



2004/ED/EFA/MRT/PI/43

Background paper prepared for the
Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003/4
Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality

Junior sencondary schools in Kiribati

Ueantabo Neemia Mackenzie
2003

This paper was commissioned by the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* as background information to assist in drafting the 2003/4 report. It has not been edited by the team. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* or to UNESCO. The papers can be cited with the following reference: "Paper commissioned for the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4, The Leap to Equality*". For further information, please contact efareport@unesco.org

Junior Secondary Schools in Kiribati

1. Introduction

In 1998 the first four of the country's twenty-one Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) opened their doors for the first time. Thus, began the commitment made by the Government of President Teburoro Tito when it came into power in October 1994 to provide free and universal access to basic education in Kiribati. In the context of Kiribati, basic education includes Primary School class one to six and Junior Secondary Schools Forms one to three; or the age groups 6 to 11 and 12 to 14 years. (*Ministry of Education, Training and Technology 2003 p.9*). By the end of 2002, the twenty-one Junior Secondary Schools were operational in all inhabited islands of Kiribati, including three in South Tarawa where percent of the population reside. A total of 5299 students enrolled in Junior Secondary Schools in 2002.

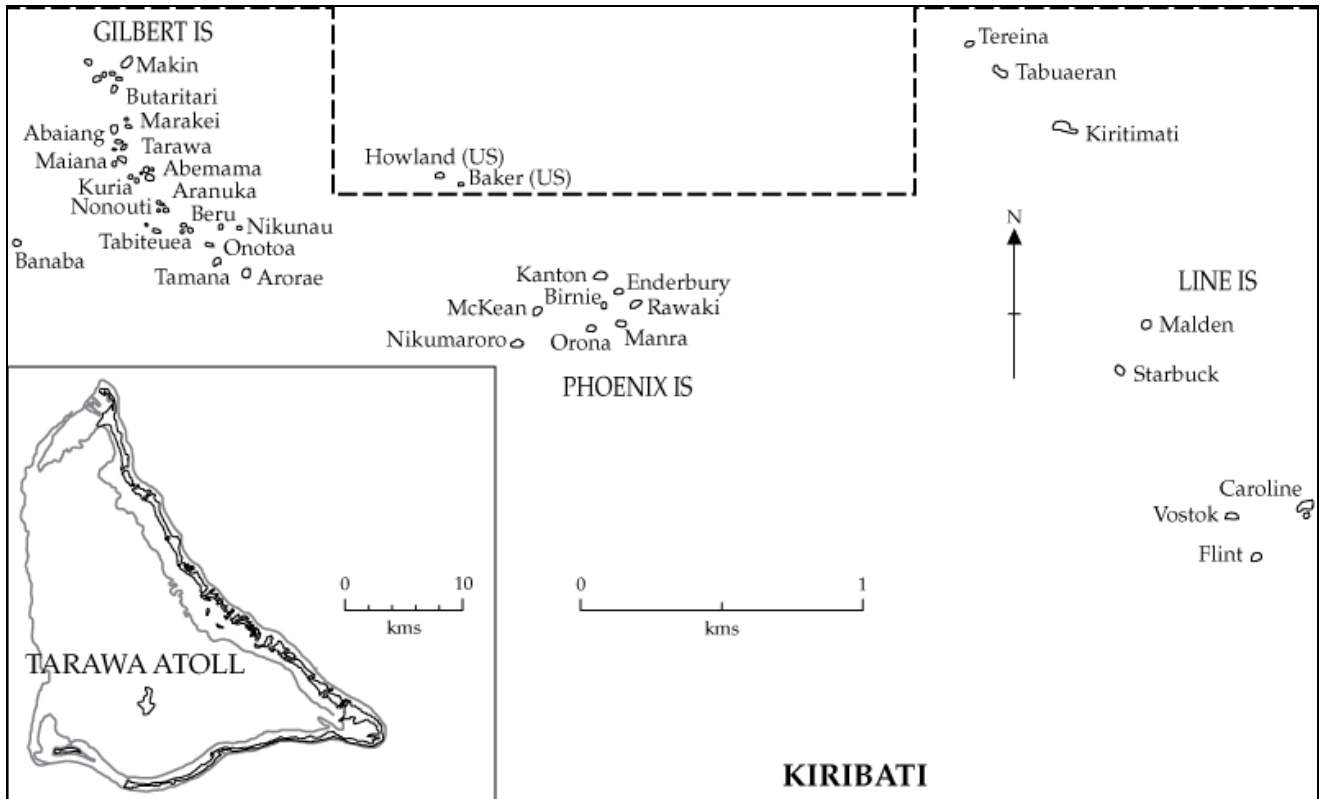
This short paper outlines the development of this important initiative, which extended universal and free access to the top end of basic education, to ages 12 to 14 years. It also looks at the strategies that have and will be employed in achieving the national education policy of providing universal and free access to basic education through Junior Secondary Schools, and discusses the longer term implications of this policy for a number of areas including educational (including teachers and their professional development and national education standards) and finance.

2. Background

The Republic of Kiribati comprises of 33 low-lying islands grouped into three main island groups (the Gilberts, the Line and Phoenix Groups) and scattered over an area of 3.5 million square kilometers in the Central Pacific. Of this total area, only 811 square kilometers is land. Only 20 of the islands have permanent populations; they are: the 16 islands of the Gilberts Group, Banaba and Kiritimati (Christmas Island), Teraina (Washington) and Fanning (Tabuaeran) in the Line Group. The rest of the 13 islands are uninhabited, except for Kanton (Canton) and Orona in the Phoenix Group, which have small transient populations supported by Government.

The population of Kiribati was 96,335 in 2002. The population has a very youthful structure with 40.2 percent in the age group 0-14 years.

According to the Ministry of Education, Training and Technology's *Annual Statistical Report for 2002*, there are 30,482 pupils/students, or 31 percent of the total population, undertaking studies at different levels. Forty eight percent (or 14,823) of the total number of students are in Primary schools, 13 percent (or 3888) in Pre-schools, 10 percent (5035) in combined Junior and Senior Secondary Schools, 17 percent (5299) in Junior Secondary Schools, and 5 percent (1447) at tertiary training institutions.



Source: Islands Business International. <http://www.pacificislands.cc>

3. The Road to Universal and Free Basic Education : Policies and Strategies.

Up until 1965 there was no attempt to integrate and coordinate primary schools in the then Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (of which the Gilbert Islands, now Kiribati, was a major part), and different providers, the Government and the Christian churches pursued education policies pertaining to their schools independently of each other. The first comprehensive Education policy for the colony was prepared in 1965, and subsequently was amended and adopted by the House of Representatives in 1970. The main objective of the policy was “to provide a nine-year primary education for all children which would prepare them to participate in social and economic development of the colony and, at the same time, provide a sound educational base for those selected for secondary education.” (Talu 1993 p.239). Following the adoption of the policy, mission-run village and island schools consolidated into larger schools, and the Government was providing grants-in-aid which covered the costs of teachers’ salaries, school supplies and capital costs for permanent material buildings. (*ibid.*)

In 1977 the colonial Government, as part of its preparation for independence, assumed control of all primary schools except six that chose to remain outside the system and were registered as private schools. (*ibid.*) Schools fees were abolished in all outer island schools in the same year, and in 1980, the first Government of the newly-independent Republic of Kiribati, in pursuing the objective of universal access to basic education, implemented a new education policy, which saw the introduction of free and compulsory primary education for Classes 1 to 7, or ages 6 to 12 years.

The Government of President Teburoro Tito, an educator by profession, who came into power in 1994 extended free education from primary schools to the first three years of secondary education. Thus, making access to basic education in the country completely free. Junior Secondary Schools provided the main mechanism through which free education in the top end of basic education was implemented. (*See 4 for the details of the 1995 Education Policy which set up Junior Secondary Schools*)

The Government of President Tito was so committed to establishing Junior Secondary Schools during its first term in office (1994 to 1998) that it rejected the recommendations of a World Bank report, which recommended that Junior Secondary Schools be trialed in a few selected islands before it was fully implemented, and decided to go ahead with the establishment of the schools starting with four islands, one each from the four administrative districts – Northern, Central, Southern and Line and Phoenix (Linnix) Districts.¹

With the beginning of the 1998 school year as the target date for the opening of the first four schools, a series of preparation began in earnest. The Curriculum Development R Centre of the Ministry of Education, Training and Technology in 1996 began preparing curricula for the schools in the subject areas of English, Mathematics, Home Economics, Industrial Arts, Music, Accounting Studies, Science, Social Science and Kiribati Studies.

The training of teachers also began in 1996 when a two-year Certificate in Junior Secondary Teaching was introduced at the Kiribati Teachers College. An intake of twenty trainee teachers was admitted into the programme. The trainees were required to major in two teaching subjects, with the following combinations of teaching subjects recommended: English, Arts, Maths/Science, Accounting/Physical Education, Home Economics/Kiribati Studies, and Industrial Arts/Kiribati Studies. As at the end of 2002, there were 122 teachers who have joined the teaching profession after the two-year JSS teaching certificate programme. Forty nine teachers are expected to graduate at the end of 2002 and 2003.

The construction of classrooms and provision of facilities for Junior Secondary Schools began in 1997 when the Government of Kiribati allocated \$187,000 for the construction and renovation of specialized classrooms. Thus began the JSS Construction programme, which was funded from local funds, and extended from 1997 to 2002. At the end of 2002, the Kiribati Government had spent \$5.17 million of its own funds in establishing Junior Secondary Schools.² Seven (3 in Tarawa and 4 in the outer islands) of the twenty-one Junior Secondary schools were built with the assistance of the Government of Australia, which provided a grant of \$15 million to meet construction and other associated costs.

By the beginning of 1998, the first four Junior Secondary Schools in the islands of Makin, Nonouti, Onotoa and Kiritimati (Christmas Islands) were ready to open their

¹ M. Baraniko, (former Director of Economic Planning, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning), personal communication, 27 April 2003.

² Actual expenditure 1997 to 2002. From Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning records.

doors. Staffed by the first graduates of the 2-year JSS Teaching Certificate and Grade One teachers redeployed from the primary schools, the four new JSS began teaching at the start the 1998 school year. Eight more schools in the islands of North Tarawa, Tabiteuea North, Tabiteuea South, Abemama, Butaritari, Abaiang, Aranuka and Tamana opened in 1999. Junior Secondary Schools in the rest of the eleven inhabited islands, including the capital, South Tarawa, were opened between 2000 and 2001.

4. The Junior Secondary Schools and Universal Access to Basic Education

The Education policy which brought Junior Secondary Schools into existence was formulated in 1995. Its main objective was to provide universal and free access to basic education in Kiribati, by extending free education to the first three years of secondary education. In brief the main features of the Policy were:

- the provision of Junior Secondary Schools in all the 20 inhabited islands of Kiribati;
- the phasing out of the Common Entrance Examination to Secondary schools, and automatic entry into Form One in the Junior Secondary Schools;
- the incorporation of the last year of primary education (classes 7) with the first three years of secondary education within the newly established junior secondary schools;
- at the end of Form 3 Junior Secondary School students would sit Kiribati Junior Certificate Examination for places in Form 4 in the Senior Secondary Schools.

The establishment of Junior Secondary Schools contributed to improving universal access to basic education in a number of ways: Firstly, it provided for automatic access to secondary education, when the annual Common Entrance examination to secondary schools, a barrier which screened and selected students, was abolished and students proceeded automatically from Class 6 to Form 1 in Junior Secondary Schools. Instead of the 40 or less percent of students from Class 6 getting places in secondary schools as the result of their performance in the Common Entrance, everyone from Class 6 who requires a place in Form 1 now gets one. Thus, with the establishment of Junior Secondary Schools the number of students accessing secondary education has increased markedly. This vast improvement of access to the first three years of secondary education and top end of basic education in Kiribati can be demonstrated by the use of one of UNESCO's Educational For All (EFA) indices, Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), an indicator which expresses total enrolment in Junior Secondary Schools of the official JSS age group (i.e 12 to 14 years) as a percentage of the corresponding population age group. According to the Kiribati Ministry of Education, Training and Technology's Annual Statistical Report for 2002, of the total population of 6408 in the official JSS age group of 12 to 14 years, 5598 or 87 percent were enrolled in Junior Secondary Schools. (*METT 2003 p.28*). On the basis of gender, the net enrolment ratio for males and females in 2002 were 43 and 44 percent respectively. (*ibid.*)

With JSS on each inhabited islands, most students did not have to leave home to attend school in another island as was the case before. Secondary education is now available right on their door step.

School fees, for most parents, especially those in rural areas and outer islands, was a major hurdle in their attempt to provide secondary education for their children. With limited opportunities for earning cash in most outer islands, especially with the current low price for copra, the main cash crop in the islands, most parents have been struggling with schools fees. The introduction of free education in the first three years of secondary through JSS removed such major hurdle, and makes secondary education readily available.

In 2000, and as part of its effort to ensure the full success of its policy of free education in Forms One to Three, Government began to persuade Churches, whose schools were still, by and large, a combination of junior and senior secondary school, to close their Forms One to Three and focus their effort on senior secondary education. In 2002, a cash grant of \$90,000 was provided to church school to help them with the development of their senior secondary schools. The grant provided an incentive for a speedy closure of the junior forms and a concentration of effort by Church schools on senior secondary education. In 2002, only 4 of the 13 church schools continue to retain their junior forms, for reasons including denominational considerations and, as would be discussed more fully in Part 5, perception of poor standard of JSS.

5. Some Implications of the New Policy

a. Kiribati Culture and the Universalisation of Educational Access Imperative

Before focusing on the longer terms implications of the policy of providing for universal and free access to basic education through the creation of Junior Secondary Schools in each inhabited island of Kiribati, it is worth looking at how the ideal of universalisation of access to education fits in with the Kiribati culture.

The creation of Junior Secondary Schools in Kiribati in 1998 represented the latest development in the Government of Kiribati's continuing commitment to the objective of providing universal access to basic education in the country. It is important to recognize the possibility that the universalisation of educational access as a national objective was more than an expression of the Kiribati Government's commitment to some International convention on education (e.g UNESCO's Education for All); it was, very importantly, a felt need of the people profoundly influenced by the ideal of *te kaboraoi* (literally, to make equal), a core cultural value in the predominantly egalitarian Kiribati society.

This core cultural value not only prompted the consistent pursuit of the objective of universal access to basic education, but was also a key factor in the failure of educational policies perceived to widen the gaps between pupils. The latter effect of *te kaboraoi* cultural precept was demonstrated in the failure of the Community High Schools in the mid-1970s. The Community High Schools were established by the colonial Government

to provide places for pupils who could not get places in the five secondary schools (one Government-owned and the rest owned by different Christian denominations) which existed in the country at the time. In a common entrance examination sat by all Class 6 in any one year only 40 percent found places in the following year in the country's 5 secondary schools.³ With heavy emphasis on vocational training, the new initiative failed to meet the expectations parents had of education for their children. Most parents in the outer islands quickly realized that community high schools destined their children to be content with the narrow confines of their peripheral outer island world, or at best, to be 'blue collar' workers in urban areas, while the few who got places in secondary schools pursued higher educational goals and eventually well-paid jobs.

As a core cultural value of the I-Kiribati, *te kaboraoi* must be seen to be an influential factor in the justification of a wide range of policies. There is a very strong possibility that this cultural precept lurked behind Government's commitment to, and the urgency to which it accorded, the implementation of JSS as a vehicle for the provision of universal access to basic education.

b. Financial Implications

The Annual Review and Update of the Medium Term Strategy in 1998 pointed out that the Education sector's share of the recurrent budget "averaged 18 percent in the period 1985-90, and moved up to 19 percent in the period 1991-97. The sector accounted for 23 percent in the 1998 recurrent budget, and this is due mainly to the introduction of the Junior Secondary Schools programme." (*Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning 1998 pp.33-34*). The Review also cited an analysis by the World Bank on the financing requirements of the JSS programme, which indicates that once the programme is fully operational the impact on recurrent costs will be manageable at \$0.25 million per annum. (*ibid. p.34*).

c. Educational Implications

The longer term educational implications of the introduction of JSS as a vehicle for the provision of universal access to basic education can be examined in a number of areas, but two key ones which stand out at this stage in the development of the programme are the professional development/training of the teachers, and issue of quality and standard.

c.i Staff Development

Starting with staff development, it is very clear from the number of individuals spoken to in the preparation of this paper that the training of teachers in 1996 and in years immediately following that was, to say the least, rushed. Staff of the Kiribati Teachers College, who provided the training, have admitted this and are already planning for an upgrade course for most of the graduates of the two-year JSS Teaching Certificate programme, especially those who graduated in the first three years of the programme. Since 1999, the JSS teaching had changed from a two-year to a three-year programme.

³ Calculated from 1994 figures. Ministry of Education, Training and Technology, Education Statistical Digest 1994, Tarawa.

With this change, it was hoped that teachers would have in-depth training in their subjects of specialization.

A number of JSS teachers are developing themselves professionally by investing in courses offered by the local centre of the University of the South Pacific. For its part, the Kiribati Centre of the University of the South Pacific is targeting a cohort of JSS teachers already doing courses for special attention with regards to the fast-tracking of their diploma or degree programmes. Specifically the Kiribati Centre plans to put this cohort of teachers through a programme of courses, most of them will be delivered face-to-face by lecturers from the main campus in Suva, Fiji.

From talking to a number of the JSS teachers, it is clear that one of the needs in the area of professional development is for training in Educational administration, in order to meet the need of the Principals of JSS, many of whom have no training in administration. Most were deployed from positions of responsibility in Primary, while some are new to administrative responsibilities having no prior experience with leadership. Most would benefit from short-term courses in administration.

c.ii Quality/Standard of JSS education

An issue of concern by most people – parents, politicians, other educators, independent observers – is that of the quality and standard of JSS education. There seems to be two inter-related issues/factors here, which relate to the teachers and the condition of facilities at JSS. All have a strong bearing on the quality and standard of education.

Before addressing each factor, it is worth noting that rather low quality/standard of JSS education is more than perception. Rather it is gauged from the experience of those who have had to deal with the outputs of JSS. In other words, the teachers in senior secondary schools who, since 2001, have been teaching students who continued to Form 4 from JSS. Almost all of the teachers interviewed commented on the fact that most JSS students struggled with Form 4 work in almost all subjects. One school reported that they are giving their Form 5 students two years (they go into Upper Form 5 in their second year in Form 5) to prepare for their first external examination after the national Kiribati Junior Certificate, the Pacific Secondary School Certificate. The PSSC is normally sat at the end of Form 5.

A close look at the teachers at the JSS will show that 62 percent (or 176) are graduates of the two-year programme, which has been described as a somewhat ‘rushed’ programme, and whose outputs have been identified as requiring upgrading. Apart from qualification, a substantial percentage (37 percent) of the teachers are relatively inexperienced with a maximum of 3 years of teaching experience under their belts. With these figures it is not unreasonable to assume that both qualification and teaching experience have implications for the quality of the teaching and the standard of education that the students are getting.

In addition to the teachers, there is also the issue of facilities, which again have implications for the quality of education at JSS. A look at the result of the survey of

facilities in 2002 shows, for example, in the area of classrooms, while most classrooms are categorized as ‘good’ and ‘satisfactory’, a number of them are of ‘unknown’ and ‘poor’ conditions. In the area of Science, while most schools (71 percent) have laboratories, not all of them are equipped with such important requirement for science teaching as electricity, piped water and gas. It is interesting to note that 90 percent of the JSS laboratories are not complying with National Infrastructure Standards for JSS. (*METT op.cit. 148*).

Like the qualifications and experience of teachers, the conditions of the facilities have important implications for standards and quality of education at JSS.

6. Conclusion

The initial implementation of JSS the main consideration seemed to have been quantity (i.e getting the number of schools to open within a particular time-frame) over quality. Now that the issue of quantity has been achieved, the focus should now be on improvement and assurance of quality in the area of the professional development of teachers and the condition of facilities. Improvement in these two important areas would produce quality students with sound footing for the demands of secondary education.

There is a perception in some quarters that JSS, would in the long-term drag the standard of education, especially at secondary school to low levels and it would take sometime for system to climb out that hole. If nothing is done to assure quality of the teachers and the facilities, such negative perception might become a reality in future.

Bibliography

Ministry of Education, Training and Technology, (2003), Annual Statistical Report – 2002, Tarawa: Statistical Unit, METT

Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, (1998), Annual Review and Update of the Medium Term Strategy 1998, Tarawa: National Planning Office, MFEP.

Talu, A, (1994) “Towards Quality in Education” In Van Trease (ed.) Atoll Politics: The Republic of Kiribati, Christchurch: MBCPS, University of Canterbury.