

Support for local community programs key to climate change response in Arctic

May 31 2011

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"When we talk about supporting adaptation to climate change, what we mean is supporting [resilience](#) at the community level," says Noorjehan Johnson, Vanier [Canada](#) Graduate Scholar in Cultural Anthropology at McGill University. "In the Arctic, much of the resilience is fostered through community institutions, which are playing an increasingly important role in crafting a local-level response to climate change."

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"The communities know best," she says. "They know what their priorities are. They know how they want to respond to climate change, and how climate change fits within the wider constellation of changes they have experienced over the last half century. As decisions are made at different levels of government—decisions that have a direct impact on Inuit communities—it is vital that their voices be heard."

Johnson acknowledges, however, there are different understandings of climate change within Inuit communities, as there are within every community around the world.

"Elders and hunters within the community have witnessed climate change in a nuanced way," she says. "They notice changes in snow formation, wind direction or weather unpredictability; whereas many of the younger members of the community learn about climate change in school or from the media, or from others who are more active on the land."

A family resource centre—called Ilisaqsivik—has been trying to bring together the disparate voices from the community and create a vision for the future. Johnson says the centre has become the "heart of the community"; it runs programs for youth and women, and fosters connections between the young and the old. The centre fosters a wide range of skills that are useful in adapting to climate change in the context of globalization, including hunting, land skills, and sea-ice safety programs, as well as training community members in office administration and grant writing – skills that Johnson believes are equally important in allowing Inuit to engage in climate change decision-making, which often happens at national and international summits.

"Sadly, Ilisaqsivik is relatively unique in the Arctic," says Johnson. "It is important to provide more support for institutions like this. They help sustain Inuit knowledge, connect local communities to resources, and contribute to our understanding of climate change."

Johnson will present her research at the 2011 edition of the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Together with Canada Research Chairs Andrew Weaver (University of Victoria), Ratana Chuenpagdee (Memorial University) and Ian Mauro (Mount Allison University), she will take part in a panel discussion

called "How Do We Build Resilient Communities in the Face of [Climate Change](#)?"

More information: The panel discussion is open to the public, and starts at 2.30 p.m. on May 31, 2011, in the Ted Daigle Theatre, Edmund Casey Hall, at the University of New Brunswick.

Provided by Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

Citation: Support for local community programs key to climate change response in Arctic (2011, May 31) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-05-local-key-climate-response-arctic.html>

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