

Noted


TABERANNANG KORAUABA is editor of the *Kiribati Independent* and he researches climate change.

Pacific climate change doco lacks ‘media impact’

The Hungry Tide, documentary produced, directed and written by Tom Zubrycki. 2011. 88min. I-Kiribati with English subtitles. thehungrytide.com.au

ON THE night the *The Hungry Tide* was screened on Māori Television in New Zealand, our family was having a farewell party for our relatives returning to Kiribati the next day. We sat cross-legged on a mat in a circle while women prepared meals for everyone.

Words circulated through text messages and social media about *The Hungry Tide*. As time approached the broadcast, the TV was turned on and children were told not to make a noise. There was excitement and anxiety on the faces of just ten Kiribati people in the house.



the HUNGRY tide

A film about a nation on the front line of climate change.

The Pacific nation of Kiribati is on the front line of climate change. Sea level rise is threatening the lives of 105,000 people in this vulnerable and forgotten corner of the Pacific.

Maria Timon, a Kiribati woman living in Sydney, has been given the task of alerting the world to her sinking homeland. The film follows Maria from a small Sydney high school to the world stage. Stay as first, we watch her grow in confidence as she takes her country's message to the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, and a year later to Cancun. Copenhagen ends in failure, and evidence emerges of Australia's complicity in silencing Pacific nations.

Back in Sydney Maria receives troubling news. Via the crackly CB radio link to her home island she finds out that her beloved father is very ill. She must return home immediately. Meanwhile in Kiribati storms have damaged sea walls protecting entire communities...

The urbane President Anote Tong, acutely aware of these problems, says his government lacks the resources to fix them. The eventual relocation of his people is inevitable, he believes: 'we have to assume the worst'.

A film by Tom Zubrycki
Editor/associate producer Ray Thomas
Co-cinematographer Nicola Daley
Original music Jan Preston

"This is a marvellous film, strong in narrative, imagery, argument and character. Every politician should be obliged to watch it." Sylvia Lawson, *Inside Story*.

For more information visit thehungrytide.com.au

Chauvel Cinema Special Screening
Friday August 5, 7pm
Paddington Town Hall
101 Bay Rd & Oxford St
No Bookings - Entry by donation
Pre drinks from 6pm.

I remember one of the elders' famous phrases during movie sessions, '*ataei tai karongoa bwa e nang oti te tamnei*'—children don't make a noise because the movie is now showing. Documentary and movies are different, but in Kiribati everything on DVD is a movie, *tamnei* or *birim*. There is no Kiribati word for documentaries.

Of course, our family members were going to watch the 'movie' rather than a documentary. They were going to re-connect with their country and to re-construct their memories of Kiribati through this film. Not surprisingly, climate change and sea level rise are already a disaster on the minds of these people.

Though none of them have studied climate science before, the power of the media and the word of mouth has played its strong advocacy here. Kiribati is ‘disappearing’. The family members in that sitting room have identified some of the places and characters in that documentary.

The protagonist, Maria Timon, an I-Kiribati woman living and working in Australia, took the audience to an outer island in Kiribati, Beru—where her entire family live. The island of Beru has some interesting legends and myths that could have made *The Hungry Tide* a well-informed and researched documentary had the producers explored them.

For instance, there is a lake on that island containing ‘mud’. The lake produces a source of food for the people on this island during a long and prolonged drought that struck the island many decades ago.

Today, visitors are taken to see the lake and villagers can make food out of this mud for their guests. The mud of *te bokaboka* story is important history of Beru island.

The Hungry Tide was the title of a novel by Amitav Ghosh. It tells a very contemporary story of adventure and unlikely love, identity and history. It takes place off the easternmost coast of India, in the Bay of Bengal.

Amitav Ghosh is one of India’s

best-known writers. His books include *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *In An Antique Land*, *Dancing in Cambodia*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *Incendiary Circumstances* and *The Hungry Tide*. Maria was part of the Kiribati delegation to Copenhagen 15 in Demark, 2009 and also accompanied the Kiribati team to another climate conference the following year.

There Was Once An Island also applies the same technique; the protagonist was a woman and she works and lives in Port Moresby. She advocated for her people in Takuu Island; she returned to meet her parents there. Her loved one passed away and she had to convince the rest of her family and the community to leave the island.

The Hungry Tide and *There Was Once An Island* have both raised the profile of climate change to an outside world but they have done little to raise the awareness of the media in the Pacific. A new study on why the media feel reluctant to cover news on documentaries and movies on the islands may assist future investigations. In Kiribati, video clippings, DVD, documentaries are called movies and they are for entertainment only.