Dependency on Australian aid and the introduction of inclusive education initiatives in Kiribati

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Abstract

This study examines dependency on Australian aid in the introduction of inclusive education initiatives in the Pacific Island nation of Kiribati through data analysis of documents and individual interview responses with key stakeholders from both the recipient and donor sides. The results indicate that the catalyst for inclusive education initiatives has been Australian aid highlighting a social justice issue, namely the exclusion of children with disabilities from school programs. Australian aid has shaped policy, funded inclusive education initiatives, and directly managed the programs through the externally controlled Kiribati Education Facility. The long-term sustainability of inclusive education initiatives is uncertain if Australian aid priorities change and funding is withdrawn.

KEYWORDS

Australian aid, dependency, inclusive education, Kiribati, Pacific Island nations

The views expressed in this article are the author’s own and not necessarily those of the Australian Government or the Government of Kiribati.
1 | INTRODUCTION

This article examines the research question: “How does dependency on foreign aid from Australia influence the course and impact of inclusive education policy and practices in the Pacific island nation of Kiribati?” In examining this question, the article first considers issues concerning foreign aid and inclusive education. Then the methodology for the study, using data from document analysis and interviews with key stakeholders, is outlined. The data are analysed in terms of four subthemes related to the central theme of dependency. A concluding section draws together the findings from the subthemes and discusses the sustainability of inclusive education initiatives.

The Republic of Kiribati is a small island nation centrally located in the Pacific Ocean. The country’s 32 atolls straddle the equator and extend across a distance of 3,900 km east to west. Kiribati is classified as a least developed nation; “Kiribati has few natural resources and is one of the least developed Pacific Island countries” (World Fact Book, 2015). In 2017, foreign aid contributed 48 percent (A$153m) to the government's programs (Government of Kiribati, 2016), making Kiribati one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world. Australia is a substantial bilateral aid donor to Kiribati; “Australian aid comprises about 20 per cent of total Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Kiribati” (DFAT, 2018). Inclusive education is a relatively new concept that is being introduced largely through Australian aid funded projects.

2 | FOREIGN AID AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Foreign aid is generally provided through short-term projects identified, developed, and funded by the donor using external technical expertise. The design and implementation of the project is often driven by the donor country with limited input from local counterparts (Riddell, 2007). Bilateral aid, which flows between two countries, can be particularly restrictive in that it is generally linked to the donor country's interests and agenda. For example in 2014, the then Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop stated, “We are refocussing our efforts, placing our aid program more clearly in the context of Australia’s national interest” (Bishop, 2014, para. 12). Bilateral Australian aid has been particularly influential in the Pacific, where Australia has been the largest donor. The Australian government has been the “most influential in providing support to Pacific governments” (Miles, Lene, & Merumeru, 2014, p. 3).

The short-term nature of aid projects limits the long-term sustainability of the outcomes achieved (de Renzio, 2016). A criticism of aid is that it has little impact in the long term (Riddell, 2014). Whereas short-term projects are easiest to evaluate, they are probably the least effective in terms of impact, because impact takes time. Systemic changes such as inclusive education policies and practices are difficult to assess (Nastios, 2010) as they are multifaceted (Mitchell, 2015), requiring qualitative evaluation of the change made to people’s lives (Riddell, 2014).

Riddell and Nino-Zarazua (2016) reviewed what has been learned “over many decades” regarding the contribution that foreign aid has made to education. They concluded that aid has made a positive contribution to “education in aid-recipient countries, the most tangible outcome of which is the contribution that aid makes to expanding enrolments especially of basic education” (p. 23). They caution, however, that “development agencies which focus only on demonstrable short-term impact may well be contributing, unwittingly, to an undermining of long-term impact on the education systems” (p. 23).
There is also a question of sustainability when initiatives are generated and controlled from the agenda of the donor country that may not correspond to the agenda of the recipient country and its community cultural values. “It is commonly and no doubt rightly said that aid projects will only succeed if recipients ‘own’ them” (Howes, 2013, p. 69).

Globally, inclusive education has been concerned with groups of children who have historically been excluded from schools because of perceived differences, such as sex, ethnic origin, language, religion, nationality, poverty, rural and geographic isolation, and disability (UNESCO, 2017). Definitions of inclusive education are varied, ranging from a specific focus such as the inclusion of students with disabilities to a much broader definition of inclusion that includes all students who may have been excluded from accessing schooling.

Inclusive education is socio-political in nature, emerging from the human rights and social justice movements in developed countries. “The concept of inclusion has emerged in the last 30 years within European social theory” (Terzi, 2014, p. 1). The international human rights movement and associated conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994), Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2000), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), and the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), have all promoted the introduction of inclusive education policies and practices in developing nations and highlighted the importance of inclusive education worldwide. Whilst most countries support these conventions, the level of commitment and implementation can depend on factors such as available resources (including aid).

Le Fanu (2013) sees inclusive education as “global evangelization” promulgated through United Nations organisations. Implementation of inclusive education can be a challenge particularly for developing countries. These challenges include:

- the imposition of developed countries’ concepts of inclusive education (even if subtly) onto developing countries which do not take into account the cultural factors of the developing countries (Nguyen, Elliot, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2009); and
- the capacity of developing countries to implement programs associated with inclusion (Le Fanu, 2013; Miles, 2007).

In carrying out this “campaign” through strategies such as “Education for All”, local conditions are often discounted. “The adoption of international approaches such as inclusive education and its subsequent policy development in the Pacific disregarded cultural and local issues, thus making implementation ineffective [and unsustainable]” (Duke et al., 2016, p. 910).

In Pacific Island nations, the primary concern of inclusive education has been the inclusion of students with disabilities (Puamau & Pene, 2009). This has been influenced by the primary role of Australian aid in the introduction of inclusive education initiatives that, through the Development for All strategy (DFAT, 2009, 2015), have placed a focus on disability inclusion. Certainly, in the Kiribati context, inclusive education is seen as primarily related to children with disabilities accessing education. As commented by an educational program evaluation in Kiribati: “This has created confusion as to what inclusion means” (Emmott, 2014, p. 26).

Without additional support, the governments of developing countries may not have the capacity to implement programs associated with inclusive education (Le Fanu, 2013).
Developing countries, such as small Pacific Island nations, have particular challenges regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities. Access to education, especially in geographically isolated outer islands, is often restricted given the challenges of limited resourcing and local cultural factors (Klees, 2010; Miles, 2007). The local neighbourhood school is generally the only educational facility, and local factors such as community attitudes, teacher skills and lack of resources present significant barriers to enrolment of children with disabilities.

3 | METHOD

The analysis draws from two sources of data: document analysis and individual interviews with key stakeholders. Document analysis focused on the *Development for All* strategy (DFAT, 2015), which outlines Australian aid policy for disability inclusion, and the Kiribati Education Facility (KEF) Management Plans (Coffey International, 2013; Kiribati Education Facility, 2013), which include inclusive education initiatives. The key stakeholders interviewed were Ministry of Education representatives (M), a Teachers College representative (TC), school executives (SE), a disabled persons’ organisation representative (DPO), and local contractors/employees from Australian aid donor organisations (D).

Coding was used to analyse the text of the documents and interview data. To examine the major theme of dependency, process coding (Saldana, 2013, pp. 96–100) was used. This produced four groupings or subthemes: “influencing”, “managing”, “funding”, and “depending”.

As examples of coding, the phrase “leverage broader change” from the document analysis (DFAT, 2015, p. 14) was classified under “influencing”. From the analysis of the individual interviews, the phrase “I am doing this but it reads like the Ministry” (D) was classified under “managing”; the phrase “It is good that funding is available from KEF” (M) was classified under “funding”; and the phrase “the adviser knows the important matters” (DPO) was classified under “depending”. Although this classification is useful, it should be acknowledged that there is considerable overlap across the groupings.

The following headings based on these subtheme groupings were used in the analysis of results:

1. Influencing inclusive education policy.
2. Managing inclusive education initiatives.
3. Funding inclusive education.
4. Depending on Australian aid.

The first subtheme “Influencing inclusive education policy” provides an examination of how Australian aid policy established the agenda for inclusive education initiatives in Kiribati. The second subtheme “Managing inclusive education initiatives” examines the extent to which the Australian aid education project, KEF, controls these initiatives rather than the Kiribati Ministry of Education. The third subtheme “Funding inclusive education” considers the reliance on Australian aid funding to support inclusive education initiatives. The final subtheme “Depending on Australian aid” identifies participant responses that provide general evidence of dependency on Australian aid.

The analysis of these subthemes is discussed below.
The subtheme “Influencing inclusive education policy” provides an examination of how Australian aid policy established the agenda for inclusive education initiatives in Kiribati. The findings for this subtheme draw on document analysis of Development for All (DFAT, 2015). Development for All was selected because it is the primary source for Australian aid policy on disability inclusion. Analysis of “Development for All” is supported by interview data, particularly from the individual interviews with donor representatives.

The Development for All 2015–2020 strategy (DFAT, 2015) gives priority to supporting inclusive education: “We will encourage and support the implementation of inclusive education in Australian-supported education programs” (p. 22). The role of Australian aid has been seen as actively influencing initiatives. “[Australian aid] is in a position of needing to lead many of the stakeholders at country program level to enable them to understand the rationale and benefits of disability-inclusive development” (Kelly & Wapling, 2012, p. 27). Note the use of the term “lead” rather than “support” suggests that disability inclusion is assumed (by Australian aid) to be lacking. An advocacy role by Australian aid is seen as necessary to “lead” developing countries towards disability inclusion.

An active role in influencing disability inclusion (including inclusive education) in the Asia-Pacific region is reflected in the document. Sentences such as “Australia has a strong voice globally in this area” (DFAT, 2015, p. 1) and phrases such as “encouraging partner governments” (p. 11), “leverage broader change” (p. 13), and “advocate for and support partner government led reforms” (p. 13) indicate that a direct influence is sought in directing partner government action. These terms suggest a premeditated intervention to impose disability inclusion on to the societies of countries receiving Australian aid. In education, the strategy claims (unsupported by evidence) that “We have made strong progress in enabling persons with disabilities to benefit from our education investments” (p. 21).

Advocacy for disability inclusion in Kiribati came through Australian aid policy; “The government of Kiribati didn’t see it as a priority and did not ask partners for assistance. DFAT\(^1\) is committed to disability” (D). Australian aid provided an advocacy role to incorporate inclusive education within the Kiribati education system. The donor noted the gap and included inclusive education initiatives in their program priorities: “For example, with this government’s [Government of Kiribati’s] priorities, disability, which can include inclusive education, is not a priority. DFAT has supported [inclusive education] because we saw that it wasn’t something that the previous [Kiribati] government was committed to” (D). In Kiribati, the Development for All strategy is central to Australian aid funded projects; “It’s guiding most of the development projects even in Kiribati” (D). This applies to education, as this strategy is “also integrated into the education strategies” (D). Development for All underpins inclusive education strategies in Kiribati. Support for the Kiribati Inclusive Education Policy (Government of Kiribati, 2015), which itself was developed through Australian aid support and input, is aligned to the Development for All strategy:

In line with Development for All 2015–2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia’s aid program, Australia can help the GoK

\(^1\)Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Prior to 2013 Australian aid was administered through a separate government department AusAID. In 2013 this department was abolished and aid placed under the administration of DFAT.
[Government of Kiribati] implement its Inclusive Education Policy by enabling children with disabilities to learn in mainstream classrooms through strategies adapted for the Kiribati context (Kiribati Education Improvement Program, 2015, 1).

Unfavourable community attitudes towards children with disabilities have meant that their inclusion was seen in Kiribati as a low priority. “From the local perspective disability in the past has always been a family [not a government] issue” (D). The donors are taking an active role to address this attitude. “For us on the disability side, we are pushing to have them participate because they are marginalised ones and they are left behind” (D). The question of ownership poses a dilemma. The disadvantaged need advocates to highlight and challenge their situation. When this advocacy comes from an external source, change may be difficult to sustain until local advocacy and commitment emerges.

Responses from both the recipient and donor interviewees indicated the lead role played by Australian aid. “The Ministry didn’t really know much about inclusive education. In the first place it was slow to accept this but I think it was through KEF who have been advocating this” (M). “Actually it came from DFAT. That’s how I see the first initiation of inclusive education. It was [Australian Aid]” (D). The representative of the disability advocacy group commented that they had been “fighting for that [inclusive education] for twenty years” (DPO). Other participants interviewed saw inclusive education as coming from international conventions Kiribati has signed up to. “From the conventions. Our leaders went to those conventions and there they signed the documents for international agreements and that’s where the inclusive education initiative came from” (M). However, the signing of an international agreement does not guarantee that inclusive education initiatives will be introduced, and indeed, there can be a long gap between Kiribati signing and ratifying:2 “Maybe they [were] waiting for the right time, for donors” (M). Australian aid policy supported the implementation of these conventions. The long struggle, without success, for inclusive education suggests that there was a need for stronger advocacy from external sources, such as provided by Australian aid. The evidence suggests Australian aid funded programs as the primary catalyst for the practical introduction of inclusive education initiatives in Kiribati.

5 | MANAGING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INITIATIVES

The subtheme “Managing Inclusive Education Initiatives” examines the extent to which the Australian aid education program, KEF, controls inclusive education initiatives rather than the Kiribati Ministry of Education. This subtheme focuses on document analysis of KEF Management Plans, interview responses from the KEF local contractor responsible for coordinating the inclusive education initiatives, and interview responses from other key stakeholders.

The recipients interviewed identified a number of programs and personnel related to inclusive education initiatives that had been funded by Australian aid through KEF. These included: a local Gender and Social Inclusion Coordinator (GSIC); a Gender and Social Inclusion Mentor (Technical Adviser) who came from Australia for short-term visits; the training of college lecturers and teachers; the building of new accessible schools; the development of relevant

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2For example, the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted by the United Nations General assembly on 13 December 2006 but signed and ratified by Kiribati on September 27, 2013, almost 7 years later.
teaching resources; the funding of the community consultation team providing visits to the outer islands; the funding of the development of the Kiribati Inclusive Education Policy and its promotion and advocacy; and the organising of inter-Ministry showcases to highlight inclusion initiatives. These initiatives were funded and managed through KEF. KEF advisors not only oversee specific inclusive education initiatives but are embedded across the Ministry of Education. Accountability procedures, such as acquittal of funds and program reports required by Australian aid, are generally compiled with significant input from KEF advisers and in some cases written by the adviser on behalf of the local organisation; “My report is the Ministry’s. But of course I am doing this but it reads like the Ministry and Senior Education Officer with the assistance of KEF” (D).

There is strong evidence to suggest that KEF is responsible for the day-to-day operation of inclusive education activities within the Ministry of Education; “The GSIC is an ambiguous role being a staff position of KEF but acting in a line role in the SIU [Ministry of Education School Improvement Unit]” (Emmott, 2014, p. 23). In practice, the implementation of inclusive education initiatives appears to be the responsibility of the KEF contractor who is directly responsible to KEF management (Emmott, 2014). “What can I say? I did the work but for somebody. I’m just the person doing the work behind the scenes” (D).

It is clear that KEF has been responsible for introducing and managing inclusive education initiatives in Kiribati rather than the Ministry of Education (Emmott, 2014). The Ministry of Education, although nominally overseeing the introduction of inclusive education initiatives across Kiribati, has seemingly deferred this responsibility to KEF that directly oversees day-to-day inclusive education operations (and reporting) through the GSIC. It is as if the Ministry of Education is supporting Australian aid initiatives rather than the other way round.

6 | FUNDING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The subtheme “Funding Inclusive Education” considers the reliance on Australian aid funding to support inclusive education initiatives. Responses from the individual interviews were the primary source of data for this subtheme. As commented by an interviewee, the Government of Kiribati lacks the funds to support inclusive education:

Local people have the capacity but they still need finance for a time now. My Ministry has very, very need of operational funds. All the government is catering for the salaries. The salaries of the people within the Ministry of Education and now the donors, the foreign aid are supporting the activities (D).

There is no specific provision for inclusive education in the budget allocation from the government’s consolidated funds: “The funding you can see in their budget; there’s not yet a recognised portion for this IE [inclusive education] policy” (D).

Financial concerns are the major barrier for the government. “When we started to talk about inclusive education and the implications, especially financial, that was a challenge for the Ministry. It was a worry” (M). Funding from Australian aid has largely been the only source for inclusive education initiatives. “Very little comes from the Ministry. We rely too much on assistance. It is good that fund is available from KEF. It has contributed a lot” (M). Inclusive education initiatives would be an additional expense for an already under-resourced education system without funding through Australian aid.
Without Australian aid funding, it is unlikely that the Government of Kiribati would have considered introducing inclusive education initiatives because of fears concerning costs. “With the help from KEF we managed to develop our Inclusive Education Policy. We are funded through that” (M). Budgetary commitment by the Government of Kiribati is seen as essential for future sustainability. “We have to make sure that Kiribati Government put in the budget the funds to support the provision for children with disabilities to go to school” (DPO). Government budget allocations would demonstrate a monetary commitment towards inclusive education. Resourcing is seen as a critical area requiring funding support.

It is also related to the resources of the country because we could not afford what else was needed to provide the resources, wheelchairs, braille, hearing aids, so they can access everything in education. It costs money so that’s why they have been neglected. The government fears to buy those things (SE).

There are many challenges. One is financial. If we want our schools to be more inclusive we have to do many things to support the idea and that needs a lot of money. Like the pathways and materials, like toilets to be suitable for the disabilities, infrastructure and also our teachers they need more knowledge on that – training (M).

Continued funding through Australian aid is seen as necessary for the development and sustainability of inclusive education. “It can be achieved but through funding if we have the right schools and appropriate resources to make it worthwhile. If it’s all there everything will be realistic. If not then nothing will happen” (M).

7 | DEPENDING ON AUSTRALIAN AID

This final subtheme identifies participant responses that provide general evidence of dependency on Australian aid.

The Government of Kiribati has needed outside direction through Australian aid to focus on disability issues as highlighted by the influence of the Australian Government’s Development for All policy strategy. “Because [inclusive education is] new to Kiribati I think that in the past the government did not see the importance of those people [with disabilities] because they have less knowledge and understanding of human rights” (SE). This attitude is based on a cultural view of disability. “In my culture people with disabilities are regarded as useless, not important, not really accepted to come to the public. They just stay home hidden away but with these new ideas being introduced we just realised we have not done something good for these people” (D).

The strategy supported by Australian aid has been to increase understanding and acceptance of inclusive education initiatives at community (through community consultations) and at government levels (through policy development).

It [Australian aid programs] built our awareness and opened our minds and hearts. We are very grateful that new ideas are introduced to Kiribati because Kiribati is not staying as it is but changed. So how can we cope with changes if we do not have support from others? I think foreign aid ideas are needed for us to go in the right direction (D).
The expertise and direction provided through Australian aid is acknowledged, as seen in the comment that the “advisor knows the important matters” (DPO). The KEF Management plans outline the strategies employed in the introduction of inclusive education initiatives which direct implementation of these initiatives. The donors have a proactive role in the introduction of inclusive education initiatives. Funding for inclusive education comes directly from Australian aid provisions. The donor’s aim is to “expose the Ministry to this inclusive thinking” (D) so that “we can advocate for the schools or the government to do it themselves” (D). But, ironically, because the donor is doing all this, the government is not “doing it themselves.”

Because inclusive education is a new concept in Kiribati, community acceptance is going to take time. This means that inclusive education initiatives will need continued Australian financial and technical support for a significant period of time. “Perhaps it will be like 5 to 10 years we can stand on our own feet with the rolling out of the [inclusive education policy] implementation. I think we’ll be able to survive but if we lose foreign aid at this point in time [inclusive education will be] gone” (M).

There is no question that the Kiribati education system is highly dependent, at this stage, on Australian aid for education reform including inclusive education initiatives. Sustainability of these reforms is contingent on continued financial and technical support through aid provisions.

8 | CONCLUSION: CONTINUING DEPENDENCY

The Development for All strategy (DFAT, 2015) suggests that Australian aid policy is deliberately exercising its influence (or power) to advocate for human rights and social justice for people (especially children) with disabilities, who are seen as “the region’s most disadvantaged [powerless] group” (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2009, p. 2). In exercising its power, Australian aid is “in a position of needing to lead many of the stakeholders at country program level to enable them to understand the rationale and benefits of disability-inclusive development” (Kelly & Wapling, 2012, p. 27).

Australian aid has provided the impetus for the introduction of inclusive education in Kiribati and thereby has helped disadvantaged children, particularly children with disabilities who have been historically excluded from school. It is unlikely that the Government of Kiribati would have independently supported inclusive education because of factors such as not seeing inclusive education as a priority and concerns about costs. From the interview data, there was a strong consensus regarding the contribution Australian aid has made to the introduction of inclusive education in Kiribati: “We must thank Australia because it is the only program which is dealing with this kind of issue in Kiribati” (SE). However, the influence of Australian aid policy in Kiribati has been criticised: “DFAT’s policy on Disability Inclusive Development intrudes on the formulation and implementation of KEF funded inclusive education initiatives” (Emmott, 2014, p. 29).

There is a conflict between Australian imposed values of disability inclusion and negative attitudes towards disability within the Kiribati community. On the one hand, it may be argued that Australian aid helps broaden the view of the Kiribati community to incorporate universal human rights and practices. Cultures that have different views can be shown alternatives, which may be then internalised into their own cultural perspectives.

On the other hand, it can be argued that this situation creates a mindset that makes genuine local ownership of inclusive education difficult to achieve. Dependency on external influence may be accompanied by a discounting of local ideas as inferior. As Freire (1970) puts it, the recipients
of foreign aid “begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the [donor] rather than their own” (p. 134). A culture of dependency (Moyo, 2009) develops, in which the solution to issues can only come from the provision of aid. Aid funding itself becomes the “limit situation” that prevents full local commitment to the concept of inclusive education.³ This “stepping back” by local actors was evident in the interviews summarised in the earlier sections.

There is some evidence that a commitment to inclusive education is developing in Kiribati at least with education administrators and to some extent with teachers (Yates, Carrington, Gillett-Swan, & Pillay, 2018). “We believe that inclusive education is a very important initiative” (M); “I think it’s a good idea to give more opportunity for those who have been left [behind] or ignored” (Teacher focus group). Inclusive education has been given an increased priority in the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2016–2019 (Kiribati Ministry of Education, 2016) largely due to the programs initiated by the donor. However, in general, without continuing Australian support, inclusive education initiatives would disappear or be very limited in implementation.

The dependency on Australian aid in the introduction of inclusive education is summarised by the comment: “It’s contributed a lot. Without Australian aid where can we be?” (M). The participants, however, questioned the sustainability of inclusive education initiatives if Australian aid was reduced or ceased. “Looking at this point in time it will all be collapsing. Perhaps it will be like 5 to 10 years before we can stand on our own two feet” (M). This may be a somewhat over optimistic view and needs to be seen in the context of Kiribati’s economic position as a least developed country with few resources and more specifically the limitations of the Ministry of Education in terms of funds and expertise.

Dependence on Australian aid has been the primary determinant of the course and impact of the introduction of inclusive policy and practices in Kiribati to date. The influence exerted by Australian aid can be seen as advocating for powerless disadvantaged groups such as children with disabilities. However, control by the external education program (KEF) raises questions of imposed values and agendas by the aid provider and may discourage local ownership. As long as the solutions to the challenges of inclusive education are viewed as coming solely from Australian aid, local participation and ownership will be limited. As commented by an independent evaluation report on the Kiribati Education Improvement Program, “broader traction with regard to inclusive education across all schools and Ministry of Education] appears nascent” (Smith & McNaughton, 2018). With evidence of only limited attitudinal change to date, dependency on Australian aid will need to continue well into the future for inclusive education initiatives to be sustained.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in QUT eprints at https://eprints.qut.edu.au/118144/.

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³Limit situations are barriers to freedom: “it is not the limit situation in and of themselves which create a climate of hopelessness, but rather how they are perceived” (Freire, 1970, p. 80).
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Rodney Yates’ interest in inclusive education came from a long career in regular and special education as a teacher of students with learning and intellectual disabilities, as a school psychologist and as a school principal. He has held volunteer placements in Kiribati as Inclusive Education Teacher Trainer at Kiribati Teachers College in 2013 and as Inclusive Education Advisor at the Maldives Ministry of Education in 2015. In 2016, he returned to Kiribati for two months, planning staff development at the Kiribati School for Children with Special Needs. The interviews for this study were conducted during this time. His PhD doctorate examined the role of Australian aid in the introduction and sustainability of inclusive education initiatives in the Republic of Kiribati (https://eprints.qut.edu.au/118144/RodneyYatesThesis.pdf). The author acknowledges the professional insights provided by the interviewees and by the reviewers and editors for this article.

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