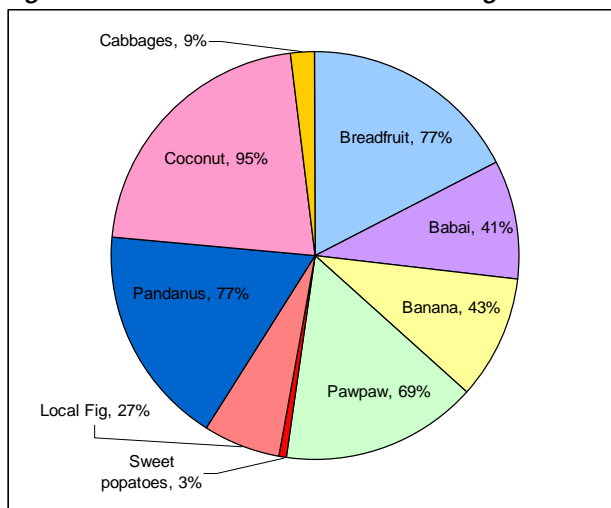


## B. ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

### 5.7 Agriculture

There is an Agricultural Assistant and a Nurseryman on the island whose responsibilities are to carry out the Agricultural headquarters outer island plans in agricultural and livestock development. Agricultural activities in TabNorth are greatly hindered by drought at times restricting activities to teaching home gardens, provision of pigs and chickens, animal health schemes, provision of seeds, seedlings (coconuts) and breadfruit cuttings, and coconut replanting schemes. Generally, the latter scheme (coconut replanting or rehabilitation) has not been fully supported by the islanders as it is deemed a waste of time and effort due to most of the replanting schemes not bearing as much fruit as one would love them to bear. Besides, people have their own traditional cultivation methods that are most of the time linked to phases of the moon and considered more successful than the agricultural methods of spacing amongst others that only result in a lot of wasted space according to the islanders. However, the islanders most of the time, are happy to turn their barren lands over to the Division of Agriculture to be replanted in this scheme.

*Figure 20: Access to food trees and vegetables 2005*



Statistics displayed in the chart (left), shows that of the 853 households on Abaiang, 95% have access to coconut trees, 77% pandanus and breadfruit, 69% pawpaw, 43% bananas, 41% bwabwai, 27% local fig, 9% cabbages and 3% sweet potatoes trees/crops. 'Access' is defined as those food trees that are located near households thus easily accessed by household members. The numbers of coconut and pandanus trees therefore, are limited in the census to those that are near households or in the villages excluding those in the bush or in other parts of the island. Abaiang is quite a stretched island and access to land and coconuts in other villages can be problematic. Then there

are others who are there as seconded island council staff or visitors who do not have access to most coconut and trees on the island except for those that are next to their allocated homes/houses.

Pawpaw throughout Kiribati has generally been popular in taste, nutritional value and also in providing a variety of color to the normal food especially when feeding guests or visitors. 'Te bero' (local fig) is another of the tree crops in Kiribati that is hard to cultivate and propagate as it can only be grown from cuttings and generally, is rare on all islands in the country. 'Bwabwai' is not strictly kept for ceremonial occasions like the southern islands but cultivation methods are also closely guarded secrets that are inherited from the parents or gifted from others. Pandanus on the other hand are abundant in variety and amongst these, there are certain pandanus varieties that have assigned uses for pandanus paste ('tangauri' and 'tuae'), pandanus powder ('kabubu'), weaving and cigarette paper.

There are no strict inspection codes as yet for transport of foodstuff, plant materials and animals on the ships and planes that visit the island and thus agriculture is vulnerable to introduced pests. The threat from 'bwabwai' beetle has been solved through strict regulations of 'bwabwai' being taken from South Tarawa to the outer islands. It falls upon the Agricultural Assistant and his nurseryman to inspect all

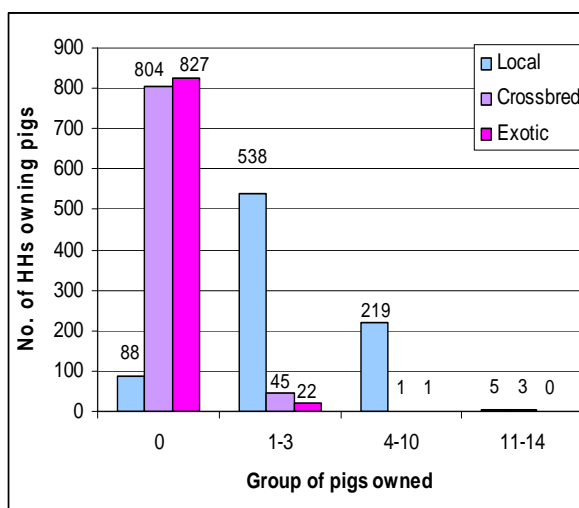
visiting aircrafts and sea vessels to check that 'bwabwai', bananas and exotic plant life are not brought to the island without proper quarantine clearances and certificates. The Department of Agriculture is responsible for protecting the country and islands from introduced tree and animal pests and diseases. Recently in 2008, promotions have been broadcasted for strict quarantine measures regarding avian influenza and red ants and swine influenza in early 2009.

Even though there are numerous agricultural activities that include cutting toddy, cultivation of bwabwai, planting of breadfruit, bananas, pawpaw, 'te bero' and pandanus, production is far too limited for export. The cultivation of bwabwai used to be and still is, one way of maintaining traditional status in the community. They form an important symbol that has to be included in social functions. Pandanus paste or 'tuae' and pandanus flour of 'kabubu' are traditional food reserved particularly for visitors and community functions of which the latter is presently rarely, if at all, made. Breadfruit on the other hand, is planted with fruits used as part of the daily diet when it comes into season. Unlike coconuts and other tree crops, breadfruit is the most vulnerable to drought and thus has to be kept near homes for management during drought times.

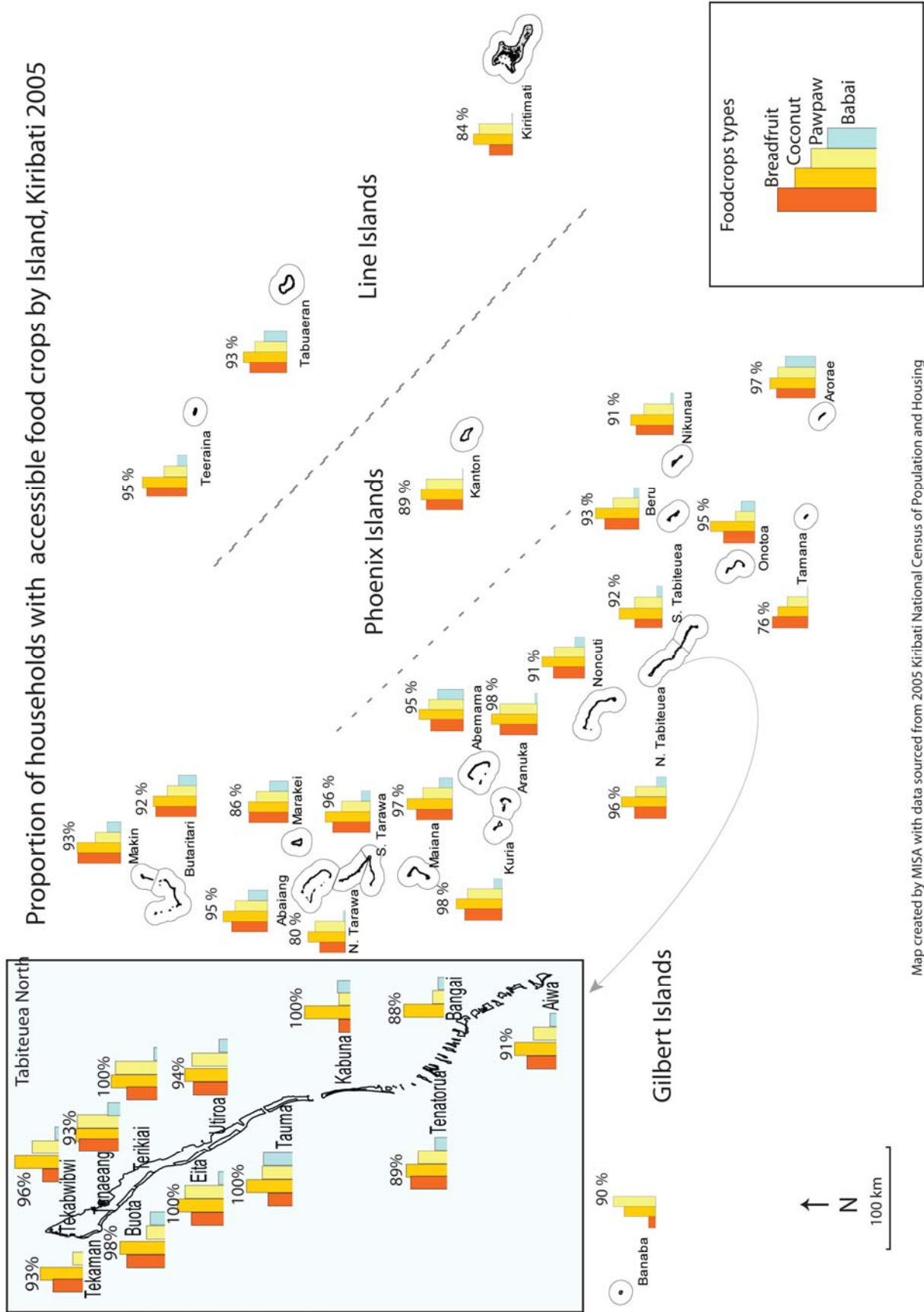
### 5.8 Livestock

Livestock on the island is limited to pigs and chickens of both local and exotic breeds. The local pigs and chickens were documented as having been introduced in the early days before Kiribati became a British protectorate and later exotic breeds were introduced as part of the Division of Agriculture's plans to develop agriculture and livestock on the outer islands of Kiribati. Local pigs vary in color and sizes and are very short, rarely reaching a height of 1 meter whereas the introduced local breeds if managed properly, grow higher than a meter and are actually nicknamed as 'horses' by the locals who never cease to marvel at the height and size that these exotic breeds can grow to. Crossbred with a local breed, the progeny are normally faster (than local breeds) growing, taller pigs with higher food conversion rates and good breeding qualities e.g. more piglets per litter. The pigs are either penned or tethered while the chickens are free ranged.

*Fig 21: Households owning pigs*



# Proportion of households with accessible food crops by Island, Kiribati 2005

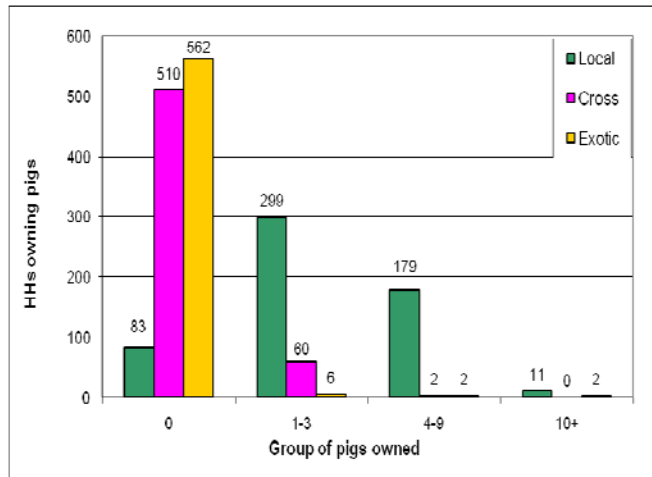


Map created by MISA with data sourced from 2005 Kiribati National Census of Population and Housing

Exotic breeds of pigs and chicken have been introduced for cross-breeding with the local breeds. The idea of owning a great big pig such as the introduced breeds resulted in initial high demand for the exotic breeds of pigs. This however lost popularity when the exotic breeds were found to be unable to perform well on a local diet that consisted mostly of coconuts and household leftovers. Through lessons learned, locals are now happy to own exotic breeds only so they can cross them with their own local pigs to get better progeny.

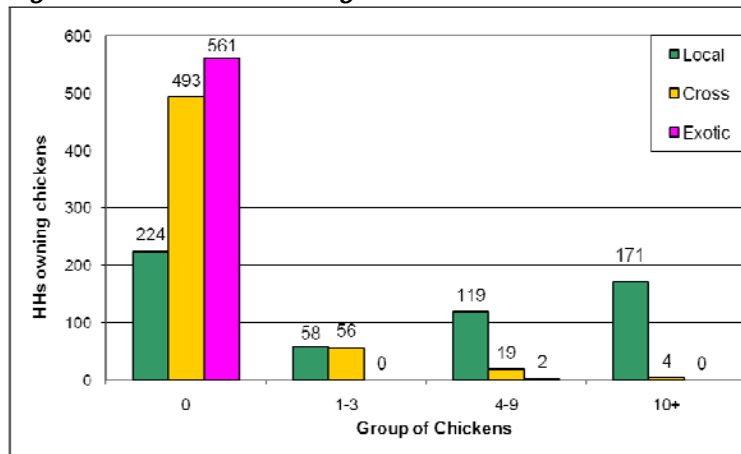
**Fig 22: Group of pigs owned**

As portrayed in the above right chart, 98% of the 573 households do not own crossed and exotic breeds pigs while 56% own local pigs. These exotic breeds are initially dependent on the Division of Agriculture supplying them to the outer islands and the exotic breeds to thrive and succeed in mating with the small local female pigs.



A total of 1,825 pigs were recorded in the 2005 census from which 92% are local pigs, 6% are crossbreds and 2% are exotic breeds. While most of the households do not own cross or exotic pigs, most own local pigs. A total of 143 cross and exotic breeds exists on the island which, given time, would presumably increase the number of more cross bred pigs on the island that are expected to perform better than the local breeds in terms of growth rates on a local diet amongst others. Five exotic breeds (Duroc, Landrace, Berkshire, Large White and Tamworth) have been imported into the country by the Division of Agricultural and distributed throughout Kiribati for crossbreeding purposes.

**Fig 23: Households owning chickens**



Chickens on the other hand totaled 2,765 of which 91% were local and the rest 9% were all crossbreds as there are no exotic chickens on the island. As portrayed in the left chart, 98% of the 573 households do not own cross or exotic breeds of chicken while 30% of the households own 10 or more local chickens.

Chickens are free-ranged and are also kept domestically for households own meat protein supplements and, like

pigs, for special occasions. As free range chickens, they inter-mingle with chickens from other households resulting in crossbred chickens. Where the hens are kept for laying eggs to produce more chickens, the roosters are kept to breed with the hens as well as for their feathers that are popularly used for fish lures. As is quite prevalent in the islands, the free-range management of chickens on the outer islands has impelled marking of chickens to declare ownership of the chickens. These markings include chopping off certain claws of the chickens or tying certain colored pieces of cloth to the feathers or legs. Eggs are rarely eaten unless important guests/functions are present or when it is required as part of a medicinal ingredient.

Unlike pigs, free ranged chickens are not liable to fines or confiscation by Island Councils whereas free-ranged pigs on the other hand are considered an offense against the law and liable with fines or confiscation of the pigs. The confiscated pigs can be released to owners at a fee of \$10.00 and where they are not claimed, they are auctioned off to the public. Pigs are kept in pig pens or tethered under shades of trees as is common throughout the islands of Kiribati.

Even though, both pigs and chickens are kept for own consumption, sale opportunities to supplement their meager incomes are never passed by especially when one has a lot of pigs or chickens and does not have an upcoming family or village function. Pig prices on the outer islands are generally negotiable but most of the time the Agricultural price of AU\$3.50/kg live-weight is used. Most would rather buy them live due to pig blood at slaughter being a local delicacy.



There are no known diseases specific to TabNorth livestock and factually, the pigs and chickens alike in Kiribati are free from infectious and dangerous diseases such as the well known avian influenza in chickens or swine influenza in pigs etc but local pigs are however vulnerable to worms and skin parasites. Exotic breeds of chicken are prone to 'botulism' once released to the outer islands making it hard to for exotic

chicken breeds to live long on the islands. The local breeds are however immune to botulism. Crossbreeding eventually does happen resulting in more disease resistant crossbreds (a characteristic of local breeds) with higher laying characteristics, tender meat and faster growing rates, characteristics of exotic breeds.

Other than providing cultivation and gardening services to the public, Agricultural Officers also castrate pigs and carry out routine injection of pigs on the island for worms and mange, the common pig ailments in Kiribati. Sterilization of cats and dogs are carried out from the Animal Health Division within the Agricultural Department who visit individual islands should the need to sterilize the domestic animals arise, as reported by the Agricultural Assistant – and only when the number of animals to be sterilized justify the expenses to be incurred.

Needless to say that were there available markets for pork in South Tarawa, the people on the outer islands including TabNorth would be the richer by pig exports.

## 5.9 Fisheries

The ocean is Kiribati's most valuable resource that is full and rich in marine resources, some of which still have to be explored. As a country with more ocean than land, it is not surprising that marine resources

have never ceased to provide for the people. Over the years, alternative income generating means have been introduced to the islands of which the most recent is sea cucumber export. In 1986 seaweed farming was taken up as a commercial activity on lagoon islands of Kiribati including TabNorth but like all good things come to an end, this too died out. Pearl farming, initiated in Abaiang is also now being tried in other islands such as Butaritari and Onotoa.

Fishing is at large, a routine activity for the men which they carry out when the seas are calm, and whenever home fish reserves have run out while others fish whenever they can as a hobby and to pass the time away. Fish jerky is still a common product throughout the island and is provided as gifts to guests, sold to others and exported to relatives in other parts of Kiribati mostly to those in South Tarawa. There are many different kinds of fishes that serve as food for the IKiribati and special methods are used for certain species or groups of species. These methods are standard amongst the fishermen but individual variation does exist (*Preston E. Cloud Jr. 1952*) which are most of the time kept within families. Nevertheless, TabNorth has a diversity of marine resources in the lagoon and reef that allows the women and even children to engage in fishing activities especially net fishing and collecting of shellfish and sea worms in the reef and lagoon flats during low tide.

**Table 17: Households and ownership of common fishing equipment**

Villages	Total HH	Own Nets	Total Nets	Own Cooler boxes	Total Cooler boxes	Own Eel Traps	Total Eel Traps	Own Fish traps	Total Fish Traps	Own Fish Pond	Total Fish Pond	Own Fridge	Total Fridge
Tekabwibwi	26	17	26	3	3	7	11	17	29	20	33	0	0
Tekaman	46	36	64	2	3	7	12	2	3	20	34	4	4
Tanaeang	81	44	72	8	8	12	25	4	4	14	15	2	2
Buota	60	31	54	3	6	4	5	4	4	1	1	1	2
Terikiai	44	30	35	1	1	7	14	2	2	1	1	1	1
Eita	94	58	98	10	14	15	35	6	12	7	8	8	8
Utiroa	103	63	143	18	31	26	60	2	2	0	0	8	9
Tauma	38	25	37	3	5	16	37	4	4	5	5	0	0
Kabuna	32	17	31	2	2	15	38	2	2	4	4	0	0
Tenatorua	19	12	19	3	7	8	22	4	4	2	2	1	1
Bangai	8	5	7	1	1	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aiwa	22	13	20	0	0	14	35	1	1	5	5	0	0
	<b>573</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>27</b>

Fishing is a daily activity for the men. Council fishing byelaw on Makin prohibits fishermen from catching flying fish in the offshore waters close to land.

Despite its small size (land and reef) Makin's offshore tuna resources are plentiful. A survey carried out in 1995 by the Fisheries Division shows that 91% of Makin's households were harvesting the sea in one way or another, both for domestic sale and to satisfy their subsistent needs. In that survey it was found that the majority of fishing households (fulltime and part-time) were accessing the deep ocean to harvest tuna, flying fish, shark and other fish resources.

The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource Development supports fisheries development on the outer islands through:

- the provision of technical staff for training, advisory and resource monitoring/evaluation purposes;
- research and trialing of new fishery-related projects;
- the sourcing of funds for implementation of national projects (such as cold storage, etc.)

- the provision of affordable fishing gear.

In an effort to develop fisheries on the outer islands MFMRD is currently building cold storage facilities on selected islands, with the objective of preserving fish for later transportation to markets in South Tarawa. TabNorth still have to come to an agreement as to the location of the such a cold storage facility as initial plans to establish it in the village of Tekaman was opposed by the Council as it would mean that only the nearby villages would benefit from the location.

## 5.10 Handicrafts

The making of handicrafts for commercial purposes remains insignificant, mainly due to the lack of a market to sell them. Tourism, which is often the reason for handicraft production, is virtually non-existent. The most common handmade local products are those that have daily use, such as mats, strings, and various forms of baskets. These are normally given away as gifts to visitors, in particular mats made from pandanus leaves.



A few years ago Government established the Kiribati Handicraft and Local Produce Company (KHLP) to encourage people to make handicrafts and local products for commercial purposes. The company buys materials from the outer islands and then re-sells them to the urban population, as well as foreigners. However, despite the existence of KHLP, the level of production is still very small. Among other reasons, KHLP faces staffing and funding difficulties that results in its inability to adequately absorb production from the outer islands.



## C. INFRASTRUCTURE

Government schools and medical facilities are all the responsibility of the Government including staff living quarters. Where working facilities are maintained by Government employees through the Ministry of Works & Energy, government employee living quarters are maintained by the Councils with funds provided by the Government.

The most predominant infrastructures on the outer islands are the churches, mwaneabas and schools (primary, junior secondary and senior high). Nevertheless, TabNorth also has two bridges, one of the longest causeways in the country and is also accommodating the Southern Gilbert Hospital. Construction of the hospital has been completed and handed over to the Government, however, there are still minor improvements and adjustments to be made before it is opened. A prison once existed on the island during colonial times but this is not used anymore and in dire need of renovation.



All inhabited atolls apart from Banaba and Kanton, have runways that are not paved except for the Bonriki International Airport in Tarawa and Cassidy Airport in Kiritimati. Seaports on the other hand are of poor standard on the islands and generally comprise a blasted channel and a concrete platform otherwise, it is just a channel by itself.

The establishment and maintenance of development infrastructure on the island is the responsibility of government. The central government normally takes responsibility of implementing new development projects while the local government is given the responsibility of maintaining such projects upon completion. Local government authorities are allocated some money every year under the "Support Grant" to enable them to perform this role.

### 5.11 Transportation

#### 5.11.1 Land Transport

The main transport infrastructure on the outer islands including TabNorth is made up of long stretches of gravel roads that run all the way along the length of the islands. In some islands such as Tamana, Arorae, Kuria and Makin, the road also runs all the way around the island. To assist in the maintenance and repair work on the road, the central government has provided a small backhoe and dipper truck to the outer island Councils, but these have now become problems of the Councils to maintain. Most are not working already.

Every few years the central government undertakes a national program to repair the roads on the outer islands. The way this is done is that a team of engineers, machinery operators and mechanics go around the islands with a set of heavy equipment. They remain on one island until their work is done, before

they are transported with their equipment to the next island. The project is done this way to maximize the use of limited manpower and equipment, however it takes time and incur very high costs to transport people and equipment from island to island. It has been quite a while now since the roads on the outer islands have been repaired.

The popular household means of land transport on the island are bicycles and motorcycles as these vehicles are cheaper when compared to car or trucks and most suitable in accessing other parts of the island that cars/trucks would otherwise not be able to get to. The main road that runs along the length of the island is wide enough for the bigger vehicles and the network of paths that run from it into the bush are too narrow for them. In a lot of cases, there are hardly any pathways thus making motorbikes and bicycles the most suitable.

**Table 18: Distribution of household ownership per vehicle**

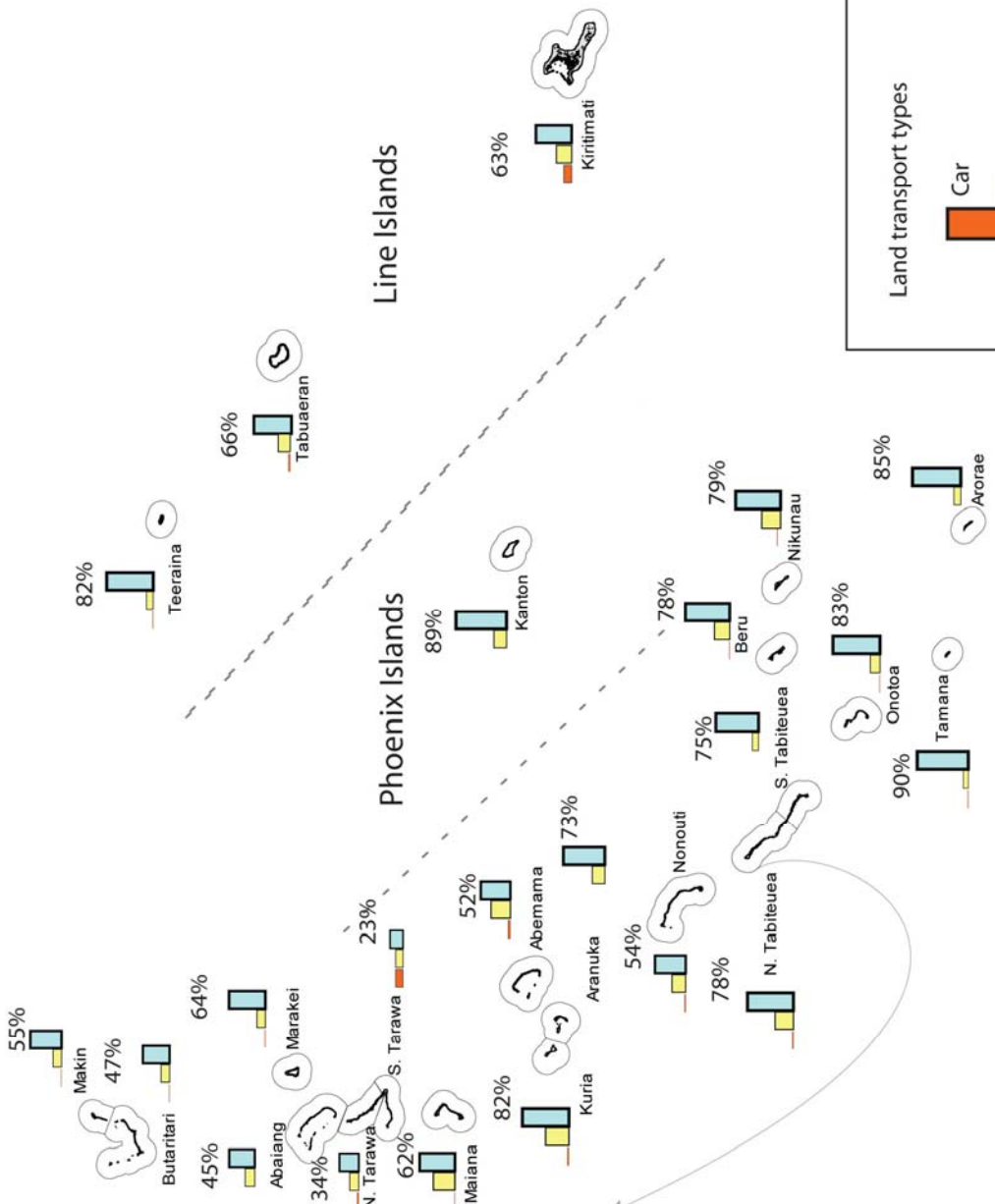
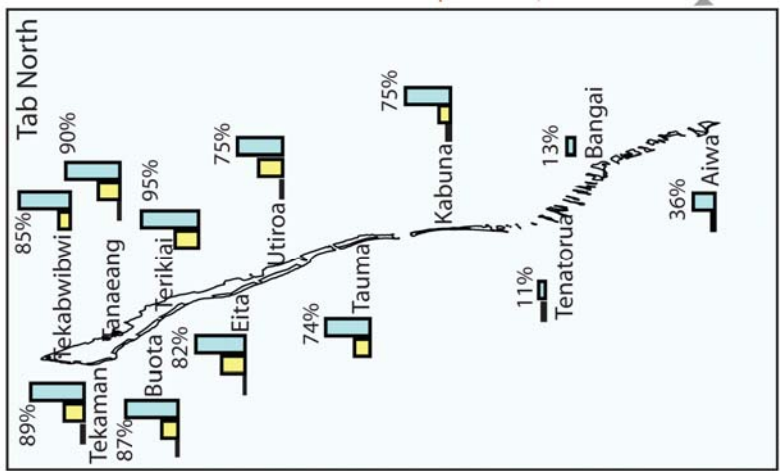
Village	Total HH	Own Motorcycle	Own Bicycle	Total Motorcycle	Total Bicycle
Tekabwibwi	26	5	22	5	31
Tekaman	46	15	41	15	57
Tanaeang	81	29	73	29	99
Buota	60	16	52	16	63
Terikiai	44	17	42	17	58
Eita	94	37	77	37	109
Utiroa	103	41	77	41	123
Tauma	38	10	28	10	31
Kabuna	32	6	24	6	32
Tenatorua	19	0	2	0	2
Bangai	8	0	1	0	1
Aiwa	22	1	8	1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>614</b>
<b>Percent</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>107</b>

*Source: 2005 census, National Statistics Office*

As obvious from the above table, the most common form of transport is the bicycle with 447 (78%) of the 573 households owning bicycles while 177 (31%) own motorcycles. Even though only 447 households owned bicycles, there was a total count of 614 bicycles for the same year, surpassing the total number of households. Owing to the difference in costs, bicycles rank first while motorcycles ranks second in popularity. Bicycles are also easier and cheaper to maintain compared to motorcycles. There are also trucks on the island that are owned mostly by the island council and to a lesser extent the churches. However, one car was seen on the island in 2009 so as lifestyles change, cheaper cars go on the markets and incomes increase, cars may soon increase on the island, though it may be a far off change.

There are hardly any motorbikes and several bicycles on the three islets as their sizes allows easy all around access by foot. Council trucks include those donated by Taiwan to all the outer islands to transport JSS students. As such, the council transports the JSS students from all over the mainland and from the school. JSS students from the islets have to stay with relatives in mainland TabNorth to attend the JSS. Transport fares are also collected from the students or rather the parents and this goes into the funds to maintain the trucks.

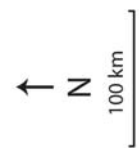
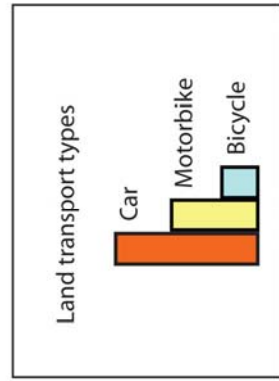
# Proportion of household with land transport by Island, Kiribati 2005



## Line Islands

## Phoenix Islands

## Gilbert Islands



Map created by MISA with data sourced from 2005 Kiribati National Census of Population and Housing

### 5.11.2 Sea Transport and Shipping

Travel to the islets of Tenaatorua, Bangai and Aiwa is done by boat even though it is possible to walk between the islets during low tide. However, the distance would mean several hours of walking from the end of Kabuna and thus not agreeable to those visiting on an official basis. If one had time to walk though, it would be quite an experience as the islets in between Kabuna and the inhabited ones are full of local history and the natural environments of islands.



Canoes and boats are therefore not only used for fishing but also provide the main means of inter-island transport between mainland TabNorth and the islets of Tenaatorua, Bangai and Aiwa. Statistics, further displayed in the following table, showed that canoes are still more commonly owned than boats. Boats and skiffs in the country mean the same thing thus where 121 (21%) of the 573 households owned canoes, a rising number of 88 (15%) owned boats. The total number of boats matched the number of households owning such sea vessels and on the other hand, some households owned more than one canoe such as in the villages of Tekabwibwi, Tanaeang, Buota, Utiroa, Taumwa, Kabuna and the islet of Aiwa.

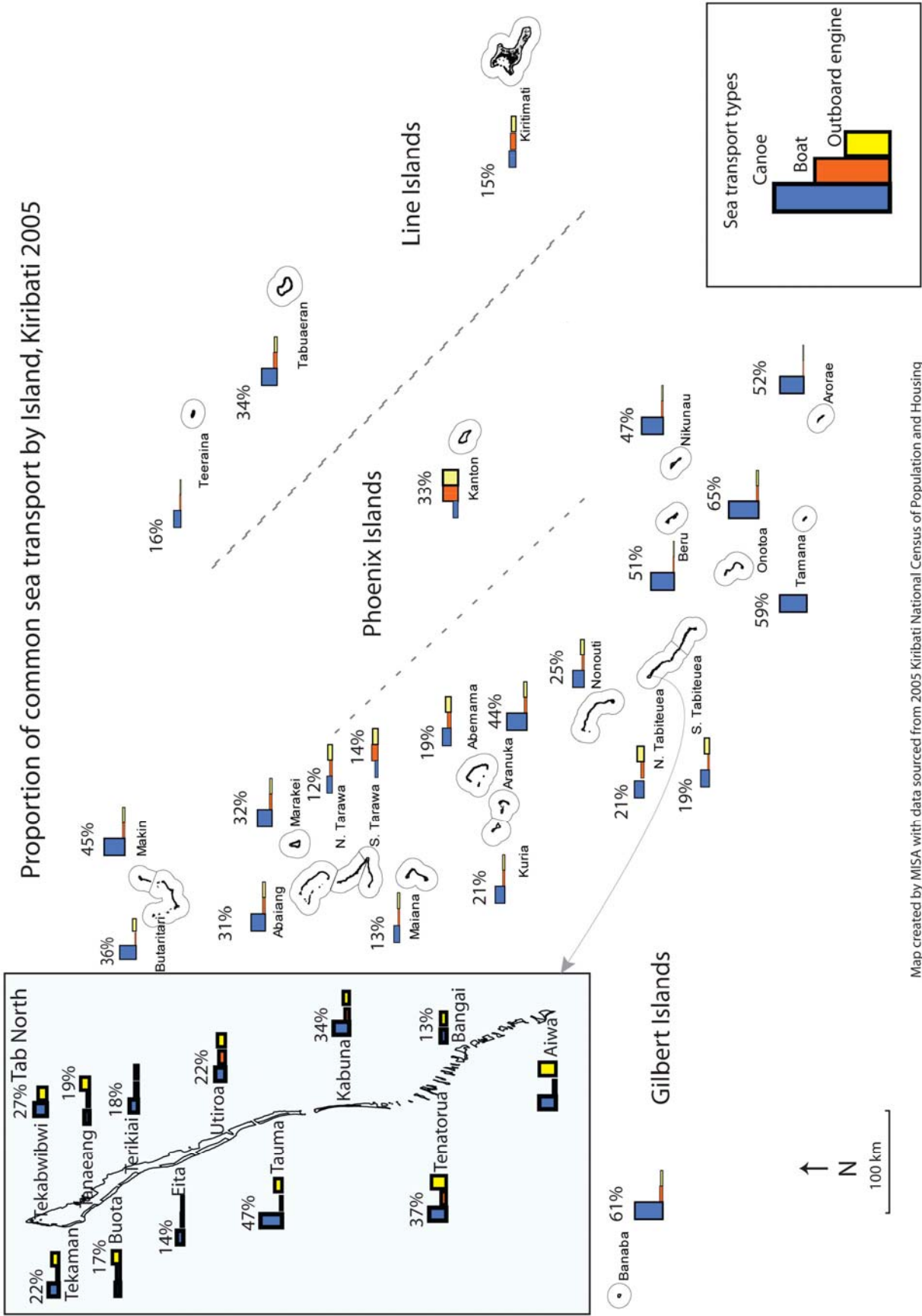
**Table 19: Type of sea transport owned**

Village	Total HH	Own Canoe	Own Skiff	Own Boat	Total Canoe	Total Skiff	Total Boat
Tekabwibwi	26	7	4	0	9	4	0
Tekaman	46	10	10	2	10	10	2
Tanaeang	81	9	15	4	10	15	4
Buota	60	6	3	5	7	3	5
Terikiai	44	8	1	3	8	1	3
Eita	94	13	0	4	13	0	4
Utiroa	103	23	7	14	24	7	14
Tauma	38	18	2	1	21	2	1
Kabuna	32	11	0	3	12	0	3
Tenatorua	19	7	3	2	7	3	2
Bangai	8	1	0	0	1	0	0
Aiwa	22	8	4	1	11	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Percent</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>

Source: 2005 census, National Statistics Office, MFEPD

Compared with land transport ownership, the islets of Tenaatorua, Bangai and Aiwa understandably own more sea vessels than land transport.

# Proportion of common sea transport by Island, Kiribati 2005



Map created by MISA with data sourced from 2005 Kiribati National Census of Population and Housing

### 5.11.3 Air Service

The need for inter-island travel is served either by oceangoing vessels or by small aeroplanes. Air Kiribati is the state-owned airline based in the capital Tarawa which provides domestic flight services to all islands in the Gilbert group with the exception of Banaba.



The airstrip is located on mainland TabNorth in the village of Taumwa at Takea. The maintenance of the airstrip is the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority based within the Ministry of Transport. The Island Council looks after the air-terminal while the agent for Air-Kiribati is responsible for reservations, ticketing, check in and maintains communications and safety for airline crew and passengers.

Due to their remoteness, the Southern islands excluding Tabiteuea North have only one flight a week while there are more flights to Tabiteuea North, the central and northern islands in a week. The flight schedules comprise flying to two islands at a time however, TabNorth and Nonouti are big islands by themselves and most of the time, require separate flights. As a re-fueling point for Air Kiribati, TabNorth travelers are fortunate in that they can get seats during services to other southern islands when the flights are not full. Owing to the high airfares to the remote southern islands, weekly flights to and from the islands are always not full compared to islands in the central and the northern.

**Table 20: TabNorth flight schedule**

Day	A/C	ROUTE	ETD	ROUTE	ETA
Friday	ATJ	Tarawa	0800	Nonouti	0900
		Nonouti	0820	TabNorth	0935
		TabNorth	1005	Tarawa	1115

Source: Air Kiribati Bairiki 2008

Peak flights are generally during the school holidays, Easter, Independence celebrations, Christmas, and New Year holidays. During these times, the TabNorth flight can be full by students as hardly any of the locals use the service as they are more used to traveling to Tarawa by boat. There is a 15kg baggage and a 5kg hand carriage allowances while excess baggage during flights costs double the normal freight cost of \$1.70/lb. Air cargo baggage is generally cheaper (\$0.75/lb perishable goods and \$1.55/lb un-perishable goods) than excess flight baggage for all goods.

Infant, student and child airfares are excepted as they are still dependent on senior family members whereas tertiary/university students have reached independent age and therefore are included in the adult fare group. The fares vary, depending on the distance to the island. These airfares were recently increased in August 2008 after a trial of period of nearly a year of reduced airfares. During the trial period of reduced airfares, there was a definite increase in the use of the air-service but was not profitable in the long run for the airline and thus the airfares were increased.

Early in 2009, a new private owned airline started operating initially with flights to the central and northern islands of Gilbert group. The *Coral Sun Airways* cannot as yet service the southern islands as it does not have a refueling point yet such as TabNorth for the Air Kiribati domestic line. The competition could be one that Air Kiribati needs to get back and running on its own feet.

**Table 21**

**AIR KIRIBATI LIMITED  
AIR TARIFF EFFECTIVE 15TH AUGUST 2008**

ISLANDS	ADULT
MAKIN	\$90.00
BUTARITARI	\$72.00
MARAKEI	\$36.00
ABAIANG	\$30.00
MAIANA	\$30.00
KURIA	\$55.00
ARANUKA	\$55.00
ABEMAMA	\$55.00
NONOUTI	\$100.00
TAB NORTH	\$120.00
TAB SOUTH	\$135.00
ONOTOA	\$150.00
BERU	\$160.00
NIKUNAU	\$170.00
TAMANA	\$210.00
ARORAE	\$230.00

**5.11.4 Issues facing Transportation**

The scattered nature of the islands over a wide span of ocean has ever been an hindrance in inter-island travel that has been greatly assisted initially, with the introduction of canoes, bicycles, motorcycles, trucks, cars, and aeroplanes. The sea, land and air vehicles now provide the only means of travel transportation between the islands.

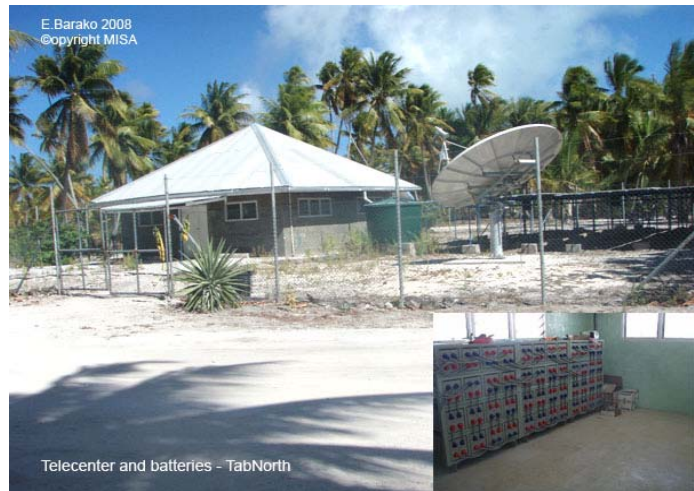
Issues fall more on the airfare costs to and from the islands as most would rather travel by plane were it cheaper as travelling by boat for most would mean being seasick and being in cramped conditions for the whole trip. Bicycles are also amongst the imported items/products whose prices are controlled by the Government besides flour, rice, sugar and tobacco. It would be a happy day for all on the outer islands were motorbikes and boats were to also be included.

If there were to be any transport issues on the outer islands, it would have to be the state of the roads, the cost of land and sea vehicles/vessels as well as the airfares.

## 5.12. Communication

Kiribati is a nation of fragmented islands dispersed over a vast ocean area that extends almost 3,000 kilometers across the central Pacific, bordering the Marshall Islands in the east and French Polynesia in the west. This fragmentation and vastness of ocean give rise to major communication and transport problems that have been, and will continue to be the greatest development challenge for government. Shipping is a critical service that needs to be provided and maintained between Tarawa and the outer islands, in order to facilitate the transportation of supplies to and from the islands. Government has been the major shipping operator since colonial times, and still continues to dominate this service, although private businesses have secured an increasing share of the market. Still, central government attempts, through its shipping line – Kiribati Shipping Services Limited (KSSL) – to serve all islands in the country near and far. TabNorth, like other islands, is visited at least once a month by a KSSL ship, bringing replenishments of food, fuel and other assortments of supplies and loading copra etc.

The improvement of airport and seaport facilities across the country is a priority development objective of central government, with focus to be given to islands which hold the potential for viable economic operations especially when it comes to marine and to a lesser extent, land resources. The northern islands of the Gilbert group are fertile and have great potential for agricultural development while those in the central and southern including TabNorth are the greatest fishers of men.



Half of the outer islands can be reached by integrated VHF links while the remaining islands have no permanent telephone links. Until a few years ago, the main mode of communication between the islands was through the use of HAM radio communication systems operated by TSKL based at the Island Council headquarters on the islands. Members of the general public normally use this for inter-island communication, as does the Island Council and central government in Tarawa. However, despite the fact that the system has been dependable and effective, there were a few problems relating to its use, among which are:

1. the system is not safe for sharing of private information, since the frequency used can be assessed by anyone, and the radio equipment is operated by a TSKL agent.
2. the use of the radio is dictated by a schedule, hence only available for 1-2 hours daily, and only from Mondays to Fridays.
3. the radio operator lacks the skill to undertake major repair works if the radio breaks down. Communication with the island could be cut for at least one week during which the radio is sent to Tarawa for repairs.
4. since there is only one radio, people from distant villages must take long journeys in order to use it.

In order to address these problems TSKL has decided to slowly introduce a new technology, a satellite-based telephone system which connect directly to the telephone system in Tarawa. The new system also supports the use of facsimile and internet, and therefore was considered to be a major accomplishment as far as progress is concerned. After its installation the old radio communication



system was decommissioned and removed, and direct telephoning replaced it. But it was not very long after the new system was in operation before new problems surfaced. First it was found that the new technology costs more to use compared to the radio; connection is vulnerable to rough weather conditions, and people still need to travel to Council headquarters to make a call. The Government however has not wavered from trying to upgrade the systems on the outer islands.