



# Many Strong Voices

– turning vulnerability into strength

Many  
Strong  
Voices **MSV**  
Arctic • Small Islands Developing States





Photo: Christine Germano



Photo: Fiore Silvio/Topham Picturepoint

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# Many Strong Voices

## – turning vulnerability into strength

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# Many Strong Voices in a nutshell

## What is MSV?

An alliance of Indigenous Peoples Organisations, NGOs, researchers, policymakers, community organisations and others in over 20 Arctic and SIDS (Small Island Developing States) states

## What does MSV do?

Builds capacity and alliances in the Arctic and SIDS to support the voices of people in these regions in international processes dealing with climate change

Raises awareness about the effects of climate change on vulnerable regions in general and on the Arctic and SIDS in particular

Works to understand regional needs and generate practical mitigation and adaptation solutions through innovative community-based research and knowledge exchange

## Who co-ordinates MSV?

UNEP/GRID-Arendal and the Center for International Climate and Environmental Research – Oslo (CICERO)

# Introduction

Climate change in the Arctic is a human issue, a family issue, a community issue, and an issue of cultural survival. The joining of circumpolar peoples with Pacific Island and Caribbean States is surely part of the answer in addressing these issues. Many small voices can make a loud noise.

**Sheila Watt-Cloutier**

Inuit Advocate and 2007 Nobel Peace Prize Nominee<sup>1</sup>

Our right to exist, our right to pursue sustainable development, can never be placed on the bargaining table. Our survival cannot be exchanged, bought or sold.

**Stephenson King**

Prime Minister of St. Lucia<sup>2</sup>

**Climate change presents the human race with profound choices that go beyond the current debate over new technologies, economic, and social costs and even concerns over environmental impacts. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called climate change the “moral imperative and the defining issue of our era.” Increasingly, climate change is being viewed as an ethical issue and a matter of justice. And, said the Secretary General, “We have an ethical obligation to right this injustice. We have a duty to protect the most vulnerable.”<sup>3</sup>**

Under the terms of the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), different nations have different responsibilities to meet the challenges of climate change and respond to the threats faced by vulnerable regions, countries, and peoples whose very existence is threatened. Under the treaty, countries that have contributed the most greenhouse

gas emissions have a responsibility to dramatically cut emissions and to assist the most vulnerable peoples and regions to adapt.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was unequivocal in its 4th assessment report released in 2007: unless there are deep cuts in greenhouse

gas emissions there will be dramatic effects on water, ecosystems, foods supplies, coastal areas, and human health. The number of unpredictable extreme weather events will continue to increase.

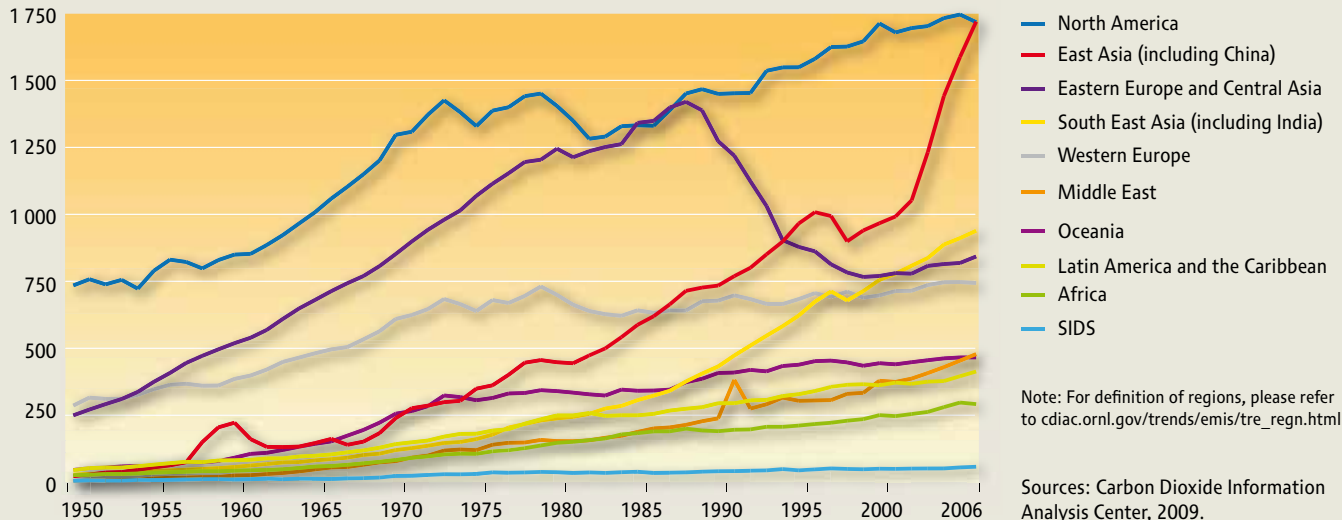
Since there is no equity in climate change impacts, these effects will not be evenly distributed. They adversely fall upon the regions that have produced the fewest emissions. Usually these regions are least able to deal with climate change and are thus the most vulnerable. For this reason it is imperative that there be equity in how the world responds.

These ethical and human rights considerations are the philosophical foundation of the Many Strong Voices Programme.



## Regional CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

Millions of metric tonnes, 2005





## The goal of Many Strong Voices

The goal of Many Strong Voices is to promote the well-being, security, and sustainability of coastal communities in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) by bringing these regions together to take action on climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to tell their stories to the world.

The Arctic and SIDS are barometers of global environmental change. They are considered critical testing grounds for the ideas and programmes that will strengthen the adaptive capacities of human societies confronting climate change. Lessons learned through MSV will support policy development at local, regional, and international levels. They will provide decision-makers in the two regions with the knowledge to safeguard and strengthen vulnerable social, economic, and natural systems.

The fight against climate change is a fight based on our undeniable human right to exist, and not just as nation states, but as peoples and communities. The peoples of the Arctic, for example, and other indigenous peoples are also suffering climate change first-hand. Their voices, just like those of the SIDS and other particularly vulnerable states, need to be heard by the world's leaders.

**Ronald Jumeau**

Permanent Representative of the Republic of  
Seychelles to the UN<sup>4</sup>

# The Arctic and SIDS – different regions with similar goals

**At first glance, the Arctic and Small Island Developing States appear to have little in common. Yet Arctic and SIDS societies share characteristics of vulnerability and resilience, and both of their environments are sensitive to climate change impacts.**

Although natural and human environments in the two regions differ markedly, the effects of climate change threaten the ecology, economies, and the social and cultural fabric of both regions posing serious challenges for their sustainable development. While communities in both regions have adapted to changing conditions in the past, climate change presents a new and formidable challenge.

The impact of climate change on coastal zones is an important common denominator between the two regions and provides a context for comparing vulnerability and adaptation processes. Developing adaptation strategies that contribute to sustainable development in both regions is the key to their long-term survival. At the same time, successful adaptation requires immediate and deep cuts to global greenhouse gas emissions.

## **The Arctic and SIDS share strengths, including:**

- A continuing, deeply-rooted connection of the people to their environment
- A body of local and traditional knowledge that is incorporated to varying degrees into daily life and decision-making
- A history of resilience and a demonstrated ability to adapt to outside influences and perturbations over generations

## **The Arctic and SIDS share vulnerabilities, including:**

- Reliance on economies based on fragile natural resources on land and at sea
- High unemployment and below average educational attainment
- Transportation and communication challenges
- Communities located in vulnerable and remote coastal areas of great importance for the human and natural environment
- Limited markets, lack of local economic control, and overdependence on imports





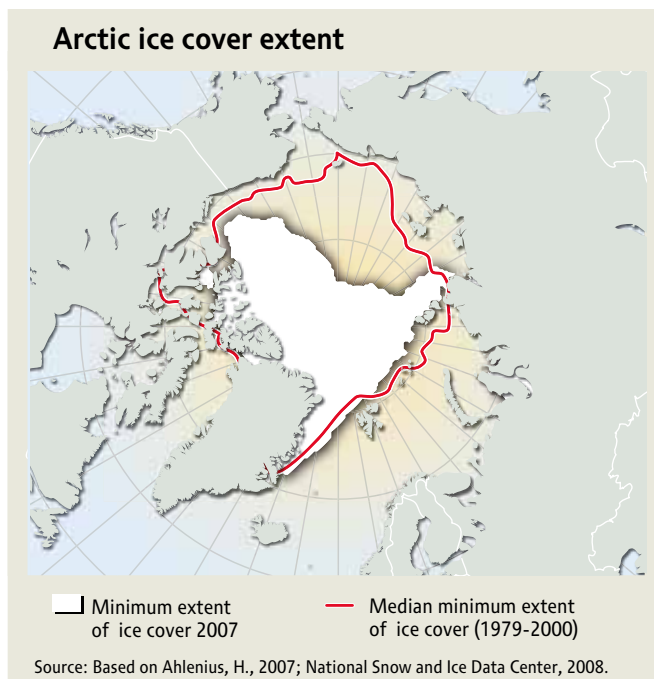
# Climate Change in the Arctic

**The 2005 Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA)<sup>5</sup> concluded that the Arctic is expected to feel the effects of climate change sooner and more severely than other regions of the earth. The Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC<sup>6</sup> echoed and amplified the ACIA findings.**

Further events have highlighted the rapid changes taking place in the Arctic: the greatest reduction in Arctic summer sea ice extent since satellite observations began occurred in 2007, with the following two years experiencing the second and third biggest reductions. The Greenland ice sheet, which could raise sea levels by six metres if it melted away completely, is currently losing more than 250 cubic km a year – faster than can be explained by natural melting.<sup>7</sup>

## Impacts and adaptation challenges

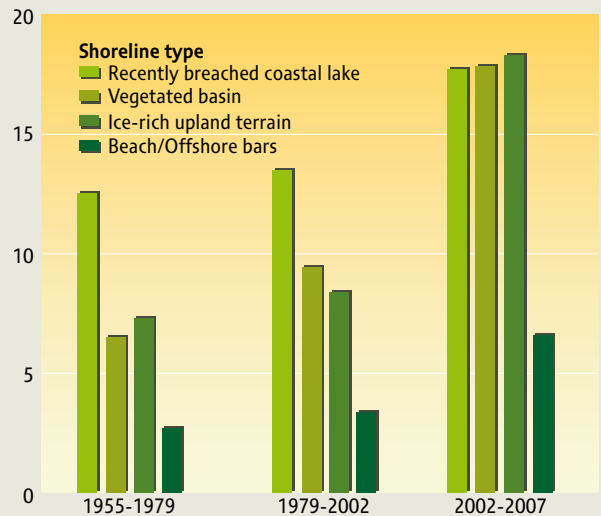
In the Arctic, impacts of climate change will include reductions in the extent of sea ice and permafrost, increased coastal erosion, and an increase in the depth of permafrost seasonal thawing. For Arctic human communities impacts are projected to be mixed, with detrimental impacts expected on infrastructure and traditional indigenous ways of life in these regions. Food security for some subsistence systems will be threatened





### Mean annual coastal erosion in arctic Alaska (Beaufort Sea shoreline)

Metres per year



Source: Jones, B. M., et. al., 2009<sup>8</sup>.

through changes in natural ecosystems. Human health may also suffer through the reappearance or new arrival of vector-borne infectious diseases. According to the ACIA, potential beneficial effects could include reduced heating costs, more navigable northern sea routes, and increased access to market food items.

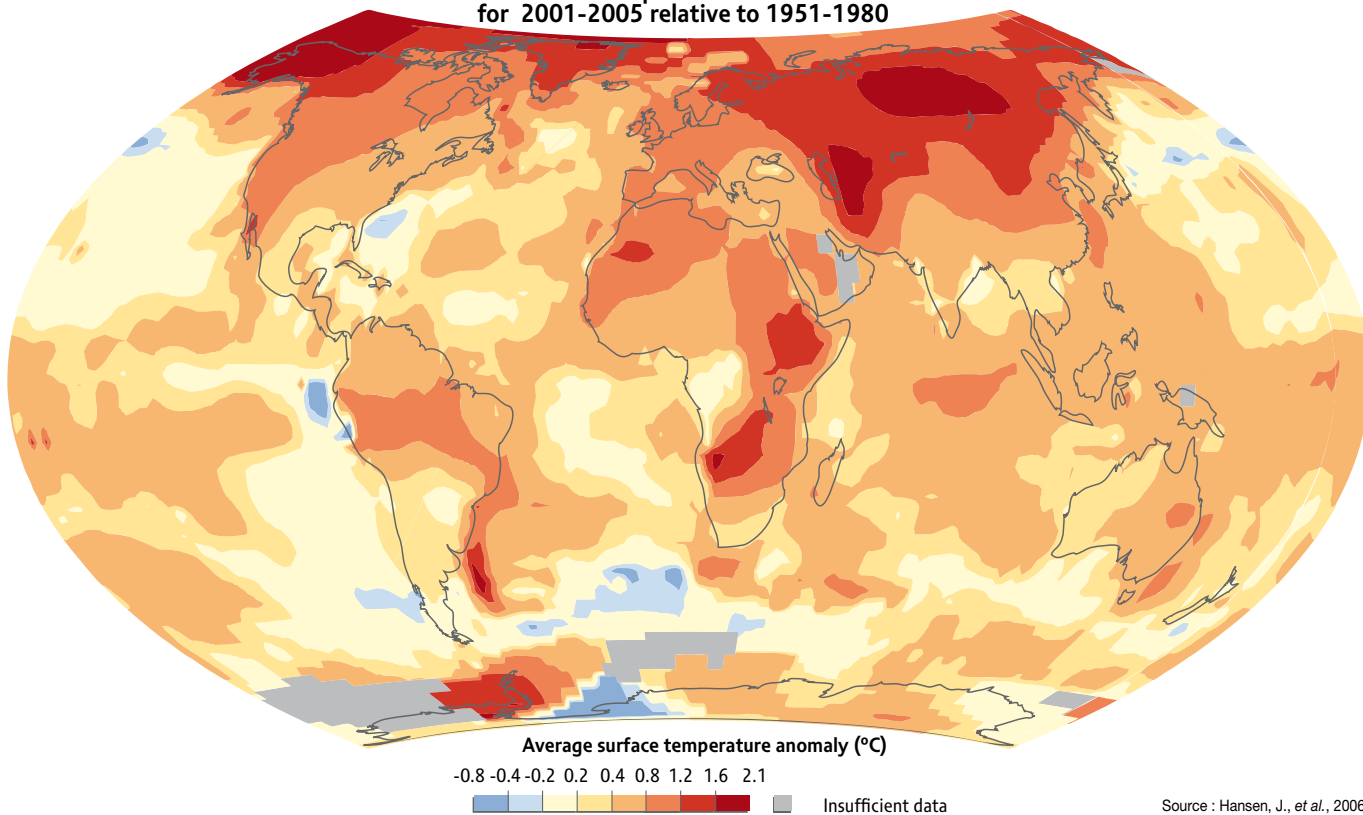
Arctic human communities are already responding to climate change but external and internal stressors are severely testing their ability to adapt. Despite the resilience shown historically by Arctic Indigenous Peoples, some traditional ways of life are being threatened and substantial investments are needed to adapt or re-locate physical structures and communities.

A few years ago, there was no ice on the sea at all in winter, and it was very hard for the people. Hunters could not hunt because there was only a very thin layer of ice on the whole area. They could not sail in a boat or could not go out on the thin ice. During that time women who make Greenlandic clothes also needed seal skins to make traditional costumes, but they were not getting many skins from the hunters.

**Aviaq Pjetursson**  
Greenland



Annual temperatures increases  
for 2001-2005 relative to 1951-1980



Source : Hansen, J., et al., 2006<sup>9</sup>.



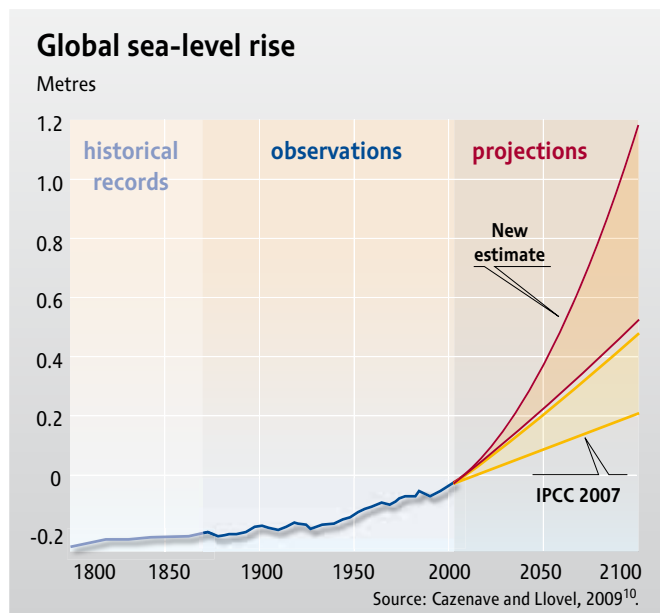
# Climate Change in Small Island Developing States

**Small islands have characteristics which make them especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, sea level rise, and extreme events. Global sea level rise has been increasing at a rate of 1.8 mm per year from 1961 to 1993, and at 3.1 mm per year from 1994 to 2003.**

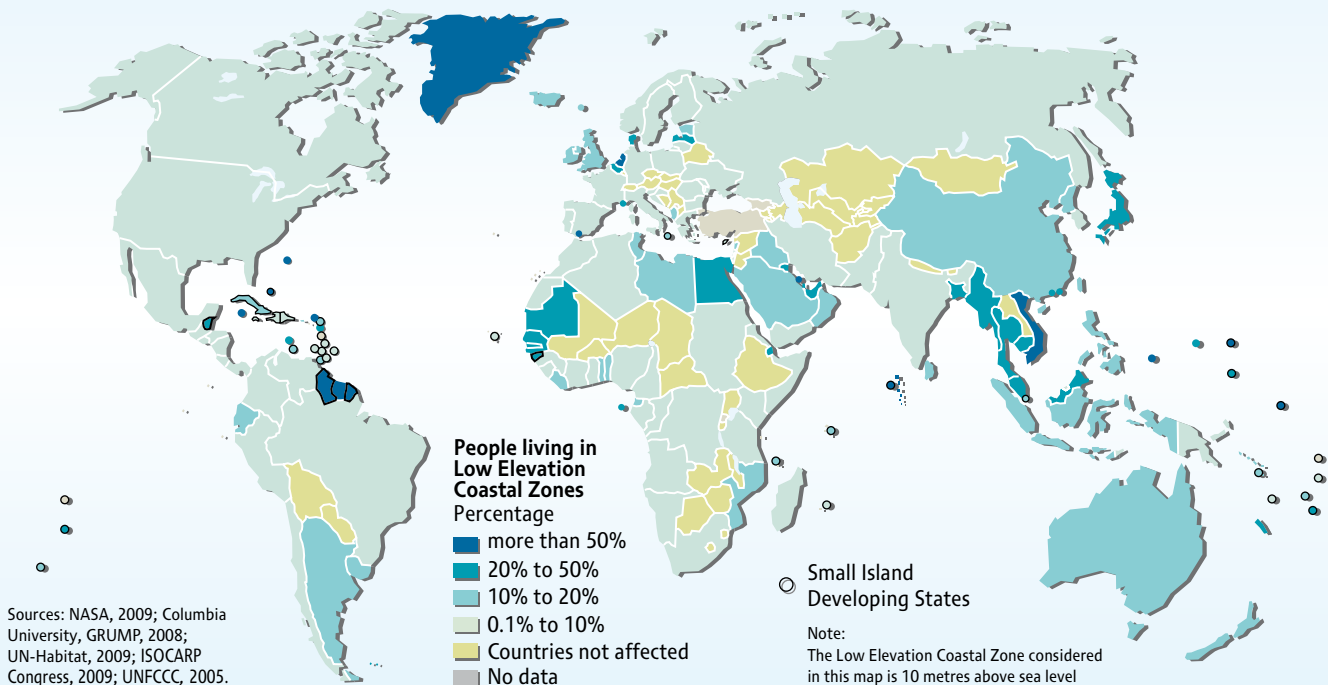
According to the 2007 IPCC report, global average sea level rise will vary from 18 cm to 59 cm by 2100. The IPCC models did not account for the accelerated melting of ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica. Some of the latest research, however, estimates a global sea level rise of between 0.6 and 1.2 metres by 2100<sup>10</sup>. Small Island Developing States, where low-lying coastal plains have provided attractive locations for human settlement, are most at risk.

## Impacts and adaptation challenges

According to the 2007 IPCC report, small islands are expected to experience largely detrimental impacts from climate change. Sea-level rise is expected to exacerbate flooding, storm surges, erosion, and other coastal hazards, threatening vital infrastructure that supports the livelihood of island communities. Beach erosion and

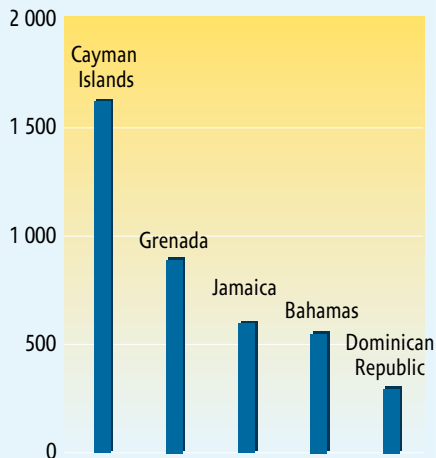


## Coastal vulnerability and climate-related impacts



### Economic Impact of Hurricanes

Million US dollars, 2004



### Maldives today...



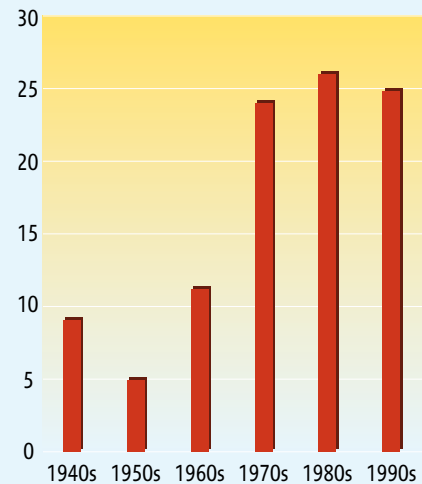
### ...and with 1 metre sea level rise



0 100  
Kilometres

### Trend of cyclone frequency in Vanuatu

Number of events per decade





coral bleaching will reduce the value of fisheries and tourism – both important economic activities for many SIDS. Furthermore, by 2050 the projected reduction in water resources will pose severe threats to food security, sanitation, and health on many small islands.

People on small islands have developed a wide range of adaptive strategies to cope with annual and seasonal climate variability and extreme weather events such as tropical storms. Such experience will prove invaluable in dealing with future climate change challenges. However, islanders' traditional knowledge for coping with environmental hazards is being lost at the same time as its value in developing adaptation strategies is increasingly recognized. Unlike large developed countries, the cost of adaptation relative to GDP is high in SIDS. Thus, substantial investments and international financial assistance is needed to build adaptive capacity in these countries.

During my childhood days in Kiribati, we never experienced severe sea flooding. There were storms, but they weren't that bad. As the sea levels continue to rise in Kiribati, several king tides hit the island. Saltwater intrusion affects the quality of water in wells, floods taro patches, gardens, and puts stress on plants [and] trees which are very important to the life and culture of an I-Kiribati.

Serious storm surges in 2006 led to the collapse of the beautiful Dai Nippon causeway. This incident bore huge costs on the people of Kiribati. They had to build new homes with their own finance, and dig up their deceased relatives from their graves and bury them further inland.

**Ben Namakin**  
Micronesia<sup>11</sup>

# The Many Strong Voices Programme

Since its founding in 2005, the Many Strong Voices Programme has been working to promote the well-being, security, and sustainability of coastal communities in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States in the face of climate change. It complements and builds upon its partners' efforts in climate adaptation in the Arctic and SIDS regions and supports their call for deep cuts to greenhouse gas emissions. MSV is also a vehicle through which people can tell their stories. Thus communications and knowledge exchange is an important part of the programme.





I believe the lessons being learnt via this unique collaboration can generate lessons and coping strategies for others who are currently not in the front-line, but one day soon may be including Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and the Caribbean and parts of North America and Southern Europe.

**Achim Steiner**

UNEP Executive Director, on MSV<sup>13</sup>

## **MSV – influencing decision makers**

Developing countries and the Arctic have contributed the least to climate change and have the fewest resources available to tackle the problems it creates. They also have the least capacity to influence international discussions and decisions on battling climate change – the most prominent being the negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

For that reason, the participants in Many Strong Voices are asking the world community for three things:

- 1.** For a global climate change agreement that keeps global average temperature increases as far below 1.5 degrees Celsius<sup>12</sup> as possible in order to ensure their continued survival as peoples and nations
- 2.** For countries to be open to learning from the experiences of Indigenous Peoples and islanders on adaptation and to assist these communities in building upon their traditional knowledge in this area
- 3.** For the richest countries to help the vulnerable countries and regions to adapt to change by providing adequate financial and technical assistance

These messages have been delivered in a number of international meetings, including the UNFCCC negotiations and the UN General Assembly.

## **MSV – telling our stories to the world**

In order to create the political will to tackle climate change, there needs to be a wide understanding of the immediate human costs. That is why MSV is trying to put a human face on climate change. It approaches the problem from the perspective of the people who have the most to lose. But MSV is not just about the Arctic and SIDS. The lessons learned through this collaboration must be shared. Models and approaches that are developed can have wider implications and benefits.

MSV partners see communications as essential and the programme facilitates sustained collaboration between and within Arctic and SIDS regions. MSV works to inform affected communities and regions about the impacts of climate change. It highlights adaptation options and lessons to be learned from comparable situations in other parts of the world. It employs communications plans and initiatives aimed at strategically influencing global negotiations and policy development processes affecting the Arctic and SIDS. And it helps partners in affected regions tell their stories, raise awareness, and push for action.

## The Portraits of Resilience Project

The Portraits of Resilience photography project illustrates the ethical dimension of the climate change discussion through the words and photographs of children in Arctic and SIDS communities. The first phase of the project focuses on four Arctic communities in Alaska, Greenland, Norway, and Nunavut, Canada. The goal is to let these young voices be heard and to show that the children and youth of the planet have the most at stake from climate change.

The project was first exhibited at the Danish National Museum during the December 2009 COP 15 climate change negotiations in Copenhagen. There are plans to take it to other museums and galleries in Europe and North America. Stories and photos have been gathered in the Seychelles as part of a second phase that will focus on schools in a number of the SIDS. The stories and pictures of children in some of the world's most remote regions illustrate in a concrete way the similar challenges they face.

According to fishermen in the Seychelles these days they have to fish deeper because sea surface temperatures are rising and fish are going deeper. They also need to go out fishing for longer periods of time and further out than usual. Because of a warmer sea temperature, they also report that the fish they are catching are changing shape. In addition, they have to spend more money on food supply, fuel, and fishing materials. We need to be aware about our ecosystem and how climate change will impact on it. These impacts mean fish are more expensive on the local market. Fishermen's livelihood is getting harder and our economy suffers.

**Mikael Barbe, Ryan Benstrong, James Ernesta  
& Mario Dubel**  
Seychelles

The climate is changing here in Uummannaq and it is getting both warmer and colder. This is affecting our life and culture in a variety of ways. We still have the ice in the winter, which is still thick, but not as thick as it used to be more than ten years ago. But I can feel that it is definitely getting warmer and warmer in the summer time. This is having an effect on our hunters, who find it more and more difficult to get seals. Seals are an important part of our livelihood and I hope that climate change does not effect the lives of seal hunters and the rest of the people here in Uummannaq.

**Nina Thygesen**  
Uummannaq, Kalaalit Nunaat/Greenland

## MSV – knowledge and research

MSV partners have pointed out that even though SIDS are recognized as vulnerable to climate change, research bringing together knowledge, experiences, and data is lacking. There is an urgent need for increased scientific and traditional understanding of on-going and future climate change impacts. Research is also required to demonstrate the constraints and opportunities for adaptation within SIDS communities in order to support the design, implementation, and subsequent monitoring of community adaptation strategies.

The MSV programme is addressing this gap by working with researchers around the world to develop climate change vulnerability and adaptation assessments in several of the SIDS. These assessments combine scientific approaches with traditional, local, and indigenous knowledge bases. Case study comparisons of local vulnerability and adaptation will be undertaken in selected SIDS regions by looking at isolated SIDS communities within the context of national, regional, and international initiatives. Some examples of the work undertaken to date by MSV include:

- The development of a template for conducting vulnerability and adaptation assessments in SIDS, to ensure consistency in assessments and to allow comparisons across sites/regions
- The development of an international network of MSc and PhD students wishing to undertake assessment work based on MSV guidelines
- Liaison with researchers and practitioners working on these topics in SIDS in order to avoid overlap and duplication

I'm not wrong that I feel I'm sweating more. Scientists have shown that global warming is causing humidity to increase and people to sweat more. Warmer temperatures and higher humidity have an impact on people's well being. Older persons are at risk. Tourists may find Seychelles hot and uncomfortable. People may use more air conditioners and fans, leading to higher consumption of fossil fuels. But the Seychelles's traditional houses, built on stilts, with high roofing, many garrets, sweeping verandahs, and tall windows keep people cool and can handle heavy rainfall. Let's propagate this traditional style of construction!

**Nirmal Jivan Shah**  
Seychelles



# Partners

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## Policy and Research Organisations

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- Alaska Native Science Commission
- Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre
- Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research (CICERO)
- New Zealand Tourism Research Institute (NZTRI)
- Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)
- Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)
- UNEP/GRID-Arendal

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## Non-Governmental Organisations

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- Cayman Institute
- Climate Change & Energy Programme, Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development (FIELD)
- Climate Law and Policy Project (CLPP)
- International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)
- Nature Seychelles
- Northern Forum Academy, Russia
- Sea Level Rise Foundation
- WWF South Pacific Programme
- 350.org

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## Indigenous Peoples Organisations and Communities

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- Aleut International Association (AIA)
- Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC)
- Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)
- Pangnirtung, Nunavut, Canada
- Unjárgga (Nesseby), Norway
- Uummannaq, Greenland
- Shishmaref, Alaska

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## Multinational Bodies

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- Caribbean Community (CARICOM)
- Organization of American States, Department of Sustainable Development (OAS DSD)
- Overseas Countries and Territories Association of the European Union (OCTA)

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## Supporters

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- Government of Niue
- Government of Sakha Republic (Yakutia), Russia
- Government of the Republic of Seychelles
- Nordic Council of Ministers
- Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The Christensen Fund
- U.S. National Science Foundation
- UNEP Regional Office for North America (RONA)
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- United Nations Foundation
- Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation (Canada)
- World Bank Institute



## MSV Partners around the World



Source: [www.manystrongvoices.org](http://www.manystrongvoices.org)

# Notes

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Photo: Jaap Hart/iStockphoto



Photo: Ilan Kelman



Photo: Christine Germano



Photo: Lawrence Hislop



Photo: Christine Germano



Photo: Lawrence Hislop



Photo: Peter McQuarrie



Photo: Bruce Richmond



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Photo: Bjorn Frantzen



Photo: AS Duncan/Topham Picturepoint



For more information on the  
Many Strong Voices programme,  
visit [www.manystrongvoices.org](http://www.manystrongvoices.org)  
or write to [voices@grida.no](mailto:voices@grida.no)

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