
Written primarily by I-Kiribati, Atoll Politics assembles wide-ranging and forthright views that focus on the 1991 elections and related development issues. This period was crucial for Kiribati politics and encompassed the transformation from the successive governments of the popular first president, Ieremia Tabai, to a new government under Teatao Teannaki.

The thirty-four chapters of Atoll Politics cover the history of Kiribati politics, the personal views of the country's leading politicians, the 1991 elections, and an extensive review of development and social issues. The book also documents the emerging sophistication of the country's political system. Many other important issues are discussed including the I-Kiribati commitment to their maneaba (community meetinghouse) system of government, the struggle of the government to expand the economy, and the mounting social, environmental, and welfare concerns. Notable achievements discussed include the prudent management of both the Revenue Equalization Reserve Fund and the budget (chapter 14), the fortitude to reject imperfect aid (chapter 20), and the pursuit of self-reliance (chapter 29).

The book generally does not grapple with the conflicts between culture, politics, economics, and the environment. The relatively large volumes of international assistance have helped the government to postpone many painful compromises and have helped to perpetuate certain contemporary development myths. Given these circumstances, the country's achievements are all the more noteworthy.

A major issue—one that urgently warrants attention but is largely overlooked by the book—is the conflict between the economic force of the traditional maneaba system and that of the emerging private sector. A new economic system obviously has to evolve—a system that will both advance the commitment to self-reliance, based not only on atoll subsistence but also on trade, and minimize social costs. "In the minds of the Kiribati people, economic and social equality are supposed to be contributions of the gods" (27). Again, "there are no concentrations of great wealth and, while individual achievement is admired, the flaunting of personal superiority or promotion of oneself in public is usually not well received" (83). These traditions stand in stark contrast to the increasingly vibrant indigenous private sector based in South Tarawa. With the exception of the comments of the current president in chapter 28, the book virtually ignores this particular entrepreneurial activity, but given its existence, the reference to a "scarcity of entrepreneurship" (161) is not justified.

Nevertheless, the maneaba ethic
combined with public service control has not encouraged private entrepreneurship to date. Regarding control of the public service, the chapter on restraints to business (chapter 19) could have been far more critical of the policies of previous governments that favored state capitalism. Although recent governments have endorsed the vogue for greater commitment to the private sector, and for commercializing and privatizing some government holdings, the manner in which this new policy will be implemented has yet to unfold. For example, to what extent will the government continue to view the use of public funds to finance the purchase of ships that compete with private shipping as "normal commercial practice" (59)?

Much modern construction and other investment has degraded the atoll environment, which is nowhere more apparent than on South Tarawa. Chapters 11 and 27 reference this classic conflict but offer no guidance for new policy. There is little evidence that the national government can protect the urban environment in the way in which the unimane 'respected old men' have traditionally conserv ed the island environment. The authors' failure to address these conflicting interests and to comment on likely alternative policies is frustrating.

The traditional myths and legends of Kiribati have been augmented by modern myths of development. For example, repeated optimistic references to a vast marine resource overlook the fact that, except for the fishing license fees that are restricted to a nominal rent, Kiribati, like nearly all countries in the Pacific, has not succeeded in its expensive and protracted efforts to develop an indigenous commercial fishery. The country's exclusive economic zone may contain the resource, but Kiribati is situated far from the markets. Moreover, the country does not possess the required technology, skills, and billion-dollar risk capital. A comparative resource advantage may be a comparative economic disadvantage when it comes to developing a domestic commercial fishery. In addition, describing government-run fisheries and other ventures as "commercial" (170) not only uses a misleading term but is also unsound economic policy.

Although the government cannot claim many resource development successes, its welfare programs have fared better. Regarding education it is unfair to state that "there has been little effort to re-examine the old model" (249). The early community vocational schools and Tarawa Technical Institute introduced new educational initiatives, and the Asian Development Bank's vocational training review of 1986, and studies by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau, proposed steps toward more effective education.

Although the economic overview in chapter 12 suggests otherwise, the Kiribati economic situation is not comparable to that of other economies that invest and trade on the basis of their own foreign exchange reserves, currency, and goodwill. The national investment and trade deficits are generated by aid—not a justification for it. Is aid dependency therefore desirable or undesirable? Former President Tabai comments that the partial clo-
sure of the heavily aid-funded Te Mautari (the national "commercial" fishing company) may have been a blessing in disguise in that its workers subsequently became more committed to working for the company. What if more aid were to be withheld or rejected?

The book's comments regarding distributions of the earnings of the Revenue Equalization Reserve Fund should take account of the nature of this asset, where the country has few other "earners," as well as the nature of the I-Kiribati commitment to forgoing consumption. As the president states, "the Reserve Fund is seen as an insurance which should not be squandered. It is a sort of security which the country has built up over several years with great sacrifice" (306). The real issue then is when, and for which investments, can the fund feasibly finance a direct investment in the domestic economy? For example, while social welfare can be improved, the fund cannot provide US standards of health and education.

Policy compromises may be postponed and development myths may prevail, but it is encouraging to read the candid overviews by two of the longest-serving cabinet members, President Teannaki and Vice President Iuta. Overall the book makes a substantial contribution toward a more complete understanding of the vulnerability and strengths, trials and achievements of Kiribati politics and development.

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This book is the second in a series, edited by Rodney Cole of the Development Studies Centre at the Australian National University, of "doomsday" forewarnings about the Pacific Islands. The series is funded by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau, a government agency. With luck, many of us will still be around to see whether the forewarnings come true. The prime focus of the series, as indicated by the editorial note, "highlights the consequences of failing to recognize and plan for the effects of population growth." The target audiences are island leaders and "those in metropolitan countries responsible for the design and delivery of Overseas Development Assistance."

With the publication of this policy-related series, Australia seems poised to join Hawai‘i, including the Pacific Islands Development Program at the East-West Center, as a second major source of advice for Pacific Island leaders who may, of course (and this is sometimes not fully recognized), also defer to their own departmental advice, their own consultants, and their own regional bodies and universities. The insider-outsider research field is spiked with mines that may prevent the Australian National University