

WOMEN OF MICRONESIA

AT THE FOREFRONT OF CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Three islands. Three women. Three perspectives. Different shores, different challenges – but one shared reality: climate change is shaping their lives, and they are shaping the response.

Climate change is not gender neutral.

Global evidence confirms that climate change impacts are not experienced equally. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022) highlights that climate risks interact with existing social and economic inequalities, increasing vulnerability for women and girls. UN Women (2024) reports that women are more likely to depend on climate-sensitive livelihoods and to carry primary responsibility for securing food and water and providing unpaid care.

Across the Pacific, including in Micronesia, women often carry the greatest burden of climate impacts because of the roles they hold in their families and communities. Women are responsible for securing food and water, caring for children and elders, and holding households together during times of disruption (UNDP 2025). When droughts intensify, crops fail, water sources become contaminated, or typhoons damage homes, it is women who stretch limited resources further, travel longer distances, and manage the daily consequences of these changes.

Climate change magnifies existing inequalities. It increases workloads, health risks, and economic vulnerability (UN Women 2024).

But women are not only vulnerable. They are also essential to climate solutions. Women hold deep knowledge of local ecosystems, food systems, and community networks.

FSM'S NATIONAL ADAPTATION PLAN

This awareness campaign forms part of the Federated States of Micronesia National Adaptation Plan (NAP) project, funded by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and implemented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), in partnership with the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia and Haskoning New Zealand.

The NAP will be central to strengthening long-term climate resilience across the nation. It will provide a coordinated roadmap to identify climate risks, prioritise adaptation actions, and guide investments that protect communities, livelihoods, and future generations.

They are often first responders during disasters and leaders in recovery. Yet they remain underrepresented in formal climate decision-making. When women are meaningfully included in leadership and planning, climate responses are stronger and more effective.

This is the principle behind Give to Gain: when women are supported to lead, communities gain resilience.

In Micronesia, this reality is visible every day. Recognising and strengthening women's leadership is not only about equity – it leads to stronger, more effective climate action. This is a story about the Women of Micronesia.

Women's leadership is not optional in climate action. It is fundamental. When women gain, we all gain.



Authors: Noora Yukich & Christopher Eustaquio
Photography: Noora Yukich

Bantomera Enlet:

“We are already adapting our farming practices, but the rain comes too fast now. We don’t need big systems – we need simple drainage so the water doesn’t wash everything away.”

When crops fail, women carry the burden

Bantomera Enlet has grown up and lived her life on the island of Onei, in the Federated States of Micronesia.

Bantomera has been farming on the high lands in Onei for more than fifty years. She began when she was young, when her first child was still unborn. Like many families in Micronesia, her land is not just a source of food, but a way of life. Farming means independence, dignity, and the ability to provide – not only for her own family, but for others as well.

She knows what the seasons used to feel like. That is why she knows something has changed.

Today, farming is no longer shaped by predictable cycles. The heat comes stronger and stays longer. Crops bloom, but do not last. The sun feels heavier – not only on people’s bodies, but on the plants themselves. *“If we feel it,” she says, “why wouldn’t the plants feel it too?”*

At the same time, rain has become more extreme. On the hills, water no longer arrives gently. It rushes downhill, gathering speed, with nowhere to go. Soil loosens. Gardens slide. A season’s work can disappear overnight. Water is no longer only a source of life – it has become something that must be carefully managed.

Bantomera does not speak of climate change through theories or statistics. She speaks of it through food.

Coconuts still grow, but they no longer taste the way they once did. Taro patches closer to the coast are turning salty after king tides, leaving families without their most important staple. These changes may seem small from the outside, but together they reshape what it means to live securely.

So people adapt.

When king tides flood coastal villages, families raise cooking fires on stacked stones so meals can still be made. When animals are at risk of drowning, pigs and chickens are released so they have a chance to survive. During storms, families shelter in caves, bringing what food and water they can, sharing resources until the danger passes. Women prepare meals not only for their own households, but for others who arrive with less.

This is resilience practiced daily, without labels.

Women like Bantomera carry much of this load. As farmers, mothers, and community leaders, they organise food, care for the injured using local remedies, and find ways for families to endure.

What frustrates her is not change itself. People here have always adapted. What frustrates her is the distance between plans and reality.

Over the years, many visitors have come to talk about climate change. There have been workshops, meetings, and discussions about what should be done. The words are often good. The plans sound promising. But too often, they stop there.

For farmers like Bantomera, support is not complicated. Simple drainage channels could slow and guide floodwaters. Small investments in tools and irrigation could protect crops. Practical measures could make farming safer and more reliable. These are not abstract needs — they are solutions already imagined by the people living with the impacts.

When asked whether she feels seen in planning, Bantomera answers quietly: she does not see herself there. *"I feel invisible"*. Not because she lacks ideas, but because those ideas rarely turn into action. After years of repeating the same needs, many people stop asking. Not out of anger, but because experience has taught them what question will, and will not, be answered.

She speaks with gratitude about the few organisations that respond with action, such as her local Women's Council — those that provide tools, seeds, and direct support. For her, these small interventions matter more than promises. They allow farmers to keep going. They restore a sense of being valued.

Bantomera's message is clear: People here are ready. They are already adapting. What they need is for planning to meet practice — and for action to follow words.

Did you know?

Women are central to household food production and security in the Pacific — yet climate change is increasing food insecurity, with nearly **64 million more women than men affected globally.**

Source: UNSDA, Gender Snapshot 2025





Authors: Noora Yukich &
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Photography: Noora Yukich

Elinor Rollis

“When the king tides come, there is nothing to block the water, and when emergencies happen, we cannot even communicate. If we cannot tell people what is happening here, how can they help us?”

When the tides rise, women rise first

Elinor has lived her entire life in Losap, one of the outer islands of Micronesia. She is a caretaker – not as a title, but as a responsibility she has carried since she was a young girl.

Caring for family, for neighbours, and for the everyday needs of the community is simply part of life in the remote outer islands of Micronesia. When Elinor speaks about climate change, she does not speak in distant terms. She speaks about food, water, and preparedness; the foundations of daily survival.

In the past, people in her island grew food close to their homes. Trees, gardens, and small plots provided sustenance on the island itself. Today, that has changed. Farming near houses has largely stopped, and families depend on another island for food, on an island that has been allocated for this purpose. When that island is affected – by king tides and saltwater – everyone feels it.

King tides worry her. They now arrive with nothing to stop them. There are no natural or built barriers to slow the water as it moves inland. Saltwater reaches places it never did before, damaging land and limiting what can grow.

Elinor is clear: yes, she is worried about climate change, because without food, there is nothing.

Water has become another quiet concern. Rain still comes, but the systems to capture it no longer work for everyone. Some households have tanks, but no proper catchments to fill them. Others miss out entirely. When tanks remain empty, families are left unprepared for dry periods, even when rainfall is heavy.

In times of disaster, Elinor describes women’s roles as constant and expected. Before storms, women prepare homes and food so families do not need to go outside. After storms, their work continues. When saltwater floods gardens or heavy rain threatens crops, women move quickly to harvest what they can before it spoils.

Elinor speaks not only of climate impacts, but of what is missing. Reliable communication is one of the community’s biggest challenges. When emergencies happen, there is no effective way to call for help, share information, or explain what her community needs.

Without communication, the island remains invisible, even when families are struggling.

She also raises concerns beyond climate alone. Power shortages leave many people living in darkness. Mosquito populations have increased dramatically in her experience, bringing health risks that compound existing vulnerabilities. These pressures overlap — climate change makes them harder to manage, and isolation makes them harder to solve.

When asked what she would want planners and leaders to understand, Elinor's answer is simple and firm: *"Remember us. Without communication, how can anyone know what is happening here? Without practical support, how can people prepare?"*

Elinor does not describe herself, or her community, as powerless. She describes what people already do — and what would help them do it better. Her message is about connection: planning that reaches the island, listens carefully, and supports the work that is already holding the community together.



Did you know?

Globally, disasters kill more women and children than men — especially where gender inequality is high.

Source: UN Women 2024



Location: Losap, Chuuk

Christine Robert

“Before, women could plant crops and come back days later. Now they have to check the crops every day just to make sure they don't die. That is more work for women.”



Author & Photography: Noara Yukich
Location: Weno, Chuuk, Micronesia

When girls are informed, communities are stronger

Christine Robert was raised in Micronesia. Her life has been shaped by island rhythms — family, church, land, and the everyday work of women.

Today, she's working with the Chuuk Women's Council's Young Women Empowerment program, empowering girls aged 13-22 with knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their bodies, education, wellness, finances, and overall future. They plant vegetables together. They learn sewing and handicrafts. They cook and share meals.

It is empowerment in its most practical form. But climate change has entered these conversations too.

When asked whether women worry about climate change, Christine answers without hesitation. *“Especially the older ladies,”* she says. *“They're worried about the sea level rise and how their soil is getting washed away.”*

She saw it herself when she returned to one of her home islands for the first time in more than ten years. What she found was not what she remembered.

“There used to be rocks, beach, and then the water,” she recalls. *“When I went back... it was just the cement and water.”*

She had dressed expecting to walk on sand and stones. *“We were just walking in water.”* Ankle-deep. Between houses.

The shoreline had shifted. The land had been eaten away by waves. What once felt solid now feels uncertain.

Christine notices that it is often the older women who feel this change most deeply. They are the ones still working the land. The ones planting. The ones watching the soil. The younger generation, she says, are busy with school and less connected to farming.

“The older ones are more worried about climate change than the younger ones.”

For the women tending gardens, the change is constant. Before, crops could be planted and checked days later. Now, they must be monitored daily. *“Now they have to do it every day just to make sure the plants don't die.”*

The heat is stronger. The sun harsher. Heavy rain floods gardens. Food prices rise. Work increases. *“There will be more work added to them,”* she says simply.

Climate change, in Christine's view, is not gender neutral.

Did you know?

Women perform 2.5 times more unpaid care work than men – a burden that increases during climate crises.

Source: UNSDA, Gender Snapshot 2025



Sources:

UNSDA (2025). The Gender Snapshot. Progress on the sustainable development goals.
UNDP (2025). Gender and Climate Change. Overview of linkages between gender and climate change.
UN Women (2024). Climate Change, Gender and Health in the Pacific. Fiji.
IPCC(2022). AR6 Working Group II, Chapter 18. Climate Resilient Development Pathways.

But she is not only observing impacts – she is building awareness.

Through local Women’s Council, she and her colleagues have introduced small-scale adaptation techniques. Instead of planting directly in the ground, women use rice bags filled with soil and fertilizer – movable gardens that can be shifted during heavy rain or extreme heat.

“We tried giving them options... so when it’s really hot or during heavy rains, they can move them around.”

They also build raised planting beds – simple “table-size” structures – to protect vegetables from flooding. Practical. Local. Low-cost.

Yet for Christine, the biggest gap is not only resources. It is awareness.

“I think the first thing we need is to raise more awareness... especially on the effects of climate change and what they can do.”

Too often, she says, communities ask for the only solutions they know because it is the only option they have heard about. Without information about alternatives, consultation becomes limited. Choices cannot be fully informed if options are not visible.

“That’s why we need more awareness.”

When asked what message she would give to decision-makers, Christine’s answer is steady: *“To help the ones that are really in the most vulnerable communities.”*

She worries that assistance often stays in central areas, while more remote communities remain unseen. You cannot understand urgency from an office. You have to go out. You have to walk the flooded paths between houses. You have to stand where people are standing. Sometimes ankle-deep.

Because climate change, gender inequality, economic strain, and social vulnerability are not separate issues. They meet in daily life – in gardens, in kitchens, in flooded walkways.

And it is often women who are standing at that intersection.



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