



KIRIBATI COUNTRY REPORT

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Disaster Management and Communications in Kiribati

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Introduction

Kiribati is an island nation located in the central tropical Pacific Ocean. The country's 33 atolls are scattered over 1,351 square miles (3,500 km²) near the equator. Each island is located separately and the population of the country is about more than 90,000.

There has been a major change and development in Kiribati in relation to information and communication technologies. Despite this development, the current legal framework existing in Kiribati remains the same as there is no existing national policy or any specific provisions in the disaster and telecommunication laws dealing with disaster communication. It is therefore very essential that Kiribati participates in this workshop in order to gain better knowledge and understanding of disaster communication issues.

Disaster Threats in Kiribati

Due to its geographic location, Kiribati rarely experiences fast onset natural disasters such as cyclones and earthquakes that affect other Pacific nations. However, Kiribati face numerous slow onset disasters such as drought, effects of climate change, sea-level rise as well as other disasters caused by human behaviour such disease outbreak like HIV/AIDS and road accidents.

Disaster Management

The *National Disaster Act 1993* provides for the organization and management which is necessary to ensure mitigation of, preparedness for, response to and recovery from disasters in the country. However, this Act has not been implemented.

National Authorities involved in disaster management

Since Kiribati is now beginning to experience the dreadful impacts of climate change, this has become a priority concern of the Government and therefore leads to the formulation of a national policy on adaptation to climate change. This national policy is implemented by the Kiribati Adaptation Project (KAP).

Central oversight and coordination for disaster management is provided by the Office of Te Beretitenti (OB) through the recently established division of National Strategic Risk Management (NSRM).

A technical working group designated as the Climate Change Study Team (CCST) is currently based in Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development (MELAD) and chaired by a senior MELAD official. This group is made up of national climate change specialists and officials from the most concerned ministries. CCST monitors climate change nationally and globally, and assesses the vulnerability of islands and investments or activities to climate-related risks. CCST reports to the National Adaptation Steering Committee (NASC) currently based in Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MFED).

NASC is chaired by the Secretary to OB and includes senior officials from concerned ministries and representatives of churches, the private sector and non-government organisations. It is serviced by the Kiribati Adaptation Project secretariat. NASC has been concerned with inter-Ministry co-ordination and the inclusion in Ministerial Operational Plans of CCA-related activities. NASC reports to and advises OB, and through OB in collaboration with relevant ministries, it advises the Cabinet on CCA matters. Cabinet decisions are advised to NASC and implemented by responsible ministries.

There are also non-governmental agencies such as the Kiribati Red Cross Society that has its own disaster management scheme.

Communication in Kiribati

The *Telecommunication Act 2004* is an act to provide for and regulate telecommunications systems and services and related matters. One of the main objectives of the Act is to promote development of telecommunication systems and services in accordance with international standards, practices and public demand.

Fixed line telephones and radio telephones are the two most common means of communication available in the country. Mobile phones and internet are available only in the capital (South Tarawa). There are 2 radio broadcast stations and 1 television broadcast station. Telecom Services Kiribati Ltd and the Kiribati Red Cross Society have emergency satellite phones which are kept for emergency purposes.

It is interesting to note that section 72 of the *Act* provides for Government's power to waive the current existing regulatory barriers which may impede the use of any telecommunication equipment or resources.

Conclusion

The current status of telecommunication system in Kiribati assists in determining the country's ability to respond to disaster communication issues. It is our view that in terms of its resources and facilities, Kiribati needs extensive financial and technical assistance to enhance its communications capabilities in order to reduce loss of life, damage to property and livelihoods, and damage to the environment caused by disasters.

Moreover, the formulation of a national regulatory framework dealing with disaster communication and the integration of emergency telecommunication action plan into such regulatory framework is necessary to enable Kiribati to provide prompt telecommunication assistance during disaster periods.