Shishmaref, Alaska

Many Strong Voices MSV

"…we are in big trouble."

How Erosion is Affecting Our Village

Whenever a big storm hits our town, it erodes the land from the ocean side and the lagoon side. Whenever there are really big waves it washes the land away. It doesn't wash away the land on the lagoon side as much because the grass holds the sand together. Sometimes people lose their boats and sometimes they sink to the bottom of the water. On the ocean side it washes away our racks. Racks are very important to our community because that is where we work on our subsistence food. We use the racks to dry our seal meat, fish, and more.

Whenever it washes away our racks, we usually just move them to a different spot and hope they don't get washed away again. We are using big rocks on the ocean side to keep our land from eroding. The sea wall is very good because it is big and it covers most of the seaside. The village can be saved if the sea wall will keep the waves from getting to the land. If the waves are too big and the sea wall isn't capable of preventing the waves from getting to the land, we are in big trouble.

Our community voted for our village to move to a place called Tin Creek. We will need a lot of money because of all the houses that will need to be moved. It would take a long time to move our whole village because of all of the houses and big buildings. We can build new houses or simply take apart the old houses and then use all the wood to rebuild them, if it isn't possible to relocate them. There are a lot of places we can move our village because of all of the land there is around our area. If we relocate during the summer, we'd need a lot of barges to move everything. In the winter we can use big sleds or anything that can hold our houses while they are dragged across the snow.

The thought of moving our village is very sad because Shishmaref is the place where I grew up. Shishmaref is a great place to live because everyone knows each other. If we move, it would probably bring our community closer together. It could be totally opposite though because some people might just move to a new place. If we move, it won't be the same because it wouldn't be the Shishmaref that everyone knows. I would rather have a big sea wall to save our village instead of having a bad sea wall that wouldn't save our village. If the sea wall is good then we would have a chance for saving our Shishmaref. If we had to choose to move or to stay, I would choose to stay. I love this village and I would do anything to help save it.

— Allison "Anisaaluk" Nayokpuk

Portraits of Resilience is part of the Many Strong Voices Programme. It illustrates in a personal way what climate change means to young people in the Arctic and helps communities create their own visual archive of the changes they are experiencing. More @ www.manystrongvoices.org

Canadian Rivers Institute · UNEP GRID Arendal Environmental Knowledge for Change · CICERO Senter for klimaforskning Center for International Climate and Environmental Research – Oslo · norden Nordic Council of Ministers Nordic Council