



Agenda Item 3: Poverty Alleviation and Food Security in Kiribati

Development Partners Forum
Tarawa, 14-15 March, 2014

1. Introduction

This paper discusses Government's current strategies to respond to the issues of Poverty and Food Security in Kiribati. The paper provides more details and additional information which are described in a general way in a powerpoint presentation to be delivered during the Development Partners Forum on 14-15 March, 2014.

Accompanying this paper are two important documents (1) Consolidated Action Matrix on Poverty Alleviation and Food Security and (2) the Private Sector Development Strategy (PSDS) 2013-2015. The first document outlines what various ministries have done, are currently doing, and are planning to do in the near future in connection to poverty alleviation and food security. The PSDS on the other hand focuses on Government plans to promote and strengthen the role of the private sector, and how this strategy is going to contribute to improving the standard of living of people in the country.

It is important to note that the issues of poverty alleviation and food security are cross-sectoral, meaning that while their impact could be clearly delineated to a certain category of people or section of society, how this impact could be realized touches on the areas of responsibility of various Government ministries, including those involved in agriculture, fisheries, business, education, rural development, governance, infrastructure, and more. Coordination of these efforts is therefore critical to determine what is being done, and what the impacts are in real terms. The inter-ministry group on poverty alleviation and food security, led by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Cooperatives (MCIC) was set up at the beginning of 2013 for this purpose.

2. Background

The process of globalization have brought unprecedented changes to Kiribati, resulting in the change in lifestyle, loss of traditional knowledge and technologies, exploding population growth, rising dependency on imported foods, and much more.

Since Independence in 1979 former Governments have been aware of the problems and issues facing a fast-growing population against a backdrop of numerous natural disadvantages such

as size, isolation and fragmentation of islands and scarce natural resources. They have therefore placed emphasis on themes such as self-reliance, improved standard of living and equitable distribution of wealth. Putting these as national objectives mirrored the issues and challenges that previous administrations were trying to address.

Realizing that Poverty and Food Security are real and happening in Kiribati, the current Government has resolved to accord high priority to this issue and have assigned concerned ministries to work together to address this problem. The Ministry of Commerce Industry and Cooperatives have been tasked to coordinate the activities at the Ministry level, to consolidate activities and monitor progress of ministries on a regular basis. As reflected in the Consolidated Action Plan provided with this document, a lot of activities have been undertaken since the first half of 2013, many are ongoing, and much more remains to be done.

3. The Need and Importance of Coordination

As an issue which was previously considered relatively inapplicable in Kiribati society, poverty and food security received very little focal attention by Government. This resulted in the fragmentation of activities and lack of attention accorded to poverty and food security. A lot of projects have been implemented on both South Tarawa and the outer islands in agriculture, fisheries, health, education, water and sanitation, and a lot more. Unfortunately these were done in isolation and were hardly associated to the issues of poverty and food security.

Even up to last year there was a lack of collaboration and coordination at the ministry level, not only in relation to poverty and food security but even affecting other equally important areas like population, governance, climate change and so forth.

The situation has now changed. Government is taking a whole-of-government approach to address a wide range of issues like poverty and food security. It is now realized that coordination of activities is crucial to achieve the objectives of current and future programs with the limited financial resources and time available. As far as poverty and food security is concerned, this coordination and collaboration among ministries must be further strengthened, in order that the momentum that has been built over the past year is maintained, and the objectives of the projects, programs and activities are realized.

4. Current and Future Activities

As colleagues would note the workplan contains information on the activities, projects and programs that are being done or planned both in physical project implementation, policy development, capacity building, employment generation, and more.

The Consolidated Action Plan on Poverty and Food Security describe in some detail the work of respective ministries which has a significant bearing on reducing poverty and food

insecurity (refer to Action Plan). These have been taken from ministries' operational and/or strategic plans for the period 2013-2015.

The workplan features 2 main outcomes, which corresponds to poverty and food security respectively. These are (1) Improved access to basic needs and improved standard of living and (2) Enhanced food security. Outcome 1 is to be achieved through 2 key strategies and 14 activities, including:

- Support to the private sector through the implementation of the Private Sector Development Strategy (PSDS), development of a Foreign Investment Policy, and the promotion of Public-Private Partnership,
- A review of high port charges,
- Strengthening labour mobility through the formulation of strategic plans and review of existing policies,
- Strengthening delivery of TVET programs, and
- Expanding overseas employment in addition to RSE and SWP programs,
- Increase production of processed fish (smoked, dried, jerky) from targeted islands, and artisanal production of big-eye tuna for sale to and marketing by KFL,
- Support seaweed production on selected islands and improve its marketing,
- Support commercial production of root crops in the northern islands (Butaritari, Marakei, Abaiang and North Tarawa) for export to South Tarawa, processed food products and livestock from the central and southern islands,
- Introduce large-scale commercial production of VCO as alternative to copra,
- Improve inter-island shipping to facilitate efficient movement of goods between islands,
- Improve domestic and external marketing of local products through freight levy review and identification of clients,

Enhancing food security on the other hand involves a number of activities designed to ensure that there is sufficient food available on hand (imported or locally produced) to avoid food shortages. It is important particularly for a country like Kiribati (with limited arable land for agriculture) to have a food security plan in place to protect its population from going hungry. At this point the following activities have been identified to address this issue:

- Setting up a rice buffer scheme,
- Establishing firm arrangements with foreign shipping companies and suppliers of food products serving Kiribati,
- Explore and open new markets and shipping routes in particular for the Line islands,
- Build 2 national cargo storage facilities in Betio, and utilize existing facilities in the central and southern islands,
- Improve the Cargo Guarantee Scheme,

- Review freight rate of copra shipped from outer islands to Tarawa,
- Increase production and consumption of local foods.

The consolidated workplan, managed by a team from concerned authorities, contains one important activity on the formalization of a draft Private Sector Development Strategy. Government is of the belief that the private sector (which for the purpose of this paper, consist of the business community and the outer island communities) is and will in future play a significant role in stimulating the much needed economic growth which the country needs in order to overcome the many difficult challenges it is facing beside poverty and food insecurity.

Based on this instinct Government is now putting emphasis on the implementation of the PSDS, besides the current and future activities/plans outlined in the Workplan. As of now the PSDS is being put up to Cabinet for endorsement, with high expectations that the endorsement will be given soon. However, a draft copy of the PSDS is available for those who are interested to read it before it is approved.

5. Conclusion

There is growing appreciation that poverty and food security are real and important, and therefore must be addressed in a coordinated way. The experience in the past is that there was poor coordination among Government agencies in dealing with issues, resulting in wastage of resources and duplication of work. This is an unfortunate situation which Kiribati, with its limited financial resources, is not in a position to be in. Therefore the move to pool resources together and coordinate the relevant activities of government agencies is a positive move into the right direction.

Finally, there is evidence that the private sector has grown from strength to strength in Kiribati. It is the intention of Government to support and facilitate further growth of the private sector, by building strong partnerships particularly in the provision and implementation of appropriate services, projects and programs which were previously done by Government.

Government has confidence that, with support and encouragement, the private sector will contribute in significant ways national efforts to reduce poverty and to enhance food security.