

REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI



HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to formally present to this high-level political forum Kiribati's first Voluntary National Review report (VNR), and I begin by conveying to you warm greetings from the government and the people of Kiribati on whose behalf I humbly address you – **Kam Na Bane ni Mauri.**

The video you have just seen depicting His Excellency President Taneti Maamau foreshadows most of what I will be presenting here. Therefore, I will confine my presentation to discussing briefly: (1) Kiribati's progress on its commitment to the SDGs; (2) key challenges faced in the implementation of the SDGs; and (3) the way forward.

The VNR report uses the Kiribati Development Plan (KDP) 2016-2019 as a basis for the preparation and review of Kiribati's progress on the implementation of the SDGs. The KDP 2016-19 is the government's 4 year blueprint for formulating policies and programs to advance inclusive economic development in Kiribati. The 2016-2019 targets six Key Priority Areas (KPAs) – Human Resources Development, Economic Growth & Poverty Reduction, Health, Environment, Governance and Infrastructure – which broadly cover all SDGs. It makes sense, therefore, that we frame the VNR report on the outcomes of the six priority areas of the KDP given their full alignment with the SDGs.

So, how has Kiribati been performing so far on its commitment to the SDGs? The answer to this question is provided in detail in the VNR report but let me summarise the major achievements (or lack thereof) made so far.

With respect to Human Resources Development (KPA 1), one of the major achievements made is on SDG 4: Quality Education. From 2013 to 2016, the total school enrolment rate increased by 5%. Despite this achievement, there is always a higher proportion of girls in schools than boys. The numeracy level has also improved by 93% and the literacy level by 56% from 2012 to 2015. The teacher qualification ratio has also shown an improvement for the senior secondary levels, however the teacher qualification ratio remains a concern for the primary and junior secondary schools.

With respect to Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction (KPA 2), the progress made in this sector pertain to SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 8, and SDG 10. Our real capita GDP has increased by 13% from 2011 through to 2015, however in 2016 real GDP growth declined to 1.1%, mainly due to the completion of major capital works and a decline in our fishing revenue. The Kiribati Joint Implementation Plan has been produced to increase water and food security. In the outer Islands with limited formal employment opportunities, there has been an increase in cash earning income through copra cutting, and an increased in overseas employment opportunities through the seasonal workers scheme in New Zealand and Australia and the Pacific Labour scheme to uplift youth unemployment in Kiribati. However, the increase in overseas worker schemes has not been enough to lower unemployment which remains high in Kiribati.

With respect to Health (KPA 3), health issues remain a significant threat to the lives and productivity of I-Kiribati despite free health care provided by the government. Both the communicable and non-communicable diseases remain high. The number of NCD cases has increased to 83.6% in 2015. Our Leprosy is highest at 17 cases per 10,000 population in South Tarawa compared to the outer islands. The prevalence rate of TB is estimated at 749 cases per 100,000 population in 2015. We experienced a rise in our maternal mortality rate to 179 per 100,000 live births and we also have the highest child mortality rates in the Pacific according to WHO report.

On Environment (KPA 4), I'm pleased to report that this is one area where Kiribati has made significant progress, especially relating SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities); SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production); SDG 13 (Climate Change); SDG 14 (Life below water); and SDG 15 (Life on land).

As noted by H.E the President, Kiribati's biggest challenge is addressing the impact of climate change. Unless we can find ways to address this urgently, many of the gains we might have made on the SDGs could be undone. A national Climate Change Policy has been developed to safeguard the future existence of Kiribati as a sovereign resilient nation. Other progresses in this area include the production of the government's National Fisheries Policy to support economic growth and employment opportunities through sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, and marine resources development, to protect and secure food security and sustainable livelihoods for I-Kiribati, and to build climate change resilience for fisheries and marine resources in Kiribati. The full closure of the Phoenix Islands Protected Area or PIPA from commercial fishing activities in 2015 has been found to be a very effective ocean conservation and management tool already resulting in the re-stocking of tuna and other fisheries in the Central Pacific area of the national fishery (SDG 15).

On Governance (KPA 5), we have made notable progress on SDG 5 (Gender equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong institutions). School curriculum, particularly at the primary and junior secondary level. However, there is always more to be done in this sector, especially on the elimination of gender-based violence.

Other progresses on SDG 16 include the establishment of the Public Service Integrity and Corruption Control Unit in 2017, and the adoption of the Leadership Code of Conduct Act in 2016 designed to promote a corrupt-free society.

Finally, on KPA 6 (Infrastructure), I am glad to report that significant progress has been in this area, especially in relation to SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation); SDG 7 (Clean and affordable energy); and SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure). This covers constructions of causeways, roads, airfields, sea ports, seawall defences, safe water and sanitation, renewable energy, inter-island transport systems and telecommunications. These are detailed in the VNR report.

Major Issues and Challenges

The achievements outlined in this presentation were not made without hindrances and challenges. The major challenges identified during the review include the lack of technical skills and institutional capacity constraints with respect to data collection and processing, and inadequate financing. These constraints have inhibited and will continue to inhibit our

ability to effectively implement and monitor the SDGs unless addressed as a matter of priority. It is in this context that Kiribati will continue to forge partnership with our development partners to help us shoulder this all-important responsibility.

In conclusion, let me acknowledge the contributions and support of our development partners without which this VNR report would not have been possible. I would like to thank in particular UNDP, UNESCAP, Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, and SPC for their invaluable assistance and support in the preparation of this VNR report.

On a slightly different but relevant matter, please allow me to take this opportunity to thank the many member states in the UN for their support on our request for deferment of Kiribati's graduation from the LDC status. This will enable us to further strengthen our economy with a stronger foundation before we can meaningfully move up to the next level.

Thank you for your attention.