

Guiding Sustainable Tourism Growth in Kiribati



The Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative's technical assistance during its fourth funding phase (Phase IV, 2020–2026) has supported the Tourism Authority of Kiribati to develop sustainable tourism products, enhance tourism marketing, strengthen coordination, and plan for long-term growth in Kiribati's tourism sector.

BACKGROUND

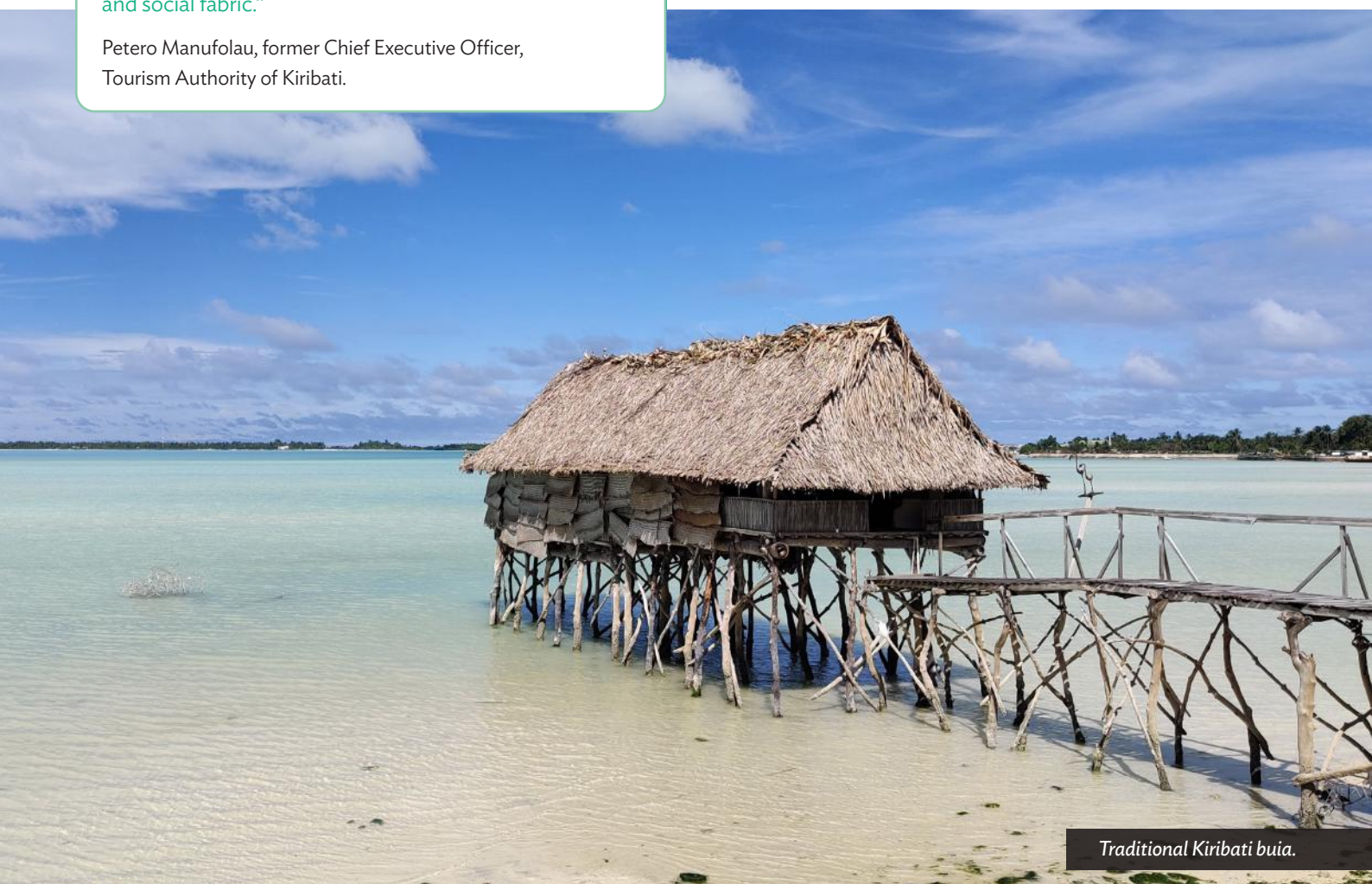
Tourism has significant potential to drive economic growth in Kiribati, yet its current contribution to gross domestic product is one of the lowest in the Pacific. Recognizing this untapped opportunity, the Government of Kiribati highlighted its plans to grow the tourism sector as a strategic priority in the *Kiribati 20-Year Vision 2016—2036 (KV20)*. The KV20 highlights tourism’s potential to promote sustainable economic development, preserve cultural and environmental heritage, and support social well-being.

“As a young tourism destination, Kiribati has this one excellent opportunity to map out [a] future... that will ensure that the nation benefits economically from tourism without compromising the natural environment and social fabric.”

Petero Manufofau, former Chief Executive Officer,
Tourism Authority of Kiribati.

However, developing tourism in Kiribati comes with unique challenges. As a small, remote island nation with a widely dispersed geography, Kiribati faces limitations in infrastructure, connectivity, and private sector investment. At the same time, any plans to develop tourism and increase international tourist arrivals must be carefully managed to avoid placing additional pressure on the country’s limited natural resources, such as freshwater.

The Tourism Authority of Kiribati (TAK) is the agency mandated to lead the country’s tourism development and promotion efforts. TAK is responsible for tourism investment promotion, product development, training, research and statistics, and tourism marketing and promotions. However, its ability to deliver on this mandate is constrained by limited resources, fragmented coordination with other sectors, and insufficient data to support evidence-based planning.



Traditional Kiribati buia.

PSDI'S PARTNERSHIP WITH TOURISM AUTHORITY OF KIRIBATI

In 2022, TAK approached the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI) for support to strengthen sustainable tourism policy and planning. PSDI—with such expertise in resource-constrained countries across the Pacific—worked closely with TAK to provide a comprehensive multi-year package of technical support to shape the enabling environment for tourism. This work has included:

- Kiribati's first whole of nation **Sustainable Tourism Policy**,
- a corporate **Strategic Plan** for TAK (2024–2026),
- a suite of **Sustainable Tourism Indicators**,
- a **Target Market Analysis**, and
- a new **Destination Brand**.

PSDI has worked in close collaboration with TAK to ensure its support is shaped by local priorities and cultural context. By working so closely with staff at TAK, PSDI also aims to strengthen organizational capacity and buy-in for long-term implementation.

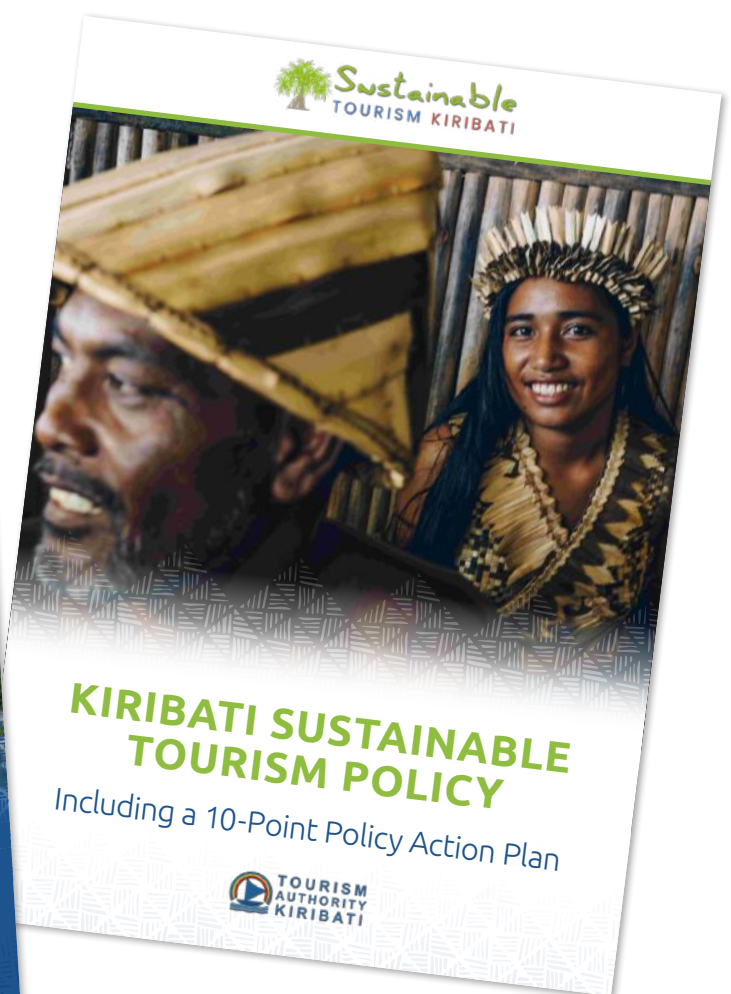
To assist a collaborative public, private and community approach to tourism sector policy and planning, which is a key need for tourism in Kiribati, PSDI provided finances and support for in-person consultation and validation workshops on the sustainable tourism policy, planning documents, and brand strategy. The consultations brought together the private sector, and relevant government, non-government organization, and development partners to provide input

to the documents and secure alignment on the strategic direction of the tourism sector, as well as to develop a representative vision for the new brand.

To monitor progress against the goals set out in the sustainable tourism policy, PSDI also developed a set of sustainable tourism indicators. The indicators articulate relevant data on environmental, cultural, and economic impacts, to provide TAK with a holistic understanding of the benefits and costs of tourism experienced by different groups, including women, youth, and rural and remote communities.

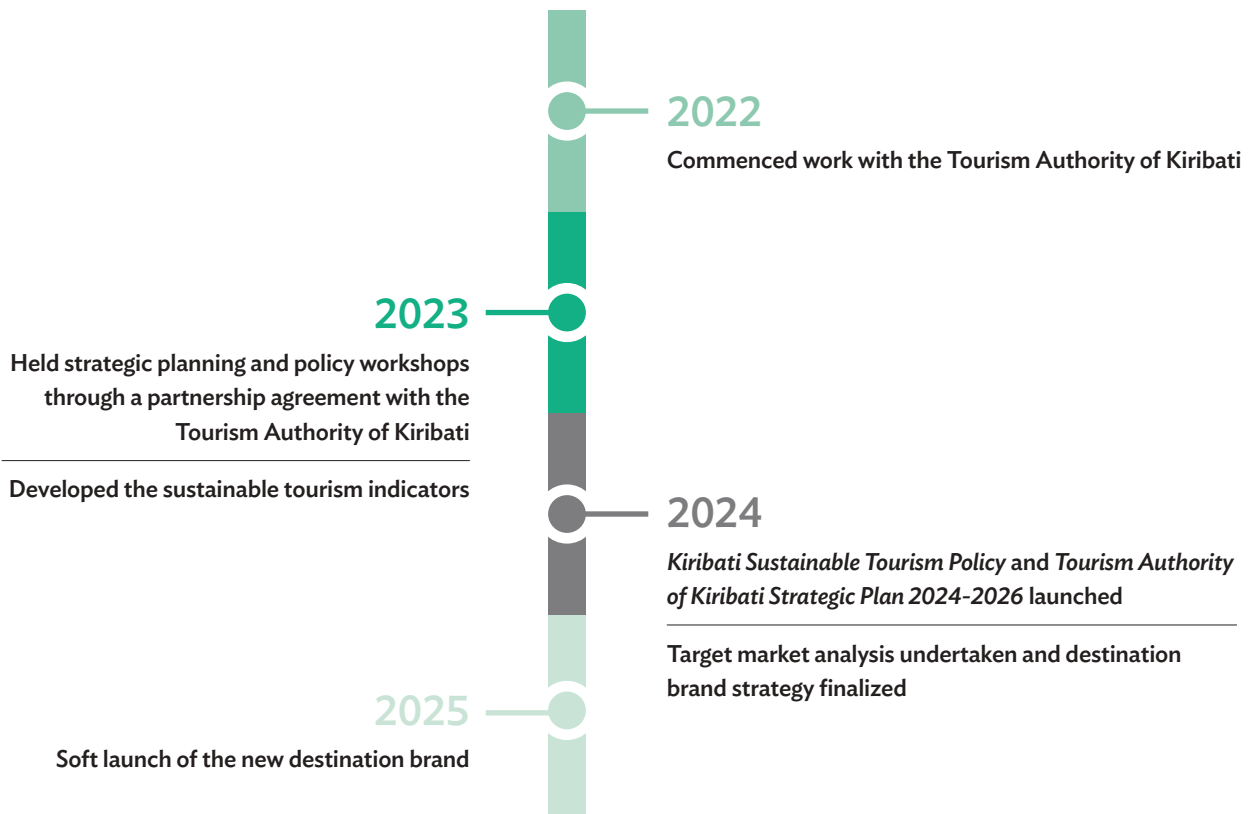
To support TAK to fulfil its mandate and support its role in convening the new Policy, PSDI also supported the preparation of its institutional Strategic Plan, and is now supporting implementation of this plan through an evidence-based approach to destination branding and marketing.

PSDI conducted a target market analysis. Insights from the analysis are being used to inform future marketing and product development decisions. The analysis has also helped inform a bold new brand direction for Kiribati, developed with PSDI support, and includes a prioritized communications plan for its implementation.



The PSDI-supported National Sustainable Tourism Policy and Strategic Plan (2024-2026) for the Tourism Authority of Kiribati.

TIMELINE OF PSDI SUPPORT



The Tourism Authority of Kiribati is a key partner for PSDI.

OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

PSDI's partnership with the Government of Kiribati and TAK has delivered tangible results—most notably the launch of Kiribati's first-ever Sustainable Tourism Policy and the TAK 2024-2026 Strategic Plan on 13 January 2024.

The Kiribati Sustainable Tourism Policy laid the foundation for whole-of-nation tourism sector planning and provided a 10-point action plan to guide the first 12 months. Kiribati is now one of the first Pacific nations to formalize its commitment to sustainable tourism through a dedicated policy.

With the Policy and Strategic Plan now in place, TAK and policy partners are moving forward with greater confidence and capacity to turn the vision into action.

“This policy charts a course toward sustainable tourism and shall be the foundation on which our future tourism development will be guided.”

Honorable Minister Michael Bootii Nauan, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, formerly the Minister for Tourism, Commerce, Industry and Cooperatives.



Evidence-based marketing and a striking new brand direction

Two key actions from the Policy and TAK's Strategic Plan were the development of a market analysis and a branding strategy. The market analysis identifies priority market segments for tourism and provides an evidence base for Kiribati's first destination brand strategy.

“We worked with PSDI on the market analysis, which is based on the signature experiences and offerings of goods in Kiribati, which is a niche market,” said TAK marketing manager Mr. George Kee.

The market analysis revealed several tourism market opportunities, including fishing, diving, bird watching, and eco-tourism experiences. Mr. Kee said that everything PSDI identified was “right to the point.”

PSDI's market analysis findings informed the development of the branding messaging. According to Mr. George Kee, branding is a “key priority” for TAK, and they are “very satisfied” with PSDI's support, “especially with the branding concept they came up with. It's just the one we had in mind, and [PSDI] managed to bring it to life. The concept is spot on.”

The brand strategy was finalized in 2024 with a soft launch in 2025. The full new brand is expected to launch in 2026.



Traditional dance presentation in Tarawa, Kiribati.



Sustainable, community-based tourism product development

Over the past year, the TAK Strategic Plan and the National Sustainable Tourism Policy have underpinned TAK's work plans and guided its product development. TAK uses the policy's seven goals and corresponding policy responses as a guiding checklist to identify and assess community-based tourism products.

“The tourism policy is like a guide for us in terms of tourism product development, together with the Strategic Plan. Our workplan feeds from these two. Before, we didn't have that. We just developed a product based on our own understanding. We appreciate the policy because it explains how we can carry out our activities in tourism product development. It's a guideline that we always go back to and ensure we meet those objectives.”

Ms. Kiarake Karuaki, TAK Product Development Officer.



Increased cross-sector collaboration

TAK's increased confidence has started to lead to collaborations with other ministries on tourism-enabling projects. Mr. Kee said a challenge that TAK faced was that “the other sectors have a lack of understanding that tourism is always involved”. This limited understanding previously hindered cooperation on projects by other agencies that impact tourism.

“We can add value if [other agencies] have an activity that we are interested in. [For example], the Ministry of Fisheries was one of the first ministries I tried to reach out to, and after that, they always consider TAK as part of their team. They see our potential to add value to activities, in terms of conservation and marine activities that we can add tourism to.”

Ms. Kiarake Karuaki, TAK Product Development Officer.



Improved confidence and capacity

The workshops that PSDI supported have strengthened TAK's networks and confidence, enabling and encouraging TAK to more actively engage with other ministries, such as the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Infrastructure, and the Ministry of Fisheries, to initiate sustainability projects and integrate tourism considerations into national planning.

“Before, I had no knowledge on other sectors, but after [PSDI] and the consultations and the information we requested from different sectors, I have a lot more experience. In the next consultations, I had more confidence, and I know where to go. It gave me more confidence to talk about tourism and I can relate to other sectors. It has helped me to reach out to people for other activities in other areas in Kiribati... Now, we can contact [other agencies] more confidently. It makes our work easier. For new projects coming in, we know what to do and where to reach out.”

Ms. Kiarake Karuaki, TAK Product Development Officer.

In line with priorities set out in the tourism policy, TAK has also reached out to the Ministry of Infrastructure to discuss developing a building code for local accommodation and homestay providers. TAK hopes that this will support the development of more local accommodation for tourists, generating income opportunities for communities.



Kiarake Karuaki, Product Development Officer, and George Kee, Marketing Manager, at the Tourism Authority of Kiribati.

PSDI's support is also contributing to improved capacity within TAK, by guiding staff through the process of data management and policy and branding development. Mr. Petero Manuolau, former TAK CEO, said that the partnership with PSDI “helped enhance capacity within TAK and strengthen its relationship with relevant stakeholders.”

LESSONS LEARNED



Providing collaborative support can strengthen organizational capacity.

By developing tourism policies and strategic plans in close collaboration with TAK, PSDI's technical assistance also served to enhance the agency's capacity to identify and implement sustainable tourism initiatives. This collaborative approach has given TAK firsthand experience and increased their organizational capacity.



Holding inter-agency workshops and consultations around policy development can strengthen cooperation for policy implementation.

PSDI adopted a consultative approach to policy development to strengthen TAK's alignment with other government agencies and ministries and foster a sense of shared ownership with local stakeholders. This approach has helped TAK establish stronger networks and advocate for tourism's role in national planning that will extend beyond PSDI's engagement. It has also supported strengthened recognition of TAK's role by other agencies, such as the Ministry of Commerce seeking their input on SME development and investment decisions.



Sustained engagement strengthens implementation and sustainability.

PSDI's ongoing support to implement key policy actions, such as the sustainable tourism indicators, market analysis, and branding, has helped TAK maintain momentum and confidence in achieving the goals of its sustainable tourism strategy and strategic plan.

CONCLUSION

PSDI's support to develop a whole-of-nation sustainable tourism policy—alongside an organizational strategic plan, sustainable tourism indicators, and a tourism market analysis—has significantly strengthened TAK's confidence and capacity to lead. TAK is now better positioned to collaborate across government and industry on sustainability-focused initiatives.


These efforts have laid a strong foundation for TAK to implement its strategy and advance the Government of Kiribati's long-term vision for sustainable tourism growth.




Kiribati locals transporting thatched roofing.

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