to play a prophetic role in bringing a life-giving message and standing in solidarity with the people.

8.5.2. Coconut theology as a challenge to the Tangintebu Theological College

Even though the research respondents gave slightly different responses about climate change, their arguments are reminders to the church that it needs to be more active in its vocation in serving the people effectively in the contexts where they live and struggle. The research respondents cited viewed the church as an institution that is run in theory but not in practice. In such a context, where people are living without proper guidelines and teachings from the church, then inevitably the people are living with confusion in both their faith and in their belief in God (Akena, 23 July 2016).

In response to the perceived weaknesses in the mission of the church, Doornenbal insists that churches and theological education are facing adaptive challenges which they must overcome. The 'old' must move to meet the 'new,' or the institutions clinging to the 'old' will be left behind, and more importantly, will lose their followers (2012:3) Doornenbal's main concern in this argument is about the importance of training leaders to face the challenges that lay ahead of them, where training a student to become a minister does not necessarily equip them to become a leader in the twenty-first century missional church (2012:3).

Christianity in Kiribati faces a problem. The criticism aimed at the mainline churches has shown that people accepted the Western style of Christianity introduced by the first missionaries without question or challenge. Many theologians are now challenging this concept, with writers such as Kim arguing that this is a weakness of the church. The argument is that the church has failed to plant the Christian message in a truly Pacific style of Christianity, and that this can be considered as a lack of respect to the people and their culture (2016:377). In chapter five above, it was argued that the legacy of the first missionaries has held the people to follow their standards and structures in a conservative and non-challenging way, instead of teaching the islanders to live independently and work out their own Christian agenda in a manner appropriate to their own situation. This has taken place in Kiribati where one respondent expressed the

opinion that in the twenty-first century the church is active for its own agenda, but not for the people themselves. For Ernst (1996:48), this is a failure to correlate and adapt to fundamental transformation within the Pacific island societies and cultures (1996:48).

Conradie suggests that a vision of justice and human equality needs to be embedded in a wider theological education in order for people to be informed how to live with their environments (2009:43), a statement which respondents clearly agreed with. As shown above, the research respondents viewed the KUC's mission as failing to address the real needs of the people because of the inability of the TTC to address climate change issues in its curriculum. For Ernst, the approach relayed by the first missionaries began with the training of its ministers who were taught not only to spread the message of the Christian gospel, but at the same time become "agents of the colonial powers that took the leading role in bringing Western culture to the Pacific Islands" (2012:32). Ernst saw this approach as a powerful tactic to employ pastors not only for preaching the Christian message, but also as agents for the revival of cultural ways of living.

In the context of climate change in the Pacific there is much need for the church to be effective in building communities and shaping the lives of the people with Christian traditions that respond positively to the contemporary context of environmental and human challenges of climate change (PCC Report, 2007:174). This means responding in an appropriate Pacific context, rather than a Western context, in addressing the challenges facing the people to whom the church ministers. Palu adds to Havea's assertion that if Jesus had grown up in the Pacific, he would have been part of the people's life. In other words, Jesus would never have isolated himself from the context of suffering in which people are living (2012:71).

In this regard, the concept of the coconut tree of life—the ecological presence of God with the people—is used to examine the role of the KUC in the context of climate change. As an I-Kiribati, Jesus could have referred to the meat of the coconut as his flesh and its milk as his blood, thereby using the coconut as an example because it is the main food source of the people. This implies the inter-connection between God, God's creation and God's people. Accordingly, one research participant was of the opinion that:

Our connection with the land is full of stories—because it is the place where we are connecting with our ancestors. It is through the land that we are equipped with wisdoms and knowledge of how to live as I-Kiribati (Ibiti, 23 July 2016).

Another respondent expressed the view that there exists a connection between God and the land, and that people need to listen to the voice of God through the land. As the land is being destroyed through climate change, there is a voice that humans need to listen to, because without listening, people will never care about the destruction of the planet.

Another respondent critically remarked that:

The church should not be isolated in its mission to care for the land in which people are accommodated with all their need (Baru, 14 August 2016).

Likewise, when John Doom encouraged the church leaders to embrace their Pacific identity and to collect the coconut theology and live by it, he did not simply mean they must just address climate change; instead, he wanted them to be more transformative in their mission, and to live in solidarity with the poor, the vulnerable victims of climate change (PCC Report, 2007:15).

A further research participant pointed to the importance of the TTC as an educational institution:

...that could play an important role in educating her future pastors on the reality of climate change and its impacts on the wider community. Once initiated at the college, the same information could be further disseminated to the rest of the KUC members through the various churches Beso (30 September 2016).

In line with the above comment, another research participant expressed the opinion that:

...the church's vocation is to nurture the faith life of its member to ensure that they live a righteous life and in harmony with each other. However, the relationship between humans and their environment is not part of

our responsibility. This is because at the TTC students did nothing about climate change and ecological issues. Therefore, ministers are responsible to care for the people's life physically and spiritually but not for the well-being of the environments and other existing creatures (Mele, 23 July 2016).

As human beings, we do not live separately with creation. Hence, it is not the role of the church to be ecclesio-centric and aim at serving only itself. Rather, the church must see itself as emphasising the reign of God upon earth with its mission aimed not on the agenda of the church but on God's agenda (Ayre and Conradie, 2016:110). It is within the reign of God where the KUC and the TTC should be extended in their mission beyond the traditional boundaries of the institutional church, caring and embracing the whole of God's creation. "Faith traditions sustains reflections of our place in nature and what constitutes the proper goals of society and an individual life" (PCC Report, 2007:174). This should be taken as a call to the KUC to revive this in its mission.

According to Ross, rethinking the meaning of mission is necessary due to the changing context of the people. As the world is now living in the context of climate change and global warming, the KUC is challenged to "rethink their understanding of mission, because the "landscape" of ecumenical missiology has also changed" (2016:2).

A respondent in Focus Group A pointed to:

The failure of the church to clarify the word of God in the context of climate change issues was based on the people's confusion of how to interpret their context in regard to their difficult experience (Bita, 04 September 2016).

The research participant Tabi (21 August 2016) also affirms that most KUC missionaries do not understand the notion of climate change. Indeed, they even deny its existence, even though the impacts are practically experienced in Kiribati. This is supported by the questionnaire, where some 94 percent of the respondents expressed the opinion that the church had failed in its mission as most pastors resist climate change advocacy because they robustly believe that God alone has the power to attack us with changes in the climate.

LengkaBula challenges the churches to stand and address issues of injustice and discrimination towards the poor and vulnerable. When the churches fail in their mission, they are called to revisit their prophetic role to protect justice in creation and human society (2009:128), because climate change is caused by the greed of developed nations that do not care about the effect it has on small islands nations far away such as Kiribati.

Another research respondent stated that the only place to reach out and address ecological issues is within the theological college:

The TTC being an educational institution could play an important role in educating her future pastors on the reality of climate change and its impacts on the wider community (Mele, 23 July 2016).

Research participant Matema (03 September 2016) expressed the strong belief that the church through its preaching remained a powerful medium to provide awareness of climate change and necessary guidelines for the people to follow. Accordingly, the church's vocation is to nurture the faith life of its members to ensure that they live a righteous life in harmony with each other and with creation:

In order to drive the message home to the people this interpretation and its implications should be included in the curriculum of the TTC, and in addition it should include consideration of the ecological problems in the context of injustice and selfishness" (Tabau 21 October 2016).

According to Kaunda and Hewitt (2015:10), the problems people are facing in their daily lives, "should help reset the agenda of how missio-formation of leaders should be done." Conradie (2009:34) proposes that the church needs to find a practical way of addressing the need for moral imagination in dealing with the existing situation.

8.6. Chapter summary

This chapter has collected the views of a cross-section of the church through interviews, group focus sessions and questionnaires to assist in answering the key problem statement of this study. The chapter compiles the responses of the research participants, who called upon the church and its theological education institution to address issues around climate change more seriously. The PCC agreed with this, saying that the church should embrace this role if it is to remain a life-giving institution for the people (PCC Report, 2007:175). Dharamraj (2014) has added that the church can only effectively communicate the truth about God in every cultural context if it possesses an appropriate theological perspective. Akena thus calls upon the KUC to be more active in the context of the current hopelessness and confusion that surrounds the people of Kiribati. He urges the KUC to provide a clear interpretation of the Bible regarding the contemporary challenge of climate change and global warming. In order for the KUC and the TTC to become effective purveyors of justice and messengers of hope, the theological and ministerial formation of its students must be appropriately educated on the issues of climate change as well as the broader issues of injustice and greed caused through environmental exploitation and oppression of the vulnerable that has destroyed life and still exists as a threat to every form of life. As part of this resolve, the research participants also challenged the church to present a united front and to be vocal regarding the issues of injustice that are suppressing and destroying both creation and the people.

To help tackle the ecological problems, the research participants also called for a return to traditional and cultural ways of living among the islanders. Village communities should be encouraged to return to these former ways as effective means of living in the context of climate change. Consequently, the theological college is challenged to take a broader view of its curriculum and implement changes that will positively address the issues of climate change and global warming in the present context of the people.

The chapter which follows will present a summary of the entire work, as well as highlighting the outcome of the research objectives derived from the stated objectives of the research project as detailed in its key question and sub-questions. The chapter

with also provide the study's contribution to new knowledge, gaps for further research and a final conclusion.

CHAPTER NINE

GENERAL CONCLUSION

9.1. Introduction

The previous chapter argued that things today have changed with the new emerging language regarding missio-formation. In this new paradigm, the agents of mission are the entire people of God, not just some expert class of people (Kaunda and Hewitt 2015). This observation leads to the general conclusion of the study on how the KUC diagnoses the modern concept of ‘missionary.’ Clearly it is still being aligned to the Eurocentric, ‘one style fits all’ style of the old-world order that was Eurocentric and hegemonic in nature. This shows that any church that still confines itself to Eurocentric perspectives and neglects the voice of the people fails to address the contemporary issues that people are facing. This final chapter summarises the contribution of the preceding chapters by briefly highlighting the outcome of the research objectives set out in the opening chapter. The chapter also provides the contribution of this research project to new knowledge, identifies research gaps for future research, and offers some concluding remarks.

9.2. How can coconut theology inform and shape mission-formation?

In terms of the research questionnaire, some 88 percent of the participants were of the opinion that incorporating issues of climate change within the TTC curriculum could help to mitigate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.³⁰ Accordingly, the call is to include ecological issues in the TTC curriculum, to assist the clergy to include in their preaching and teaching relevant facts concerning climate change and global warming, thereby empowering their congregations by providing them with sound guidelines and information to mitigate the effects of climate change. Based on the responses of the participants in the questionnaire, there was a great

³⁰ See Appendix E.

demand for the church to implement such a change in the teaching programme of the college.

In order for a transformative theological curriculum to be realised, it must be redesigned to serve the fundamental needs and common good of the people and the environment in which they live. The most challenging aspect is the type of education offered in post-primary education and other institutions in the Pacific Islands, which are largely skewed to a Western colonial form of education (Bray, 1993:337; Nabobo-Baba, 2013:87; Miles 2014:4-5; Lotheringham, 1998:65; Burnett, 1999:83, 2002:11). According to Nabobo-Baba, there have been some positive developments, not only within the secular education sector, but also within the theological institutions to move away from its previous emphasis on Western pedagogical systems of knowledge developed in the 1980s (2013:85).

According to Longchar (2010:414), a contemporary theological curriculum must address the importance of the contemporary context in order to provide answers to the demands of the times. He argues this on the basis of the influence that the classical Western missionary model has had on theological education in the Pacific Islands, where such a curriculum has demonstrated its limitations in addressing contemporary climate change and other related issues. Therefore, the vulnerability of life on the atolls of Kiribati suggests that there is a need for an alternative strategy to empower ecclesiastical institutions to shape the lives of the people and re-focus them on nurturing a culture of life or “fullness of life” as advocated in John 10:10.

For Kaunda and Hewitt (2015:2), theological education must serve as a strong missional platform that builds a strong character of agents with “moral-ethical stamina” to be life-giving agents in their contemporary context. This could be the reason why Kaunda and Hewitt postulate a theoretical lens of missio-formation to address the deficiencies of the Eurocentric missionary legacy because of the problems people are facing in their daily lives. They point out that the church, “should help to reset the agenda of how missio-formation of leaders should be done” (2015:1). This theory emphasises the emerging contextual paradigms for mission-formation that strengthen the role of church leaders to empower and equip the local people in their role as agents and subjects of God’s mission (Kaunda and Hewitt, 2015:8). Werner, who advocates for the

strengthening of institutions of theological education and its quality in Africa, states that:

Without proper theological education, fragmentation and both ethnic and religious disunity will increase in African Christianity. Without proper theological education, African Christianity cannot play the vital role it should play for the future of world Christianity (2010:276).

For Werner, the consequence of improper theological education will ultimately lead to the failure of Christianity's important role across the continent. Through such poor-quality theological education, the church will also fail to maintain a strong future for Christian society in general. In such a regard, the theoretical lens chosen in this study uses the missio-formation in theological education as proposed by Kaunda and Hewitt. This missio-formation emphasises an emerging contextual paradigm for mission-formation that strengthens the role of church leaders to empower and equip the local people in their role as agents and subjects of God's mission (2015:8).

As Jones (2014:33, 34) has also commented, many church leaders who have undergone the process of addressing contemporary issues in their theological seminaries, nevertheless, "try nothing truly disruptive of current realities." The failure to develop an orienting purpose of the seminary could end up in a crisis of people and the church that ponders which way to turn. This theory therefore will be constructive to the mission of the KUC that is still silent in addressing the contemporary issues affecting life in Kiribati.

In order to address the contemporary challenges facing the church and its people, Conradie (2009:48) insists that the theology of salvation must be explored not only in terms of the death and resurrection of Christ, but also in his life, teachings, parables, wisdom, and suffering. Christians must focus more on a theology of creation rather than on themes such as sin and redemption that have been the traditional loci of those Western theologies taught in most theological colleges in the Pacific Islands. Consequently, wider environmental concerns should not be ignored in the life of the church as it is part of its mission to reflect Christ's love and concern for justice and human equality; a concern that must be embedded in a wider concept of theological education (2009:43).

As Kaunda and Hewitt (2015:2) observe, theological education is supposed to provide a platform that can shape a nation to respond appropriately to the context and life experiences of its people. Hewitt is thus of the view that the place of one's upbringing is that which can produce a way of living and personal identity. He therefore contends that:

Leadership formation must therefore be intentionally interdisciplinary and ecumenical and must consider seriously the theological education shaping its development, examining whether the local congregation remains the primary agent of God's mission in the world (2014b:145).

Hewitt also affirms that the real crisis is not so much ecological, as it is cultural. He identifies that most of Jesus' teaching focussed more on what affects life, rather than that of spiritual matters. It is an, "...economy, ecological and ecumenical [that] is fundamentally connected between the church God's creation and economic justice" (2012:213). He further points to the role of the church, not only as a steward of human beings, but also for the community of all living things. With the missional message imitated in a coconut, Josefa Mairara summarises the mission in two ways:

- i. Mission should be rooted in the being of God that exists within the forces of God's creative Spirit and human social experiences. If the church fails to locate that sacred space, it misses the force of gravity in mission.

- ii. The church's mission should never sit back idly and say, "it is done!" It is free to move, as the wind of God leads to bring about transformation in human society in a never-ending journey (2007:194).

Niemandt (2015a:5) reflects a major interest in the importance of ecological issues and offers a clear understanding that the Christian message is not only good news for all of creation, but demands justice towards the entire *oikoumene*.³¹ In particular, he points to the relationship between creation, mission and ecology that:

³¹ In the WCC policy document, "Together towards life: Mission and evangelism in changing landscapes" unanimously approved by the WCC Central Committee held in Crete, Greece, on 05 September 2012, Niemandt notes that its emphasis was on "life-affirming mission" (2015b:5). In this, the mission of the church is set and affirmed in the context of God's creation and the entire *oikoumene*,

Mission must be future-directed and orientated to the here and now. There is an intrinsic relationship between hope and eschatology, and this must be linked to the kingdom and reign of God (2015a:6).

Hewitt (2012b:204) further points out that “mission is best expressed through praxis and the church’s mission should be focussed in addressing issues of human development.” For Deane-Drummond (2008:30-31), the fundamental factor that threatens the campaign to change the way the society lives and acts, is the influence of globalisation undermining the structures of nation states using the power of widespread technologies available and convenient to the present generation. She goes on to comment that, despite these threats, a deep ecology should be constructed on its own platform to address environmental issues (Deane-Drummond 2008:31). In the context of climate change, Deane-Drummond notes that a meaningful theology can only be achieved if it addresses a specific context in which environmental concerns are engaged with the understanding of God at a global, national and local level (2008:x).

9.3. Summary of major findings

The empirical findings of this study have shown that people on the ground are human faces registering their individual situations who present the realities of life and the true context of the place in which they live. Accordingly, this study serves to answer the key research question:

What are the curriculum implications of the phenomenon of climate change in Kiribati for the renewal of theological education that fosters ministerial formation of students at Tangintebu Theological College?

The research findings have identified the phenomenon of climate change, which has affected the environment and the lives of the people of Kiribati, allowing the voice of the people to be heard publicly. It also interrogates the missiological implications for the ministerial formation of KUC students.

with a clear emphasis on the broad issue of ‘life.’ In its mission, the church must therefore move away from a human-centred concept and instead focus its attention on a relationship with God’s created world.

The main findings are summarised as follows:

- i. **Chapter One:** This chapter presents a guideline for the research study, beginning with the motivation that calls for an urgent response and action of the church in the critical context of climate change in Kiribati. A brief background follows of how climate change and sea level rise has affected the environment and people of Kiribati and how this issue has been ignored in the mission of the KUC, even though it has become the most critical issue ever experienced in the islands. Being an indigenous, struggling among his people to save the islands and their way of life, this concern motivated the present researcher to conduct this study. The chapter is a guideline to the main objective of the study, which points to the TTC curriculum as the only way to change the ministry of the KUC to make it more responsive to the issues of climate change. A powerful institution among the people, the church needs to recognise the root cause of its failure to concern itself with ecological issues.

- ii. **Chapter Two:** This chapter contains a perspective of the phenomenon of climate change and sea level rise, and how it affects the Pacific island nation of Kiribati. The chapter goes on to present the context in which the landscape and seascape of Kiribati has been severely affected and how the people are living in such a context. This is followed by discussion on the Paris Agreement where the voice of the Pacific nations and the people of Kiribati presented an urgent call to the developed world to consider their situation. The chapter discusses how the peoples of the Pacific Islands are being ignored by the developed nations who are focussing on their own economic development without caring for the impacts that are destroying the lives of the people of small island nations such as Kiribati and destroying the very islands themselves. The chapter also discusses the Government of Kiribati's concern and preparation for the future by seeking the help and assistance of larger nation states such as Fiji, New Zealand and Australia. The chapter concludes that migration will be the last option as Kiribati has been so seriously affected and the future is no longer optimistic.

- iii. **Chapter Three:** This chapter highlights how the issues of climate change and sea level rise are incorporated in the songs of tearfulness in the context of fear and hopelessness. The chapter opens with a poem about the nation of Kiribati, where life on the island is being destroyed and its people continue to face the destructive force of climate change impacts and sea level rise. This chapter employs song as an expression of the past events of the people and how they were treated as a British Protectorate and through song spoke about their contemporary situation. The treatment of the people in the past and how they were treated is connected to the treatment they receive today from the developed nations who have caused the brutal impacts of climate change. The songs are collections of data and indications of facts of what people want to say. Songs are powerful tools to voice out the cries of the people in both their past and contemporary contexts and to save those cries for the future generations as a living history. The chapter uses songs as vehicles for spreading the feelings of pain, the call for help and the message of hope.

- iv. **Chapter Four:** This chapter focusses on the tripartite theoretical framework that guides this research study. The framework developed by Havea of the Pacific missiological imagination of a coconut tree of life is employed in this study to converse with the missio-formation perspectives of Kaunda and Hewitt on theological education as well as with Conradie's eco-missional Earth-keeping ethics that focuses on God's loving care for creation. The reason for using this framework is to identify the interconnection of culture and the Christian message to develop the knowledge of how humankind can live in this world. This has been initiated through the cause and effect of climate change and sea level rise which is the global scenario reminding humankind of its failure to adapt and connect to live in this world.

- v. **Chapter Five:** This chapter discusses the pre-missionary traditional cultural life in Kiribati and how the Kiribati culture was influenced and interrupted by the modern lifestyle of globalisation and modernisation which swept into the Pacific islands in the latter part of the twentieth-century. The chapter points to the value of the traditional culture that offered answers to problems and events,

especially the issues of climate change and sea level rise. This chapter also points to the failure of the church which has abandoned the traditional Kiribati culture as not being matched to the Christian teachings and beliefs, and which has promoted this Euro-centric Christianity in the lives of the people. The chapter identifies both the arrival of Christianity and of globalisation as powerful movements in the Pacific that have caused the people to accept what they were taught without questioning anything and without standing up for their own rights. The chapter shares the impacts of the adopted new culture in the lives of the new generation which has coincided with the impact of climate change causing crime, overcrowding, lack of work, and moral decline. The chapter acknowledges that the traditional culture that has been ignored is another place for people to turn to for help to answer their needs in their present context where life is relying heavily on a capitalist economy and is becoming more expensive by the day, both in terms of money and the toll on the environment.

- vi. **Chapter Six:** This chapter focusses its attention on the background of the KUC and the first missionaries who brought the Christian message with positive things that improved the lives of the people. Yet, at the same time, they brought negative impacts that can be seen in the legacy that still exists in the life and culture of the people. In this regard, this chapter aims to critique the negative impacts on the leadership role of the present church leadership which has contributed to the schism in the KUC and the theological education curriculum of the TTC which is still Eurocentric and which ignores the critical context that is destroying the lives of people on the ground. The chapter also analyses the rise of individualism verses communalism where moral respect, which is at the core of Kiribati culture, is denied and rejected, thus leading to the opposition of the General Assembly, the highest ruling body in the church. The chapter concludes with a challenge to the KUC to move beyond this myopia in mission and to see the value of the people and the importance of engaging them in every decision and development of the church. This does not mean that all people will be involved in decision-making, but that the people and their livelihood are to be regarded as priorities in any decisions and development in the church. In this

regard, the theological curriculum is challenged to expand its curriculum to incorporate ecological issues that affect both the lives of the people and the environment as a whole.

- i. **Chapter Seven:** This chapter considers the qualitative methodology being used as the research methodology for this study. This chapter reveals that the church has been very lively in its mission but disregards something that is very important in its mission—issues about life. A qualitative methodological approach was thus employed to examine the critical impacts of climate change and sea level rise. It served as a guiding tool assisting this study to investigate the threat to life that people in Kiribati are encountering in the context of climate change and sea level rise. Participants were engaged from three different islands and included church leaders, ministerial students and theological lecturers at the TTC. The methodology aimed to engage people on the margins to share their experiences and contribute with their perspectives on the role of the church and the curriculum of the theological college.

- ii. **Chapter Eight:** This chapter discusses the major findings of this study concerning the situation in the context of climate and sea level rise, including the views and contribution of the participants regarding the role of the church and their proposals regarding curriculum development at the TTC. This chapter presents the voices of the research respondents that challenge the KUC to find a practical way to work toward a solution to circumstances that are denying life. The chapter goes on to remind the KUC to work alongside the traditional culture which has been ignored in the curriculum of the TTC. The chapter evidences that the theological college in operation prior to the establishment of the TTC, and which incorporated the traditional culture as part of the pastoral training has graduated active and effective pastors working in their mission of the church. The chapter expresses the need for a powerful institution with an appropriate curriculum that can equip trained ministers to correctly interpret the Bible to counter the people's own interpretation of their situation. The chapter speaks about the demand of the people that the church should not be silent and inactive in a situation that needs an urgent response to the crisis facing the lives of the

people. The chapter also voices the proposal of the people that the TTC needs to provide a curriculum that makes sense in the contemporary context that the population is encountering. The chapter concludes by presenting the argument of the people that the church must be vocal against the injustices that are causing climate change and which are suppressing and destroying creation and the people.

- iii. **Chapter Nine:** This chapter provides a general conclusion to the study and suggests measures by which the TTC and the KUC can strengthen their missional identity and vocation to better equip their members to respond more effectively to the challenges of climate change and sea level rise. The chapter also suggests some fresh perspectives concerning how the KUC and the TTC can better respond to the missional needs of a context ravaged by climate change in which they serve.

9.4. Contribution to the field of new knowledge and gaps for further research

According to Maeland, mission in the twenty-first century is challenged to inspire “forms and develop Christians in their thoughts and actions as participants in God’s ongoing,” because ‘the concept of mission and evangelism in the WCC policy document, “Together Toward Life” (TTL) is about “doing,” not “theorising, mission in the world,” where “commitment,” “action” and “practice” are part of the aims of missional formation. Put differently, “one cannot be missional, nor participate in the mission of God and the Spirit merely in theory” (2016:552). The cosmology of the traveling coconut points to the symbol of the church on the move with life despite the stormy sea and to reach island distances dispersed in a wide ocean with a message of hope. The church never sinks in the midst of the rough and angry waves; instead, the church should be a floating coconut with life in it, in the context of climate change, sea level rise, and an uncertain future.

This research study points to the TTC curriculum as the powerful tool to change the church ministry to make it more responsive to the issues of climate change. To do this, it needs to be expanded if it is to incorporate training for student pastors to enable them

to counsel and advise the people of the islands who are experiencing the devastating effects of climate change and sea level rise.

Without limiting the scope of the expanded curriculum, it should include the following perspectives:

- i. The theory used in this study proposes that eco-theology must be given a prominent place within the study of the impact of climate change;
- ii. Concentration has been on people and not on God or God's place in all this.
- iii. The environment is as important in this crisis as humankind and must be studied in detail so that pastors can explain its importance to their congregations.
- iv. People must understand the place of the environment, the land and the sea in all this, and God's place in all things.
- v. That eco-theology, cultural values and indigenous knowledge should be included in the curriculum of the TTC in order to fully equip pastors in Kiribati to combat climate change.
- vi. According to Maeland, theological students need to be well-equipped culturally and theologically because the Christian message must not be separated from culture. Where fullness of life is lacking, there mission must act, because God is not bound by the presumed boundaries of the church, so the church should not be so bound either. As part of its missional formation, the church must be prepared to embrace good co-operation with people of cultures as, "life-affirming spirits present in different cultures" (2016:555).
- vii. The Eurocentric legacy still existing in the islands must be abandoned in favour of a strong Pacific Christianity and this should be taught in the TTC. This will make understanding all the ramifications of the theological aspects of climate change easier to follow and can be taught to the people so that they can better understand God's role and their role in all this. The church is a powerful

institution among the people and needs to give a lead that people can understand and follow.

- viii. The effect of climate change on the environment must be considered. This should not be limited to the importance of the environment in which people live, but also the consequences, now and in the future, of climate change on land and sea.
- ix. People are important in this crisis, and they must be made to realise how important they are. Discussions are important, but people—the marginalised, their cultures and their other religious traditions—must be included, not just left on the fringes. They must be placed at the heart of this conversation—bottom-up, not top-down (Kaunda, 2017:50). Through this process they must be encouraged to take actions to achieve results, not just sit around and talk. They must be made to see that God will expect them to do something, not just talk and hope things will improve. To enforce this view, Hewitt (2016:480) argues that to embrace the concept of “fullness of life” churches must start a missional reformation to gain a broader understanding of the challenges it faces if it is to adopt leadership of the practical issues that matter in the lives of the people now. Hewitt thus points out that, “the understanding of salvation must be moved to a broader “all creature” perspective” (2016:480).

9.5. Concluding remarks

This study has set out to establish that the Eurocentric Western style of Christianity established in Kiribati and throughout the other Pacific islands by the first missionaries in the nineteenth-century is no longer appropriate for the twenty-first century Pacific region. Most importantly, it is not theologically suitable when confronting the climate change crisis and an ever-rising sea level. It is clear from the confusion arising among islanders regarding the crisis, the possible outcomes, and the puzzlement of where God fits into the whole scenario, that the pastors being trained in the TTC today cannot find answers to the questions posed by their congregations. The theological curriculum now being taught in the TTC is clearly no longer appropriate or adequate.

The study further argues that to give strength to the people, to make sense of the crisis, to find answers to often-impossible questions, the curriculum must be expanded to include the lived experiences of the local people and their environment. This means that various other factors should be considered such as eco-theology, the abandoning of a Euro-centric style of Christianity for that of a contextually-relevant approach that adopts coconut theology, the effect of climate change on the environment, and the importance of ordinary people in finding workable solutions.

The TTC is thus encouraged to promote a lived theology or be missional oriented. As de Gruchy advises, “missional practice gives to theological education an outward orientation, one that gives a focus to the world rather than the church or the academy” (2010:42). Maeland speaks of “lived theology” and the need for a connection between theology and mission, which he argues can best be achieved by leadership within a congregation. As Maeland further notes:

Only this way can lived theology get its right place with due attention to context and how the gospel is relevant to every aspect of human life (2016:560).

The research study challenges the KUC in its mission that fullness of life has been there in the lives of people, in their culture and indigenous knowledge and that the continuous work of the Holy Spirit should be embraced, bringing fullness of life through the mission of the church both in the culture and way of life of the people. Furthermore, life in its fullness cannot be found in the life of supposedly faithful Christians who spend their lives quietly sitting and reading the Bible, but rather in the hardworking and faithful lives of those who produce what is good for life where they live and work.

Finally, the study demonstrates that until this is done, and pastors are trained in an awareness of what matters today, and that twenty-first century Pacific Christianity must be the base upon which they preach to their people, the crisis will remain just that—a crisis that no-one can find an answer for. And if this happens, there might be a danger that people may begin to lose faith in the God of the Pacific Islands who has sustained them for so long and abandon their faith. If nothing else, people must not be allowed to lose hope in the future, and to ensure this, the theology of the twenty-first century God must be introduced into Kiribati.

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Code	Pseudonym ³²	Gender	Status	Date	Place
101	Mele	M	Pastor	23 July 2016	Tarawa
102	Tabi	M	Congregant	21 November 2016	Betio Kiribati
103	Aken	M	Politician	23 July 2016	Suva Fiji
104	Eli	M	Congregant	30 July 2016	Tarawa Kiribati
105	Kate	F	Congregant	23 November 2016	Tarawa
106	Tela	F	Politician	08 July 2016	Tarawa
107	Nali	F	Theological lecturer	30 September 2016	Bairiki Tarawa
108	Tinira	F	Theological Student	30 December 2016	Tangintebu Theological College
109	Beso	M	Congregant	30 September 2016	Bairiki Kiribati
110	Beta	M	Politician	22 July 2016	Tarawa
111	Iakob	M	Pastor	21 November 2016	Abaiang Kiribati
112	Matema	M	Theological lecturer	03 September 2016	Tarawa
113	Raoi	F	Theological lecturer	27 November 2016	Aranuka Kiribati
114	Kate	M	Politician	14 August 2016	Suva Fiji
115	Baru	F	Politician	08 July 2018	Tamana
116	Ibiti	M	Congregant	13 November 2016	Aranuka

³² In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the real names of all field research participants are herewith withheld. All the names of participants in both the text and index are thus pseudonyms.

117	Uati	F	Pastor	03 July 2016	Aranuka Kiribati
118	Aike	M	Pastor	20 July 2016	Abaiang Kiribati

Research participants in focus groups

Focus Group A

Code	Pseudonym ³³	Gender	Status	Date	Place
101	Reue	M	Theological Student	04 September 2016	Abaiang
102	Bitu	M	Deacon	04 September 2016	Abaiang
103	Bakati	F	Politician	04 September 2016	Abaiang
104	Tosa	M	Pastor	04 September 2016	Abaiang
105	Abita	M	Youth	04 September 2016	Abaiang
106	Arare	F	Politician	04 September 2016	Abaiang
107	Weiti	F	Theological Lecturer	04 September 2016	Abaiang
108	Ronti	F	Theological Student	04 September 2016	Abaiang
109	Etai	F	Youth	04 September 2016	Abaiang
110	Tinao	F	Deacon	04 September 2016	Abaiang
111	Ibere	F	Deacon	04 September 2016	Abaiang
112	Raiti	M	Business Woman	04 September 2016	Abaiang
113	Abai	M	Women's Fellowship	04 September 2016	Abaiang

³³ In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the real names of all field research participants are herewith withheld. All the names of participants in both the text and index are thus pseudonyms.

Focus Group B

Code	Pseudonym ³⁴	Gender	Status	Date	Place
114	Itinta	M	Women's Fellowship	21 October 2016	Tamana
115	Raera	F	Elder	21 October 2016	Tamana
116	Takam	M	Elder	21 October 2016	Tamana
117	Toare	M	Deacon	21 October 2016	Tamana
118	Teaki	M	Elder	21 October 2016	Tamana
119	Ngaan	F	KUC Officer	21 October 2016	Tamana
120	Tabau	M	Pastor	21 October 2016	Tamana
121	Robai	M	Elder	21 October 2016	Tamana
122	Tiaka	M	Youth	21 October 2016	Tamana
123	Rakie	M	Youth	21 October 2016	Tamana
124	Tarara	F	Theological Lecturer	21 October 2016	Tamana
125	Tietu	M	Deacon	21 October 2016	Tamana
126	Ngati	F	Deacon	21 October 2016	Tamana

Questionnaire participants

Code	Pseudonym ³⁵	Gender	Status	Date	Place
101	Betia	M	Driver	21 June 2018	Betio Tarawa
102	Bwebwe	F	Office Cleaner	12 July 2018	Betio Tarawa
103	Aaki	M	Fisheries officer	23 August 2018	Tangintebu

³⁴ In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the real names of all field research participants are herewith withheld. All the names of participants in both the text and index are thus pseudonyms.

³⁵ In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the real names of all field research participants are herewith withheld. All the names of participants in both the text and index are thus pseudonyms.

104	Reeti	F	Education director	21 June 2018	Bairiki Tarawa
105	Kate	F	Meteorologist	23 November 2016	Betio Tarawa
106	Tela	F	Fisherman	08 July 2016	Banraecaba Tarawa
107	Teboa	F	Marine Biologist	30 September 2016	Aranuka
108	Tiima	F	Elder	30 November 2018	Aranuka
109	Beso	M	Moderator KPC	21 September 2016	Betio Tarawa
110	Beta	F	Youth Officer	02 July 2016	Bikenibeu Tarawa
111	Jacob	M	KUC Official	21 November 2016	Antebuka Tarawa
112	Matema	M	Deacon	03 September 2016	Abaiang
113	Raoi	F	Pastor	27 November 2016	Abaianga
114	Kate	M	Teacher	14 August 2016	Aranuka
115	Baru	F	Journalist	12 July 2016	Tamana
116	Ibiti	M	Economist	21 August 2016	Betio Tarara
117	Uati	M	Journalist	03 July 2016	Bairiki Tarawa
118	Aike	F	Social Welfare Activist	20 July 2016	Abaianga

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT LETTERS FROM THE CHURCH

KIRIBATI UNITING CHURCH

Email: otanikunau@gmail.com
Telephone: (686) 21195/22623
Mobile: (686) 73004814



KUC Headquarters
P.O. BOX 80 (Bairiki)
Antebuka, Tarawa

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Consent Letter

The Ethics Body
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Private bag X01, Scottsville
Pietermaritzburg, 3209
South Africa.

Dear Sir/Madam.

Letter of consent for Rev. Tioti Timon's study

I am glad to know that Rev. Tioti Timon is starting to do his PhD fieldwork on the role of the church in the context of climate change in Kiribati. As his study is part of the church plan to develop and upgrade our theological college, I officially welcome and support him to conduct his research and interviews with executive leaders of the Kiribati Uniting Church involving the Moderator and the executive secretaries and at our theological college. My office will arrange his interview with political leaders in our government according to his request. We will be working alongside with him especially in arranging times and places to do his interviews.

For further information, please contact the above address, email and phone number of this office.

Yours faithfully,

Rev Mareweia Riteti
GENERAL SECRETARY



Est. & Reg. 1900

TANGINTEBU THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE
(The Theological College of the Kiribati Uniting Church)

P.O Box 264 Bikenibeu, TARAWA,
Republic of Kiribati
Phone: (686) 28342

Email: tangintebu@tskl.com.ki or registry@kuc.org.ki.

7th June 2016

To whom this may concern

Re: Acceptance letter for Rev Tioti Timon to do interview at the Theological College

I hereby write this letter to confirm the acceptance of Rev. Tioti Timon to carry out his research through interviews in the campus. Rev. Timon was our former principal and his arrival in our theological college for his research on climate change and our curriculum is very much supported for the development of our theological college. On his arrival, I will arrange an appropriate time to meet with students and staff for his interview.

For more information or queries, kindly contact me on the above email or phone number.

Tiia Manaima

Principal Tangintebu Theological College

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus group discussions were conducted among church congregation members in the outer islands of Tamana and Abaiang. Participants were selected from the youth, women and church elders. There were four parts of the discussion on the questions.

Section A Understanding impacts of climate change

Explain your experience on the impacts of climate change affecting life, culture and faith.

Kabarabara am namakin ngkai ko a nora ana urubai bibitakin kanoan boong

Section B Culture and climate change

How do you think about your islands and traditional culture in the context of climate?

Explain your understanding of God from the coconut.

Tera am iango iaon katein te aba n te kanganga ae e a riki ngkai ni bibitakin kanoan boong? Kabarabara otam ni kinakin te Atua man te kai ae te ni.

Section C Theological education and climate change

What do you expect TTC to offer in its curriculum to equip pastors?

Tera ae tangiria ba e na anga TTC nakoia ana ataei?

Section D Church response to climate change

How can the church be more responsive to the issues of climate change?

E na kangara te Ekaretia ni kaekai tibangana inanon bibitakin kanoan boong?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEWS

SEMI-STRUCTURED AND UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section A **Understanding climate change / *Otam n bibitakin kanoan boong***

Explain your view on impacts of climate change and how do you maintain your life and indigenous culture in such a context?

How do you understand the love and care of God through the coconut tree?

Ko kanga kateimatoa am katei ni Kiribati inanon tain bibitakin kanoan boong?

Tera am atatai noran ana tangira ma ana kakawakin te Atua man te kai ae te ni.

Section B **Understanding the vocation of the Kiribati Uniting Church**

How does the church engage with the issue of climate change?

Tera aron reitakin te Ekaretia ma bibitakin kanoan bong?

How can the church be more effective in responding to the issue of climate change?

E na kangara te Ekaretia ni kona kakamakuri riki iaon buokan te kanganga ni bibitakin kanoan bong?

Section C Understanding the vocation of the Tangintebu Theological College: Curricula recommendations

What do you understand as the missional identity and vocation of the Kiribati Uniting Church and Tangintebu Theological College in the context of Climate Change?

Tera otam n tibangan te Ekaretia inanon te kanganga n bibitakin kanoan boong?

What possible curricula changes are needed to facilitate missional formation of students to respond to climate change issues as threats to life?

Tera kawai n anga reirei aika ana kona n ibuobuoki riki nakon tataeknan bibitakin kanoan bong?

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE

PhD Thesis Topic: Towards an Emerging “Coconut tree missiological imagination”:
An enquiry into climate change and its relevance for ministerial
formation at Tangintebu Theological College

PhD Candidate: Timon Tioti

Main research question

The central research question of this study is:

What are the Curriculum Implications of the phenomenon of Climate Change in the Kiribati for the renewal of theological education that fosters Ministerial Formation of students at Tangintebu Theological College?

Instructions

- i. This questionnaire has two sections A and B. (*Uoua itera te titiraki aei*).
- ii. You can answer all questions if you wish to do so. (*Ko kona ni kaeka ni kabane ngkana e angaraoi*).
- iii. In both sections circle the appropriate answer that appeals more to you or write it in any language of your choice in the space provided. (*Kanikinaea te kaeka n te tieko ko korei am kaeka n are mawa*).

SECTION A (*Moan itera*)

1. Name (optional) (*Ara*)
2. Age range (*Ririki*)
 - a. 19 to 20 years
 - b. 20 to 30 years

- c. 30 to 50 years
 - d. 50 years and above (*50 ni waerake*)
3. Sex
- a. Male (*Mane*)
 - b. Female (*Aine*)
4. Which part of the Republic of Kiribati do you come from? (*Kain te itera ra iaon Kiribati*)
- a. Southern districts (specify the name of the Island) (*Itera Maikai*)
 - b. Central districts (specify the name of the Island) (*Itera Nuka*)
 - c. Northern districts (specify the name of the Island) (*Itera Meang*)
5. What is your social status? (*Kinakim*)
- a. Elder (*Unimane*)
 - b. Group chairperson (*Tia Babaire*)
 - c. Pastor (*Mitinare*)
 - d. Villager (*Kain te kawa*)
 - e. If none of the above, please specify: (*Korea am kaeka inano ngkana akea nem ieta*)
6. What is your highest qualification? (*Tera tokin am reirei*)
- a. Primary education (*Moanrinan*)
 - b. Junior Secondary School (*JSS kauarinan*)
 - c. High School (*Kauarinan*)
 - d. Tertiary education (*Katenrinan*)
 - e. If none of the above, please specify: (*Korea am kaeka ikai*)
7. What is your occupation? (*Nakoam*)
- a. Farmer (*Tia ununiki*)
 - b. Business person (*Tia Bitineti*)
 - c. Fishermen (*Tia Akawa*)
 - d. If none of the above, please specify: (*Korea am kaeka ikai*)
8. Which denomination do you belong to? (*Am aro*)
- a. Roman Catholic Church: Please specify diocese (*Katorika*)
 - b. Uniting Church (Protestant) (*Kamatu*)

- c. If none of the above, please specify: (*Ngkana akea nem ieta ao koroia ikai*)

SECTION B

9. Explain what climate change mean to you (*Tera bibitakin kanoan te bong?*)
- Sea-level rise (*Rietatan tari*)
 - The changing of the weather (*Bibitakin kanoan te bong*)
 - Unpredictability of the weather (*Buaka ae aki kantaningaki*)
 - Most destructive scenario (*Te urubai n bitakin kanoan te bong*)
10. How does climate change impact on the Pacific region, in particular the nation and indigenous culture of the I-Kiribati? (*E kanga aron ana urubai bibitakin kanoan te bong*)
- It has caused storms to destroy our property, lands and plants (*E roko ba te buaka ke te nao ae urubai nakon kaubaira abara ao arokara*)
 - It has to do with sea-level rise (*Rietatan tari*)
 - It has contributed to inundation in most our atolls (*Korakoran te iabuti*)
 - It has contributed to pollution of our fresh water reserves in urban centres (*Rotakin te ran ni moi*)
11. Do you think the Tangitebu Theological College and the Kiribati United Church has missional identity in regard to issues of climate change and environment management to this region of Pacific Islands? (*Iai ana makuri ni mitinare Tangitebu nakon bibitakin kanoan te bong?*)

[YES] or [NO] (*Eng ke Tiaki*)

12. Do you agree that the theological curriculum should incorporate issues of climate change and environmental management?

[YES] or [NO] (*Eng ke Tiaki*)

13. Do you think the church has a role to play in issues of climate change and environment management? (*Ko kakoaua bá te Ekaretia iai tibangana n ana kangnga bibitakin kanoan bong*)

[YES] or [NO] (*Eng ke Tiaki*)

14. Do you agree that the theological curriculum should include indigenous knowledge on and about climate change?

[YES] or [NO] (*Eng ke Tiaki*)

15. Give reasons why the Church should be involved in issues of climate change and environmental management: (*Anga am kaeka ba e aera ngkai e na rin te Ekaretia inanon ana kangnga bibitakin kanoan bong*)

- a. Because it is its responsibility to manage the God-given resources (*Ibukina ba bon tabena te tararua kaubain te aba*)
- b. Because Christians are the main victims of the effects of climate change (*Ibukin bá Kiribati bon taan rotaki moa*)
- c. Because God will hold the church accountable for managing its creation (*ibukina ba te Atua e mwioa te Ekaretia ibukin tararuan te aonaba*)
- d. Because the Church complements government's responsibility (*Ibukina ba te Ekaretia e riai ni makuri ma te tautaeka*)
- e. I am not sure (*I aki koaua*)

16. Will the knowledge learned at the theological college contribute to mitigate the effects of climate change?

[YES] or [NO] (*Eng ke Tiaki*)

17. Do our ministerial training institution mainstream issues of climate change and environment management in its school curriculum? (*Iai taben te reirei ni minita?*)

[YES] or [NO] (*Eng ke Tiaki*)

18. Do you suggest that theological college should do more work in addressing issues of climate change and environment management? (*Ko kakoaua ba te Tangintebu e bon riai n inanon te kanganga aei?*)

[YES] or [NO] (*Eng ke Tiaki*)

19. Do you think that by incorporating issues of climate change in school curricula this can mitigate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation? (*Ko kakoaua ba e na ibuobuoki ngkana e rin inanon ana reirei Tangintebu taekan te bibitakin kanoan bong?*)

[YES] or [NO] (*Eng ke Tiaki*)

20. Explain how the ministerial students can benefit from the curriculum that has incorporated issues of climate change and environment management? (*Tera am namakin ngkana a rin ataei te kura ni minita iaon tararuan te otabanin?*)

- a. It will empower them with appropriate knowledge on issues of climate change and environment management (*E na kakorakora riki te rerei iaon tararuan te otabanin ao bibitakin kanoan bong*)
- b. It will shape their biblical hermeneutical skills and will able to incorporate issues of climate change and environment management in their sermons (*E na ibuobuoki ni bita te kabarabara ngkana e a rin taekan tararuan te otabanin*)
- c. It will help them to mobilise and civic-educate their congregants to engage with issues of environment management such as afforestation and proper waste management (*E na ibuobuoki ni kararaba te ota nakoia aomata*)

SECTION C

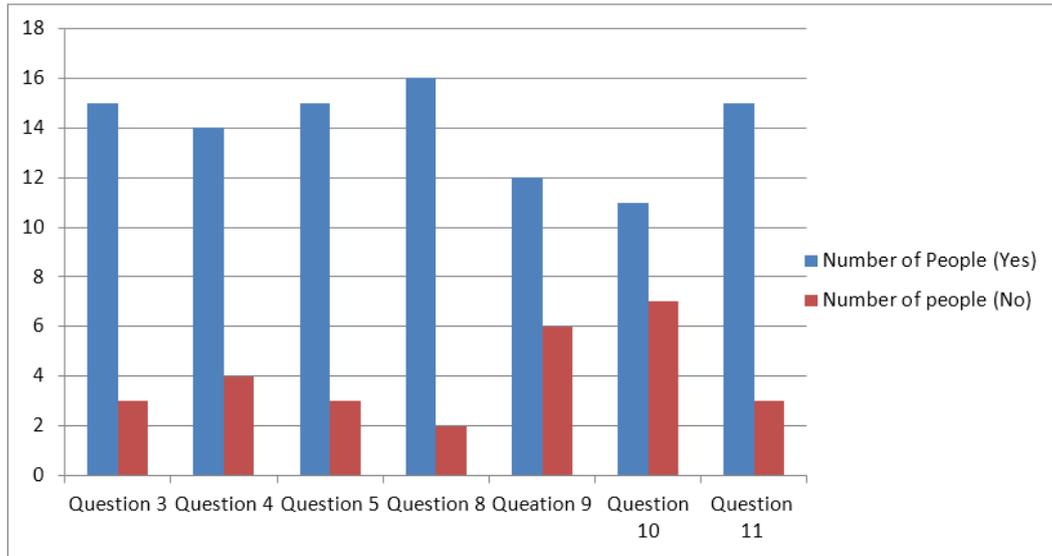
Un-structured interview questions (*Te maroro temanna imwin temanna*)

1. How do you maintain your life and indigenous culture in the context of climate change? (*Ko kanga kateimatoa am katei ni Kiribati inanon tain bibitakin kanoan boong?*)
2. How do you explain the love and care of God through the coconut tree? (*Tera kabarabaraan ana tangira ma ana kakawakin te Atua rinanon te kai aei te ni?*)
3. What possible curricula changes are needed to facilitate missional formation of students to respond to climate change issues as threats to life? (*Tera kawai n anga reirei ni buoka tataeknan bibitakin kanoan bong?*)
4. How does the church engage with the issue of climate change? (*Tera aron reitakin te Ekaretia ma bibitakin kanoan bong?*)
5. How can the church be more effective in responding to the issue of climate change? (*E na kangara te Ekaretia ni kona kakamakuri riki iaon buokan te kanganga ni bibitakin kanoan bong?*)
6. What caused the split in the church and how does the church encounter this challenge? (*Tera ae karika te bwenaua n te Ekaretia ao tera taben te Ekaretia ni kaitara?*)

APPENDIX E

**TABLE SHOWING THE OUTCOME OF THE RESEARCH
ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

#	Question	Number and percentage of people (Yes)	Number of people (No)
1.	Do you think the Tangintebu Theological College and the Kiribati United Church has missional identity regarding issues of climate change and environment management to this region of Pacific Islands?	15 = 88%	3
2.	As a Christian, do you think that you have contributed to climate change?	14 = 77%	4
3.	Do you think the church has a role to play in issues of climate change and environment management?	15 = 88%	3
4.	Considering the effects of climate change and environmental degradation and impact they have on the indigenous culture and citizens of the Islands of Kiribati; do you think church ministers have a role to play in attempt to mitigate the situation?	16 = 89%	2
5.	Do our ministerial training institution mainstream engages issues of climate change and environment management in its school curriculum?	17 = 94%	1
6.	Do you suggest that theological college should do more work in addressing issues of climate change and environment management?	15 = 88%	3
7.	Do you think that by incorporating issues of climate change and cultural values in school curricula this can mitigate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation?	15 = 88%	3



Bar chart showing the responses to seven questions related to effect of climate change

APPENDIX F

ETHICAL CLEARANCE



21 June 2016

Rev. Tioti Timon 215081764
School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Rev. Timon

Protocol reference number: HSS/0601/016D

Project Title: "The Coconut Tree" Theology: The Missiological implications of Climate Change for Ministerial Formation in Kiribati Uniting Church at Tangintebu Theological College

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 19 May 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Prof Roderick Hewitt
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Denis
Cc School Administrator: Ms Catherine Murugan

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

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Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville