



Briefing Note #1

Climate Change Adaptation: Why we need Many Strong Voices

Adaptation will be crucial in reducing vulnerability to and is the only way to cope with the impacts that are inevitable over the next few decades. In regions that may benefit from small amounts of warming, adaptation will help to reap the rewards. It provides an impetus to adjust economic activity in vulnerable sectors and to support sustainable development, especially in developing countries. But it is not an easy option, and it can only reduce, not remove, the impacts. There will be some residual cost – either the impacts themselves or the cost of adapting. Without early and strong mitigation, the costs of adaptation rise sharply.

Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, 2006¹

Background

In 2004, representatives of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and UNEP/GRID-Arendal began discussing the need for a joint effort to raise awareness about the effects of Climate Change in the world's most vulnerable regions. Although small in number, the people of the Arctic and SIDS had participated vigorously in a number of international negotiating processes, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The link between these regions has been repeatedly emphasized by former Inuit leader and 2007 Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Sheila Watt-Cloutier:

“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. As we melt, the small developing island states sink.”

In August 2005, Premier Hans Enoksen of Greenland urged Environment Ministers from 25 countries meeting in Ilulissat to “bring vulnerable regions of the globe together so that we may learn from each other and work with each other internationally.” Premier Enoksen went on to say that “the Arctic, the Small Island Developing States, low lying states, and sub-Saharan states in Africa need to help each other.”

¹ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/stern_review_report.cfm

At an organizing meeting in 2006, which was attended by representatives from the Arctic and SIDS regions, it was decided that while the populations of these regions are small, their voices are strong. Thus the name of the programme -- Many Strong Voices (MSV) – came to be.

All of the initial discussions between representatives of the two regions quickly drew attention to a number of similarities upon which a working relationship might be built:

1. **Coastal communities in the Arctic and SIDS regions are experiencing the effects of climate change first-hand.** Although natural and human environments in the two regions differ markedly, the effects of rising temperatures, changing precipitation, shifts in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, and projected changes in sea level threaten the ecology, economies and the social and cultural fabric of both regions, thus posing serious challenges for their sustainable development.
2. **Both regions consider themselves as barometers of global environmental change.** Because of their close ties to land and sea environments, economies and cultures in both regions are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Arctic and SIDS communities have proven adept at adapting to changing conditions in the past. However, climate change will pose new and unprecedented challenges to their adaptive capacity and resilience.
3. **Research on climate change vulnerability, impacts and adaptation is ongoing in both regions,** including through the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the Caribbean Community Centre for Climate Change (CCCCC). Corresponding research in the Arctic resulted in the release by the Arctic Council, of the *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (2005)*. Although both bodies of work have been circulated within their respective regions, they have yet to be formally linked or communicated to a broader audience.

The Many Strong Voices (MSV) Programme was launched at a roundtable organized by UNEP/GRID-Arendal at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 11) meeting in Montréal in December 2005. Participants included Dr. Klaus Töpfer, former Executive Director of UNEP; Sheila Watt-Cloutier, then International Chair, Inuit Circumpolar Conference; Taito Nakalevu, Climate Change Adaptation Officer, of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP); and Karen Kraft Sloan, Canada's Ambassador for the Environment. The event focussed attention on links between Arctic and SIDS regions and launched the Many Strong Voices Programme.

The roundtable attracted considerable media interest and coverage around the world. In early 2006, the Government of Canada provided seed funding for programme start-up activities, including a planning meeting, held in Ottawa, March 2006. At this meeting the terms of reference for the programme were defined (see [programme document](#)) and coordination mechanisms were established. The programme is now moving to full implementation with support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. National Science Foundation. A Steering Committee is in place

with representation from UN agencies, research institutes, Arctic and SIDS regional organizations and Indigenous Peoples' Organizations.

Overview of the Many Strong Voices Programme

The Many Strong Voices Programme document, produced in early 2006, is included in this information package. The following is a brief outline of some of the key points in that paper:

Vision -- to ensure the well-being, security and sustainability of coastal communities in the Arctic and SIDS in response to ongoing and anticipated climate change.

Methods: build a consortium of researchers, policy-makers, and organizations to advance mutual learning and exchange of knowledge, research, and expertise on Climate change adaptation within and between the Arctic and the SIDS.

The programme will develop along a number of parallel tracks:

1. **Research:** collaboration on comparative research on climate change vulnerability and adaptation;
2. **Assessment:** comprehensive climate change impact assessment related to Arctic and SIDS coastal regions, tailoring assessment products to meet the needs of these regions (designed from the ground up);
3. **Networking:** build on existing initiatives and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices;
4. **Support:** to communities to devise concrete, community-relevant adaptation strategies;
5. **Outreach:** Communications, outreach and education tools to raise the profile of these regions, highlight the urgency and extent of concerns, and enable communities to outline their own solutions.
6. **Action on Mitigation:** enhance existing and develop new networks, communications tools and mechanisms to ensure that the voices of the people in these vulnerable regions are heard in international negotiations.

Next Steps: Stakeholder Workshop, Belize, May 2007

The workshop will provide a forum for stakeholders from the Arctic and SIDS regions to discuss the latest research and policy developments in their respective regions regarding climate change vulnerability and adaptation. The outcome of the workshop will be a 5-year Action Plan for the MSV programme that will detail specific milestones and outcomes for collaborative research, policy, communications, capacity-building, and fundraising activities. An important goal of the workshop will be to design a comparative assessment scoping study of coastal impacts of climate change in the Arctic and SIDS regions.