

Portraits of Resilience



Portraits of Resilience is a photography project that works with youth and schools in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States to document the effects of climate change in their local communities. These geographically distant societies share characteristics of vulnerability and resilience, and are amongst the first to feel the effects of climate change.

Portraits of Resilience illustrates the ethical dimension of climate change, helping to bring personal stories about its impacts to the attention of decision-makers and people around the world. It shows that the people of these regions are not helpless victims of climate change and that their youth have a profound sense of place and a strong desire to see their cultures and communities survive and thrive.

Portraits of Resilience has worked with young people in the Arctic communities of Shishmaref (Alaska), Unjargga (Norway), Pangnirtung (Nunavut, Canada), and Ummannaq (Greenland), as well as the island states of Seychelles and in the Pacific Islands of Fiji, Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, Samoa and Kiribati.

Portraits of Resilience is part of the Many Strong Voices (MSV) programme which links people in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States to work together on climate change adaptation and mitigation. MSV is jointly co-ordinated by UNEP/GRID-Arendal and CICERO in Oslo.

Samoa

Satoalepai Village

On the exterior, Samoa is an idyllic place to visit because of its beautiful seas, the amazing beach and the swaying palm trees ... but there are cracks in this interior due to climate change.

About one hour away from Salelologa stands a village named Satoalepai. My class and I talked to the high chief of the village, Polutea. He said the problem with his village was that the river kept on flooding because of heavy rains. The people on either side of the river couldn't cross over because of the flooding. Man! Can you imagine kids going to school in a canoe? That's just unheard of!

The solution to their problem was to build a bridge for people to cross over. They built culverts under the bridge so the fish and water could flow through. The grant money was also used to build a sea wall to protect their land from erosion.

You know what I think? I think that if every village that has been affected by climate change followed in Satoalepai's footsteps, then who knows, our next generation might still be able to see what we see in front of us today.

— BJ Lima



Pangnirtung, Nunavut

The Land that Never Melts is Melting

The Inuktitut word Auyuittuq means "the land that never melts." In the past, the glaciers in the park melted at an average of one metre per year. This has been increasing and in the last year, they melted eight metres.

During the summer of 2008, a suspension bridge over the Weasel River in Auyuittuq National Park was washed away due to a flash flood caused by the high temperatures, rain and lots of snow. The conditions were so bad that tourists had to be rescued from the park by helicopter. Melting glaciers will mean higher sea levels in all parts of the world, which is already happening in our northern communities.

Climate change is a growing concern for Elders, youth, and all people living in the North. We need to ensure that our world leaders take action right now before it's too late, as we are already seeing changes to the land and to our Inuit way of life.

— Jenna Kilabuk

