

Climate Induced Migration Policies in Atoll Island States

Introduction

In 2006 Stephen Gardiner called climate change the “perfect moral storm” in an attempt to explain humanity’s difficulty addressing an issue we had long been aware of. He noted several barriers to collective action. The first: climate change is truly global in nature, making it hard for individual countries to address an issue that transcends borders. Second: climate change is intergenerational, meaning its negative effects are often delayed and the sense of urgency is diluted. Additionally, there is little institutional or theoretical guidance. The result of this moral storm has largely been inaction on both the national and international stage. But the world is quickly approaching a point of no return. The newest *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) report, released in 2018, clearly communicates the limited years remaining to turn back the clock on climate change before facing catastrophic consequences.

On no issue is the unfortunate marriage of dire urgency and total inaction clearer than climate induced migration. Though evidence points to millions of people facing displacement due to the effects of climate change in the coming decades little has been done to address this issue. Since the topic was introduced to the international stage in the 1980s, academics and politicians alike have wrestled with the very concept of an environmental migrant. The general consensus for defining climate induced migration is the forced relocation of peoples due to anthropogenic climate degradation (White, p. 25, 2011). This definition has been controversial from the start, largely because the issue was first presented in relation to the existing refugee system, a debate which has since dominated every discussion. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone who flees their country due to a “well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a

particular social group” (UN General Assembly, 1951). Though climate induced migration often resonates with the moral impetus behind the refugee system, it fails to meet many of the structural definitions, particularly the fundamentally important definition of *persecution*. Unlike more traditional reasons for migrating, climate change is both gradual in nature and generally indiscriminate. Additionally, scholars find the issue further complicated by the idea that environmental degradation interacts with multiple push factors for migration as opposed to a singular reason for relocation (which is the traditional situation for refugees). All these factors have resulted in a long-lasting debate that has spurred little change to the international legal system. Instead, climate induced migrants continue to exist in legal limbo. And for the vulnerable nations who are facing significantly more climate induced migrants, significantly sooner than the rest of the world, the current lack of legal recourse on some levels represents a potential existential crisis. The ongoing absence of action at the international level has led to both academics and international political bodies suggesting that the best approach is to leave the solution to the national level and let the suffering countries work out bilateral agreements with neighboring countries to create migration pathways or alternate solutions for those who may be displaced.

I intend to examine the existing climate induced migration strategies of Kiribati, the Maldives, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu. These four nations were chosen because of their status the world’s only independent atoll island nations. These nations face the strong possibility of being unable to support their population or in worst case scenarios literally sinking beneath the rising seas. This is due to their unique geography: an atoll island is a ring-shaped coral reef island, or series of islets, which surrounds a body of water called a lagoon. The lagoon usually rests above the ring of an extinct volcano or seamount, remaining at a shallow depth that allows

the coral to continue growing and forming reefs. These island chains exist almost exclusively in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, as they flourish only in tropical and subtropical waters. While there are many island nations that include an atoll island in their territory, there are very few nations that are made up entirely or predominantly of atoll islands. Of those, the Marshall Islands, the Maldives, Kiribati, and Tuvalu are the world's only *independent* nations with this distinctive geographic makeup, and they will be the focus of my research.

The unique geography of these four islands is significant because it plays a large role in their deep vulnerability to climate change. All four countries are rated as high risk on the Climate Change Vulnerability Index, and it is expected that they will be major sources of climate change related migrants (Maplecroft, 2016). Atolls typically have long sinuous coastlines and small land areas, creating a high coastline to land area ratio (Yamamoto and Esteban, 2013). Even more worrying, they are seldom higher than two meters above sea level (Connell, 2015). Due to this low elevation, the sea-level would not have to rise very high to have a significant effect on these nations. And unlike other islands nations, their populations cannot simply relocate to higher ground because there is no higher ground. In addition, atolls have very fragile ecosystems (National Geographic Society, 2012). Sea-level rise poses a risk not only because it may physically force people to move, but also because it has the strong potential to flood the islands and salinize the limited freshwater resources (Storlazzi et al., 2015). Given that atolls have limited land and water for human habitation, sea-level rise is dangerous for these nations in ways that are not felt as immediately elsewhere. Even if flooding is not a concern, the islands becoming uninhabitable environments is still a potent risk.

It is worth noting that vulnerability to climate change is generally defined not only by a nation's susceptibility to potential harm but also by the lack of ability to adapt to the damages

caused by climate change (IPCC, 2015). Atoll island nations meet both dimensions of this definition, as they are simultaneously ecologically fragile and economically vulnerable. Their economies are often among the most undeveloped in the world. This is partially because they have struggled to overcome a limited educated population available to work (that tends to be over-concentrated in urban areas), a lack of natural resources, and poorly developed infrastructure (National Geographic Society, 2012). Their economies tend to rely heavily on tourism, remittances, and foreign aid, none of which are viewed as sustainable, especially in the face of climate change.¹ In addition, the soil quality is usually poor on atoll islands, making it difficult to have a strong agricultural sector. As a result, atoll islands are usually food insecure and must import most of their food, making them highly dependent on other nations.

	Kiribati	Marshall Islands	Tuvalu	Maldives
GDP	\$197 mil (2017 est.)	\$199 mil (2017 est.)	\$40 mil (2017 est.)	\$4.505 bil (2017 est.)
Population	108,145 (2017 es.)	74,539 (2017 est.)	11,052 (2017 est.)	392,709 (2017 est.)
Average Elevation	2 m	2m	2 m	1.8 m
Highest Elevation	81 m ²	14 m	5 m	5 m
Size	811 sq km	181 sq km	26 sq km	298 sq km
Number of Islands/Islets	33	1,156	9	1,190

For most of the world, the issue of climate induced migration is a faraway problem. Yet these four countries - due to geography, lack of resources, and overdependence on other nations - are feeling the effects of climate change earlier and more strongly than the rest of the world. In

¹ In some cases, foreign aid makes up as high as 60% of the GDP.

² Kiribati is largely low-lying, save for the island of Banaba (2.3 square miles), which has a comparatively high elevation of 81m.

some ways, they are the most extreme examples of the devastating effects of climate change – an environmental canary in a coal mine. All four nations actively lobby and discuss potential approaches to climate induced migration in international forums, both individually and as members of organizations like the Alliance of Small Islands States (AOSIS). This indicates that this issue is present in their national consciousness and that they are all aware of the potentially dire effects that might be felt. As a result, they are also the countries who are pioneering many climate change adaptation strategies, including migration. One approach being discussed is nationwide relocation plans: a “whole nation” approach that would provide an alternative place to resettle the country’s entire population, usually by purchasing land overseas. This approach remains largely theoretical and is has yet to settle questions about sovereignty. The other approach is to address the issue through migration plans, essentially providing movement options for individual citizens to immigrate as a response to climate change. This approach has more ability to be folded into other policies like economic development or labor mobility.

Though the four nations have in common both the dangers created by their geography and their international activism to address the issue, only one of the countries has moved beyond discussion to developing a proactive policy addressing climate induced migration. In 2011 Kiribati enacted a policy called “migration with dignity” as a long-term nationwide migration strategy (MacIellan, 2012). Additionally, the government purchased a large tract of land in Fiji as a potential site for relocation. This provides ample contrast with the other three nations, none of which have developed any comparable policies. In fact, they remain largely disinterested in pursuing either migration or relocation policies to address climate induced migration.

These four countries are undoubtedly the best-case studies to understand what actions individual nations are taking to prepare for climate induced migration. By comparing the

development- or lack thereof- of such relocation policies in each of these countries, I hope to understand not only what circumstances make a country likely to take this course of action, but also the strengths and weaknesses of relying on national or bilateral policies to address climate induced migration. In doing so, I hope to prove that the decision to leave climate induced migration as a problem for individual countries is a deeply ineffective approach that has ultimately left the issue unaddressed.

History of the Issue

In the past decade, scientists and climate experts have come to a clear consensus: global warming is a real, and potentially devastating, phenomenon (IPCC, 2015). Since the 1950s, human actions have caused an unprecedented rate of change in global conditions. In addition to rising temperatures, the Earth is also experiencing changing agricultural conditions, ocean warming and acidifying, and rising sea levels (IPCC, 2015). In 2016, the international community took a large step to address these issues: 175 countries signed the Paris Agreement, accepting anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change as a pressing international problem and set goals to reduce global warming.

Yet, for all these signs of progress, two years have passed and it is clear that not enough is being done. A recently released report, originally commissioned by the Paris Agreement, makes it clear the world is on a path towards worsening food shortages, wildfires, and massive coral bleaching by 2040 if nothing is done (IPCC, 2018). Many environmental advocates have voiced concerns that the Paris Agreement simply did not set strong enough goals to create meaningful change. For example, the Paris Agreement set a goal of preventing more than 3.6 degrees of warming. However, many heads of small island nations believe that 3.6 degrees of warming could still lead to drastic changes for their homelands; as a result, they have asked

scientists to examine the effects of 2.7 degrees of warming as a possible alternative (Kormann, 2018). This reflects the reality that some of the standards set in the Paris Agreement might not meet the more dire needs of some vulnerable states.

The effect of climate change on human migration falls in the unfortunate overlap between the concerns of vulnerable states and the consequences of climate change left unaddressed by the Paris Agreement. Researchers have coined terms like “environmental refugee”, “climate refugee” or “climate induced migration” to collectively refer to the migrants who are forced to relocate because of unintentional but very real climate degradation that is fundamentally anthropogenic (White, p. 25, 2011). This issue is most pressing for low-elevation states whose populations are likely to lose their homes due to rising sea levels (McGranahan et al., 2007; Kelman and West, 2009; IPCC, 2014). Yet there are a multitude of countries, of diverse economic and geographic backgrounds, who will feel these effects. If just 2.7 degrees of warming occurs, then the U.S., Bangladesh, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam together will be home to 50 million people who will be exposed to the effects of coastal flooding by 2040 (IPCC, 2018). These numbers make it clear why some heads of state find the current Paris Agreement too weak to address the current situation.

It is worth noting that sea-levels rising is not the only way climate change can displace people. Many people will likely be forced to move because there is no remaining habitable land in their country, as is already the case with desertification in certain parts of Africa, like Burkina Faso and Mali (Pearson and Niafre, 2017). In addition, climate change often interacts with and exacerbates other economic or social factors that influence migration, forcing individuals to flee the destabilizing effects of climate change even when it is not obvious (McAdam, 2014). Displacement stemming from the adverse impacts of climate change is expected to be one of the

largest humanitarian challenges in the twenty-first century, with scientists expecting anywhere from 25 million to 1 billion environmental migrants by 2050 (Nansen Initiative, 2015). The most cited number is 200 million migrants, which is the same estimate of current international migrants worldwide (International Organization for Migration, 2018).

However, it would be a mistake to view this as an issue only for the future. Already the world is starting to see displacement caused by climate change, making it clear that this is not an issue that can be ignored any longer. For example, in 2014 the Fijian government decided to relocate a village after large portions of the settlement were damaged due to coastal erosion, increased flooding and seawater inundation (Corendea, 2016). In Vanuatu, multiple communities affected by coastal flooding have been asked to relocate to safer ground (Talakai, 2015). In Kiribati, there has been a noticeable pattern of islanders who live on the outer islands moving due to erosion, salt-water intrusion, or drought (Nansen Initiative, 2015).

The movement has not been confined only to intra-state migration. In 2013, a Kiribati citizen attempted to apply as a refugee in New Zealand due to the effects of climate change gradually destroying his home. His lawyers particularly stressed the diminished quality of life in Kiribati as the environment continued to degrade (AFP/ABC, 2013). The court acknowledged both the difficulties his family would face from the deteriorating environment and also that the cause was anthropogenic climate change. However, his case was ultimately denied as his situation was no different from any other Kiribati citizen according to the court (Buchanan, 2015). In 2014, a similar case occurred in New Zealand with a Tuvaluan family being granted residence after claiming to be threatened by climate change in their home country (Noack, 2014). However, the Tribunal made clear that this was not to be considered a case of a “climate refugee” as the claim failed to meet any of the grounds for asylum laid out in the 1951 UN

Refugee Convention. Additionally, the court made clear that there were other factors beyond climate change - like the three generations of relatives living in New Zealand - that would have justified granting the family residence regardless of claims about climate change. This allowed the court to neatly avoid a clear decision on whether climate change can or cannot be reason enough for refugees to be granted residency. Instead, the family was considered an example of “exceptional humanitarian grounds.”

Those two cases are indicative of a larger problem within the international system. Though many scholars persist in using the term “climate refugee”, this is inaccurate on a conceptual and legal level (McAdam, 2011). According to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality.” Climate migrants struggle to meet this definition on multiple levels. First, persecution has a connotation of suffering due to human actions. While the impact of climate change is undoubtedly real, it does not count as a deliberate actor as understood in international law. Second, the Refugee Convention also specifies that the persecution must be the result of an individual’s race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Climate change is indiscriminate, and its effects are felt regardless of the five Convention grounds.

Some individuals, among them former President Nasheed of the Maldives, have called for the UNHCR to redefine refugees to include those displaced by climate change (Biermann and Boas, 2008). However, the more traditional definition of the term refugee remains unchanging even now. In December 2018 the United Nations finally approved the *Global Compact on Refugees* and the *Global Compact for Migration*. Both documents were meant to help shape the

foundation of the international normative and legal framework on international migration and refugees. During the negotiations of both Compacts, many advocated for a new international policy on climate induced migration. However, the status quo was ultimately maintained when Louise Arbour, the U.N. official leading the Global Compact for Migration, announced that the document would not grant “specific legal international protection to climate-induced migrants” (McDonnell, 2018). Even less was said in the Global Compact on Refugees, where climate change was simply mentioned as one of many factors that “may interact with the drivers of refugee movements” (UNHCR, 2018).

The end result is that climate-induced migrants, regardless of what they are called, simultaneously do not receive any of the protections that are attached to the status of refugee and do not have any legal protections specific to their situation. Instead, they exist in legal limbo, as the international community continues to address the issue of climate induced migration on an *ad hoc* basis. Thus, those who are attempting to work through the legal system, as was the case with the two Pacific Islanders in New Zealand, find themselves struggling in a system that will not grant them the protections they seek.

While it is easy to dismiss these examples of climate induced migration as happening exclusively to small countries, they are indicative of a broader problem that will inevitably be affecting the whole world. In the future, events like flooding in the Mekong river delta or Bangladesh, desertification in China or the Sahara, or natural disasters like Hurricane Maria will all be causes of climate induced migration, making it clear that they will not be limited to small islands. This makes it all the more pressing that the international community starts addressing this issue now, while there is still time to plan ahead and create pathways for individuals affected by climate induced migration to relocate. The migrant crisis haunting Western Europe since 2015

is proof of the dangers of not being prepared for a large movement of peoples. This has only been confirmed by studies that prove well-planned and early resettlement can reduce poverty and further vulnerability to climate change impacts (Johnson, 2012). This is in stark contrast to the *ad hoc* approach to climate induced migration currently in use, which can result in increased vulnerability of residents (Albert et al. 2016). Given that climate induced migration is a rare situation where the world has received warning of an upcoming crisis, the international community has an opportunity to determine if the current course of national-level solutions adequately addressed climate induced migration. Unlike previous incidents of mass migration, this problem has given enough forewarning to allow for examining the existing systems and policies for weaknesses before an international crisis arrives. This allows us to move away from ineffectually letting vulnerable countries attempt to solve this on their own and instead develop a systemic approach on the international level.

Literature Review

This field of study is only a few decades old, limiting the academic resources on the subject. Yet this has not hampered discussion from authors seeking the best understanding of the very concept of an “environmental refugee.” These debates range a wide variety of topics like the vague nature of the term, its struggles to meet the traditional definition of refugee, and the multi-causal nature of environmental migration. In order to understand the current policies found in my case studies, I will trace the inception of this field, the controversies that follow, and how this discussion has led to the current international approach to climate induced migration.

“Discussing Environmental Refugees”

In 1985, Essam El-Hinnawi defined the term environmental refugees as “people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a

marked environmental disruption that jeopardizes their existence and/or seriously effects the quality of their life” (El-Hinnawi, 1985). From its inception, the term has been explored by scholars who attempted to further develop the concept, largely by addressing the problems found in El-Hinnawi’s initial definition. One issue other scholars attempted to address in El-Hinnawi’s work was his vague conceptualization of environmental refugees, making little difference between those fleeing a natural disaster or gradual environmental degradation. In the following years, the refugee literature largely focused on migrants compelled by the gradual deterioration of their environments (Black, 1998; Myers, 1997; Douglas, 1996; Hugo, 1996, Ramlogan, 1996; Westing, 1994; Millikan, 1992; Otunnu, 1992). Jacobson was one of the first to draw attention to the interactions between anthropogenic and natural disruptions of the environment, and note that human actions could exacerbate environmental events, such as hurricanes or tropical storms (1988). This perspective was continued by noted environmental scientist Norman Myers, who predicted that environmental refugees would become the largest group of involuntary migrants (1993 & 1995). In particular, his work focused on the potential of sea-level rise due to human-induced climate change.

However, no amount of debate over the proper way to define environmental refugees has been able to overcome the political barriers surrounding the academic discourse. As mentioned earlier, the term “refugee” has very particular, and unyielding, connotations in international law. This led to a large body of work that debated the concept of environmental refugees solely on the basis of using the word “refugee”. One author, Astri Suhrke, thought it unwise to characterize all forms of movement as refugee-like when they were differentiated in terms of spatial and temporal extent and thus undermined the legal definition of refugee found in the UN Refugee Convention (1993). Another researcher, Jane McAdam, notes that climate migrants struggle to

meet the definition on a conceptual and legal level (2011). While the impact of climate change is undoubtedly real, climate change does not count as a deliberate actor as understood in international law. As a result, climate change does not fit with the image of human action associated with the term “persecution.” Additionally, the Refugee Convention specifies that persecution must be the result of an individual’s race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Climate change does not interact with any of the five Convention grounds. Other researchers, like Max Cherem, felt that the definition must remain narrow, not only because climate induced migrants do not meet the definition, but also because the definition should focus only on those who are actively persecuted, as opposed to those generally deprived of human rights. Cherem argues against a more humanitarian based definition of refugee, claiming that states cannot provide membership to all those whose basic needs have not been met. As a result, it is important to ground the definition of refugee in the need for new membership, leaving little room for individuals who are displaced by climate change or other environmental events (2015). Despite the general consensus that climate change could lead to involuntary migration, El-Hinnawi’s writing remains controversial due to his decision to invoke the political and legal weight behind the term refugee.

However, though many authors critiqued El-Hinnawi’s idea, all acknowledged the relevance of ‘environmental refugee’ as a concept. Instead their efforts went to finding a more appropriate conceptualization of the 'environmental refugee'; some tried to distinguish between those fleeing rapid- or slow-onset events (Suhrike 1993; Bates 2002), others developed a continuum that classified migrants in terms of the urgency of their need to move (Hugo 1996; Bates 2002). Other scholars, like Black and Castles, attempted to address the fact that climate change only exacerbates true causes of migration and is not a direct cause (1998; 2002). Aside

from obvious cases where sudden-onset environmental changes - such as those resulting from floods - lead to forced displacement, the problem is that environmental migration is seldom straightforward. Often it simply exacerbates existing drivers of migration like unemployment or health concerns. This idea of multi-causality complicates the discussion surrounding climate induced migration as it suggests that people chose to move based on a combination of complex socioeconomic factors (Naser, 2012; McAdam, 2014). Two authors, Dun and Gemenne (2008) argued for a definition of environmental migration that acknowledges multicausality and the difficulty of isolating environmental drivers of migration. The controversial nature of the term “environmental refugee”, or even to an extent “environmental migration”, has continued to prompt debate in both academic and political circles.

Discussing the International Gaps

The inability to reach a consensus on the refugee definition has forced a discussion on the ongoing gap in the international legal system. In her research, Jane McAdam focused on the strategic role of the UNHCR in placing climate induced migration on the international agenda from late 2010 to mid-2013. Ultimately, she noted that states felt the UNHCR did not have a clear mandate for climate induced migration. As a result, states were reluctant to be pushed into action on this issue. Andrea Simonelli continued to study global governance of this issue, by doing a qualitative case study of the UNHCR, IOM, UN OCHA, and the UNFCCC’s Loss and Damage work program (2016). She found that the global governance of climate induced migration is largely governed by *ad hoc* decisions. This was in part because there is no formal legal standard or even set of policies to guide action on this phenomenon.

The end result is that climate-induced migrants, regardless of what they are called, are simultaneously denied both the protections that are attached to the status of refugee and any legal

protections specific to their situation. The newly negotiated *Global Compact for Migration* and the *Global Compact on Refugees* were both meant to recognize the need for more cooperation between nations to manage migration and refugees effectively. Many advocates saw this as a perfect opportunity to start changing international policies to better protect climate induced migrants. Instead, the final draft ultimately maintained the status quo and climate-induced migrants continue to exist in legal limbo, as the international community continues to address the issue of climate induced migration on an *ad hoc* basis.

The Discussion Goes Regional

In some ways, the failings on the international level have prompted some academics to move to a more regional understanding of climate induced migration. Comparatively, approaching climate change-related displacement by focusing on existing policies is a much smaller field. What research exists at the national level primarily focuses on Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the vast majority of which lie in the Pacific and Caribbean. This research notes that Pacific SIDS are the most likely to have national adaptation strategies for handling climate induced migration when compared to Caribbean island states (Corendea, 2016). This includes an example of migration policies in Kiribati, which has created a policy promoting “migration with dignity” (MacIellan, 2012). Due to the comparative newness of this approach, the literature surrounding the variation between regions is not as well researched. Scholars like Adelle Thomas and Lisa Benjamin have begun to contrast countries, attributing the difference to the presence of regional institutions in the Pacific that encourage nations in the region to develop strategies and share resources on developed policies with each other (2017). However, even with those existing policies, most scholars agree that there is still much more work to be done in order to develop clear criteria or plans (Thomas and Benjamin, 2017; Albert et al., 2016). Though

Pacific Islands have many adaptation plans for the general effects of climate change, this preparation does not necessarily extend to the migration policies. In his research, Petz notes that Pacific Governments have yet to fully address migration related adaptation policy options (2013). Though many Pacific SIDS are breaking barriers by having any policies regarding climate induced migration, most scholars agree that there is still significant work to be done in order to meet the anticipated number of environmental migrants.

Some of the research done in this field has been identifying barriers to effective adaptation policies in general and more specifically migration policies. Betzold's research identified three key barriers to effective policies: perception of the seriousness of climate change's effects, institutions, and (lack of) resources (2015). Other studies have shown that the issue is also culturally sensitive, creating a certain level of psychological or political resistance to climate induced migration (Lazarus, 2009; Mortreux and Barnett, 2009; Smith, 2013). Pacific identity is deeply linked to land and community, which could explain the sensitivity around the issue (McAdam and Loughry, 2009; McNamara and Gibson, 2009). Many Island narratives tell stories of how God or spiritual ancestors gifted the islands to their current inhabitants. As a result, many worry that relocation could lead to the end of their cultural heritage. Other academics also suggest that the spiritual beliefs of many Pacific Islanders may play a role in the lack of policies (Betzold, 2015). Their research has demonstrated the belief held by many islanders that God would not allow climate change to significantly damage homes, thus justifying inaction (Mortreux and Barnett, 2009).³ However, there has not been any comparative research between other regions that are more secular or have a different faith, making it hard to truly understand the role of religion in a country's response to climate change.

³ As the only non-Pacific and the only predominantly Muslim nation in this group, these studies do not apply to the Maldives.

Atoll Islands

Some researchers have chosen to go even more specific and focus in on specific types of islands: atoll islands. This is largely because academics view climate change as “a grave, foreseeable, external threat to the autonomy of atoll island peoples” (Wilcox, 2015; Burns, 2006; Yamamoto and Esteban; 2014). In their research, John Campbell and Olivia Warrick note that atolls are among the areas within the Pacific that will produce the most climate induced migrants (2014). Yamamoto and Esteban also note that climate impacts tend to exacerbate local socioeconomic conditions; this is significant since atoll island tend to be comparatively underdeveloped economies (2014).

Some scholars have attempted to explore potential solutions for climate induced migration with atoll nation states. This research tends to focus on the idea that migration is simply another form of adapting to the effects of climate change. Esteban and Yamamoto explore a range of options from purchasing land elsewhere to changing the definition of refugee (2017). Ultimately, they suggest the use of bilateral or regional agreements, initiatives, and national policies as the most viable solution for atoll island states. This concept was around as early as 2008 in McNamara’s work suggesting that in climate change discussions in the Pacific there was a sense of “pragmatic bilateralism,” and the only serious action on climate change would stem from bilateral means. This idea was further adapted to specifically address climate induced migration in the work of Richard Bedford and Charlotte Bedford, who suggest modifying and expanding existing migration pathways to allow for re-settlement of atoll islanders (2010). Kelly Wyett builds on this idea, focusing specifically on the case of Kiribati. She suggests that the best policy option is bilateral migration deals with Australia and New Zealand, as their existing relationships make the idea more feasible (2013). The idea that, in the absence of any international action, national and bilateral solutions are the only feasible approach

has been espoused by other scholars and political bodies. However, given the relative youth of this area of study, there has been little work examining the existing attempts at creating climate-related migration policies, or what makes a country more or less likely to have a policy on this topic. My work intends to fill this gap by examining the relevant policies of Kiribati, the Maldives, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu.

Methodology

I examined the existing climate induced migration strategies of Kiribati, the Maldives, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu. These four nations were chosen due to their uniquely low-lying geography as the world's only independent atoll island nations. However, the situation goes beyond mere geographic vulnerability. The effects of climate change are often more profound due to limited ecological, social, economic, and technological capabilities. This makes the current environmental situation even more urgent for atoll island nations. As the countries who are the first to feel the effects of climate change, they are the nations where one would most expect proactive policies on this issue. These approaches can range from a migration policy that focuses on allowing citizens more opportunities to move as a response to climate change, or a nationwide relocation plan focused on moving a country's entire population.

I used a variety of resources to track the formation of these policies. In order to better understand the rationale behind each countries' actions, I examined government speeches given on both the domestic and international level. Throughout the past few decades there has been a variety of international and regional conferences on climate change that are increasingly focused on the specific effect of climate change migration. This provides ample material about the international context in which these actors made their decisions. In addition, I looked at interviews with the political leaders of these countries. These are particularly useful for

understanding the development and motivation behind Kiribati's *Migration with Dignity* strategy. Anote Tong, the former president of Kiribati and the developer of this migration policy, has given many interviews both during the development of the policy and after he left office.

To better understand the differences between the respective governments' policy priorities I examined many of the official government documents released like *National Adaptation Plans* and *National Frameworks for Climate Change*. *National Adaptation Plans* are a flexible process that builds on a country's existing adaptation activities to integrate climate change into the national decision-making process. They are meant to identify an individual country's medium- and long-term adaptation needs as well as the strategies and programs to address those needs.⁴ Given its long-term vision, this makes it one of the more likely documents to discuss a problem like climate induced migration, which is often viewed as an issue for the future. Unlike the *National Adaptation Plan*, whose format and process are guided by an international agreement, the *National Frameworks for Climate Change* are somewhat less uniform. These documents are done at the national level and fall solely under the jurisdiction of each country. The documents are meant to lay out a broad framework for each government to respond to the effects of climate change, both in the short and in the long term. They are especially focused on determining how an individual country's adaptation plan can fit in with sustainable development. Every country I will be examining has some equivalent policy, though they go by different names. In Kiribati it is called the *National Frameworks for Climate Change and Climate Change Adaptation*, in the Marshall Islands and the Maldives it simply the *Climate Change Policy Framework*, and in Tuvalu it is the *National Climate Change Policy*. As both the

⁴ The National Adaptation Plan process was established under the Cancun Adaptation Framework in 2010, that pushed to enhance adaptation methods. These plans were meant to facilitate the integration of climate change adaptation into new and existing policies or programs. They are meant to simultaneously facilitate and summarize country-driven action.

National Adaptation Plans and the *National Frameworks for Climate Change* are meant to help outline a country's blueprint for addressing the effects of climate change, the inclusion of migration policies is a telling sign of where relocation falls as a potential adaptation strategy.

Given the fact that climate induced migration falls at the intersection of several issues, it will be important to look at documents and policies beyond those explicitly focusing on climate change. Depending on how a country plans to address relocation, their solution may be folded into a labor or migration policy. This is especially true if they are attempting to build off existing migration pathways or relationships. Additionally, often in the cases of environmentally-vulnerable nations like these, climate change plays a role in national economic development as well. This makes it important to look at both labor policies and economic development policies to get a more holistic understanding of how a country is approaching climate induced migration.

At the international level, documents like *Intended Nationally Determined Contributions* are also valuable tools for accessing these countries approach to adaptation. The *Intended Nationally Determined Contributions* are individual countries' outlined plans to meet the requirements of the 2015 Paris Agreement.⁵ The documents largely focus on mitigation and pursuing net zero emissions, which makes them good sources for understanding if countries are prioritizing adaptation or mitigation efforts, and where relocation falls under their priorities. Other useful sources are International Organization for Migration reports. Not only has the organization released a *Pacific Strategy* meant to address the challenges to migration in the region, including how climate change plays a role. It also has several more country-level documents or studies, like the *Marshall Islands IOM Country Strategy*.

⁵ All countries that signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change were asked to publish Intended Nationally Determined Contributions outlining how they would reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Going beyond national governments, I looked at reports released by regional associations to incorporate a wider variety of voices. This includes organizations like the Association of Small Island States that, due to its makeup, has been forced to address climate induced migration. For more scientific reports there are organizations like the Nansen Initiative, a research collaborative working towards a protection agenda for those displaced by the effects of climate change. The Pacific Islands Climate Action Network brings together civil society across borders to advocate for climate justice, and consequently bring non-governmental voices into the discussion.

Lastly, I also examined news sources to follow national dialogues and fill in the gaps in the narratives. This included national news sources, like *Kiribati Updates*, and regional ones like the *Pacific Islands News Association* or *Radio New Zealand*. Additionally, there are many news sources that have an environmental or climate change focus, like *Climate Change News*. Many of them have spent time covering climate induced migration. Beyond traditional news sources, there are also several documentaries, like *Anote's Ark* or *The Island President*, which follow leadership and climate change in these countries. All these resources together helped build a narrative around the building of a national plan in Kiribati, and the absence of action in the remaining three countries.

It should be noted that I originally hoped to conduct several interviews as part of my research. I reached out to embassies for all four countries as well as some organizations whose research focuses on climate induced migration. However, I received no responses from any of them leading to me depending on the other sources I have mentioned to create a clear picture of the events in each country.

Findings

Kiribati

As early as 1989, a UN report cited Kiribati as a nation likely to completely disappear in the 21st century due to rising sea levels. This may explain why Kiribati has attempted to address the effects of climate change through focusing on long-term, nationwide relocation (in addition to adaptation and mitigation efforts). The main pathway was first introduced by the government of President Anote Tong in 2012 and was termed “*Migration with Dignity*.” The primary idea behind the policy was a slow and methodical relocation as opposed to moving the entire population at once in response to some catastrophic natural disaster (like a flood or hurricane). The policy was fully incorporated into the *National Labour Migration Policy* in 2015 and has four main policy areas: 1) protect the rights of migrant workers and provide support services, 2) promote opportunities for decent foreign employment, 3) increase the development benefits of labour migration, 4) and improve the administration of labour migration (Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development, 2015). Tong’s government hoped that by creating a preemptive policy that strengthens and expands migration opportunities, I-Kiribati (a native of Kiribati) would have more agency in how they react to climate change as opposed to simply reacting to a crisis. Additionally, by tying this issue to an economy-oriented policy, it was hoped that the solution would become more palatable.

Migration with Dignity had a two-pronged approach. The first step aimed to ease the future relocation of Kiribati citizens by building up strong expatriate communities in receiving countries so that they can act as a support network for future migrants. Not only are expatriate communities valuable tools for keeping I-Kiribati culture alive overseas, but they could also provide expertise to incoming immigrants who are adapting to new schools or social service networks. In addition, these overseas workers strengthen their home communities by sending

back remittances in the short-term, which is a fundamental part of the Kiribati economy (Connell and Brown, 2005).⁶ The money sent would hopefully ease the burdens of climate change for those who remain in Kiribati. It was expected that the receiving countries would most likely be Fiji, Australia, or New Zealand. Kiribati already had some labour schemes with these countries that could be expanded and there are already I-Kiribati communities in these three countries. These two factors provided an existing foundation for the government to build upon. However, the Kiribati government was also considering expanding relationships with the United States or Taiwan to have more options (Ministry of Labor and Human Resource Development, 2015).

The second part of this policy focuses on giving Kiribati citizens increased mobility by improving their levels of educational and vocational qualifications, especially improving English language skills.⁷ This would theoretically allow them to choose when and where to migrate, as opposed to suddenly leaving when they have no other options (Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development, 2015). Increasing the international value of the workforce is particularly important in a country like Kiribati, which tends to have relatively low access to labor markets compared to other Pacific nations (Curtain et al., 2016). In addition, it would change the dialogue in receiving countries away from accepting burdens on state resources. Instead, countries would be accepting valuable members of society who can fill gaps in the labour market.

One past model of this is the Kiribati Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI) that educated 84 young I-Kiribati women and men in nursing at Griffith University in Brisbane.⁸ This serves as a prime example of a program that fostered Kiribati's attempts to give I-Kiribati internationally

⁶ Remittance inflows are usually considered a relatively stable source of income, making up a sizeable portion of their GDP (usually around 10%).

⁷ This would also have the added benefit of helping address Kiribati's high unemployment rate, particularly among young people.

⁸ Researcher Lara K. O'Brien interviewed KANI students. All participants said climate change motivated their decision to join the initiative.

recognized qualifications (O'Brien, 2013). Interestingly, the program also led to the development of a group called the Queensland Kiribati Community Youth to counter the students' culture shock (Walsh, 2017). The group celebrated I-Kiribati holidays together, performed traditional music at events, and helped create a smaller community. This makes KANI a good demonstration of both aspects of *Migration with Dignity*: fostering expatriate communities to ease migration and helping young I-Kiribati receive valuable vocational qualifications.

One of the primary benefits of *Migration with Dignity* is that it would give I-Kiribati agency in how they migrate. This would prevent them from becoming "climate refugees", and thus avoid the legal void surrounding such a term. The term climate refugee is deeply resented among many Pacific Islanders who feel it robs them of agency and instead projects a story of victimhood and passivity (McAdam and Loughry, 2009). Additionally, following the refugee crisis in Europe, there is fear about the kind of resentment and pushback that comes with refugee status. In an interview with Vice News, Tong said: "If we train our people and they become skilled, then they would migrate with dignity and on merit, they would not be people running away from something." He emphasized that having skills would allow his people to become "members of communities they go into" (Duhaime-Ross, 2016). *Migration with Dignity* was meant to address climate induced migration in a way that made migration palatable both to communities receiving I-Kiribati and the people migrating.

In addition to *Migration with Dignity*, Tong's government also purchased 6,000 acres of land in Fiji in 2012, in what they called a "whole nation approach" to the idea of relocating (MacIellan, 2012). The US\$8.77 million transaction was the first international purchase of land specifically meant for climate induced migration. The government has at times gone back and forth on the purpose of the purchase, occasionally claiming that it was largely a property

investment aimed at making money for the government. The land was also meant to act as a potential site for farming as Kiribati struggles to feed its population, thus alleviating concerns about food security (The Economist, 2016). However, from the first discussion of the land purchase there has always been the tacit understanding that if “absolutely necessary” this property could be used for relocating Kiribati’s population (RTCC staff, 2012). In 2014, then Fijian President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau announced that Fiji would be willing to help them relocate: “if all else fails you will not be refugees” (Fiji Sun, 2014). This commitment has since been reaffirmed in recent years by succeeding governments of Fiji (Mathiesen, 2017).⁹ However, Kiribati’s purchase of the land is not synonymous with sovereignty. As such, though there is currently much goodwill between the two nations, there is no legal guarantee that the I-Kiribati could relocate, and any plans would be dependent on the goodwill of the Fijian administration. Additionally, given that the land purchase cost roughly 5% of Kiribati’s annual GDP, the purchase proved a very controversial allocation of scarce public resources.

Beyond these steps, Kiribati made its commitment to a migration policy clear in other government documentation, not only in national level documents like the *National Adaptation Plan* but also in documents submitted at the international level. Unlike the other three nations, Kiribati’s *Intended Nationally Determined Contribution* (submitted to the UN following the 2015 Paris Agreement) mentioned both migration and relocation. Not only does the document mention relocation, but they outline the policy steps being laid out to assist “the inevitable migration of the population due to climate change” (INDC Republic of Kiribati, 2016). Though this mention of relocation made up only a small portion of Kiribati’s INDC, it still was a

⁹ This is not the first time Fiji has acted as a destination for desperate Pacific migrants. Fiji was the destination of a few hundred Vaitupuan who, due to their expanding population, shortage of land and financial status, bought and migrated to the Fijian Island of Kioa in 1947. They were eventually naturalized in the 2000’s. However, it should be noted that this was not an easy or well-received transition.

valuable signal on the international stage that Kiribati considered migration a fundamental part of adapting to climate change.

All of these efforts were introduced by the government of Anote Tong, following years of frustration at the lack of progress on the international level. Not only has Kiribati struggled to reform international laws to include climate induced migration, but the nation has also continually struggled to access any of the funds meant to help mitigate the effects of climate change (Tabuchi, 2017). As early as the 2007 World Environment Conference, President Tong mentioned the need for pre-emptive action on the international stage, stating a preference for gradually migrating in the next few decades, “rather than merely, in 50 to 60 years’ time, simply come looking for somewhere to settle our 100,000 people” (Van Herpen, 2013). In the years between Tong making this statement and the initiation of the Migration with Dignity policy, Kiribati officials continually faced disappointment at the international level. Following the lack of action at the Durban climate negotiations, Kiribati’s then foreign affairs secretary, Tessie Eria Lambourne communicated the frustration felt by many officials at the lack of progress in global negotiations and the failure of large industrialized countries to focus on the needs of vulnerable nations like Kiribati (MacIellan, 2012). After years of trying to bring international attention to this issue, Lambourne explained that many felt Kiribati was being ignored: “Our government kept shouting at the world to do something about climate change. We know that nobody heard that voice (MacIellan, 2012).” In an interview looking back, this frustration was expressed again by President Tong: “After the Copenhagen meeting, there was a lot of disappointment. Much of our disappointment was based on our high expectations of what the outcome might be” (MacIellan, 2012). Though he and other island leaders had walked into the 2009 Copenhagen Accords with high hopes for action, they left with only a non-binding document recognizing that

climate change is one of the greatest challenges of the present day and that actions should be taken to keep any temperature increases to below 2 °C. These accords were but one instance of Kiribati's disappointment at the inaction of international bodies that would leave Tong's government with a deep sense of frustration and isolation.

Inevitably, given the lack of response from the international community, forming a national policy seemed the only rational response to address climate induced migration. As Lambourne put it: "We're done waiting, so now we're doing something about it." While other atoll islands like Kiribati feel this same frustration, the difference is the relative isolation. Traditionally most of Kiribati's emigrants were seafarers, but there has been a steady decrease in demand in recent years. This trend, combined with Kiribati's remoteness and difficulty expanding seasonal migration schemes to Australia and New Zealand has resulted in Kiribati having relatively few migration opportunities with nearby countries despite strong social pressures in the form of high youth unemployment (Voigt-Graft and Kagan, 2017). In addition, though there is some financial aid from nearby Australia and New Zealand, there is nothing comparable to other Pacific Islands which have deeper associations with nearby countries. As a result, not only has Kiribati felt the effects of climate change without relief from neighbors, but they also lacked hope of future intervention from international players. Eventually, too much time passed with little action to stop the effects of climate change and Tong's government felt that they had run out of adaptation and mitigation options, with the President saying: "It is too late" to save Kiribati (Yeo, 2014). This forced the Kiribati government into the unenviable position of having to approach climate-induced migration largely on their own and with no other course of action save relocating their population.

However, this frustration alone was not enough to lead to Migration with Dignity, as Kiribati was not the only island nation to feel this same impatience and disappointment. Instead, the lack of action at the international level created the perfect environment for a charismatic leader to harness frustration and dissatisfaction to overcome the structural barriers to creating this policy. In Kiribati, this leader was President Anote Tong. First elected in 2003, Tong was an articulate and convincing speaker, allowing him to rapidly become one of the world's unofficial spokesman for nations like Kiribati who were endangered by climate change (McNamara, 2014). Throughout the course of his presidency, Tong consistently demanded assistance from international institutions and led mitigation efforts (Duyck, 2015). However, he also recognized that relocation must be the "brutal reality of the future of atoll island nations" which pushed him into becoming the advocate for the national plan that quickly became his best-known policy as president (Tong, 2016).

The frailty of depending on one leader to lead the charge became quickly apparent after the 2016 elections. Despite Tong no longer being a candidate (having reached his three-term limit) the election was still dominated by his presence, in particular, his intense focus on climate change. The lone opposition party, Tobwaan Kiribati ("Embracing Kiribati"), disagreed with Tong's perceptions of Kiribati's vulnerability and his decision to direct efforts towards relocation (Economist, 2016).¹⁰ Some even went so far as to call him an alarmist whose policies were "done strictly for the publicity" (Pala, 2014). Led by Taneti Maamau, Tobwaan Kiribati won the election by promising to focus the government's attention on more domestic issues (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). Maamau, like much of the highly religious I-Kiribati

¹⁰ Tobwaan Kiribati was formed in 2016 by merging two existing parties, the United Coalition Party and the Maurin Kiribati Party. In previous elections the United Coalition Party was known to criticize Tong's government for spending too much money and time addressing climate change at the expense of addressing more pressing domestic problems.

population, believes that only God's will could allow the islands to be unmade (Walker, 2017). This has resulted in Kiribati no longer having a full-scale relocation plan. Instead, he has directed efforts towards addressing Kiribati's social vulnerabilities, like unemployment. This change is best embodied in the Kiribati 20 Year Vision Plan, which was released in 2016, and barely mentions migration. Both in the long term and short term, Kiribati's new government clearly articulated their intention to focus attention away from relocation plans and onto development through the tourism and fishing industries.

Looking at media coverage, both in the islands and outside, it is evident that Migration with Dignity is a policy tied to Anote Tong's government entirely. In the years since Tong left office a documentary called *Anote's Ark* has been released covering the existential threat to Kiribati and Tong's efforts to combat them. The film, which has been shown internationally, is being heavily promoted by President Tong himself, who uses this opportunity as a continued platform to make his case for Migration with Dignity. In several instances he has encouraged the government to act now and stop debating politics around the issue (Radio New Zealand, 2018). Even out of office, he continues to be the primary advocate for Migration with Dignity, illustrating how deeply this policy is tied to his legacy. However, the Kiribati government has widely condemned the film and Tong's policies, making it clear that whatever policies developed prior were not here to stay.

The instability of Migration with Dignity is apparent in its short-lived nature. Though the lack of international assistance was enough to motivate Tong's formulation of the policy, it was not enough to create policy strong enough to survive his absence in office. Structural barriers including scarce monetary resources, the highly religious nature of Kiribati's population, and a deep cultural resistance to relocation made it difficult to truly address the issue of climate

induced migration. As a result, relocation policies seem vulnerable to the inconsistency of domestic politics. This inconsistency shows the tenuous nature of leaving climate induced migration to the national level, where it is increasingly difficult to create a sustained policy of relocation.

Maldives

For many years the Maldives has been an active voice on the international stage pushing to address climate change. In 2006, they even proposed amending the 1951 Refugee Convention to include climate refugees. Yet the Maldives truly became a leader on climate change in 2008 with the Presidency of Mohammed Nasheed, the first democratically elected President of the Maldives. Nasheed was a charismatic, young activist who quickly became known for his impassioned efforts towards halting climate change. In one memorable instance, he donned scuba gear and held the first underwater cabinet meeting to illustrate what the future may hold for the Maldives if no action was taken on climate change (Omidi, 2009).¹¹ In 2009, days after scientists issued warnings that rising seas caused by climate change could swallow the Maldives, Nasheed made the radical vow that the Maldives would carbon neutral within a decade by turning to renewable energy and offsetting carbon emissions caused by tourists flying to the Maldives (Clark, 2009). His leadership helped make the Maldives a clear leader on climate change despite their size, often suggesting or pursuing what seemed like radical options at the time.

However, Nasheed's leadership did not focus exclusively on mitigating the effects of climate change. In fact, from the early days of his presidency he was highly aware of the real possibility of relocation for the Maldivian people and proceeded accordingly. Though he was

¹¹ Nasheed and his ministers used a white plastic slate and waterproof pencils to sign an "SOS" message from the Maldives during the 30-minute meeting.

unable to formulate an official relocation policy during his tenure, he did create a public dialogue around migration and the beginnings of a government plan. Within a month of entering office, Nasheed declared his intention to establish a sovereign wealth fund to finance the relocation of people if sea levels continued to rise. In theory, the fund would eventually be able to cover the costs of relocating the entire Maldivian population. He admitted some concerns about feasibility, given the underdeveloped nature of the Maldivian economy, but hoped diverting revenue from the tourism industry would contribute to the fund (Rameesh, 2008).¹² There were several countries under consideration as possible sites for relocation. Sri Lanka and India were often discussed due to their cultural similarities with the Maldives and proximity (these are the two closest nations). Australia was also considered due to the abundance of open space, favorable climate, and perceived economic stability (Doherty, 2012).¹³ Eventually in 2012, President Nasheed seemed to indicate his government coming closer to a final decision, telling the *Sydney Morning Herald* that his government was considering Australia as a new home if the archipelago sinks beneath the seas (Doherty, 2012). Even though his government had yet to codify their aspirations into an official policy, there was a clear intention to address the relocation problem.

However, before his government was able to have any official conversations with any potential host countries, Nasheed lost his chance. Throughout his Presidency he had faced mounting obstruction and unrest from an opposition loyal to his predecessor, the long-ruling President Gayoom. Many people in this opposition also objected to his attention to climate change, preferring the government focus on domestic issues. This eventually resulted in

¹² Tourism is the largest industry in the Maldives and is a large driver of the country's economic development.

¹³ It is questionable whether Australia would have agreed to this proposal in 2012, as it has previously refused other island governments, claiming that their humanitarian obligations were prioritized to people who require "assistance urgently."

Nasheed's 2012 resignation.¹⁴ His vice president was sworn in, and Nasheed was ultimately charged with terrorism and jailed for the next thirteen years. In the following election in 2013, Gayoom's half-brother, Abdulla Yameen, took over the presidency ushering in a new era for the Maldives both politically and environmentally. President Yameen backtracked on many of Nasheed's ambitions, especially his hopes for climate change. Instead of setting an example on the international stage by using solar power and carbon neutrality to adapt to climate change, Yameen intended to refocus the Maldives attention to mass tourism and mega-developments (Vidal, 2017). This essentially meant giving up on Nasheed's dream of Maldives becoming a carbon neutral country and instead aiming to be a low-carbon country. One example of this change can be found in the Maldives pledge for the Paris climate agreement, where the nations' emission from energy consumption will actually triple between 2011 and 2030 (INDC, 2016). Another example is the Maldives *Climate Change Policy Framework*, which makes little mention of relocation or migration (Ministry of Environment and Energy, 2015). The absence of migration or relocation plans in any of the Maldives major climate change policies is demonstrative of the substantial changes in policy within a short period of time. Following this quick shift in policy, former president Nasheed has claimed in interviews his country is regarded as an "ecological villain" following the government's actions since his ousting (Pashley, 2016).

It should be noted that Yameen's administration was not denying the effects of climate change on migration. In one IOM report focusing on environmental degradation and migration in South Asia, the Maldives Minister for Environment and Energy clearly acknowledged that the environment was one of the key drivers of migration (Rabbani et al., 2016). And though they walked back the policies of Nasheed's government, they still acknowledged the need for

¹⁴ Nasheed has since claimed that he was forced out of office at gunpoint, while Yameen supporters maintain that the transfer of power was voluntary and constitutional.

empirical evidence to better understand the relationship between migration, climate change, and the environment. While their actions were a significant step back, they were not a complete denial of the issue. Instead, they turned to other methods of adapting the effects of climate change.

One consequence of Yameen's plan to build up the islands is its dependence on large amounts of capital from foreign investors and tourism. His government hopes to see the money come from a planned increase in tourism from 1.3 million people a year to more than seven million in the next decade. In order to facilitate his plans, Yameen amended the country's constitution to allow foreign ownership of land if they invest at least \$1 billion and show that 70% of their project site will be made up of land reclaimed from the sea (Vidal, 2017).¹⁵ Yameen has wisely capitalized on his country's geographic position and the geopolitical powers that wish to have a naval presence in the Indian Ocean.¹⁶ This has resulted in his country participating in China's One Belt One Road initiative. It has also resulted in negotiation leasing 23 islands to Saudi Arabia for 99 years, for roughly \$10 billion - over three times the GDP of the Maldives (Dauenhauer, 2017). All of this increasing openness to foreign investment is representative of a policy shift away from Nasheed's plans of relocation and instead a refocus on land reclamation funded by mass tourism and foreign investors.

One potential reason for the decision to shift policies is that the Maldivian people tend to view sea-level rise - and consequently climate induced migration - as a problem for the future. Instead, they consider non-climate change related issues, (like lack of housing, increasing scarcity of freshwater, or overcrowding in cities) as much more urgent or worthy of government

¹⁵ Ironically, though the new government has turned away from international migration, their plan hinges on internal migration. They plan to relocate residents to larger atolls - leaving small islands available for development into high-profit resorts.

¹⁶ The Maldives provides a presence along oil trade routes to China.

attention (Stojanov et al., 2017).¹⁷ This has prompted a philosophy in both the Maldivian people and government that long-term concerns like climate induced migration can be put off as short-term needs are addressed. Shiham Adam, director of the government's Marine Research Centre, phrases this philosophy best, saying: "We have immediate needs. Development must go on, jobs are needed..." (Vidal, 2017). Climate induced migration is the perfect example of a long-term societal problem, which makes it easy for governments to view the development of relocation policies as a less than urgent concern and, in the case of the Maldives, easy to abandon earlier plans of migration.

However, Yameen's policies are endangered by the same thing that troubled his predecessor: a regime change. In the September 2018 elections, Yameen lost to Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, a founding member of the same party as former President Nasheed. In his first official address, Solih highlighted climate change saying: "The Maldives will further consolidate its global position as a leader in climate action amongst Small Island Developing States and will strive to become the leading advocate for this cause." (Panda, 2018). In many ways this statement was an indication of his intention to reform the Maldives climate change policies. In addition, he invited former President Nasheed to lead his team at COP24 in Poland, which is aimed at creating rules to implement the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change (Wright, 2018). Although his presidency is still in its early days, some view his inclusion of President Nasheed as a sign for potentially returning to Nasheed's environmental policies, including relocation.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that the popular idea of "non-climate change related issues" is debatable, as many of the issues stated as primary concerns are often problems that are exacerbated by the effects of climate change. This makes the policy debate more a question of perception instead of a question about the exigency of climate change and migration.

The past decade of Maldivian politics is indicative of the fragility of environmental politics at the domestic level, particularly when they involve such monumental - and often controversial - subjects as the possible migration of a nation. Though President Nasheed's government was not able to officially codify a nationwide relocation policy, they did have the beginnings of a policy. And if they were unable to turn those early ideas into a formal policy, it was largely a product of a change in government, showing how such policies are often left to the whims of domestic politics. The Maldives has undergone four changes in leadership in roughly a decade; this sort of turnover is proving an insurmountable barrier to developing a policy to address climate induced migration. For an issue already controversial given its emotional nature, this leaves climate induced migration policies unfulfilled without a leader willing to push through the popular reluctance to consider relocation or migration.

The Marshall Islands

The Marshallese people have long been some of the most vocal advocates against climate change on the regional and international stage. In 2014, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner (daughter of the current Marshallese Prime Minister) performed a poem at the UN Climate Summit speaking of the threats facing her country and her child, ultimately receiving tears and a standing ovation but no concrete promises to save her homeland (Watson, 2018). Prior to this, the Marshall Islands hosted the Pacific Islands Forum where participants signed the Majuro Declaration, written to encourage "a new wave of climate leadership" (Yeo, 2014)¹⁸. And in 2015 they were once again instrumental to the creation of an international accord on climate change, helping to usher in the Paris Agreements. Beyond instances like these, the Marshall Islands have consistently been

¹⁸ The Majuro Declaration on Climate Leadership sought to demonstrate the Pacific Islands' adoption of some of the world's most ambitious emissions reduction targets. When Marshallese president Christopher Loeak presented it to Ban Ki-moon at the UN General Assembly, he called the Declaration a "Pacific gift".

involved in a number of organizations, like the Association of Small Island States, that consistently put out policy briefs on the effects of climate change, including possible instances of migration. Their actions in guiding international declarations and summits, promoting local activists, and supporting research initiatives have all made them a clear leader on climate change issues.

However, despite the demonstrated interest in addressing climate change, and even in some cases an acknowledgement climate change's effects on the movement of people, the Marshall Islands has generally focused policies away from climate induced migration. In 2013, Foreign Minister Tony de Brum explained that the country does not see relocation as an option, instead they "are hopeful that with some of our efforts, if the world will pick up on some of the initiatives we're suggesting, we won't need to displace our population at all." (Yeo, 2013). This approach has shaped Marshallese policies for the last decade, guiding what some call the Marshall Islands' "less confrontational approach" to shaping international environmental politics (Darby, 2018).¹⁹ Current president Hilda Heine has been particularly vocal in her desire to "[lead] from the front" (Chestny, 2018). Her government has been focusing their initiatives on policies expanding the renewable energy industry and being carbon neutral by 2050 (Mead, 2015). While Kiribati chose to pursue migration as part of their adaptation plans, the Marshall Islands has taken the stance that adaptation and migration are meant to prevent the need for relocation. Consequently, the Marshall Islands has no existing policy for climate induced migration.

The lack of policy does not necessarily mean the Marshall Islands is in any way unaware of how climate change could affect the need for relocation. In the International Organization for

¹⁹ This is compared to countries, like Vanuatu, that are threatening major oil companies with climate damages lawsuits.

Migration (IOM) *Country Strategy for the Marshall Islands*, climate change is mentioned as a driver of migration. This led to one of their Strategic Priorities being: “Migrants and communities in the Republic of the Marshall Islands benefit from migration as a sustainable development and climate change adaptation strategy.” (IOM, 2016). Yet this philosophy has not been realized in the Marshall Islands own adaptation plans. In documents addressing climate change policies like the *Nationally Determined Contribution* or the *National Joint Adaptation Plan*, the Marshall Islands either only mentions relocation or migration as an absolute option of last resort or does not mention it at all (RMI, 2018; RMI, 2014). Even in reports like the *National Climate Change Policy Framework*, that are exclusively created by the Marshallese government to address the consequences of climate change, there is no mention of migration.

Though the possibility of relocation is no less real than in Kiribati, in the Marshall Islands the sense of urgency to create a nation-wide policy is somewhat lessened because they have a safety net that Kiribati does not. This has little to do with the climate, and more to do with political relationships stemming from the Marshall Islands’ unique history with the United States. During World War II, the United States assumed administrative control of the Marshall Islands, which it maintained until the Islands’ independence in 1986. However, the Marshall Islands remain a US-Affiliated Pacific Island under the Compact of Free Association.²⁰ As a result, there is an existing migration pathway between the two nations that can act as a de facto climate change policy. Though not an agreement created to address climate induced migration, the Compact of Free Association still has practical implications as it allows Marshallese to live

²⁰ The Compact of Free Association has been in place since 1986. Many of the policies in the Compact are meant as recompense for the nuclear testing programs performed by the United States at Bijin and Enewak Atolls from 1946 to 1958. The U.S. State Department told VOA that “the United States (has) recognized the effects of (the) testing and has accepted and acted on its responsibility to the people of the Marshall Islands.” As part of the 1986 Compact with the Marshall Islands, the U.S. government settled claims with the country and has paid more than \$600 million to affected communities, including \$135 million to resettle people who lived on the atolls.

and work in the United States without a visa or work permit. As a result of this pathway between the two countries, high numbers of Marshallese have already migrated. One example is a community in Springdale, Arkansas largely settled during the 1970s and mid-90s. The city's 2005 special census places the Marshallese population at about 2,000 people, though some estimates reach as high as 8,000 and is thought to be one of the largest Marshallese communities in the United States (AETN, 2018).²¹ This sort of robust expatriate community is the exact result that Aote Tong's government was attempting to foster with Migration with Dignity.

In addition to the original Marshallese communities formed decades ago, there have also been large waves of Marshallese migrating to the United States in recent years. From 2000 to 2010 alone, the number of Marshallese residing in the U.S. increased from 7,000 to 22,000; this number represents nearly a third of the current Marshall Islands' population (Burkett and Richardson). This diaspora is only expected to grow as climate change increasingly affects the livelihood of Islanders. And as that possibility looms on the horizon, many Marshallese politicians have been clear in their expectation that the current relationship between the two nations will act as a foundation for any potential solutions. Speaking in 2013, Foreign Minister Tony de Brum emphasized that, should it come to relocation, America was viewed as the most likely place for Marshallese to go. When asked about climate induced migration, he said: "We have the right to enter the United States under the Compact of Free Association between our country and the United States, and any citizen of the Marshalls can do that." (Yeo, 2013). This choice to mention the Compact makes clear that the Compact in many ways acts a replacement for a climate induced migration pact. The Marshall Islands is not alone in its view of the United States' responsibility in the situation. This view was reinforced by the Fijian Prime Minister,

²¹Many in the town have worked to carve out a space for Marshallese culture, including a Marshallese newspaper, radio station, and churches.

who stated: “We expect the United States to do the same for the people of the Marshall Islands...because of their long-standing historical ties.” (Mathiesen, 2017). This sort of commentary makes it clear that though there is no nationwide relocation plan in the Marshall Islands, there is still a tacit understanding that the United States will act as a safety net in the worst-case scenario.

Though the Compact of Free Association provides a valuable migration pathway, it is not meant to be a permanent replacement to an actual relocation or migration policy. For one thing, the Compact is a finite deal and is only slated to last till 2023. It also does not automatically confer residency or citizenship, which makes sense given that the current design is predominantly temporary migration. More importantly, it is not designed to be easily accessible. Most of the vulnerable people affected by climate change will likely not have funds or support to make use of the Compact immigration provisions. Though the Compact allows people to move freely, there is no financial support or other forms of assistance to make migration to the United States feasible. This is already clear in existing dynamics as Compact citizens tend to arrive in the United States with very little money (Ward, 1998). Additionally, unlike policies like Migration with Dignity, which focus on creating a competitive workforce who can become productive members of their host community, the Compact has no such provisions. Finding jobs, adapting to new education systems, or understanding social services have all been difficult for Marshallese who came to the United States (Shikina, 2006). Without a program designed to address the difficulties of relocation, it may be difficult to adapt for both the migrants and the host community. Simply put, the Compact does not provide adequate immigration provisions to address permanent or large-scale relocation.

Beyond being a site for migration, the United States also provides other forms of assistance to the Marshall Islands which help alleviate the burden of climate change. Another aspect of the Compact requires that the United States provides the Marshall Islands with decreasing levels of financial support. Between now and FY 2023 the United States will be providing the Marshall Islands with approximately \$70 million annually. This includes contributing to a jointly managed trust fund that will continue to provide assistance after FY2023 (US State Department, 2018).²² This money goes to improving areas like infrastructure, health, or the environment. Whether intentionally or not, much of this money helps to alleviate the burdens placed on Marshallese society by the changing environment. In 2016 alone, the United States provided nearly 2.5 million in drought assistance (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2018). In addition to finances, the Compact ensures there are a number of United States agencies that operate in the Marshall Islands.²³ An especially important example in a society worried about the effects of sea-levels rising and tropical storms is the continued presence of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) which coordinates disaster response and relief. A large part of the United States' established role in the Marshall Islands involves both monetary and administrative aid. This provides substantive help in the Marshall Islands adaptation and mitigation efforts against climate change. This is a marked contrast to a country like Kiribati whose highest bilateral aid donor, Australia, will only donate roughly \$20 million (DFAT, 2018).

²² There are ongoing talks about the potential for a new deal that will extend the Compact's timeline. However, even in the absence of the Compact the United States will continue leasing the US Army base on Kwajalein Atoll. As a result, the two nations will continue to have strong economic and financial relations after 2023 regardless of the Compact.

²³ Financial assistance from the United States is particularly important given the Marshall Islands biggest barrier to implementing adaptation and resilience measures is long-term financing.

It is clear in both writing and practice that the relationship between the United States and the Marshall Islands has played an important role in the development (or lack thereof) of a Marshallese relocation policy. The Marshallese government has not pursued any such policy, instead leaving individual Marshallese citizens to take advantage of the Compact to escape from the effects of climate change. In the few instances where climate induced migration is discussed, it is widely understood that the United States will be an important part of whatever solution the government formulates. One ongoing research project, the Marshall Islands Climate and Migration Project, has stated that in order to reach a solution decision maker in both the Marshall Islands and the United States need better information to understand the factors contributing to current migration.²⁴ What makes this statement rather revealing is the decision to include the United States in any solution on this issue. This trend is prevalent in many discussions, with organizations like the IOM's making mention of the United States' and its Marshallese communities in their Country Strategy for the Marshall Islands (IOM, 2017). In both instances it is reflective of how politicians and civil society alike view the deep relationship between these two nations and expect it to play a role in how the Marshall Islands addresses climate-induced migration. On a concrete level, both the ability for citizens to migrate with ease and the contribution of financial aid to mitigate current effects of climate change have eased the pressure on the Marshallese government to create a program to address climate induced migration. More abstractly, the historical and political ties between the United States and the Marshall Islands has

²⁴ This research project is a collaboration between the Pacific Island Climate Science Center (the primary funder), NOAA's Pacific Research and Integrated Science Assessments Program (Pacific RISA), and the Marshall Islands Conservation Society (MICS). The project itself receives funding from the US Department of the Interior and is largely based at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

created a partnership that is expected to endure in the face of climate change and the quest to find a more permanent solution for the Marshallese people.

Tuvalu

Tuvalu has the distinction of being one of the smallest independent nations in the world, both in size and population. This vulnerability affects many aspects of life, including the ability to fully respond to the impacts of climate change. As noted by Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga, Tuvalu also struggles with an economy that is underdeveloped and highly vulnerable to external economic influences; this reduces the resources the government has to address climate change and making Tuvalu heavily reliant on the assistance of outside nations (Government of Tuvalu, 2011; Duyck, 2015). Given the heavy dependence on outside support, it is little wonder that Tuvalu has looked for solutions to climate change on the international level (both regarding mitigation and adaptation).²⁵ However, like many island states asking for help on the international level, Tuvalu has frequently been disappointed. In interviews with former Prime Ministers Willy Telavi and Apisai Ielemia, both politicians expressed their disappointment that the major powers of the world have been missing opportunities to meaningfully act against the negative impacts of climate change (McNamara, 2014). In addition to attempting to encourage climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, Tuvalu has at times worked to create an international legal structure providing some substantive rights to climate migrants. The Permanent Mission of Tuvalu to the United Nations has repeatedly requested a legal framework for people displaced by climate change, before eventually proposing their own resolution in 2017 (Radio New Zealand, 2017; Rowling, 2016).²⁶ Like other island nations, Tuvalu has proved a

²⁵ Entirely separate from the discussion of ability to address climate change is responsibility. It has also been argued by many Tuvaluan politicians that: Tuvalu's emissions are less than 0.000005% of global emissions, one of the lowest contributions from any Parties, which is negligible in the global context.

²⁶ Unsurprisingly, this proposal has yet to see substantive change to UN policies.

vocal advocate in both international and regional forums when it comes to addressing the negative effects of climate change and requesting some form of action from developed nations.

While willing to call upon the international system for a legal framework for climate displacement, the country has proven reluctant to make relocation a nationwide policy. Notably, this is in contrast with Kiribati, the country Tuvalu is most often grouped with when discussing the effects of climate change due to their similarities; Kiribati has not only pursued a national relocation policy of Migration with Dignity but also been much more vocal on this issue. At the Rio +20 meeting in 2012, it was noted that President Tong of Kiribati mentioned ‘relocation’ explicitly in his statements. In comparison, such words were absent from the Tuvaluan statement (McNamara, 2014). Not only do they differ in migration schemes but, as noted by the Tuvaluan Ambassador to the U.N., Tuvalu doesn’t “have the strategy to buy land like Kiribati,” referring to Kiribati’s 2012 purchase of land in Fiji (Komai, 2015). This is demonstrative of the central difference between the two countries: Tuvalu has primarily considered migration as one option among many, and even then, it is primarily viewed as an option of last resort. This view has endured through all of the Tuvaluan governments of the past decade. In 2009, then Prime Minister Apisai Ielemia firmly stated that Tuvalu would not consider migration as a solution. He stated, “While Tuvalu faces an uncertain future because of climate change...it is our view that Tuvaluans will remain in Tuvalu...we are not considering any migration scheme” (Balesh, 2015). A decade later, current Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga has also made clear his strong belief that relocating to another country is not a viable solution to climate change (Qounadovu, 2017). Though there has been some softening in position, given that there is an acknowledgement that migration might happen regardless, the overall message that relocation is not a policy to be

pursued has endured. Instead, the government of Tuvalu has chosen to “fight to keep our country, our culture and our way of living” (McAdam, 2014).

One potential barrier to the formation of a national relocation policy is Tuvalu’s small size. With only 11,000 people Tuvalu is by far the smallest of the four countries (the next smallest is the Marshall Islands with around 74,000). The country has a small public service and public sector, which could easily act as a stumbling block to managing challenges like climate induced migration. This can be in Tuvalu’s 2016 request for Technical Assistance by the ACP-EU Migration Action. The Government of Tuvalu hoped to review the immigration legislation but claimed that their bureaucracy lacked the human resources and technical capacity necessary to effectively address their problems in a timely manner (ACP-EU Migration Action, 2016). The government hoped that with assistance they would achieve substantial policy improvements on migration with the EU. This is demonstrative of how Tuvalu’s small population and limited capacity can hinder the day to day functions of government. A small bureaucracy struggling to handle everyday policy needs might find it even more difficult to address issues like climate induced migration, which are comparatively long-term.

This is further demonstrated in Tuvalu’s *National Climate Change Policy*. One of the strategic goals outlined in the policy is “enhancing Tuvalu’s governance arrangements and capacity to access and manage climate change and disaster risk management finances” (2011). This goal aims to strengthen the capacity of the agencies that are tasked with responding to climate change issues, including the possibility of migration. This was one of seven goals included in a document outlining Tuvalu’s fifteen-year plan for adapting to climate change, and it reflects the government’s acknowledgment that a lack of capacity remains a fundamental barrier to responding to the impacts of climate change.

As with many other atoll island states, the reluctance to fully pursue relocation largely stem from concerns about sovereignty, the degradation of Tuvaluan culture and identity, and a deep-seated connection to the land.²⁷ Ambassador Simati best voiced these fears when saying that Tuvalu doesn't "want to give the signal that we are giving up on our country. We can't be called Tuvaluans if we live in another country" (Komai, 2015). Some, like Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Maatia Toafa, have taken the extreme view that without their islands, there is no saving their people, stating: "If the state of Tuvalu perishes, we will go with it. What makes Tuvalu, Tuvalu, is the country, the people, the culture and the language - that all cannot be resettled." (Minninger and Wirsching, 2017). This reluctance is not only espoused by politicians but has also made its way into policy. In most of the government's climate change policies, their espoused vision is to "protect Tuvalu's status as a nation and its cultural identity and to build its capacity to ensure a safe, resilient, and prosperous future" (Government of Tuvalu, 2011). This vision is demonstrative of the belief that increasing adaptive capacity is one of the only ways to preserve not only Tuvalu's physical boundaries but the cultural identity that is so deeply tied to the land.

As a result, Tuvalu's government has largely focused on fighting the effects of climate change through mitigation and adaptation. However, there has been some discussion around migration in prominent government documents. In Tuvalu's *National Climate Change Policy* that lays out the Government's strategic policies for responding to climate change and related disaster risks from 2012 to 2021, the government lays out seven thematic goals. The final goal, "guaranteeing the security of the people of Tuvalu from the impacts of climate change and the

²⁷ These are the concerns of those who believe in the effects of climate change. There are however, as mentioned earlier, those whose religious beliefs strongly guide their refusal to consider relocation, largely because they believe God will not let the islands sink.

maintenance of national sovereignty”, clarifies some of the government’s key issues addressing forced migration (2011).²⁸ These include the cost of any relocation and the lack of international policy for climate induced migration. Also under this goal were mentions of examining the Special Pacific Access Category (PAC) being reshaped for climate induced migration and resettlement plans for each island in the worst case scenario (Government of Tuvalu, 2011).²⁹ Though this analysis made up only a small portion of the document, it does show an openness to addressing climate induced migration, even if it is not the current priority.

The ideas first mentioned in the *National Climate Change Policy* were further built into an action agenda in the 2015 *National Labour Migration Policy*. This was Tuvalu’s first national labour migration policy and action plan, and though it was not explicitly a climate change document, climate induced migration nonetheless plays a prominent role when discussing the need for migration opportunities. The long-term vision of the policy is to revitalize existing migration options, like seafarer training schemes, in order to provide Tuvaluan citizens with more opportunities to migrate for work abroad (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade, Tourism, Environment and Labour, 2015). In terms of locations, the agenda hopes to build upon existing pathways and encourage immigration to New Zealand and potentially Australia. This policy builds on previous statements by Tuvalu’s government that relocation is primarily a private decision of individuals and families, and should be left up to them (Komai, 2015). This policy is not necessarily meant to encourage large-scale migration, but simply to provide options if

²⁸ The other six goals are: 1) strengthening adaptation actions to address current and future vulnerabilities; 2) improving understanding and application of climate change data, information and site specific impact assessments to inform adaptation and disaster risk reduction programmes; 3) enhancing Tuvalu’s governance arrangements and capacity to access and manage climate change and disaster risk management funds; 4) developing and maintain Tuvalu’s infrastructures to withstand climate change impacts, climate variability, disaster risks and climate change projection; 5) ensuring energy security and low carbon future for Tuvalu; 6) planning for effective disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

²⁹ The PAC allow for a number of people from five Pacific countries, including Tuvalu and Kiribati, to be selected for New Zealand residence each year, provided they meet the necessary requirements.

citizens choose to relocate. Most of the migration options referred to in the policy are simply labor opportunities and are not intended to be understood as a climate change-related migration option.

Though this policy does not go so far as Kiribati's Migration with Dignity, there are certainly undeniable similarities. Both plans hope to create increased opportunities for the increasing numbers of people who wish to relocate. More noticeably, Tuvalu's policy explicitly uses the phrase "migrate with dignity" when discussing increasing citizens' options (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).³⁰ The reference to Kiribati's relocation policy, emphasizes the similarities in their goals, even if Tuvalu does not go so far to codify this policy as Kiribati. Despite the official acknowledgement that migration may be necessary for Tuvalu, the majority of stakeholders (NGOs, churches, and other members of civil society) have chosen not to accept this view (McNamara, 2014). Instead, the country has focused on emphasizing aid packages meant to increase Tuvalu's ability to focus on adaptation strategy. It is perhaps reflective of barriers like popular will, low capacity, and lack of resources that have prevented further development of a defined national relocation plan.

Conclusion

Despite ample requests for action from many countries around the world, the problem of climate induced migration has largely been left in the hands of the countries who are most at risk from the effects of climate change. International bodies like the United Nations have been unable to resolve the controversial debate about whether climate induced migration fits within the existing refugee system. As a result, they have largely been pushing the idea that countries that

³⁰ The phrase migration with dignity was also used in a policy report for a UNU-EHS research report on Tuvalu and migration.

are vulnerable to climate change can work out bilateral agreements to build upon existing migration pathways and relocation plans. Given the extreme vulnerability of atoll island states, the logical assumption is that they would be among the first to follow such a suggestion, if only out of necessity. However, the reality in these four countries tells a different story. Examining the policies of all the existing atoll island countries shows that there have been very little changes to increase migration options for individual citizens or whole-nation relocation plans despite the fact that some of these nations have already been forced to move some of their communities.

The government of the Marshall Islands has been reluctant to pursue any official climate induced migration policy, preferring instead to focus on adaptation and mitigation instead. This has resulted in their relationship with the United States, particularly the Compact of Free Association, acting as a pseudo agreement on climate induced migration. Though this agreement does not grant Marshallese citizens any rights in the United States, it does provide individual citizens with an individual pathway to migrate to the United States and provides the Marshallese government funds that can be used to address the effects of climate change. Yet, the time limit on the Compact and the Compact's inability to address the deeper needs of climate induced migration have this is an unsustainable situation for the long term. Even worse, it has in some ways lessened the urgency to create an official relocation policy for the nation.

Tuvalu's government, while frequently using the language of "migration with dignity", has been similarly reluctant to pursue any relocation or migration strategy. In many instances, political leaders, especially those in Tuvalu, equate the relocation of their people with an existential threat to their culture and nation, demonstrating the deep cultural reluctance to migrate that acts as the barrier to any policy formation. Additionally, as one of the worlds'

smallest nations, Tuvalu has an added structural barrier of a limited bureaucracy and at times struggles to meet the needs of their population.

The Maldives went farther than the other two countries, with the government of President Nasheed discussing the development of migration pathways or the purchase of new land. But this progress was driven by a singular administration and was undone as soon as that administration was out of office. His successor instead focused on land reclamation funded through mass tourism and foreign investments. Yet the mercurial nature of environmental politics was demonstrated once more when in 2018 a new government was elected into office and has since signaled their intentions to pursue a new approach to environmental issues, which many expect to mirror the politics of former President Nasheed. Though there is some hope for the new government to explore options like migration and relocation, it only serves to underscore the frailty of such a political process.

Of all four countries, Kiribati was the only one to ever fully pursue either a migration or a relocation plan. The government of President Tong bought land in Fiji as a possible sight of relocation and created an economic development policy called *Migration with Dignity* that was meant to provide migration pathways for the I-Kiribati population. Yet the pattern of policy changes in the Maldives repeated itself in Kiribati when the 2016 elections resulted in a complete turnaround in the government's approach to climate induced migration. This policy was also tied to a singular individual, President Tong, and once his Presidency was over, Kiribati's next administration also proceeded to scale back his work demonstrating the delicate nature of such a process.

All four countries have common barriers that make it difficult for a country to proceed. The one seen most broadly across all four countries is the cultural barriers. For the few

governments who are able to overcome the considerable cultural reluctance to move there are still other barriers. Chief among them is the fact that these countries often have pressing domestic problems like food scarcity or high unemployment that need to be addressed. Leaders in these countries must face the competing urgency of domestic issues and the perception that they are allocating already scarce resources away from problems plaguing people in their everyday lives. Climate induced migration is by its nature a long-term problem, making it hard to justify as a government priority when compared to other “contemporary” issues. In such a situation it is no wonder administrations struggle to produce a relocation policy or that they struggle to stay in power after developing one, often as a result of their prioritization of such a controversial issue.

If the international community is not willing to proactively fight climate change and prevent the sinking of these islands, then there must be some solution for those who are forced to migrate due to environmental degradation. Given that the only example of a national relocation or migration policy did not last more than five years, it is evident that the current approach of pushing the problem of climate induced migration onto national governments is not a viable strategy. These four countries make clear that urgency and vulnerability are not necessarily enough to force a national government to develop a policy addressing climate induced migration. There are too many barriers in the process and in the few instances that a solution is reached they are often so susceptible to political will that there is no guarantee they will last beyond a singular administration. Additionally, it places the burden of formulating a very controversial policy upon governments that are already struggling.

Daunting though it may seem, it is time for the international community to arrive at a solution that is not merely abdicating responsibility to a lower level of government. The cultural

barriers that make it hard for countries to implement relocation plans on the national level will undoubtedly complicate any proceedings at the international level as well. But this should not prevent us from giving those individual citizens who are affected by climate change and seeking to relocate a better option. Just as the United Nations once struggled to give rights to refugees, now the international community must provide a legal pathway for those individuals affected by climate induced migration. Not by folding them into the existing refugee system, but instead creating a pathway that recognizes the unique pressures of climate induced migration. Though placing the problem away from the international stage may seem like an appealing way of avoiding a contentious issue, it ultimately results in no real solutions. The way to address climate induced migration is not to push the issue to vulnerable nations, but to work together with them to create an international framework. This will be one of the biggest problems of the 21st century, and it is not one the world can afford to ignore or push to the side.

Appendix of Reports, Treaties, and Policies

Assessing the Climate Change Environmental Degradation and Migration Nexus in South

Asia (2017) – An IOM assessment study on the effects of climate change and environmental degradation on migration for the eight countries in South Asia. The study includes a review of literature and existing policies, including field research in the Maldives, Bangladesh, and Nepal. It also includes model plans of action that can be implemented.

Compact of Free Association (1986) - An international agreement establishing and governing the relationships of free association between the United States the Marshall Islands. The agreement mandates that the United States remain responsible for the defense and security of the Marshall Islands, continues to provide economic assistance, and allows for Marshallese citizens to migrate to the United States.

Copenhagen Accords (2009) – A United Nations agreement aimed at reducing greenhouse emissions, much like the earlier Kyoto Protocol. It was not legally binding, but was considered impactful because it included explicit emissions pledges by all major economies, including China.

Global Compact for Refugees (2018) – A United Nations approved framework that aims to reshape the international response to protracted refugee situations. The Compact has four key objectives: 1) ease the pressures on host countries, 2) enhance refugee self-reliance, 3) expand access to third-country solutions, 4) Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. It is not legally binding.

Global Compact on Migration (2018) – A United Nations pact which aims to improve international cooperation on migration. It describes itself as covering "all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner". It is not legally binding.

Global Warming of 1.5 °C (2018) – A special report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), written at the request of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change when the Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015. The report focuses on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C compared to 2°C or more.

Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) – Following the 2015 Paris Agreements, countries published outlines of the post-2020 climate actions they intended to pursue under the new international agreement. The INDCs are meant to pair the national policy setting with the international framework outlined in the Paris Agreements to facilitate collective actions towards a net-zero carbon emission and climate-resilient future.

IOM Pacific Strategy 2017 – 2020 (2017) – This document provides a framework for the IOM to respond to migration challenges in the Pacific. It outlines three priorities in the region: 1) Migrants and communities in the Pacific benefit from migration as a sustainable development and climate change adaptation strategy; 2) displaced persons and affected communities in the Pacific are protected from and resilient to the impact of natural disasters and climate change; 3) migrants in the Pacific enjoy protection from human rights abuses and are able to migrate in a safe, orderly and dignified manner.

Kiribati: National Framework for Climate Change and Climate Change Adaptation (2016) – This document outlines the government of Kiribati’s approach to climate change and adaptation. The integration of adaptation into national planning is viewed in the context of sustainable development. It covers six key areas: 1) mitigation, 2) integration of CC and CCA into national planning and institutional capacity, 3) external financial and technical assistance, 4) population and resettlement, 5) governance and services, 6) survivability and self-reliance.

Maldives: Climate Change Policy Framework (2014) – The framework outlines the government’s policies for addressing the effects of climate change for the next decade (2014 – 2024). The policy outlines five strategic goals: 1) ensure and integrate sustainable financing in climate change adaptation opportunities; 2) strengthen a low emission development future and ensure energy security; 3) strengthen adaptation actions and opportunities and build climate resilient infrastructure and communities; 4) leading role in international negotiations; and 5) foster sustainable development while ensuring security, economic sustainability and sovereignty.

Migration in Maldives: A Country Profile (2018) – This IOM report is the result of a two-year project bringing together all available information on migration in the Maldives and examining existing national and international legislation relevant to the situation. It then provides recommendations for future policy development.

National Adaptation Plans – A process first established under the Cancun Adaptation Framework in 2010. It is meant to be a continuous process of identifying a country’s medium – and long-term – adaptation needs. From there countries are supposed to integrate these needs into relevant new and existing policies.

Paris Agreement (2015) – An agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change focusing on strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change. The central goal was limiting global warming to well below 2°C.

Republic of the Marshall Islands: IOM Country Strategy 2017-2020 (2017) – The International Organization for Migration created a country strategy meant to fit the unique needs and priorities of the Marshallese government. This document provides a framework for addressing the challenges of migrations in the Marshall Islands, in order to facilitate the IOM’s responses to the government of the Marshall Islands. The framework outlines three priorities

identified in the Marshall Islands: 1) Migrants and communities in the Marshall Islands benefit from migration as a sustainable development and climate change adaptation strategy; 2) Displaced people are protected from and resilient to the impacts of natural disasters and climate change; 3) Migrants are protected from human rights abuses and are able to migrate in a safe and dignified manner.

Republic of the Marshall Islands: National Climate Change Policy Framework (2011) – A government document focusing on developing the Marshall Islands' climate resistance through adaptation measures and energy security. It does so by identifying several target areas for acting to stop climate change and ultimately presenting five strategic goals: 1) strengthen the enabling environment for climate change adaptation and mitigation; 2) adaptation and reducing risks for a climate resilient future; 3) energy security and low-carbon future; 4) disaster preparedness, response and recovery; 5) building education and awareness, community awareness.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – Small Island Developing States refers to a group of nations that share similar sustainable development challenges due to being made up of small islands. These islands often have similar vulnerabilities and priorities, and thus choose to act together on the international stage.

Tuvalu: National Climate Change Policy (2011) – This policy prescribes the government's strategic policies for adapting to climate change impacts over the next fifteen years (2012 – 2021). The policy outlines seven thematic goals: 1) strengthening adaptation actions to address current and future vulnerabilities; 2) improving understanding and application of climate change data; 3) enhancing governance arrangements and capacity to access and manage finances; 4) develop and maintain infrastructure; 5) ensure energy security; 6) plan for disaster preparedness;

7) guarantee the security of Tuvalu's people from the impact of climate change and the preserve national sovereignty.

UN Refugee Convention (1951) – The United Nations treaty that defines who qualifies as a refugee and sets out the rights of individuals who are granted asylum and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum.

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