

# Changing Climate, Changing Health, Changing Stories: A Capacity Development Approach to Community-Based Participatory Climate-Health Research in Rigolet, Nunatsiavut, Canada

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## Introduction

The *Changing Climate, Changing Health, Changing Stories Project* is a multi-year, community-based and community-driven research and capacity development initiative situated in Rigolet, Nunatsiavut, Labrador. Focused on discovering and analyzing the impacts of climate change on human health and well-being in Northern communities, this project uses participatory digital storytelling, story media, and qualitative research methods to enhance capacities to understand, adapt to, and manage the effects of climate variation and changes on the land.



## Project Objectives

Premised on an understanding of the importance of oral histories, storytelling, and personal narrative in Inuit communities, the objectives are to:

1. Gather baseline data on climate change, climate-health relationships, and adaptation strategies in Rigolet, Nunatsiavut;
2. Develop, utilize, and evaluate the effectiveness of using digital storytelling as a climate-health data gathering methodology;
3. Create locally-appropriate and culturally-sensitive health media;
4. Expand and enhance individual and community capacity to understand, identify, adapt to, and manage the effects of climate change on health and well-being; *and*
5. Foster dialogue between and among Northern and Southern communities surrounding climate-health relationships.

## Methods

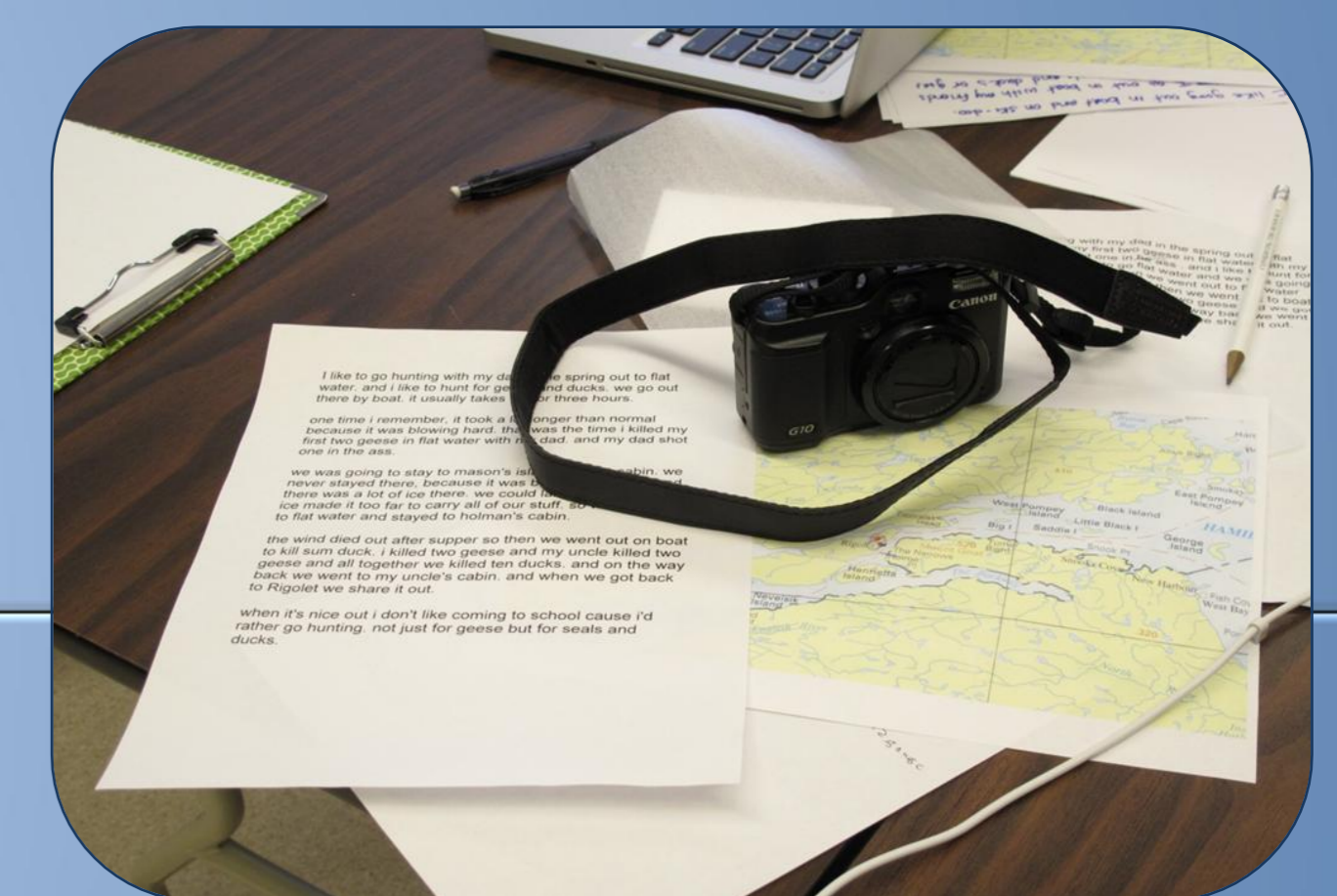
1. **Digital stories:** 22 stories were created by 17 community members over five workshops in November 2009, January 2010, and February 2010.
2. **In-depth interviews:** 46 preliminary and follow-up interviews were completed between November 2009 and March 2010. Interviews were with workshop participants and community stakeholders (all ages, male and female), and ranged from 15 minutes to 120 minutes.
3. **Focus Groups:** 4 focus groups were conducted in November 2009 and January 2010 with workshop participants (all ages, male and female). Focus groups ranged from 30 to 60 minutes.
4. **Population surveys:** Census surveys were completed by 54 of 80 households (totaling 74 respondents) in November 2009. Follow-up surveys are planned for November 2010.



Open water in Rigolet Bay, two months earlier than previous years.  
Photo: A. Cunsolo Willox, 2010

### PROJECT GOAL

To further develop individual and collective capacities in Rigolet, Nunatsiavut to understand, identify, adapt to, and manage health issues experienced in the community due to changes in climate, using digital storytelling and narrative research methodologies.



A digital story script and related technology and materials.  
Photo: L. Dean, 2009

## Results

### Land & Ice Changes

- Ice comes later, not as thick, thaws earlier
- Less snow
- Travel routes changed, conditions unpredictable

### Water Changes

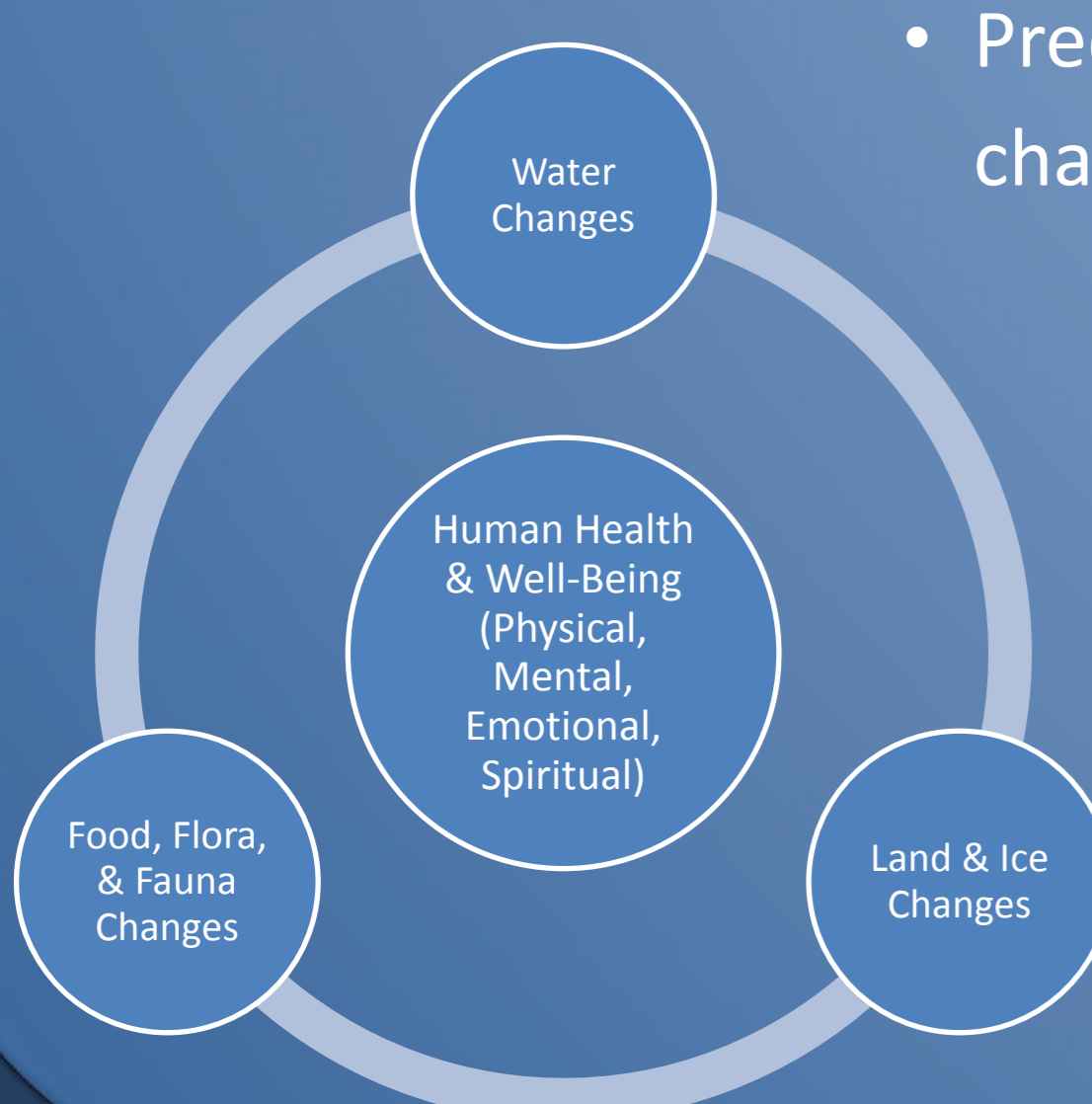
- Decrease in quality and quantity of clean, fresh drinking water
- Harmful organisms in water
- Wells and ponds drying up
- Precipitation patterns changing

### Food, Flora, & Fauna Changes

- Decrease in quality and quantity of traditional food
- Berry-picking season decreased, fewer berries
- Changes in animal location and migration

### Impacts on Health & Well-Being

- Increased stomach and intestinal distress
- Decreased physical activity
- Increased diabetes and obesity
- Increased depression
- Increased mental, emotional, and spiritual stress



## Conclusions

### Research

1. Community-based and community-driven research is imperative;
2. Funds should be given directly to community;
3. More climate-health research needed in Northern Canada (effects increasing);
4. More focus on narrative research and storytelling and story sharing; *and*
5. Increased focus on mental, emotional, and spiritual impacts of climate change.

### Digital Storytelling as Methodology

1. Builds community;
2. Shares wisdom, knowledge, and experience in first-person voice;
3. Accessible, transferable, culturally-appropriate, and locally-specific;
4. Strong health media platform;
5. Enhances dialogue between and among community, researchers, and private and public sectors; *and*
6. Rich source of first-person data (historical and present day).

**'The truth about stories is that that's all we are.'**

King, T. 2003. *The truth about stories: A Native narrative*. Toronto: House of Anansi.

## Future Work

- The establishment of *My Word: Storytelling and Digital Media Lab* in Rigolet, Nunatsiavut
- Continuation of climate-health relationships research and creation of adaptation strategies

## Acknowledgements

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