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“Innovative Strategies for Resource Mobilization”

Paper presented by Makurita Baaro
Background

I would like to preface my remarks by thanking the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in particular the Division for Public Administration and Development Management and UNDP Suva, in partnership with the Pacific Islands Development Programme for convening this very insightful and key Forum on the Exchange and Transfer of Innovations for Transparent Governance and State Capacity. I also wish to thank our gracious host, the Government of Fiji for providing the venue for this Forum and for all the arrangements for the meeting.

2. As background to this presentation, I wish to highlight one single development that has perhaps been the most instrumental in the development of transparent Governance in Kiribati in recent times.

3. In July 2003, a new Government came in Kiribati on the platform of transparent and accountable governance of “Te Eti ao Te Riai.” At the very next sitting of Parliament in November 2003, one of the first legislation to be introduced or to be repealed by the Government was the Beretitenti Immunity from Civil Proceedings Act. This represented a most instrumental development in Kiribati which highlighted the importance of and focused public debate on transparency and accountability by Leaders to the public they serve.

A “Leadership Code”

4. In introducing the Bill to Parliament, Government highlighted the need for Government and for leaders in general to be answerable to the public they serve and that no-one but no-one is above the law. The need to introduce legislation to bind leaders to this ethos was flagged and that this could take the form of a Leadership Code similar to that introduced in some other countries around the region.

5. There was however recognition that passing legislation was not going to address any problems overnight as apparent in these other countries already with leadership codes– there was an important need to first discuss this issue widely with all stakeholders, the community, non-governmental organizations, faith based organizations, women’s groups, youth groups, the private sector and members of Parliament, before a Draft Bill is submitted
to the House, the objective being for the Bill to be presented as a non-partisan Bill with support from across the community.

6. An initial workshop was held on this subject in late 2004 in Tarawa, with funding and resource persons from the Forum Secretariat. It was apparent that the passage of the envisaged “code” was not going to be an easy one as there was obvious resistance to the idea from some leaders. The thinking at the time was to let the issue rest for a while and to then follow this up at a later date with wider consultations at the national level that was to include outer island representation.

7. While discussing arrangements for this consultation, it was obvious that to take up the issue of a “leadership code” on its own was perhaps not the best the way to go. A way forward was designed to address this in the larger context of challenges and issues which the people could identify more with, and which could then be used as a basis of building cooperative partnerships, including in the development of a leadership code that suited our context in Kiribati.

**Building in- Emerging Socio-economic Challenges**

8. At about this time, several social challenges were also under consideration by Government. These included:

   i) the growing concern over the apparent emerging “culture of lawlessness and anti-establishment” in society, mostly amongst our youth, and manifested through underage drinking, growing sex related crimes, rise in prostitution etc;

   ii) the concerns in the community, in Government and in Parliament relating to the increasing number of security related problems in the outer islands related to the growing dichotomy between traditional and modern institutions of governance;

   iii) Overcrowding on South Tarawa, land disputes over ownership and boundary determination and the growing squatter problems;
Partnerships with community - and Joint Responsibility

9. These developments highlighted to Government the importance of taking a more proactive approach in developing stronger partnerships and closer collaboration with the Churches, traditional leaders and civil society in addressing the many challenges facing our people and in working together to respond to these, in an effort to raise the quality of life for the people of Kiribati.

10. The consultation earlier envisaged to focus solely on the concept of a leadership code was thus developed in the wider context of:

   i) a broader approach to nation building to encourage the fostering of an environment of shared collective responsibility nationally;

   ii) forging stronger partnerships and collaboration with all national institutions and civil society, including churches, the private sector, women and youth groups, and traditional leaders.

Planning for a Way Forward

11. In recognizing the major role and influence of Churches in Kiribati, Government discussed the concept with the Kiribati National Council of Churches made up of all the major Churches in Kiribati. They were very supportive of the concept and agreed to jointly work with Government in the convening of the National Leadership Convention. A preparatory Committee made up of the heads of the Catholic Church and the Kiribati Protestant Church and key Government Ministries and agencies was set up which worked on all aspects of the planning for the Convention ranging from presentations, structure, conduct and funding.

12. Funding was a major issue as it was not cheap to bring in representation from all the islands in the Republic. The level of support from the donor community happily very positive and in fact, was overwhelming. Funds were received from New Zealand, Australia, the Forum, the Republic of China and UNDP with an indication of willingness by most of these development partners to Kiribati to consider providing additional funding for the eventual outcomes from the Convention.
13. The Preparatory Committee spent some time deliberating on how to conduct the meeting and made a deliberate decision not to use the traditional meeting in the “maneaba” setting recognizing the constrains on who can and cannot speak in such a setting. The conventional conference arrangement was opted for with at least 3 seats made available for each island at the Conference table.

**The National Leadership Convention**

14. The National Leadership Convention was convened in May 2005 in Tarawa bringing in Leaders from the whole country including heads of all registered churches, members of Parliament, heads of traditional “unimwane” (old men’s) associations, Heads of Island Councils and their Clerks, heads of private sector, women and youth groups, to discuss these major challenges facing the country and identify ways around these challenges.

15. The Convention was structured to first focus on presentations from Government Ministries, intended to brief Leaders on major initiatives undertaken by Government (to address the expected criticism that Government was not doing anything.) These included:

i) **Development Issues and challenges**; covering a brief on the recently adopted 5 year National Development Strategy, an update on the Revenue Equalisation Reserve Fund (RERF) or the Trust Fund, emphasis on the limited resources available to Kiribati and the need for prudent with Government spending as well as being realistic with what government can and cannot do;

ii) **Public Sector Reforms** – an update on Reforms currently underway in the public service in an effort to work towards excellence, efficiency and cost effectiveness in the delivery of public service;

iii) **Law and Order** – a prerequisite for development; an update on reforms to strengthen the police services; and a call for community engagement to complement what the police are doing;
iv) **Good Governance** – the Forum’s Principles of Good Leadership and the proposed Leadership Code for Kiribati to strengthen accountability by Leaders to the public they serve; and

v) **The Key Role of Churches and community groups** in nation building and development.

**Major Socio-economic Challenges**

16. Key presentations were then made to the Convention by heads of the major Churches and Government agencies on the following major challenges:

**Peace and Harmony in Society** being the prerequisite for development, role of Government, Churches, Traditional Institutions, Island Councils, Women’s Groups, Youth Groups, NGO’s and for us as heads of our families;

**Alcohol Abuse** particularly amongst the young, related problems and proposals for collective community action.

**Overcrowding on Tarawa** – creating excessive strain on water, health, social services and family units on Tarawa.

**Population growth** – a time bomb for a country with limited resources.

**Land Issues** – Land disputes can create instability and derail development efforts.

**Community Participation and Ownership** - the differentiation between public and private programmes and property. This has invariably led to the absence of a sense of ownership by the people over public property such as schools and hospitals. This is quite different from the care and attention from the community to village buildings such as the “maneabas” and churches. Why?
Outcomes

17. The outcomes exceeded expectations and many of the resolutions reached by the Convention went beyond what Governments would normally venture into, with a strong element of self-examination. These include the following:

i) Issues and challenges facing our youth is a reflection of the quality of our leadership starting from the most basic unit – the family. A call by the Convention was made to parents and grandparents, churches, women, youth and all leaders in Kiribati to lead by example and to promote dialogue with our children;

ii) That Churches develop/strengthen programmes on promoting Christian values with a focus on peace and harmony, and for Government to assist with funding these programmes;

iii) That a “leadership Code” be developed and finalised as soon as possible and that our Leaders in Parliament be reminded to follow basic courtesies and customary convention in speeches in Parliament;

iv) That the Alcohol Ordinance be reviewed to include among others, provisions on alcohol free zones surrounding school areas, putting a time limit on the sale of alcohol to 9.00pm, that alcoholic toddy be sold from specific bars for this product, and not from homes and that the age limit for alcohol consumption be raised to 21 years;

v) That higher taxes be imposed by Government on cigarettes and alcohol products;

vi) That Government put a limit on alcohol consumption at official functions;

vii) That Government introduces legislation to ban smoking in public places and on public transportation;

viii) That Government considers alternate “mweaka” or traditional gifts given when visiting “maneabs” to exclude cigarettes;

ix) That those who are on Tarawa with no jobs be returned to their home islands;

x) That Government identifies more development opportunities for income generation on the outer islands;

xi) That education facilities be expanded on the outer islands;

xii) That Government removes all squatters from government land;
xiii) That all leaders take a proactive role in maintaining peace in Kiribati; and
xiv) That a similar Convention be convened every three years.

**Response to the Initiative.**

18. The response from the public was very positive with representation at the Convention very high. There was a very strong sense of appreciation by these leaders of the move by Government to dialogue with and include the community on discussions in addressing major socio-economic challenges facing the country which was a first for us in Kiribati.

19. There were however others with views expressed against the initiative, that all the issues discussed in the Convention were Government’s job to deal with – comments like - we have a government in place that should address these problems – why is government not doing its job? Were expressed in the corridors but never got to be raised at the Convention.

20. Overall, it was a major success and implementation of the outcomes is now progressing. Some examples are as follows:

- An Amendment to the Criminal Procedure Code was passed in the last sitting of Parliament to give more powers to Police to board vessels and enter premises in scenes of suspected sex crimes involving minors;
- A major review of the Alcohol Ordinance is now almost completed and will be tabled at the next meeting of Parliament.
- A “leadership code” is currently being finalized for tabling at the next Parliament meeting;
- Taxes on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages have been raised almost doubling the price of these products as from 13 February, 2006;
- The Tobacco Convention has now been ratified by Kiribati;
- Youth programmes are being developed by churches in consultation with Government departments and funding allocated for this purpose by Government;
- A programme to remove squatters from Government land on South Tarawa has begun and work is progressing in this area;
- and we are continuing with implementing other outcomes.
21. What was earlier intended as a move to introduce a “leadership code” was taken up in its broader context of real issues which impacted on and were closer to the lives of the average person in the community. This helped substantially in moving the dialogue to a more positive and cooperative footing, and assisted in the forging of partnerships as well as the mobilization of collective action and shared responsibility in nation building.

22. It is early days yet and the challenge is in keeping the momentum going in implementing the outcomes before the next Convention in 2008, but more importantly, to act while the political climate is right.

23. For the purpose of this meeting, the innovation does not lie in the National Leadership Convention itself as this has been done in Kiribati and elsewhere in the region. Perhaps the real value lies more in the collaboration with key non-state actors, in this instance, the churches, in the joint management of the process to foster a positive and collaborative environment for constructive dialogue at the highest level. It also provided an alternate high level forum in addition to the elected legislature which allows for open debate on major challenges facing the country.

24. In conclusion, I would like to emphasize two points; the first and most important is that the work put into the preparations in the lead up to the Convention and in the follow-up and implementation of outcomes by the Planning Committee, particularly the contribution from the church representatives, was phenomenal and a strong message of appreciation from Government has been conveyed to the Churches in Kiribati. I wish to add my own deep appreciation and acknowledgement of this major contribution from the Kiribati Catholic and Protestant Churches.

25. Secondly and equally important, a Convention such as this does not only require massive planning, both logistics and in content but is also very costly. Our deep appreciation therefore goes to our generous development partners for their assistance in this regard with the hope of continued engagement in this worthwhile process.

Thank you all for your attention.