



Many Strong Voices Concept Note

Climate change presents the human race with a profound challenge. It is not just an environmental, economic or even social issue. Increasingly, it is being seen as a matter of ethics and human rights. The effects of climate change are regional but solutions must be global. We all have an ethical responsibility for our common future - and we also have a particular responsibility to the world's most vulnerable populations. The ethical position is clear:

Unless people see that climate change creates ethics and justice concerns, they will not likely be motivated to do what is needed to protect those most vulnerable to climate change who include many of the world's poorest people and future generations.¹

This ethical dimension in the climate change debate is being put forward by people in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) through a new programme called Many Strong Voices, coordinated by UNEP/GRID-Arendal and the Center for International Climate and Environmental Research – Oslo (CICERO). The programme involves indigenous peoples, community organizations, policy makers, NGOs and researchers. One of its key goals is to make sure the voices of two of the world's most vulnerable regions² are heard in climate change negotiations.

Major scientific studies have concluded that climate change poses particular and immediate threats to economies, environments and societies in both the Arctic and SIDS. The 2005 Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) concluded that Arctic people and environments will feel the effects of climate change sooner and more severely compared to other regions of the world.³ The 2007 Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) echoed and amplified the ACIA findings with regard to the Arctic and at the same time singled out SIDS as being particularly vulnerable to climate change. In relation to the Arctic, it concluded that:

Arctic human communities are already adapting to climate change, but both external and internal stressors challenge their adaptive capacities. Despite the resilience shown historically by Arctic indigenous communities, some traditional ways of life are being threatened and substantial investments are needed to adapt or re-locate physical structures and communities.⁴

In terms of small islands, it concluded that:

Small islands, whether located in the tropics or higher latitudes, have characteristics which make them especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, sea-level rise and extreme events. Sea-level rise is expected to exacerbate inundation, storm surge, erosion and other coastal hazards, thus threatening vital infrastructure, settlements and facilities that support the livelihood of island communities.⁵

Despite the immanent threats that climate change clearly poses to communities in the Arctic and SIDS, the voices of people living in these two vulnerable regions are often marginalised or overlooked. There is a pressing need to ensure that the many strong voices of people in these regions are heard in international negotiating processes, and that they have access to forums for exchanging the latest information on climate change adaptation in their respective regions.

The Arctic and Small Island Developing States – Unique Regions Facing Common Challenges

At first glance, the Arctic and Small Island Developing States appear to have little in common. However, despite geographic and cultural differences, communities in both regions share a number of important similarities that unite them in their efforts to adapt to and mitigate climate change, including:

- Reliance on economies based on natural resources on land and at sea;
- Transportation and communication challenges associated with isolation;
- Coastal zones of great importance to communities, economies and natural environments.
- A continuing, deeply-rooted connection of people and communities to their environments;
- Both regions are home to a diverse number of Indigenous Peoples.
- Incorporation of traditional knowledge into daily life and decision-making; and
- A history of resilience—a demonstrated ability to adapt to outside influences over generations.

These and other similarities among Arctic and SIDS communities bring with them both challenges and opportunities for dealing with climate change. For example, on the one hand, peoples' close connection to their environments has resulted in the development of robust bodies of traditional knowledge linked to the use of particular resources, such as fisheries. On the other hand, climate change is threatening and changing the very natural resources upon which many Arctic and SIDS communities depend.

The Role of Many Strong Voices

The Many Strong Voices Programme brings together local, national and regional stakeholders in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States to exchange knowledge about the climate change challenges facing them. Its aims in doing so are to support and build capacity among vulnerable regions and peoples to collaboratively devise strategic solutions to the challenges of climate change, and to raise the voices of peoples in the two regions such that they may be heard in international fora on climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The development and financing of a consortium of organizations linking the Arctic and SIDS -through which knowledge and information about climate change mitigation and adaptation can be collected and communicated at a variety of scales - is a central aspect of achieving this goal. Information collected and disseminated through the consortium will be anchored in the latest scientific knowledge of how vulnerable people, communities, states and regions are affected by and respond to climate change, and will provide a platform for collaborative, mutually supportive and strategic action in the two regions. It is anticipated that the lessons, knowledge and experiences gained through the Many Strong Voices programme will draw on and be applicable to other vulnerable regions of the globe.

Programme Background

Many Strong Voices was launched by UNEP/GRID-Arendal at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 11) in Montréal in December 2005. The MSV programme is coordinated by GRID-Arendal and the Center for International Climate and Environment Research – Oslo (CICERO). It supports a consortium of Indigenous Peoples Organizations, researchers, policy-makers, and community organizations in the Arctic and SIDS to collaboratively design solutions to the climate change challenges facing them. The MSV programme is by design an exercise in building creative partnerships. The programme is guided by an informal steering committee that meets electronically, via conference calls, and ad hoc at relevant international meetings and fora to develop MSV strategies and materials.

Key partners include the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) based in Belmopan, Belize which hosted an initial MSV Stakeholders Workshop in May 2007; the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPEP); the Inuit Circumpolar Council; the Arctic Athabaskan Council; Aleut International Association; Organization of American States (Department of Sustainable Development); the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED); Climate Change & Energy Programme, Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development (FIELD); Conservation Society of Ponipeh, Federated States of Micronesia; the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute (NZTRI); and the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (UNEP-GPA).

Programme Objectives

Many Strong Voices is designed as a five-year programme with three inter-connected objectives:

1. **Research:** development of dynamic assessment of vulnerability and adaptation to climate change in SIDS that leads to concrete, community-relevant adaptation strategies, strengthens national adaptation planning, and supports SIDS in their call for strong mitigation action globally;
2. **Capacity-building:** Development of new climate change networks to facilitate sharing of knowledge and communication of best practices between vulnerable regions and groups, and within the regions themselves;
3. **Communication:** Development of communications tools that will ensure that people's voices in the two regions are heard in international negotiations and fora, as well as informing and supporting communication at the regional, national and local levels

Proposed programme activities for 2008-09 include:

1. SIDS Dynamic Assessment of Vulnerability and Adaptation

Work is currently being carried out with SIDS partners to implement a dynamic assessment of vulnerability and adaptation to climate change in the SIDS. An assessment design scoping document has been completed that builds on a review of available information on climate change impacts, vulnerability and adaptation studies in SIDS, identifies gaps in current knowledge and approaches, and suggests scientific methods for addressing shortcomings and linking to similar research efforts undertaken previously in the Arctic. We are now seeking funding to implement the assessment by and in the SIDS, in collaboration with relevant regional and international partners. As the name suggests, the assessment builds on a recognition that vulnerability and adaptation to climate change are dynamic processes whose study must go beyond static descriptions, include elements and approaches that ensure practical and policy relevance, and address questions that relate to the needs and priorities of SIDS regions. The SIDS assessment will provide a robust scientific foundation for MSV partners in the Arctic, SIDS and other vulnerable regions as they seek to make their voices heard and to lobby effectively in international climate change fora and negotiating arenas regarding adaptation and mitigation. It will also lay the foundation for the design of appropriate capacity-building and communication efforts under the MSV programme.

2. Capacity Building – Adaptation and Negotiations

Many Strong Voices will hold a second Stakeholder Workshop in Washington, DC, in late fall this year. Scheduled for the week of 26 October, this workshop will be an opportunity for participants to present the latest information from their regions, to

discuss progress within the programme, and to devise strategies for the UNFCCC COP XIV meetings in December 2008.

One of the important lessons from COP XIII in Bali was that Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic and SIDS need support to operate effectively in intense negotiating environments and to influence high-level political processes. To address this, part of the stakeholders' meeting will be devoted to a capacity building to assist MSV partners who are not familiar with the negotiations learn how they work and how they might best influence the process. The specific goal of this work is to push for emissions cuts below the 2°C limit which the IPCC and other entities such as the European Union feel is necessary to avoid dangerous climate change. MSV participants also wish to insert references to "indigenous peoples and people in other vulnerable regions" into the language of the post-Kyoto climate change protocol to be developed by the end of next year. Since climate change discussions won't end with the new protocol, capacity building efforts are expected to continue beyond 2009.

Discussions are also underway with the World Bank Institute about holding a session for Indigenous Peoples on exchanging traditional knowledge and developing methodologies to ensure that it is used effectively in assessments of climate change impacts, adaptation and vulnerability. There are lessons to be learned from experiences in the Arctic which can be shared with people in the SIDS and other regions.

3. COP XIV Climate Days Event - Indigenous Peoples, Adaptation and Vulnerability

We plan to hold a Many Strong Voices event focusing on adaptation at the COP XIV featuring Indigenous Peoples from the Arctic and SIDS. This event will be part of Climate and Development Days, sponsored by the International Institute for Environment and Development. Discussions are underway about the format of the event, which will be used to highlight issues from the regions, present preliminary findings from the dynamic assessment for SIDS and its links to the Arctic ACIA findings, and hear the voices of people who are on the front lines of adaptation.

4. Support for Indigenous Peoples Global Summit on Climate Change

Over the next year, MSV will work closely with organizers of the Indigenous Peoples Global Summit on Climate Change to be held in Anchorage, Alaska, in 2009. The summit is being coordinated by the Inuit Circumpolar Council, a key partner in Many Strong Voices.

The activities outlined above will be built upon in subsequent years. For example, we expect to hold an annual workshop and provide training opportunities and stage similar events with our partners IIED at the COP XV meeting in Copenhagen in 2009. These activities are important because (i) they highlight the urgency of the situation faced by Indigenous Peoples and other residents of these vulnerable regions and (ii) they will help MSV partners increase their effectiveness in lobbying, communications and outreach activities.

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Many Strong Voices has developed a five-year plan and is currently seeking financial and other support to continue its work over the next few years. For further information, please contact:

John Crump
Polar Issues Co-ordinator
UNEP/GRID-Arendal
john.crump@grida.no

¹ *Climate Ethics in Bali - the Urgency of Seeing Climate Change as an Ethical and Justice Concern*
<http://climateethics.org/?cat=1>

² *IPCC IV: Summary for Policymakers 2007*, pg. 21, http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_spm.pdf

³ ACIA, *Impacts of a Warming Arctic: Arctic Climate Impact Assessment*. Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp 24-31.

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007). **Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report, Summary for Policy Makers**, pg. 15.

⁵ IPCC, *Summary for Policy Makers*, pg 15.