



Women producers of Kiribati and their participation in inter-island and international trade



UNITED NATIONS





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report investigates the income-generating economic activities of women producers and traders in Kiribati and the constraints they face while participating in production and trade activities. To this end, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) carried out both desk research and a field study in the four islands of South Tarawa and Kiritimati as urban areas, and Arorae and Makin as rural areas.

Kiribati's fragmented geographic structure and limited connectivity, narrow range of resources, high dependence on imports, and lack of economies scale – all of which are common to most small island developing states – create challenges for the expansion of the private sector and inter-island and international trade. Remoteness results in slower penetration of modern technologies and poses challenges for imports of raw materials and intermediate goods unavailable domestically. Weak business infrastructure, limited access to finance and burdensome licensing and trade procedures imply additional costs, further inhibiting the development of the private sector.

The economy of Kiribati is characterized by the dualism of urban and rural areas. While urban areas are home to public sector and most formal private sector jobs (with South Tarawa being the main urban centre), the rural sector is characterized by subsistence-based and informal economic activities. As a least developed country, Kiribati also faces high levels of poverty and inequality, more severely felt in remote islands and among female-headed households. Health and education are among the major success areas in terms of gender equality. However, gender-based physical and sexual violence remains an important issue despite some positive changes achieved over time. Women's participation in decision-making lags behind, especially in upper-level entities. Women

Agriculture (mainly copra growing) and fisheries are the two major economic activities in Kiribati. As a reflection of the economic structure, fish, crude coconut and unprocessed copra, in order of importance, are Kiribati's major export products. Like other small island developing states, the country imports most consumption and capital goods. The introduction of the Vessel Day Scheme (VDS) in 2012 and the launch of the Kiribati Fish Limited (KFL) in 2013–2014 was a turning point in this regard, substantially increasing the share of fisheries in economic activity and government revenues. Kiribati had the highest tuna catch among the small island developing states in the Pacific. The increase in fish licence revenue, in part, enabled the doubling of the copra subsidy in 2016. The government considers the development of fisheries as a priority area together with tourism in its Development Plan and KV20 to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The coconut sector is considered as complementary due to its links to tourism and other sectors of the economy.

There is a clear gender segregation of employment across sectors in Kiribati. Women are overrepresented in manufacturing (e.g. cigarette making, handicrafts, garments) and services such as wholesale and retail trade, education and public administration. Men are mainly employed in agriculture (e.g. copra) and fishing, and in services such as public administration, wholesale and retail trade, and rental and businesses sectors.

Women producers, who were covered in the UNCTAD survey, carry out mostly traditional economic activities such as the production of handicrafts, garments, coconut-based products, smoked fish, and cigarette from pandanus leaves in both rural and urban areas. In urban areas, women also sell cooked food in response to the growing demand by government offices and

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