

To you, who hold power and will listen

by Naomi Woyengu

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The Pacific-Owned Women-led Early Warning and Resilience Systems initiative launched across Madang Province in April 2025

Photo Credit: [George Kolivos](#)

On 4 June 2025, with the support of the [Shifting the Power Coalition](#) and ActionAid Australia, I had the honour of presenting a heartfelt testimonial about our work at the Hauskuk Initiative — through the power of poetry — during a high-level, multi-stakeholder plenary session titled “Leave No One Behind” at the 8th Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Hauskuk Initiative is a women-led organisation in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea, and partner in the Shifting the Power Coalition, which works on building the capacity of and centring the voices and efforts of young women and women, including those with disabilities, in disaster preparedness, response, recovery and resilience to build back better communities.

The poem I shared carries the voices, resilience, and strength of the women, young women and communities in Madang that we work with.

*It's the year 2025 —
and in Madang, in Papua New Guinea,
the strong patriarchy still says —
“Women belong in the hauskuk.”
Not to be seen. Not to be heard.*

*They meant it to confine us,
but we chose to redefine it,
in this hauskuk — our hauskuk —
we don't just light fires. No!
We spark tok storis,
stories of change.*

*With skills and knowledge,
with resources and technology,*

we stir something deeper than meals.

We stir memory.

We stir movement.

*We stir power — the kind that rises
when women and young women gather,
not to wait —
but to warn.
Not to serve —
but to lead.*

*You talk about disaster risk reduction —
but our grandmothers lived it.
They read the river's anger,
heard the silence of birds before the rain,
saved seeds when the yams grew bitter.
They knew the signs.
And we still do.*

*We are the women of Bogia,
the young women of Riwo,
the mothers of Karkar,
the daughters of Kranget.*

*Our wisdom isn't written in books —
it lives in the tok storis under coconut trees,
in bilums and clay pots handed down with love and grit.*

*We watch the tides crawl closer now,
and plant our food higher.
We build shelters from sago palms and prayers.*

*And when the storms come,
we do not wait for distant sirens.
We are the sirens —
the garamut beating in warning,
the kundu calling us together.
We are the plan.
We are the first response.*

*Radio in one hand,
bilum in the other —
carrying kaukau and care,*

data and dignity.

*We walk bush tracks where roads have given up,
speak peace in circles where old fights once whispered,
spread mats for safe spaces in a world that forgets us — until we're drowning.*

But we remember.

We remember the women who came before.

And we make space for the girls who come next.

*Because this work — this hauskuk work —
it's intergenerational.*

It's ancestral.

*It's knowledge of the land and the sea,
woven into how we watch, warn and withstand.*

*Yet, our road is steep —
logistics fail,
roads disappear,
coordination falters,
funding fades,
knowledge is locked away,
warnings come too late,
and patriarchy still shouts loudest.*

But still – we cook!

*Can you smell something simmering?
That's change — slow-cooked,
like a mumu tucked deep in the earth,
gathering heat,
gathering strength,
ready to feed more than just mouths.*

*Please —
lighten our bilum load.
Decolonize your grants.
Extend your timelines.
Respect our unpaid care.
Amplify our truths.
Join us at tables we built.
Support our daughters.
Protect the wisdom of our mothers.*

*So women can no longer whisper
in corridors of disaster,
but walk proudly,
their bilums heavy with hope and history.*

*Where young women leaders —
even with different abilities —
paddle their own canoes,
stars above,
strength within.*

*So, as you sit to deliberate — think of us: your daughters, your mothers, your
sisters, your colleagues.*

*And when you speak of climate justice,
remember —
in Madang,
justice is not a policy paper.
It is survival.
It is lived.
And it is led —
by women with no titles,
but with courage and ancestral wisdom.*

*Signed,
the women and young women of Hauskuk.*

Author/s:

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Naomi Woyengu is the Founder and Executive Director of the Hauskuk Initiative Association based in Madang, PNG, which aims to amplify the voices of grassroots women, young women and marginalised communities. She currently works as a Consultant with Alinea Asia Pacific.

Link: <https://devpolicy.org/to-you-who-hold-power-and-will-listen-20251017/>