



The Partnership Effect: Sharing the impact of Australia and Pacific partnerships

Locally-led leadership: Strengthening public financial management systems, governance and skills for Kiribati's future

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Photo: Teu Teulilo (second from left) and team.

Kiribati's Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MFED) plays an important role in managing the country's public resources and driving long-term development. The Ministry is focused on strong public financial management (PFM), economic and sustainable development, climate finance resilience and equity for all i-Kiribati.

Since 2023, MFED has sought Australia's support to strengthen its internal processes, PFM systems and capabilities. Through the Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform (the Partnerships Platform), personnel have been embedded within MFED to work side-by-side with their teams in 3 critical areas: economic and financial planning, information and communication technology (ICT), and climate finance.

As this work progressed, a Ministry-wide story of stronger PFM systems, governance and skills began to emerge.



Systems strengthening

Systems strengthening through the Partnerships Platform was both tactical and systemic, with improved operations, resourcing and mentoring reinforcing the core ministry functions responsible for governance and delivery. Although Partnerships Platform personnel worked in different departments, together they helped create a more accountable and coordinated institution.

Financial Management Information System (FMIS)

FMIS Specialist, Teu Teulilo was embedded within the MFED's National Economic Planning Office (NEPO) for 20 months from October 2023 to assisting with FMIS implementation. His focus included budget planning and the development of budget and project management modules.

Teu and the NEPO team successfully rolled out a suite of FMIS modules accompanied by targeted training. This led to improvements in fiscal transparency, budget control, reporting timeliness and overall efficiency. As a result, MFED and other ministries can now access real-time information, reducing reliance on manual processes. For instance, the Ministry now can transfer funds between one part of a budget to another with automated controls to ensure spending aligns with the national budget and legal framework.

Furthermore, budget execution is now visible for line ministries, with systematic and more efficient processes. A standardised budget submission template allows ministries to submit directly through the FMIS, streamlining budget approval processes.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Network Specialist, Siumafua Moala, worked within MFED's ICT

Unit from February 2024 to June 2025. The ICT team had been tasked with upgrading MFED's network to improve network security and stability and to prepare for connection to the pending national submarine cable and data centre. This was a big task. With Siumafua's support, the upgrade progressed, and the team gained confidence in using the resources available to them. Siumafua's work improved network stability and reliability with fewer network outages.

Additionally, the introduction of secure firewalls between departments improved security and protected data. The upgraded network can now handle higher traffic and maintain a more stable connection to the FMIS and others.

Working alongside Siumafua taught me practical skills in network upgrades and collaboration. We now have a stronger, more reliable system that we understand and can manage ourselves. ICT teams from other ministries have even approached us to learn from our experience.

Toatu Kietau
Assistant IT Specialist, MFED ICT

Climate Finance Division

Ruth Phillips-Itty has been serving as Director for Climate Finance within MFED's Climate Finance Division (CFD) since June 2023. Ruth has supported the Ministry to assemble the CFD team, deliver and report on climate projects, and improve access to international climate finance.

A key outcome was the award of almost USD 1 million Green Climate Fund Readiness 2 funding, which enabled the team to expand staff and activities. The CFD now represents Kiribati internationally and regionally on climate issues, including at the annual UN Conference of the Parties (CoP). An Adaptation Fund accreditation process is now underway, with Ruth having led engagements on various accreditation issues. Ruth's efforts resulted in the establishment of a dedicated Kiribati Accreditation Panel which held its first meeting in April 2025 to review a gap assessment report. This important step will enable Kiribati to deliberate on potential entities suitable for accreditation and advance its goal of securing direct access to climate finance. Once accredited, the country will be able to access further climate finance to address its most urgent adaptation needs.

While each system strengthened through Partnerships Platform support stands alone in terms of function and purpose, the effects are felt Ministry-wide - enhancing financial management, economic and sustainable development, climate resilience and equity for all i-Kiribati.



Photo: Siumafua Moala (second from left) and team.

Ministry ownership and leadership

A defining feature of the collaboration between MFED and the Partnerships Platform was the focus on building local leadership within the Ministry.



NEPO staff now lead FMIS training in i-Kiribati and actively contribute to system enhancements, shifting the system from being vendor-driven to locally owned.



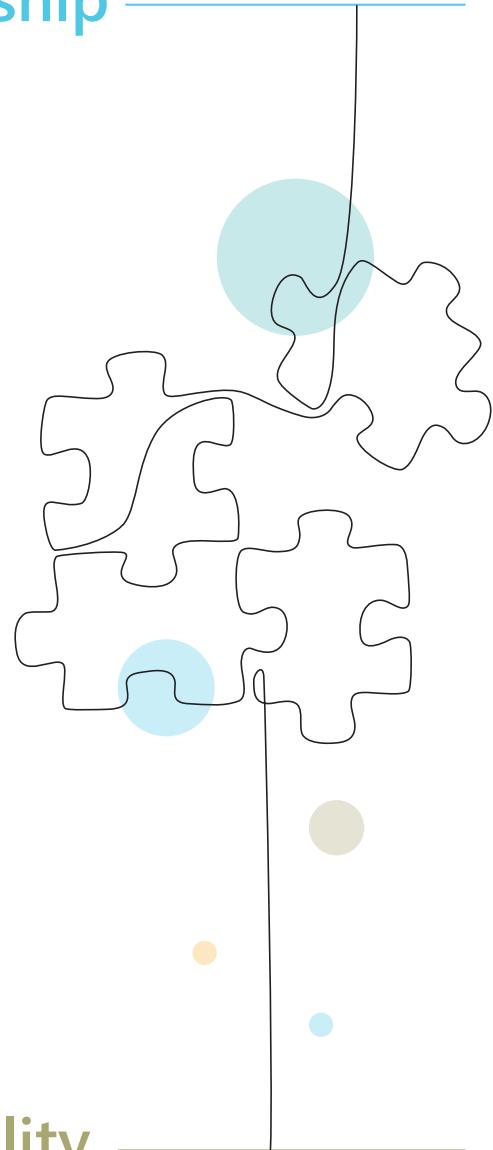
The ICT team was trained to manage and troubleshoot the upgraded network, building confidence and capability to sustain improvements over the long term.



The CFD grew from one to 6 staff, with a pathway toward full local leadership by 2027.

Since working with Teu, I'm much more confident using the FMIS and can advise line ministries effectively. I now train others in I-Kiribati, and ministries are asking for more guidance and training manuals following the sessions. Workflows are streamlined, decision making has improved, and transactions are far more transparent than before. Having someone locally, flexible and responsive, has made all the difference.

Micah Birita
Economist, NEPO, MFED



Working to context and capability

Teu, Siumafua and Ruth all upheld the Partnerships Platform's strengths-based approach to capacity development and cross-cultural collaboration. Each was embedded within

their respective departments, not to direct workflows or set objectives, but to support them. They were flexible, responsive and focused on mentoring and providing professional

development opportunities for their MFED colleagues. Their work was grounded in the Ministry's organisational context, building on existing systems, rather than introducing new ones.



The FMIS Specialist adapted his role when government priorities shifted, accelerating budget reforms to align with the new administration's 100-day agenda. By positioning staff to lead on trainings, and ensure quality assurance, their skills and confidence grew and are more likely to be able to continue the process.



The Network Specialist deliberately used components familiar to staff and were available in Kiribati, ensuring the ICT system was built on what existed and could be maintained locally. Training and troubleshooting were led by ICT staff themselves, strengthening ownership and capability.



The Director for Climate Finance supported the growth of the CFD and secured Kiribati's second Green Climate Fund Readiness project, while preparing the Division for eventual full local leadership.

These approaches helped embed change within MFED's own systems and staff, leaving behind stronger institutions rather than temporary fixes.

Stronger systems, skills and governance

The reforms across FMIS, ICT and climate finance are collectively strengthening MFED's systems, capability and governance.

Together, they build credibility and transparency, enabling the Ministry to deliver services and engage more effectively with donors and international partners.



The FMIS reforms, initially supported by the Asian Development Bank and now locally embedded, have established transparent and accountable financial management. This reassures partners and strengthens Kiribati's credibility in managing public resources.



The ICT network creates a secure, stable backbone for government operations, preparing MFED for future opportunities such as connection to the submarine cable and national data centre.



The CFD now has the structures and skills to coordinate climate finance, increasing donor confidence and positioning Kiribati for direct access to global funds.

By investing in these core systems, MFED is building resilience against both external shocks and internal vulnerabilities, ensuring it can deliver on national priorities while engaging with partners on equal footing.



Photo: Ruth Phillips-Itty (second from left) and team.

Conclusion

→ Support across FMIS, ICT and climate finance has strengthened different areas of MFED but together tell a bigger story: a Ministry transitioning from fragmentation to stronger systems, ownership, and enhanced credibility. Ultimately, these reforms are shaping a more cohesive and resilient institution.

→ Systems now provide a stable foundation. Staff have embraced leadership roles, growing in confidence and skills. Partnerships Platform personnel worked collaboratively, responsive to the Ministry's context and priorities. Strengthened governance has empowered MFED to deliver services more accountably and engage donors and international partners with greater transparency and assurance.

→ **This is the Partnership Effect in Kiribati:** change that is embedded in national systems, led by local people, and resilient enough to serve the country well into the future.



The Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform supports Australia and partner Pacific countries as they continue working together to build a stable, prosperous and secure region. The Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform provides Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and the Cook Islands with a suite of flexible, fit-for-purpose services that support development investments in governance, stability and resilience. The Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform is supported by the Australian Government and managed by DT Global.