



Smithsonian  
National Museum of the American Indian

Multimedia Exhibition

22 July 2011 2 January 2012

Conversations with the Earth

# Indigenous Voices on Climate Change

CONVERSATIONS  
WITH THE EARTH



INDIGENOUS VOICES  
ON CLIMATE CHANGE

[WWW.CONVERSATIONSEARTH.ORG](http://WWW.CONVERSATIONSEARTH.ORG)

## Experience Conversations with the Earth

Conversation with the Earth (CWE) exhibitions are created collaboratively to artfully blend indigenous local knowledge of land and seascapes, media expertise, high-tech tools, participatory process, and community action to convey intimate stories of climate change. Through excellent reporting, powerful portraits, first-person interviews including audio commentary, and participatory media, the visitor is immersed in the sounds and the feel of a site and its people, in order to recreate the intimate experiences of listening to a local person. The visitor will be directly engaged not only in a story about the earth but also by the means which indigenous and local communities everywhere share traditional knowledge to address their concerns: conversation.

**Photography** To recreate the experience of being out in the field, CWE presents life-sized color images, including landscapes and portraits, with community members photographed in daily activities and set poses.

**Talking Portraits** Selected portrait photographs within each exhibit are accompanied by hidden sound boxes that allow an individual narrator to talk directly to the exhibit visitor. The narrator's voice, usually a field recording in the speaker's native language, is heard either through a loudspeaker or headphones.

**Participatory Videos** Each CWE exhibit includes continuous screenings of both short clips and longer full-story participatory videos made by local indigenous communities about their direct experience with climate change or other challenges to the planet.

**Interactive Website and Touchscreen** The CWE website brings the voices, images and stories of indigenous peoples to a global audience beyond the exhibit walls. The site is accessible at most CWE installations via an interactive computer touchscreen. Visitors can search and navigate indigenous peoples' climate-change testimonies from around the world, access further information and published articles, and offer comments with feedback and questions.

**Informative Captions and Published Articles** At the visual heart of the exhibit are dynamic "photostories" about local communities and the issues that affect them. In a CWE photostory, each photograph is accompanied by an informative caption and/or a quote from field recordings, taking the visitor into a deeper understanding of each community. Each photostory is introduced by an informative text panel and some include text from published articles on closely related topics.

**Contemporary Interpretations by Traditional Artisans** Beginning in July 2011 at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC, CWE's exhibits will, whenever possible, include contemporary indigenous artisans' response to climate change and other ecological challenges through their original creations in traditional craft forms that also tell stories. CWE's Smithsonian exhibition includes compelling climate stories told through traditional gourd-carving (Quechua) from South America and beading (Seminole) from North America.

**In-Person Testimony and Conversation** One of the most powerful ways to experience a CWE exhibit is when visitors hear directly from local indigenous community members who participated in the photostories or created the participatory videos. Whenever possible, we facilitate the travel of local story participants to CWE exhibits for special events where the public can continue the conversation with CWE's storytellers.

Conversations with the Earth (CWE) is an indigenous-led multimedia campaign to amplify indigenous voices in the global discourse on climate change and other ecological challenges. CWE premiered its first major multimedia exhibit, *Indigenous Voices on Climate Change*, in December 2009 at the National Museum of Denmark during the landmark Copenhagen meeting of 15th Conference of the Parties (COP 15) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

CWE conveys local accounts of the impacts of climate change on indigenous communities, stories of the unintended consequences of imposed mitigation efforts on local livelihoods, and examples of indigenous science and traditional knowledge and their value in developing appropriate responses to climate change.

Bringing together audio, participatory video, photo essays, informative captions, published articles, and interactive touchscreens with web access, *Conversations With the Earth* exhibits create a powerful multi-sensory narrative portrait to convey intimate stories of indigenous peoples' experience of climate change which also serve as a backdrop to in-person presentations by indigenous representatives from the CWE communities.

All CWE stories are featured on [www.conversationsearth.org](http://www.conversationsearth.org) where we welcome your comments and questions.

Through these tools, CWE provides a way of listening closely to traditional stewards of the Earth to help formulate a viable global response to the challenges of climate change. Ultimately, CWE asserts indigenous peoples' inherent rights to their lands, territories and resources as a necessary condition of maintaining and enhancing human resilience to converging global crises, including climate change.

Since 2009, *Indigenous Voices on Climate Change* has been on a global tour in two formats: "Major" – mostly designed for longer term museum installations; and "Mobile" – a portable installation to be displayed in communities and at conferences and special events, anywhere from a few hours to a few weeks.

## Indigenous Voices

*"Our proverb says, 'The ox never gives birth, and it never rains in the dry season.' But now we have rains in the dry season, and it's dry in the rainy season."*  
**Shagre Shano Shale** (Gamro), Ethiopia

*"I make a call to all the people, to all the world, . . . that we shouldn't destroy, we should continue leaving the bad aside, and take care."* **Josefina Lema** (Kichwa), Mojandita, Ecuador

*"When I was a child there were no problems with water. The glacier was much bigger. It used to snow much more."*  
**Ishay Paldan** (Zanskari) Farmer, Kumik Village, Ladakh, India

*"You rich countries are very happy about what you're doing, going about your business, not knowing that your actions are damaging our reefs and our islands."*  
**John Pondrein** (Manus), Papua New Guinea

*"My vision is to continue having conversations with the elders who are still alive, so that they can teach us how to take care of Mother Earth."* **Irma Poma Canchumani** (Quechua), CWE Media Hub, Huancayo, Peru

*"We are a harbinger of what is to come, what the rest of the world can expect."* **Patricia Cochran** (Inupiat), Chair of the 2009 Indigenous Peoples Global Summit on Climate Change

*"There is a solution. It's not the end of the world yet. One thing we have to do is gain back respect for the animals, for all nature. We pray and give thanks to everything that we use. But if it's going to work, it has to be both Western and traditional. We have to meet halfway—and we need to find balance."* **Sarah James** (Gwich'in) Community Spokesperson, Arctic Village, Alaska, USA

Indigenous Peoples have contributed little to climate change, yet they suffer from the brunt of its direct and immediate effects. From Manus Islanders in Papua New Guinea working to save their seaside homes, to Maasai herders responding to a cattle-killing drought, CWE supports indigenous communities to give dramatic first-hand accounts of their experience with climate change and the solutions they are creating from their wealth of traditional ecological knowledge.

## Conversations with the Earth

Conversations with the Earth (CWE) will have its second major exhibit installation at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC running from 22 July 2011 through 2 January 2012. CWE is a respectful collaboration between 15 indigenous communities in 13 countries; an international indigenous-led education and advocacy organization for the rights of indigenous peoples, Land Is Life; international experts in participatory video, InsightShare; and award-winning photographer and specialist in maintaining oral traditions, Nicolas Villaume.

Through the collaboration of these media and human rights professionals, CWE is supporting a growing network of indigenous groups and communities living in critical ecosystems around the world, from the Atlantic Rainforest to the Himalayas, from the Pacific Islands to the Andes, from the Arctic to Africa, who publicly share their experience of climate change through participation in CWE. CWE continues to build on the momentum and interest generated by its exhibits by supporting capacity building in indigenous communities in order that they may tell their stories to the world. CWE's partners offer special thanks to The Christensen Fund, The Lia Fund, the Ford Foundation and our individual donors for their support.

### Smithsonian

National Museum of the American Indian

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10 AM–5:30 PM daily; closed December 25.

Admission is free, and the building is fully accessible.



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