

# IWRM in RMI : an achievement story

By Julius Lucky



## Encouraging gender mainstreaming through the appointment of an influential Water Champion



First Lady Zedkaia (right) with Mrs Evelyn Lanki and the IWRM Water Mascot at the 2011 Water Summit

At the start of the IWRM project in 2009, women's groups were not well represented at the planning level or during on-the-ground activities. In a way this is then only half the community that is being engaged and women's concerns are not being truthfully represented in the projects direction. In order to engage more women the IWRM team felt they need to engage a female water champion who could promote IWRM through the women's groups and so more women would feel comfortable to become involved.

The President of the time was Jurelang Zedkaia and his wife Hannah Zedkaia was the First Lady. She is well represented in her own right at the higher level of society and the people of RMI look up to and respect her. She has power and sway and people will listen to her if she gets behind a cause. The IWRM focal point approached the First Lady and described the project and the objectives of trying to provide safe water and improved sanitation for the community of Laura, and asked her if she would agree to become the Water Champion for RMI. First Lady Zedkaia agreed to take on the role because she felt that it is part of her duties and that it is a good cause for her to support. She felt that women ought to be more involved in the project design and direction as they represent as significant part of RMI society and need to included.

*"As the representative of my fellow female Marshallese I was proud to be engaged as the Water Champion for the first ever National Water Summit. Through this role I was able to encourage more women to attend and share their thoughts and concerns about our state of water and sanitation, their thoughts are valuable as they are primary care-givers of our families and understand the situation all too well. It is important for women to be involved at this high level event as they are often left out and so policies do not adequately address them."* – First Lady Hannah Zedkaia

First Lady Zedkaia (middle) with influential female members of the community at the 2011 Water Summit

Prior to the water summit First Lady Zedkaia was engaged as the Water Champion to bring in more women's groups so that their voices could be heard in the development of the water policy. The Women United Together Marshall Islands group became heavily involved during the summit because of First Lady and also more local Laura Community felt confident to attend and voice their issues and concerns at the summit. So now in the water and sanitation policy women and gender are explicitly mentioned in regards to safe access to water supplies and sanitation. This is through the dedicated involvement of the Water Champion uniting the women of Majuro to attend and participate in the National Water Summit.

