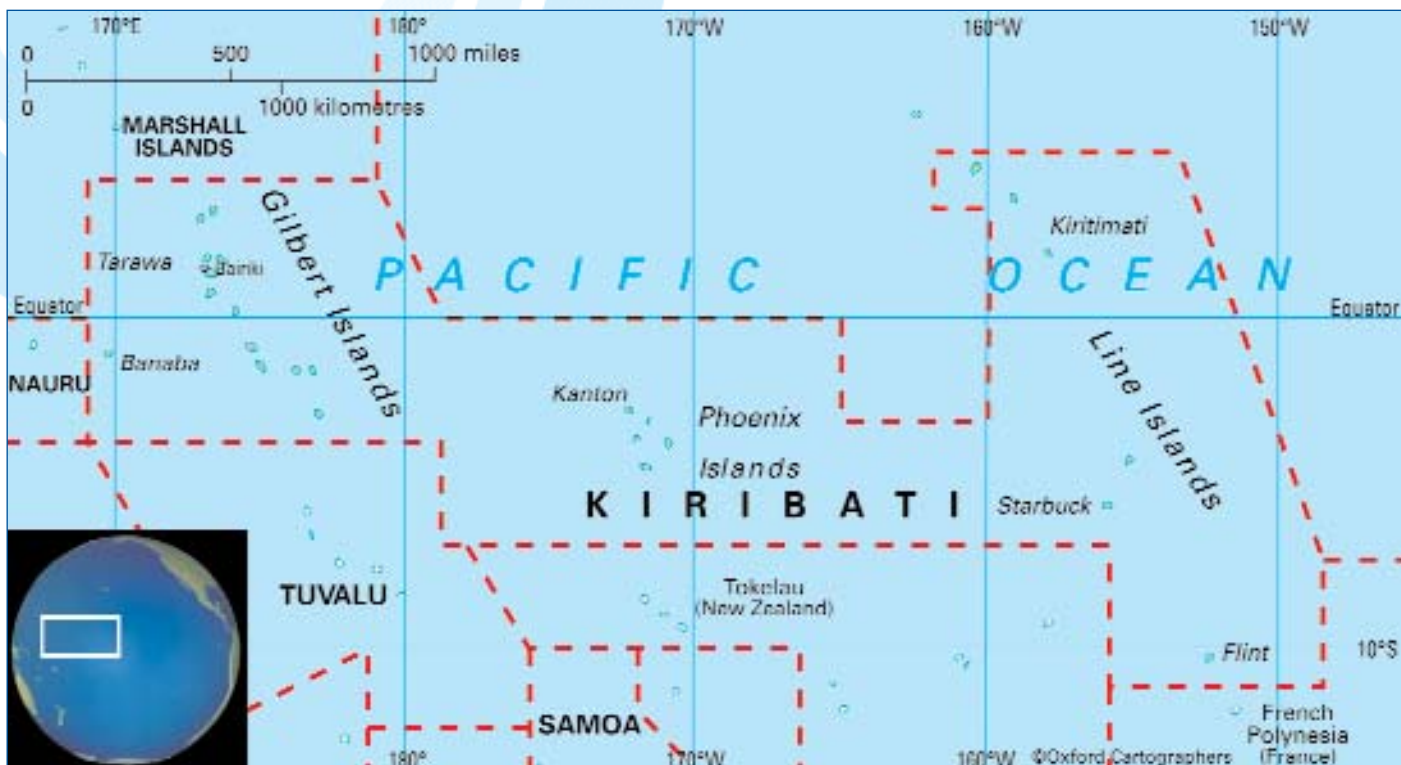


THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN

KIRIBATI



1 INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Kiribati is a unitary state situated at the equator in the Pacific Ocean, with a population of 92,000 on 30 islands covering a total land area of 811 sq km scattered over 3.5 million sq km of ocean.

The head of state is the president (beretitenti, pronounced 'belesitensi') who is also head of government. The president is elected nationally following nomination by, and from amongst, the members of the unicameral parliament. The president appoints a vice-president, an attorney general and up to 10 further ministers from parliament to make up the cabinet.

Parliament is unicameral, and is known as Maneaba ni Maungatabu. It is located in the capital, Tarawa. It comprises 40 elected members, one *ex officio* member (the attorney general) and one nominated member from the Banaban community in Rabi, Fiji Islands. Each member of parliament is elected by the first-past-the-post system to represent a single constituency.

Kiribati has five administrative districts, namely Northern, Central, South-Eastern, South-Western and the Northern Line Islands.

Local government is established on all

inhabited islands, there being one town council, two urban councils and 18 island councils. Banaba (Ocean Island) is not included in the distribution of local authorities.

The contribution of local government to GDP in 2003 was about 3.3%.

2 POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF KIRIBATI

Over the past decade there has been a gradual devolution of powers from central government to local government.

The last parliamentary elections were held on 17 October 2007. The legislative seats were shared:

- Boutokan te Koaua (BK) 27
- Maneaban te Mauri (MTM) 6

- Maurin Kiribati (MK) 6
- New party (unnamed) 5.

The incumbent president, Anote Tong, won the presidential election and was sworn in for his second term on 19 October 2007.

The minister responsible for local government oversees local government policy and provides assistance to the local councils in drafting by-laws, undertaking internal audits and compiling final accounts for the auditor general's scrutiny. The minister is empowered to do so under the Local Government Ordinance 1966 and the Local Government Act 1984 (amended 2006).

In recent years there has only been one case in which the minister intervened and

Table 1. Distribution of local authorities

Province	Number of authorities		Population	% rural
	Urban	Rural		
Northern	2	5	54,687	33
Central	Nil	5	7,117	100
Southern	Nil	7	9,426	100
Northern Line Islands	1	2	6,336	45
Totals	3	19		47

suspended a council due to corruption and abuse of office.

The five districts are responsible for the disbursement of government assistance and the coordination of aid-funded projects. They are both political and administrative in nature.

The leadership of the districts is elected through universal suffrage.

3 LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Constitutional provisions

Local government is enshrined in the constitution.

3.2 Main legislative texts

The Local Government Act 1984 was amended in the Parliamentary session of December 2006. The changes include the election of the chief councillor by all the island population, not from amongst the newly elected councillors as was the case.

The local government minister is responsible for the administration of this Act.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 Main divisions

The primary division in local government is between rural and urban councils. Both are single-tiered. The urban councils are referred to as town councils and the rural councils as island councils. Both have the same legal standing but their individual responsibilities vary according to those granted to them at the time of establishment. There are three town councils and 18 island councils.

4.2 Distribution of local governments and population

The average population of the town councils is 14,900 while that of the island councils is about 2,000.

The smallest urban council is Kiritimati (Christmas) Island Council with a population of 3,492 while the smallest rural council is Banaba Island Council with a population of 276.

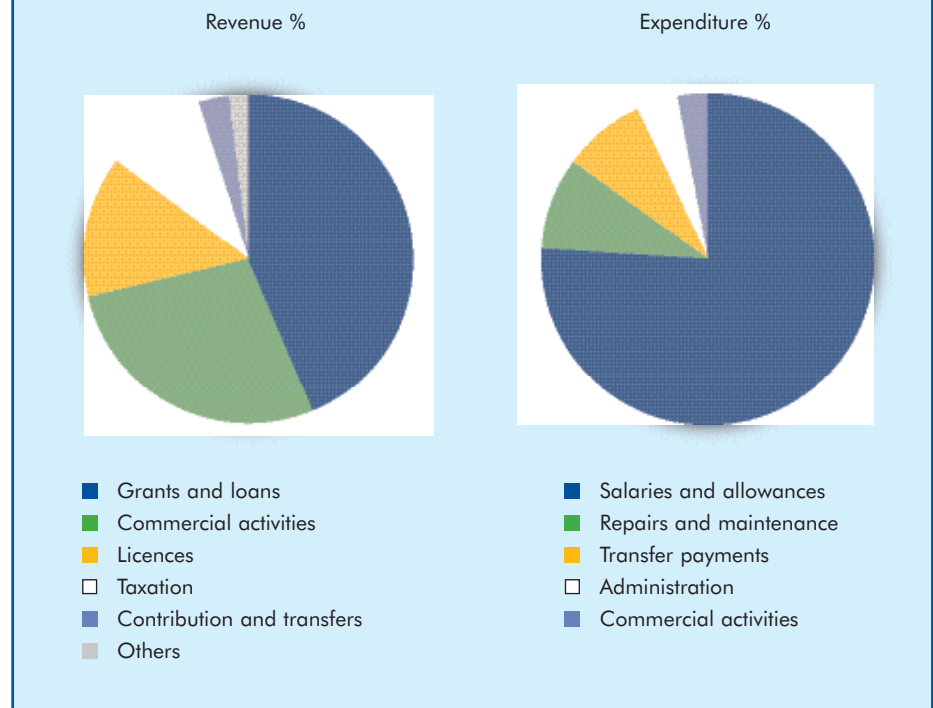
The largest urban council is Teinainano Urban Council with a population of 27,802 and the largest rural council is Abaing Island Council with a population of 5,502.

53% of the population lives in urban areas.

5 DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Councillors are elected according to who is first past the post on the basis of universal adult suffrage for a term of four years. The council also includes the members of the parliament, the Maneaba ni Maungatabu, who represent the area in *ex officio* capacity, and co-opted members. However, the number

Figure 1. The financial structure of local government in Kiribati



of *ex officio* and co-opted members may not exceed one-third of the elected members.

The leader of the council is the chief councillor and is elected indirectly from amongst the councillors. The chief councillor holds office for two to four years.

The democratic system is uniform across the country.

The decision-making process is as follows. Select committees deliberate and make recommendations to full council which takes the final decision.

Some 10% of elected councillors are women, and 13% of the nominated councillors. No woman holds the post of chief councillor.

5.1 Local councils

Each council is required by law to establish a Liquor Licensing Committee and area committees must be established in urban councils to provide planning approval. Councils have the discretion to establish other committees as necessary.

Chief councillors normally work full-time with remuneration decided by council in the form of an honourarium allowance; other councillors are only paid sitting allowance when attending meetings. The level of remuneration is determined through full council by way of a resolution and approved by the minister during budget session.

5.2 Local government staffing

Senior staff are recruited jointly by the ministry and the individual local authority. Both retain the powers to promote and discipline. Central

government deploys staff to local government.

Each council is required by law to have a senior executive officer and a council treasurer.

The head of the paid service is referred to as the town clerk in the urban authorities, and as clerk to the council in rural authorities. The staffing structure typically follows simple hierarchical lines.

Councils are permitted to jointly employ staff.

5.3 Independent scrutiny

The Auditor General is responsible for independent scrutiny of local government and is empowered by the Local Government Act 1984.

6 DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY COMPETENCE

Local government has a wide range of services to provide. These include fire protection, early years schooling, social welfare services, primary healthcare and health protection, town planning, transport and its local infrastructure, environmental and public sanitation, water supply and economic regulation (see Annex A).

7 FINANCE

7.1 Revenue

The total aggregate income for local government in 2003 was AUS\$3,647,695 (US\$2.4m).

The main sources of income were:

1. Grants and loans	44%
2. Commercial activities	28%
3. Licences	14%
4. Taxation	10%

- 5. Contribution and transfers 3%
- 6. Others 2%

Local government is empowered through the Local Government Act, the Traffic Ordinance and approved by-laws to raise head tax, land tax, road tax, airport tax and to charge licence fees for stores.

7.2 Revenue-sharing

Although there is no set policy regarding revenue-sharing between central and local government, transfer payments are made to support balanced individual authority budgets. Certain percentages are reserved for specific activities such as the maintenance of roads and causeways, offices, school buildings, hospitals and housing for government-seconded staff. Financial assistance is given towards salaries of council employees, office stationery and provision of ferries between main islands and islets that cannot be accessed by road. The minister retains the power to approve or reject local authority budgets.

Central government pays the full salary of seconded staff and contributes substantially towards the salaries and wages of council employees.

7.3 Expenditure

The total aggregate expenditure of local government for 2003 was AUS\$3,227,064 (US\$2.16m). The main items of expenditure were:

- 1. Salaries and allowances 76%
- 2. Repair and maintenance 9%
- 3. Transfer payments 8%
- 4. Administration 4%
- 5. Commercial activities 3%

Local authorities are not permitted to set deficit budgets.

8 ORGANISATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

There is no national local government association. However the two urban councils on Tarawa formed a joint association with the rural council of North Tarawa. While recognised in law, this association is voluntary. Its purpose is to further the strategic governance of the region in which each authority governs. It permits a synchronisation of policy and services. It is funded by the three councils involved.

9 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Intergovernmental relations are expressed primarily through the financial relationship between central and local government and the secondment of central government staff to local government.

Dialogue between the two spheres of government is formally conducted through the local government forum involving all chief councillors, clerks and the minister. The forum meets once a year. Also, all councils have the members of parliament representing the area they cover as *ex officio* members.

The Local Government and the Rural Planning divisions of the Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs, which is mandated with the promotion of intergovernmental relations, hold the responsibility of assisting local government authorities in achieving desired goals and pursuing revenue-generating projects that seek to be self-reliant and improve living standards.

10 E-GOVERNMENT

Although Kiribati has established a website, materials presented on it are the compositions and contributions of various government ministries, organisations and individuals. Local government has yet to consider whether e-government would be a viable undertaking at this stage as most rural councils lack basic computer skills. However, e-government is considered to be both convenient and expedient and it is likely to be given renewed consideration in the forthcoming local government review. The aim will be to devise an e-government strategy for inclusion in Kiribati's set objectives.

An estimated 2,000 people had access to the internet in 2004, representing just over 12% of the population.¹

11 ENVISAGED REFORMS

There are no substantial reforms to be implemented in the foreseeable future. There is however some attention being paid to the improvement of service delivery although work in this area remains underfunded.

12 MISCELLANEOUS

12.1 Traditional leaders

There is one *ex officio* position for traditional leaders on each council.

13 SUMMARY

There is a closely knit system of governance with members of parliament being *ex officio* members of the local councils. Kiribati local government has a wide variety of responsibilities.

References

- 1 CIA World Factbook 2007.

Service	Delivering authority		Remarks
	Central	Local government	
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION			
Police	●		
Fire protection	●		
Civil protection	●	●	●
Criminal justice	●		
Civil justice	●		
Civil status register	●	●	
Statistical office	●		
Electoral register		●	
EDUCATION			
Pre-school		●	
Primary	●	●	
Secondary	●	●	
Vocational and technical	●		
Higher education	●		
Adult education	●		
SOCIAL WELFARE			
Kindergarten and nursery		●	
Family welfare services	●	●	
Welfare homes	n/a	n/a	
Social security	n/a	n/a	
PUBLIC HEALTH			
Primary care	●	●	
Hospitals	●		
Health protection	●		
HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING			
Housing	●	●	
Town planning	●	●	
Regional planning	●		
TRANSPORT			
Roads	●	●	
Transport		●	
Urban roads	●		
Urban rail	n/a	n/a	
Ports	●		
Airports	●	●	
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION			
Water and sanitation	●	●	
Refuse collection and disposal		●	
Cemeteries and crematoria		●	
Slaughterhouses		●	
Environmental protection	●	●	
Consumer protection	●	●	
CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS			
Theatre and concerts		●	
Museums and libraries	●	●	
Parks and open spaces	●	●	
Sports and leisure	●	●	
Religious facilities			
UTILITIES			
Gas services	●	●	
District heating	n/a	n/a	
Water supply	●	●	
ECONOMIC			
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	●	●	
Electricity	●	●	
Trade and industry	●	●	
Tourism	●	●	

● = discretionary service by the local authority