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Dr David Robie
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Kiribati media, science and politics: *Telling the story of climate change in a 'disappearing nation'*

TABERANNANG KORAUABA

ABSTRACT

Although the Pacific nation of Kiribati has been identified as one of the most vulnerable countries to the impact of climate change, little is known about the attitudes of the local media and the public toward this issue. This is in contrast to empirical studies' findings which have shown that the public and the media were aware of the threats posed by climate change. Aware of and concern about are very different from 'we care and let's do something because it is our country'. President Anote Tong and his growing focus on this issue—centred on his close relationship with the foreign news media—have increasingly cast his I-Kiribati people as the victims and thus further marginalised their ability to learn about climate change. Further to this, there is no connection with what Tong has declared overseas with his government's 2008-2011 Development Plan. This monograph, adapted and extracted from the author's unpublished Master's thesis on the topic, argues that Kiribati is not united on climate change.[1] Traditional, cultural and religious beliefs about land, environment and sea, and division among educated elites and political parties are some of the key barriers to communicating and receiving climate change stories. The government's closed door policy, top down approach and its one-way communication have restricted the media's access to information relating to climate change, and more importantly, how 'climate funds' are distributed in the country. Despite attempts by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) to bridge this gap with training workshops to increase media reporting, this study argues that the regional organisation has become part of the problem. Its workshops have been flawed and lack a solid theoretical basis. These complex issues shed new light on the problems facing the Kiribati media on communicating climate change to a society that is not united on this issue. A culturally planned deliberative journalism model based on the *Karoronga* cultural concept is proposed as a framework to engage the media in addressing these issues and encouraging participation of I-Kiribati on climate change discourse through a bottom up, vertical and horizontal communication approach.

Keywords: climate change, COP15, environment, journalism, journalism research, kararonga, Kiribati, media, politics, research methodologies, tabon inaim

About Kiribati

THE REPUBLIC of Kiribati consists of three major groups; the Gilbert, Phoenix and Line Islands with a total land area of 811 square kilometres, of which ten percent is uninhabited (Storey & Hunter, 2010). The Phoenix and Line groups in the central part of the country and the east are more sparsely populated, with only Kiritimati, Teraina and Fanning (Line) having a permanent population other than Kanton and Orona. The isolated volcanic Banaba Island in the west of Kiribati has a small population of just 200. The capital Tarawa and the islet of Betio are the most populous and overcrowded islands placing pressure on the environment and sustainable development. In general, Kiribati is disadvantaged by its location and being an atoll nation limiting its resources to cater for its own people in the long term (Moy, 2009). Nevertheless Kiribati governments, which include the current administration, have shown ambitious plans or intent to re-mine the phosphate on Banaba and to re-develop Kiritimati (ADB, 2007).

The media in Kiribati

The government owned Broadcasting and Publications Authority founded Radio Kiribati in 1954 and *Te Uekera in* 1945, formerly known as *Te Tero*.[2]. The authority is governed by the Broadcasting and Publications Authority Act 1979. The Minister responsible appoints a board of directors to oversee the administration of the organisation. Kiribati Television was set up in 2004 and is governed under the *Telecommunications Act 2004*. Private and independent newspapers are the *Kiribati Newstar* established in 2000, and the *Kiribati Independent*, established in 2011. The Kiribati Protestant Church publishes its own newspaper, *Mauri,* it first published in 2000. Private newspapers are registered with the Ministry of Communication through the Newspaper Registration Act 1988. A private FM radio is owned by Sir Ieremia Tabai and others operating under the Telecommunications Act 2004. Landlines are becoming the main source of communication in Kiribati, these services are provided by the government owned Kiribati Telecom Services Limited. There is a private video production unit, Nei Tabera ni Kai, owned by Linda Uan and John Anderson, a New Zealander. Websites include *Kiribati Online Community* and *The Kiribati Independent* published

Figure 1: Coastal erosion on Tarawa. Image: *Kiribati Independent*

outside Kiribati. The government publishes its own newsletter, *RMAT* and administers a Press Unit set up by the government of President Teburoro Tito. The Press Unit combines and publishes news from all government ministries. However, the Ministry of Fisheries publishes its own newsletter, *Te Mamautari*. The Environment Ministry also previously published its own newsletter but stopped after being instructed by the Office of Te Beretitenti to send its articles to the Press Unit.

Theoretical approach

In her chapter, 'Deliberative Journalism; American Public Journalism versus Other International modes' published in a book titled *International Journalism and Democracy: Civic engagement from around the world*, of which she is the editor, Angela Romano defines deliberative journalism as the combination of all forms of journalism, public, civic, development and citizen practices. Romano argues that deliberative journalism culminates from different forms of journalism practices in the United States and other big economies. Romano explains

that the news media's influence on public agenda setting and communities' understanding of issues and events makes them a major social power in their own right. In this case, the media is involved in deliberations with those involved in finding solutions to issues they commonly face. She explains that deliberative journalism is a discussion and consideration undertaken by the news editorial before a decision is made. She cites community projects run by the news media in the United States as examples of deliberative journalism where journalists were heavily involved in the process. Opponents of these projects have argued that journalists help manufacture events to cover. However, Romano disputes this, saying these negative feelings were the results of poor planning, and lack of sound communication and consultation between the journalists and the editors. Extending this deliberation to journalism as the model becomes deliberative journalism. Examples of projects that follow the concepts of this model include networking between journalists and universities such as the Global Environmental Project at the University of Technology, Sydney. Romano explains this contemporary form of journalism requires commitment, expertise and specialist knowledge of the journalist. However, some of what Romano says in her book chapter has already been argued by Kunda Dixit in his book *Dateline. Earth. Journalism. as. if.the. planet. mattered.* in 1997. The Dixit book was first republished in 2010. Romano argues that various forms of journalism are part of deliberations.

Redefining deliberative journalism is a cultural context

A culturally planned deliberative journalism is the next step which requires vertical and horizontal communication as well as three-way communications between the media, the public and the government. This is lacking in Kiribati and this study suggests these that areas be considered. A framework centred on the cultural practice of the I-Kiribati people in finding solutions to their own problems, especially in relation to development, is proposed. Claims that the media in Kiribati have little role in climate change deliberations because the country did not cause it are wrong. In fact, Kiribati contributes to climate change and the media should use its power to educate the people about all this and what they need to do to show the world that they care. People are aware of the impacts of climate change but they have not yet reached a point where they will stand up and do something about it. In a similar vein, the media is aware but does not care. Applying deliberative journalism and taking it to the next level is not easy. This is especially the case because studies have shown much about the

gap but have disagreed on how to bridge that gap. Proposing a Fifth Estate, or watchdog of nature through deliberative journalism has not been thoroughly explored. '*Who cares*' is a very critical question which has been addressed in areas such as education, clinical nursing and counselling but very few relate it to the study of media reporting of climate change in the Pacific. However, politicians and businesses alike have used the 'we care' slogan to lure votes and build their customer base.

In Kiribati, people have become increasingly dependent on the state for their daily needs (Tabai, 1985). Projects funded by the government often receive little support from the community unless there is something in it for them. People spend more time on their church projects without any monetary benefits than they are willing to spend on their own projects, because from their point of view the more they give the more likely they will get a place in heaven. At the community level, people set up their own networks to help each other such as *te airiiri*, *te karoronga*, *te kataanga*, or *te ua aai*. *Te airiiri* is a term used by a group of people in Makin in the north to help each other grow plants in their babai pits. Each island group has its own name for this cultural networking. The groups discuss among themselves plans and tasks and collectively put together their efforts to achieve their aims. This cultural network or chain was not discussed in the *maneaba.*[3]. Therefore, the following chapters take a deliberative journalism approach (Dixit, 1997, 2010; Romano, 2010) and apply it to the journalists' reporting of climate change within a Kiribati cultural context. Allowing journalists to make sense of their own world by reporting what matters the most to their community has been addressed but not taken to the next level. Scholars have concluded that journalists, especially in the West, are still attached to their traditional journalistic practices, and trainers who assist journalists in the Pacific to boost media coverage of climate change have not explored the existing cultural framework enough. This deliberative approach seeks to re-connect and bridge the gap between the public, the media and the government.

Research on media coverage of climate change

Research on media coverage of climate change in the Pacific is limited, when compared to similar studies around the world. The body of literature is growing significantly, for example, in the United States (see Antilla, 2005; McComas & Shanahan, 1999; Good; 2008), the United Kingdom (Garvin, 2009; Carvalho, 2005; Carvalho & Burgess, 2005; Taylor & Nathan, 2002), British Columbia

in Canada (Gunster, 2011), France (Brossard, Shanahan & McComas, 2004), New Zealand (Wilson, 2000; Dispensa & Robert, 2003; Kenix, 2008), Australia (Bacon, 2011; Henderson-Sellers, 1998; McManus, 2000), Japan (Sampei and Aoyagi-Usui, 2009), Peru (Takahashi, 2010), Finland (Dispensa & Robert, 2003), Spain (Leon et al, 2011), India (Boykoff, 2010) among others. These studies examine diverse aspects of journalism such as objectivity, norms, bias, structure (Boykoff, 2007a, 2007b; Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004, 2007; Shanahan & Good 2000; Smith, 2005) and media framing (Antilla, 2005; Takahashi, 2010) and examine the weaknesses and strengths of media coverage in the West (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007), with a few studies focused on foreign media reporting about low lying islands (Day, 2010; Cameron, 2011).

Qualitative and empirical studies have confirmed that journalists in the Pacific are aware of the issue of climate change and the threat it poses to the inhabitants (Jackson, 2008; National, 2009), but these studies focus more on describing the patterns of reporting rather than theorising about why journalists have reported that way. Therefore, literature on media and climate change is still in a burgeoning state elsewhere despite some positive signs that it has garnered interests among scholars in the Pacific. The available literature in the region has grown insignificantly since its beginnings in the 1990s, particularly when Kunda Dixit published the original edition of his book, *Dateline Earth Journalism as if the planet mattered.* After the launch of this book, only one Pacific journalism scholar wrote a review about its message and contribution to journalism.[4]

Most recent studies on media coverage of climate change have been based primarily on empirical, comparative analysis in countries such as Samoa, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. The available literature so far has been increasingly centred on politics, the coups in Fiji, journalism education and the media's role in development (see Robie, 2001; Robie, 2005; Papoutsaki & Sundar, 2008). Unfortunately, no single scholarly investigation has examined the media coverage of climate change in Kiribati. Journalism scholars such as Papoutsaki, Rooney, Singh and Robie have proposed journalism education, appropriate to the circumstances of Pacific journalists to train them to be part of people's lives, especially in terms of development. Furthermore, there is a notion that journalists need to become researchers themselves so they can interpret expert reports on projects in their islands (Papoutsaki et al, 2008; Duncan, 2007). The weakness of this proposal is that it does not prescribe clear and practical journalism curricula for the media in low lying islands. For example, the media in Kiribati, Tuvalu and Niue are small

and receive little scholarly interest. Very few outside researchers have been able to cope with the lifestyle and climatic conditions in countries such as Kiribati. Fiji, Samoa and Papua New Guinea are more developed than these islands, which is why they have received sustained academic interest. Special reference is made to Kiribati and Tuvalu because they are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (IPCC, 2007).

A great deal of Pacific media research is dominated by Fiji, Samoa and Papua New Guinea. These studies, as mentioned earlier, did not examine media coverage of climate change in the Pacific or in low lying islands where the adverse impacts of climate change are very real. A comparative study by Jackson (2008) on Samoan newspapers lacks in-depth analysis and has no clear theoretical framework. A newspaper article regarding a comment by Papua New Guinea researcher Nalau Bengeding challenged the media to talk to the people about the impacts of climate change (2009, October 19, Journos challenged to expand climate change reporting, National). This author could not trace the study by Bengeding Nalau to see whether it has been updated.

In terms of literature in the Pacific, it has been difficult to find a solid and thorough theoretical analysis of Pacific media that has explored the context addressed in this monograph. Due to the significance of understanding how the media in low lying islands respond to the notion of 'disappearing nations', the author has sought a theoretical framework to reconnect media, people and climate change actors in Kiribati. How do journalists cover the issue that endangers their very existence and the community at large? How do they engage with government, NGOs, climate change activists and the community at this time of uncertainty? These are some of the key questions to be examined in this monograph.

Environmental concern and climate change science

Many studies feature the environment and climate change in Kiribati (Tebano, Kiata, Abeta, 2008; Hogan, 2008; Kuruppu, 2009; Kuruppu & Liverman, 2010; Kiribati Ministry of Environment, 1995; Storey & Hunter, 2010; Locke, 2008; Barnett, 2005), when compared to studies of media coverage of climate change in this country. Quite interestingly, the public's attention and debate on climate change became a high priority for Pacific Island governments and Kiribati in particular. At the other end of the spectrum, governments in industrialised countries have tried hard to downplay the seriousness of global warming on low lying islands.

Figure 2: Burning rubbish at Teaorareke, Tarawa. Image: *Kiribati Independent*

Questions have been asked elsewhere, such as, is climate change really happening, and what causes it? As a matter of fact, low lying island nations have not delved into the scientific aspect of this issue as they have already seen the changes in sea level, temperature and marine resources. Climate change has its original roots in scientific fears that the climate was changing in the Soviet Union in the 1950s (Wilson, 2000). Wilson found that in 1965, the United States President's Science Advisory Committee published the government's first report claiming that climate change could be caused by human activities and could have an impact on the rest of the world. The broad topic of greenhouse effect appeared on the front page of *The New York Times* for the first time in 1981, but it did not make the news agenda until 1988 (see Wilson, 2000).

Profiling the issue of public environmental concern, Hansen (2010) found that this developed during the 1960s and reached an initial peak around 1970. Then the issue retreated during the 1970s and a second cycle started around the early 1990s, and then waned again from around 1992 onwards. Hansen argues that the 2000s witnessed the era of climate change, which has now become the most important science issue of all time. These studies investigated how and when the issue of climate change came to be reported. From the regional standpoint,

SPREP did a series of studies on environment and climate change in the Pacific but did not study media coverage.

Climate change workshops and seminars

A number of workshops, training programmes and seminars have been undertaken since 2008 dealing specifically with Pacific media coverage of climate change. Who received invitations to participate and who did not is a very significant question that has not been thoroughly examined by the organisers and funders before the events. For example, it has now become the norm that journalists from Fiji, Samoa and Papua New Guinea are the preferred participants ahead of journalists in low lying states. Government and NGOs have conducted climate change workshops in Kiribati inviting participants from the outer islands. The question that has not been thoroughly explored is this: 'Whether the participants were coming to the workshop to learn, or just for the sake of travel and receiving an allowance?' Travelling to the capital island is costly and there was a common feeling among people, especially those in rural areas, that it was a special privilege.

Besides this, a few I-Kiribati people have written and commented on the media in Kiribati. They are the University of the South Pacific (USP) academic, Teweiariki Teaero, and the former editors of *Te Uekera* and Radio Kiribati, Iaram Tabureka and Batiri Bataua, former President Ieremia Tabai and the author of this article. Most of the works are very descriptive, reflecting the personal views of the writers. For example, Tabai presented his paper at the Australian Press Council conference in 2001. His views were based on his personal experience of the government of Teburoro Tito. He was invited because his radio station was shut down by that government at the time, and he became an outspoken critic of Tito.

Teaero has been vocal and critical of the Tito government handling of media freedom since Tito banned Michael Field from Kiribati in 2000. His views are challengeable as he never criticised the government of Anote Tong when he clamped down on the freedom of journalists, or when editors of *Te Uekera* and Radio Kiribati were suspended in 2005 for breaching the order of the former Minister of Communications, Natan Teewe (Korauaba, 2007a). The author, on the other hand, has written one commentary on media freedom and one research paper on the media in Kiribati in 2007, and has been actively involved in the pursuit of media freedom in Kiribati and continues to do so with the present

Figure 3: A family surrounded by sea water during high tide on Tarawa. Image: Parkelan Kabwere, a former journalist of *Kiribati Independent*

study, the launch of his news website and his *Kiribati Independent* newspaper published and printed in Tarawa. There are other opinion pieces and news stories about climate change and the environment published on *Kiribati Online Community* and *The Kiribati Independent* website. The Kiribati government newsletter, *Rongorongo Man Ami Tautaeka* (RMAT), Kiribati Climate Change and Ministry of Environment websites have also published articles on climate change and the environment, but they did not examine media coverage of climate change.

For these reasons, the author argues that there is a growing body of research through the government's Kiribati Adaptation Programme initiatives on climate change, awareness, and adaptation but very little examination of the news media coverage of climate change in Kiribati.

Deliberative journalism

In terms of theoretical framework, the governments in Pacific Island countries have participated significantly in deliberations to raise public understanding

of climate change and sea level rise through conferences, seminars, awareness programmes and consultations (Hogan, 2008: Hogan, 2011: Tarawa Climate Change Conference, 2010; RNZI, 2008; Pacific Wave Media Network, 2009; RMAT, 2010). This is, nevertheless, parallel to academic research which addresses questions around the news content, and its implications for public attitudes, intentions, perceptions and behaviour towards climate change (e.g. Anderson 2009; Boykoff 2009; Carvalho & Burgess 2005; Liu et al, 2008; Russill & Nyssa, 2009 cited in Boykoff, 2010). What is missing though, from climate change deliberations in the Pacific, is the study of the media coverage of climate change in low lying islands, also known as 'disappearing nations'. The most recent study by Cameron (2011) studied 'disappearing islands' such as Kiribati and Tuvalu, but it did not explore the issue of media coverage of climate change in low lying islands. Day (2010) examined how climate change news is framed about Kiribati in Australian media, but she didn't explore the coverage of local media on this issue.

Public awareness programmes were purportedly intended to raise public understanding about climate change in the Pacific, and included training workshops and conferences targeting the Pacific journalists and media awards for best environmental reporting. (Hogan, 2008: Radio Australia, 2009: SPREP, 2010; *Matangi Tonga Online*, 2009: *Pacific Magazine*, 2008: USP, 2010). In other words, they seek to increase media literacy and public trust of science (Shanahan, 2011: Cooper, 2011). These are parts of deliberative democracy aimed at engaging a relatively small group of citizens in discussions (Spoel, Goford, Cheu & Pearson, 2009). Spoel and others used the documentary by former US Vice-President Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2007) in their analysis. Nevertheless, no single study in the Pacific has ever looked at the influence of this documentary on the attitudes of the journalists in low lying islands in the Pacific.

Part of the problem or the solution?

Dateline Earth; Journalism as if the planet mattered is the title of the book written by Nepalese journalist and editor, Kunda Dixit. It was first published in 1997 and revised later in 2010. He said his book was inspired by the 'ghosts of the untold stories' of climate change and environmental issues. In 1997, climate change was not yet taken seriously by the mainstream media in the Pacific or elsewhere. Dixit (2010) later explained that journalists 'had been trained to write on development and environmental issues, but for the most part were covering them without linking the stories to larger economic and political realities'.

Figure 4: The meeting house for the Catholic School, Taborio, in North Tarawa. Image: *Kiribati Independent*

Dixit insisted that journalists should play a part in helping nature.

> What do they aim to achieve for themselves and the society and the planet that they live in? What, when the planet looks like it is headed towards ecological collapse, then how far does the profession allow journalists to be a part of the solution? (Dixit, 2010; p. 219)

Nearly a decade later in 2005, another Pacific journalism scholar, Robie agreed with Dixit over his views that journalism should be part of finding solutions. He wrote:

> Dixit's prophetic view that issues such as jungle families sickened by mine tailings, peasants impoverished by global free trade, countries harmed by toxic waste and general environmental neglect were often ignored is now widely accepted in the region with a wider range of environmental and human rights reporting now a normative. (Robie, 2005; p. 230)

Part of the solution

In terms of becoming part of the solution, Kiribati journalists should have no

difficulty achieving that as they are the government's employees, and follow upon the government's policies from time to time. With Kiribati's focus on climate change, journalists appear to have lost interest in the issue. Siebert, Peterson & Schramm (1965) developed their theories of the press—authoritarian, libertarian, communist and the social responsibility theory—arguing that the press always takes on the coloration of the social and political structure in which they operate. These theories have little influence on understanding why the media in 'vulnerable countries' such as Kiribati feel reluctant to devote time to this issue.

In Kiribati, journalists are not recruited as participants for the surveys and studies. An example of this was the Kiribati Adaptation Programme phase I-III where journalists were excluded, and the study tended to focus mainly on the lay understanding by the public of climate change. Spoel et al (2009; p. 49) argues that climate change entails a rich and timely venue for exploring 'theoretical and practical questions about public understanding, and engagement with science'.

Latu (2010) contended that global journalism textbooks lack in-depth details about the media in the Pacific. She did not, however, make special reference to environmental reporting in the Pacific and in Tonga. Papoutsaki & Rooney (2004) argue that lack of research on communication in Papua New Guinea increasingly reinforced the public perception that it was not the top priority need of the country. They found that the mainstream media are arguably preoccupied by Western-centric media focusing primarily on the elite and on urban areas.

Watchdog of democracy in the Pacific

A study in 2001 found that 73 percent of journalists in Papua New Guinea, and 74 percent in Fiji took up their career in the media because they wanted to be the 'watchdog of democracy'. They also chose the profession because they wanted to communicate knowledge to the community and because it was an exciting career (Robie, 2001). This watchdog role is underpinned by the notion of the Fourth Estate, a term introduced by Edmund Burke.

Although this study was undertaken 13 years ago and there has been no update by researchers in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, it demonstrated the fact that journalists in these two countries strongly perceived themselves as watchdogs of democracy. When it comes to reporting climate change, journalists and editors face a dilemma as the issue is largely abstract and intangible (Boykoff, 2010). Studies of the news media coverage of global warming (climate change in the Pacific) have shown much uncertainty and controversy (Antilla, 2008).

Secondly, the researcher studied these two countries because the news media there are well established and thirdly because they have universities, the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, and Divine University in Madang and the University of Papua New Guinea, all of which offer journalism programmes (Latu, 2010). The author argues that a new study or pilot survey of some kind would help us understand how Fijian journalists cover climate change under the military regime. For example in China, the communist state suppressed media freedom but environmental reporting is a high priority and is backed by the state (Bao, 2010).

A watchdog role has some strong connections with political journalism – a term originated in the West (McNair, 2009) and is still being practised elsewhere in the Pacific. McNair (2009) found that the practice of political journalism emerged against the backdrop of the English Civil War and its aftermath, which also links to the ideas of liberation, critical and inquiring thinking that Brazilian educator Paulo Freire discusses in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (cited in Robie, 2005). In his book, *The Pacific Journalist (2001),* Robie explored the problems facing journalists from their politics, culture, education, salary and especially the two coups in Fiji. Overall, Robie presents a case that formal tertiary education for journalists, as opposed to short term training, would make a lasting contribution to the profession and the society in which it operates.

It is for these reasons that the author of this thesis finds the concepts of the *Pedagogy of the oppressed* difficult to apply to the circumstances of low lying islands in the Pacific in terms of media coverage of climate change.

A gap in the literature on media coverage of climate issues in the region has started to fill with a number of researchers focusing specifically on journalists' representation of the environment and climate change in the region (Patel, 2007; Jasperse, 2008; Hayes, 2008; *The National*, 2009; Jackson, 2008; Robie, 2010, 2014).

Watchdog of the environment

With the watchdog role in mind, the author believes some journalists write stories that they believe will influence policy. Would journalists continue to write stories that they knew could not make any difference? This concern was voiced in 2009 by a Samoan journalist who asked if the efforts of Samoa would make a difference. When the climate change officer replied that they would not, the journalist replied; 'So that means this is no use.' [5]

A senior research fellow of the National Research Institute, Nalau Bengeding, found that Papua New Guinean newspapers have covered climate change extensively

(*The National*, 2009). While Nalau was impressed by the scale of climate change publicity, he also found that 48 percent of the total number of climate change stories were from conferences, seminars and interviews with bureaucrats and government people. He also challenged journalists to extend their scope to the impact on people's lives. This is another call for the media to become a watchdog of the environment.

Do Kiribati journalists report climate change objectively or subjectively?

The articles published in *Te Uekera* on 11-18 December 2009, showed the attachment of the reporters to their leader rather than to the issue of climate change. Endorsing what the President and his delegation did at Copenhagen was a clear indication that they wanted to work together for a common goal— to find a solution, thus allowing the government of the day to do its job while they (journalists) mobilised public support at home. Due to their perception that government 'owned' them, the journalists increasingly practised 'government says' journalism. This was disputed by Anote, Teburoro and Timeon. Anote and Teburoro saw no reason why the journalists should censor themselves when they were supposedly expected to do their job. Anote claimed that journalists used that as an excuse to justify their lack of commitment to their job. Teburoro, who had been very critical of press freedom, would like journalists to extend their horizons by reporting what he terms 'under the surface of events' rather than just the events.

From a different perspective, Timeon argued that editors and managers lacked the solid understanding of the roles of the media in a democratic society like Kiribati. Teweiariki proposed that journalists should familiarise themselves with issues they would report on, especially climate change. Comparing the roles of teachers and journalists, Teaero explained journalists find it hard to inform and educate 'their audience because they do not know "who they are" while the teachers developed programmes that suit the learning needs of their audiences because they knew them'.

As the government, and particularly the President, placed strong focus on climate change, the journalists became the most important tool to get the message across. At times, the President was disappointed when journalists did not interview him about the climate change meetings he attended. A youth climate change advocate, Claire Anterea, complained about the lack of interest and engagement of the local journalists in their climate change programmes. Anterea is one of the much sought after activists by international journalists. The local journalists have never interviewed her since she took up this advocacy role in

Figure 5: Repair work on the Dai Nippon Causeway Between Betio and Tarawa. Image: *Kiribati Independent*

2005. She said: 'I have been interviewed by many foreign journalists and I could not understand why the local journalists were not interested in my stories.' Based on her experience, she argued people did not care about the underlying science, because when you try to explain that to them they are not interested; rather they are much more interested in finding out why they hardly have rain, why water becomes salty and why their *babai* (a taro-like starchy root crop) is dead (Anterea, personal communication, 18 October 2011). Indigenous peoples have experienced similar changes before and have used their own knowledge to learn and adapt (Cherrington, 2008; Macchi, 2008). If Anterea was not seen as important by the local journalists compared with Anote, she might have lacked the authority to present herself because she worked for the church and had little influence over many people. This is linked to the media's culture of interviewing elites and bureaucrats (Papoutsaki & Rooney, 2008). Relying only on elites as sources is problematic because it excludes others in public deliberation (Romano, 2010).

Workshops

It is disappointing to note the lack of well researched stories by *Te Uekera* and *The Fiji Times* on COP15. While there has been an expectation that reporting of this issue would be enhanced following a series of training workshops there was no improvement. Although *The Fiji Times* published more stories than *Te Uekera*

and *New Zealand Herald,* they showed very little passion about climate change. *The Fiji Times* has attempted to give attention to scepticism on climate change with headlines in its editorial column such as 'is climate change a hot topic, or myth?' *Te Uekera,* whose readers stand to lose their country in the future, failed to interview people about the summit and their expectations from their leader. This raises the questions around workshops by SPREP.

It is worth noting here that Kiribati journalists have no training on environment, or climate change reporting. None of them have any higher degrees in journalism or other disciplines. As a result, their views on climate change are limited and it would be hard for them to understand linkages between climate change and people's lives (Jasperse, 2008). There has not been any specific workshop to train journalists for this job in Kiribati. In May 2007, a two-week UNESCO-funded workshop was conducted in Kiribati. The training was aimed at improving relations between journalists and society, which included NGOs, MPs and the media.

It was conducted by a Samoan journalist working at that time for the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. The workshop also touched on formulating the constitution of the Kiribati Media Association. At the time of this research, there was no improvement in the relationships between the journalists, government and NGOs, 'but the quality of journalism has dropped significantly' (Ioane, personal communication, 15 October 2011). Samoa and Kiribati are very different and the appointment of a Samoan journalist to conduct this workshop undermined the expertise of local journalists. Secondly the workshop was designed out of the blue as there had not been any scholarly studies on the Kiribati media at that time. Beginning in 1999, specialised environmental workshops for journalists were carried out by SPREP. The same organisation organised a climate change workshop for regional journalists.

The workshops were run in Tonga, Apia, Fiji and Australia. Kiribati journalists were invited to participate. The locations of these workshops have been problematic as workshops like these should have been carried out in areas where the impacts of climate change are visible for the journalists. It was believed that the organisers and trainers did not want to stay in very hot and poor countries because they were concerned about their health. Holding these workshops in countries that are better off than Kiribati in terms of infrastructure, transportation, communication and health services denied Kiribati journalists real life experience of their own people.

Public perception on climate change in Kiribati has not been thoroughly studied. Public relationships with the media, and especially the message conveyed

has not been studied in Kiribati either. The Kiribati Adaptation Programme developed its own data by interviewing lay people on what they know about climate change. They did not know where these people got their climate change information, and where they learned to be sceptical. Removing a question on God's promise to Noah from the questionnaire, due to the fact that it would reinforce people's rejection of climate change, is flawed. This is especially the case as the people's way of life needs to be understood thoroughly rather than be ignored.(Cherrington, 2008). The reason for including this biblical teaching needs to be acknowledged, it cannot just be the meaning it has for the people would not disappear just for the excluding of it in the questionnaire.

While church leaders campaigned for action to be taken by industrialised countries at all levels, it is not known whether or not the church told their followers to forget God's promise to Noah on the grounds that it was not true. But in all likelihood they have not reached a point where they would attack the very foundation of their faith—the Bible. In Arorae and Tamana, a family prayer at 7pm every night is compulsory and no one is allowed to work on Sunday. Storch and Krauss (2005) have noted the role culture plays in climate change perceptions in the United States and Germany, but in Kiribati it was ignored.

Questionnaire

The journalists shared with the author what they found and experienced in their work. But in the questionnaires (Table 1) they gave different answers. What does this mean if the information the researcher wishes to elicit is not forthcoming and especially when their reliability and credibility cannot be verified and sustained?

This discrepancy has been found and addressed elsewhere by researchers (see Lee, 2004). For example, there is a common practice of giving answers believed to please the interviewer in a face-to-face interview. Whatever he or she put on paper the questionnaire differed from what he or she said on tape. This raises a question of consistency and reliability. For instance, they disagreed with the view that climate was boring, complicated and a scary story.

As the data in Table 1 demonstrated, the leading source for the journalist was the President. The journalists relied entirely on this elite source, in urban areas, for their stories. The good time to write climate change stories was during high tides. The journalists tried to remain neutral in their reporting but imagining the impacts of climate change on themselves and family was a barrier. They dismissed questions around the controversy and complexity of climate change, but they wanted a climate

Table 1: Questionnaire for journalists

	President	High tides	Emotions	Complicated	Manual
Aneta	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Buraieta	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Uretan	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Tearinibeia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Monika	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Questions: *Who is your main source? When is a good time to report climate change? How do you cover the story?* The journalists say that the President is their primary source about climate change and they prefer high tide for climate change news gathering. When asked whether climate change was complicated, they answered no. However, they all believed that a Kiribati climate change manual would be helpful.

Source: Korauaba, T. (2012). Media and the politics of climate change in Kiribati: A case study on journalism in a 'disappearing nation'. Unpublished MCS thesis. Fig: 5.1, p. 112.

change journalism manual that carries the translation of the scientific terms into Kiribati words and advises on how to cover the story. The environment and climate change issues offer good stories for journalists in the South Pacific, which they can relate to the economic difficulties facing their country (Patel, 2006). However, the locals, apart from those in 'government', are the last sources the journalists prefer in their everyday news story writing. They were only interviewed when their houses became flooded or they became victims (Dixit, 2010). In spite of this, the journalists struggled to identify with these stories as their country is facing a dire situation.

Content analysis

Te Uekera coverage of COP15

The headlines such as 'Kabwaekeeke [outstanding performance, unique] or katika te nano Kiribati' [Kiribati attracts the hearts] are not surprising because the journalists are I-Kiribati and are working for the government-owned media, which provids public service to the population, entertainment and education. The journalists saw the President and his delegation at the summit as one team representing the country in Copenhagen. Endorsing the President's efforts at the summit, and mobilising public support, may be seen as parallel to political propaganda. However this is to be expected from the local media as they are owned and controlled by the government. The control is driven by a self-censorship norm practised by the journalists, not imposed by the government (Tong, personal communication, 13 October 2011). The weakness of the 'government

says so journalism' being practised by the Kiribati media was that it HAS denied the citizens the right to explicitly understand the agenda of its government at the summit, to KNOW who were on the delegation and how much they spent from the public fund, and whether they have a genuine agenda and motions to raise at the conference.

The use of *kabwaekeeke* in the headline suggests the importance of cultural dance in the lives of I-Kiribati. Its adoption places Kiribati delegation at a special position at the summit. For example, the President and his entourage were imagined as a cultural dancing group representing Kiribati at an overseas festival. In Kiribati, those words are invoke the high level of skillshown in the society's traditional dance, boat building and crafts. The story was provided by Linda Uan, producer of Nei Tabera ni Kai video unit, who also attended COP15. *Kabwaekeeke* may be used to describe the skills of a talented canoe builder for example or a dancer.

In that story, written by Buraieta Toakare, she interviewed the President's Private Secretary before they flew to the summit. These are the key themes from this article: 'President's trip is news' (Robie, 2004). The President is becoming popular around the world for his bravery (literally 'brave heart' in Kiribati) and for taalking about the future of his people and country. Climate change becomes Tong's favourite song. Headlined as 'Katika te nano Kautuun Kiribati i Copenhagen'—President Tong won hearts at Copenhagen—portrayed a good picture of Tong at home.

Culturally speaking, Tong was described as a great dancing performer though he was attending a summit not a festival. Whincup (2010) found that a traditional dance in Kiribati remains an important part of the people's life. However, the problem with the headline was that Tong had not arrived in Copenhagen yet, but the reports showed that he had already 'won hearts' at the summit. They exaggerated the story and misled the readers. Besides this, only one source was interviewed with a few words in the story regarding expectations that the world leaders would make a new binding agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol which expired in 2012. While the story talked about a bleak future predicted for the country, it did not make reference to scepticism or negative reports about the President's visit and campaign on climate change. Sceptics, especially the political opponents of Tong, have been left out of the media reports due to government's restrictions. In sum, the use of 'kabwaekeeke' and 'katika te nano' showed the importance of cultural dancing in Kiribati culture.

The Fiji Times coverage

The Fiji Times provided both commentaries and news articles about COP15. In its coverage, some interesting points emerged, such as 'telling what the leaders should do at COP15' and it gave more publicity to the islands' presentations at the summit than did the *The New Zealand Herald*. Similar to *Te Uekera*, *The Fiji Times* did not send a reporter to Denmark to cover COP15, indicating the position of the publication on climate change. Although it was a high profile summit, *The Fiji Times* focused more on the impacts of climate change to people's life paying particular attention to other neighbouring countries such as Tokelau, Tuvalu, Samoa and Kiribati

The *Times*' coverage of COP15 may be partly understood by the level of vulnerability of Fiji and the political atmosphere in the country at the time. Although this is outside the scope of this monograph, it is worth mentioning the fact that within this period there was consideration by the regime to gag the media. Secondly, mainstream media has been struggling to get the attention paid to climate change in Fiji and the Pacific (Robie, 2010) despite SPREP's efforts to mainstream the issue through its training workshops.

Thirdly, the publication focused mainly on the bottom-up approach, put simply—smaller vs bigger or Pacific island countries being presented as victims and developed countries as responsible for inflicting hurts on the would-be victims. The *Times* did not make any reference to the government at the summit and this was due mainly to a soured relationship between the media and the regime. Instead, it published stories about other Pacific Island governments' presentations at the summit.

The New Zealand Herald coverage

The coverage of the *Herald* during the summit was more on mitigation and less on adaptation (Anderson, 2009). It focused more on debates, blame-games, conflicts, and science (Leon & Erviti, 2011). Its coverage was different from the coverage of the *Times* and *Te Uekera*. Having a highly educated and experienced pool of journalists with specialist knowledge, let alone its financial resources, the *Herald* sent a reporter and also bought stories from other overseas news agencies such as AFP, AAP, AP, and the now defunct newswire agency, *The Press*. Two important issues arose from the analysis of the coverage of COP15: One is that the publication is far closer and similar to the Western news media which confirmed earlier findings (Kenix, 2008), and secondly, the newspaper regarded the summit as a chance to make their country's mark.

The newspaper was interested in mitigation, transference of knowledge, conflicts and debate and sought to raise New Zealand's profile at this high level summit.

Aspects of journalism and its influence on policy making

Objectivity and balance

Te Uekera attached itself to the President rather than the issue of climate change. Because it is the government's own publication, its coverage of the summit showed how important I-Kiribati culture was. It is a vernacular newspaper and the advantage of that for the public is they were able to see themselves reflected in the content. It focused on the summit, the delegate and what the readers could expect from the summit.

The Herald an English language paper is limited in its ability to express Kiribati cultural concepts to unite its people on climate change.

While balancing stories has been a Western-centric news media approach, the *Herald* when publishing stories from COP15 strongly followed this practice. For example, the coverage easily shifted from the summit to other issues outside the scope of the meeting. For example, when Prime Minister John Key's name was dropped from a BBC high profile televised interview, the *Herald* found it to be 'sad news' because as a New Zealand publication, it wanted the New Zealand leader to be seen at the centre of the world stage. This issue is related to working outside a country where the media and leaders often work as a 'team'. This relationship is best understood in sporting events where government representatives and the media and media attend overseas competitions work together as one team for the good of their country. Xifra (2009) argued that diplomacy is no longer only the privilege of nation states, other non state actors participated in international diplomacy such as NGOs and sports organisations.

Professional rules governing the work of journalism brought to light some questions regarding accessibility and relevance to the public's needs. This is not to dispute the fact that in New Zealand climate change is not the top priority of the people despite the government's attempt to become the world leader. As some scholars have found, the newspaper is a reflection of society, and this is related to what *Te Uekera*, *Fiji Times* and *Herald* did with their coverage of COP15. For instance, the coverage of the *Herald* reflected the attitudes of its leaders who were enthusiastically willing to take the lead. Moreover, the sweeping theories of journalism are helpful to understanding the tenets of different levels of government such as democratic, communist, developing countries. However, they may not be

useful in determining the coverage of climate change. Climate change is, in fact, a new phenomenon which only seriously attracted the attention of the Western media in the 1990s. This is not to disagree with the fact that studies were done in the 1960s during a time when the environment was recognised as causing a problem, but not climate change as yet (Anderson, 2008). The attention of the media at the time on climate change was not serious, meaning they did not see it as a major issue and were likely to dismiss its urgency because of its 'creeping nature' (Nisbet, 2011), and also because climate change is only an idea where people are both the 'culprits' and 'victims' (see Palfreman, 2006).

Studies on why and how the media cover any issue focused primarily on framing, agenda setting or priming, and cultural interpretive packages among others (Iyengar & Kinder, 1986 cited in Scheufele 1999) because they believe the process of construction can best be understood this way. However, the relationship between the sender and receiver remains a contested area (Nisbet, 2009). Journalists are struggling to find a place for climate change in their news reporting. People's main concern is their physical well being, and the pressing issue of climate change cannot stay in the minds of the public for a long time (Downs, 1972).

The other good aspect of the *Herald's* coverage was little space being given to scepticism in its reporting, focusing specifically on what was happening. The rules of journalism, which require journalists to report what is said, have some weaknesses. This is related to the issue of journalists distancing themselves from climate change. Rather than attaching themselves to climate change, the journalist covering COP15 reported what she saw and what happened, and what others said, thus limiting the ability of the reporter to move towards finding solutions. Finding solutions has been the enemy of journalism, especially in Western countries, but this type of report—what is said journalism—is strong in the *Herald's* coverage of COP15.

In the rise of modern environmental movements in the 1960s, the mass media was held to be the central public area for publicising contesting claims, arguments and opinions about our use and abuse of the environment (Hansen, 2011; p. 8). While Hansen calls for reconnection with processes of construction of messages, with relationships between sources and communicators, there was no mention on how the media should become the watchdog of the environment. The environment is a subfield of democracy while the media plays an important role in facilitating or connecting the two in terms of reporting what is happening to the environment and how actors in democratic societies such as NGOs and laws can play a role to

safeguard the environment. When the interest of the political decision makers and the public in general seemed not to be sustained as suggested in recent times, scholars stepped in blaming the two for not doing their part. The *Herald* seemed to be more concerned with elite sources and celebrities and authoritative people in its coverage, giving less attention to non-prominent figures such as those who may live in small island states.

Hansen has described this as an inequality in the public sphere. There is agreement that research in this area has faced difficulty in keeping up with the rapid changes to news media. For example, the internet and social media, and the changing styles of narrative and storytelling in journalism. The *Herald* reporter used at some stage a novel-like style of reporting when covering COP15.

Media interest in conflict and controversy was found not only in the UK and the US, but also in Russia, China and India. The media tended to follow the lines of their government.

For example the media in Russia found the Kyoto Protocol to be an imposed agreement while in China it accused the Western countries of 'climatic terrorism' against its economic development and India called it 'carbon colonisation' ((Tolan, 2007; Rowe, 2009 Billet, 2010, cited in Leon et al, 2011). The *Times* and *Herald* were far more interested in this type of politics when they ran stories about Al Gore, the controversy around his Oscar-winning film and the IPCC report.

Cross-cultural comparative study

In Kiribati, the national newspaper endorsed the President's efforts and his team at the summit using specific dancing words such as *kabwaekeeke*, (very unique) and *katika matan te noo* (caught the eyes of the audience). They regarded their leader as a great traditional dancer. For the *Herald* it touched on the BBC and novelist style reporting to make COP15 more appealing. They regarded their leader to be the leader in the fight against global climate change while *Te Uekera* regarded its President as a great traditional dancer. The *Times* did not give credits to the Fiji regime, and instead it played the roles of a leading regional publication.

The *Herald* was far more professional than the *Times* and *Te Uekera*. There is no doubt about why this is given the resources and expertise of the newspaper. But their coverage at COP15 is like what Dixit (2010) describes as 'written without relating it to development and people of the country'. Conflicts and debates are the common and favoured recipe of journalism around the world, which also include the *Herald*.

Again the debate and pointing fingers reporting style make COP15 more in

line with other news media around the world because they cannot cover something that is very simple where people are happy and getting along with each other.

The New Zealand Herald, being the most influential publication in New Zealand, has unknowingly entered into a diplomacy-like negotiation when it sent its reporter to COP15,— to become a party to the leaders' summit. This is related to the issue of media and foreign policy relations (Balabanova, 2007) or media and state environment relations in the Philippines (Das et al., 2010), and in China where the media coverage of the environment receives support from the state (Bao, 2010). The *Times* and *Te Uekera* did not send reporters as they relied on delegates for stories.

The findings of this present study correspond with results of earlier empirical studies (Wilson, 2000; Dispensa & Robert, 2003; Kenix, 2008) in which they concluded that the media was not reporting climate change. Nevertheless the *Herald's* coverage noted some awareness and agreement between editorial and management that they have an important role in climate change. For example, placing 'A Copenhagen diary' on the front page was strategically a big step taken by the newspaper and demonstrating its growing understanding of the danger climate change poses to the world. However, the content shed a different light, especially when it shifted its positive reporting in the beginning of a leaders meeting on 16 December to negative reporting on 18 December.

Climate change deliberations and deliberative journalism

The government's Kiribati Adaptation Programme has championed adaptation strategies under the sponsorship of overseas donors and the Kiribati government visiting the outer islands to raise awareness and understanding of the issue. The government used the media and its own newsletter to spread messages about climate change and the danger it posed to the inhabitants now and in the future. Climate change deliberations in Kiribati appeared in surveys, workshops and conferences. Most of these deliberations were done by KAP while the government attended climate change conferences and joined inter-governmental organisations for support.

The journalists were not part of these deliberations. They were only invited to get their stories. As Aneta explained in the interview, 'it's not our job to sit with the organisers and become part of the decision making'. Ueretan, Buraieta, Tearinibeia and Monica showed that they were there as reporters. A few journalists have been invited to sit on departmental committees to represent the media on health and the environment. Therefore it is the responsibility of the organisers and

donors to get one journalist to be on their committee, but then there is another problem relating to short staff as there are few journalists working for *Te Uekera* and Radio Kiribati.

The journalists were never interviewed nor consulted during surveys and studies. Whenever there are stories published by *Te Uekera* and the government's newsletter, *RMAT*, no views are sought from the journalists.

One reason for this has been that journalists have no recognised qualifications and bureaucrats look down on them. Some journalists have been confronted by their sources to disclose their qualification in journalism when there was disagreement over stories. Thus climate change deliberations are still going on in Kiribati under the direction of KAP. This project, deals with adaptation such as the building of sea walls and raising awareness on climate change. It has a communication unit charged with disseminating information manned by only one person, who formerly worked as a reporter for *Te Uekera*. Lack of cooperation between KAP, *Te Uekera* and experienced and qualified journalists has clearly shown a big gap between what the public has learnt, how information is transmitted and what feedback the messengers get from the recipients.

Elsewhere, mainly in the South Pacific, it has not been established how the recipients interpret climate change information, where they get their climate change information. Talking to people without knowing their level of understanding about climate change and their source of information is not only flawed but showed the failure of the deliberative system in Kiribati. Hiring an overseas consultant to lead KAP further reinforced thinking that outside people know better than the locals (Papoutsaki, 2010). This is the case with KAP in Kiribati. The consultants, though they know well and qualified in their own field, it does not mean that they can understand the locals properly. Some of their time would be eaten up learning about the culture. For example, KAP developed a manual consisting of traditional protocols for outsiders. Undertaking this deliberation needs people who are familiar with issues and especially in the area of communication, climate change and culture.

What happens to training workshops for journalists in the Pacific? Why are Kiribati journalists not prepared for this task? What is wrong with these training workshops? There has not been any single workshop on media and climate change held in Kiribati, the study found. The trainers may be concerned about their health as Kiribati is very hot and water is not as clean and safe like water in Fiji, Papua New Guinea or Samoa.

Many essential services are lacking in Kiribati. However, Kiribati journalists were invited to workshops outside the country such as Fiji, Samoa or Australia. This is problematic because Kiribati journalists are not writing or covering stories for Fijians, Samoans or Australians. They write in the Kiribati language and their audiences are I-Kiribati. Serious impacts of climate change are visible in Kiribati outer islands and they need to go there. There is a tradition that more funding will be secured if the project covers 'Pacific journalists'. This must change. With the growing concern about climate change, and lack of skills by Kiribati journalists to report it—training in their own language, in their own context, is becoming much more relevant and important. At the end of the day, it is the Kiribati journalist who lives with the impacts of climate change, and should be equipped to report it effectively.

Recommendations

This monograph does not critique scientific findings that Kiribati is at risk from climate change because that is not its purpose. It argues that there are media problems in Kiribati that need to be fixed and proposes that the following measures be taken to help remedy these problems before Kiribati's pleas to the international community to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are misinterpreted. It thus recommends that:

1. There should be a workshop to bring together journalists in Kiribati. They will discuss future cooperation among themselves so they can unite their people on climate change. Consideration should be given to World Press Freedom Day in May 2015 or 2016;
2. A comprehensive climate change reporting guide in the I-Kiribati vernacular should be developed. Local environment, climate change experts, elders and journalists should work together to design this manual;
3. A climate change journalism training course be developed for the Kiribati media based on a culturally planned deliberative *Te Kararonga* approach;
4. Future studies to be carried out to explore 'transparency and accountability mechanisms' in Kiribati as the country stands to gain more funding from overseas;
5. A topic such as 'Media and the politics of climate change in low lying islands' be considered as a new undergraduate paper at tertiary institutes in Kiribati and/or at the University of the South Pacific;

6. Funding be sought from donors to meet the cost of deploying 'roving' Kiribati journalists who will work with the community.

Notes

1. Adapted from Korauaba, T. (2012). Media and the politics of climate change in Kiribati: A case study on journalism in a 'disappearing nation'. Unpublished Masters in Communication Studies (MCS) thesis. Auckland: Pacific Media Centre, School of Communication Studies, Auckland University of Technology. Available at: www.pmc.aut.ac.nz/research/media-and-politics-climate-change-kiribati-case-study-journalism-disappearing-nation
2. Bataua was Kiribati's first commentator on media, his commentaries published as early as 1985.
3. Teiwaki argues that although Kiribati has changed, the *maneaba* system remains.
4. Robie has argued that newsrooms in the South Pacific should have a copy of this book (see *Pacific Journalism Review*, 2007, *17*(1), pp. 245-248
5. The Samoan journalist concludes that there was no solution in Samoa. The article is published at www. *kauri.aut.ac.nz:8080/.../Environment%20Reporting%20in%20 Samoa article written by Jackson, 2008*

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