

Salve Regina University

Digital Commons @ Salve Regina

CHP 218 Exploring North American Indian
Societies

Student Work on Display

5-8-2020

Climate Change Impacts on Amazonian and Arctic Indigenous Tribes

Olivia G. Thayer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/chp218>



Part of the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

Olivia Thayer

CHP-218-01

Dr. Alexander Uhl

22 April 2020

Climate change has tremendous impacts on indigenous peoples and due to their dependence on the environment, they are often among the first to face these direct consequences. Indigenous groups already have difficulties that are only intensified as climate change worsens. Political and economic marginalization, loss of land and resources, human rights violations, and discrimination and unemployment are a handful of issues that are faced by these groups on a daily basis (Ki-Moon, 2007). Alaskan and Amazonian indigenous peoples are two examples of groups that have been impacted particularly harder by climate change. Indigenous peoples in the Alaskan region are dependent upon hunting for polar bears, walrus, seals and caribou, herding reindeer, and fishing and gathering for food, and to contribute towards their economy. Melting glaciers, rising temperatures, and extinction are all direct impacts of climate change that could completely alter these people. In addition to Alaskan indigenous groups, the Amazonian peoples have experienced some differing effects of climate change. Deforestation and forest fragmentation are two of their biggest concerns. Damage to their forests have had a negative impact on their food sources, and made it more difficult to benefit off the natural resources that the Amazon rainforest provides. Another climatic impact is the severity of droughts and wildfires, which can be disastrous towards their living situations and diets. There have been many studies concerning the varying ways in which these indigenous groups have been impacted by climate change, and how they plan to further mitigate this issue.

“The Effects of Environmental Change on an Arctic Native Community: Evaluation Using Local Cultural Perceptions” an article published in the American Indian Quarterly aims to take a deeper look at how global warming and climate change has impacted an Inupiat Eskimo village that resides on the Alaska North Slope. This tribe relies on natural resources for their everyday lives, and climate change can heavily disrupt their way of life. It is important to understand the scope of this issue in order to provide support for these tribes that face intense changes as global warming and climate change becomes a bigger problem. The study presents ideas that the hunters and fishers had about the various underlying causes that they have noticed while living in this village (Mcbeath & Shepro, 2007). Four of these factors being oil and gas exploration and development, climate change, toxic spills and contamination, and natural climate cycles (Mcbeath & Shepro, 2007). Interviews were conducted around the village to gain information on how the indigenous people have been impacted by climate change. 40 subsistence hunters and fishers, each of whom had been living in the village for at least 15 years were interviewed by the researchers in the study. The results of the study document the specific weather and climate changes that the hunters and fishers had noted throughout their years of living in the village (Mcbeath & Shepro, 2007). In addition, the researchers also gathered results on any changes in the number of animals seen.

Climate change in the Arctic has had and will continue to have negative impacts on the livelihoods and cultures of the indigenous peoples living in the area, as stated in the *“Arctic Indigenous Peoples, Climate Change Impacts, and Adaptation”* published in the E-International Relations journal. This region warms over twice as fast as the global average, and many residents are already noticing the harmful effects of these changes (Stepien, 2014). Many changes are

called for and must be implemented otherwise indigenous groups will fall under the radar and suffer the consequences. This topic is crucial to understand because climate change is only projected to rise, which will cause even more harmful impacts on the Inuits that live in the Arctic. These groups rely on living off the land, and as habitats shift and global temperatures rise, their lives could be completely shifted.

It is crucial that the government is in compliance with the needs of these arctic tribal communities so they can benefit off of their land instead of facing brutal consequences. Over the past few years, the Trump Administration has reversed nearly 100 environmental regulations that have been put in place by presidents and governmental officials in the past. Some of these policy changes include air pollution and emissions, drilling and extraction, infrastructure and planning, animals, toxic substances and safety, and water pollution (Popovich, Albeck-Ripka, & Pierre-Louis, 2020). All of these shifts will have a direct impact on native groups residing within Alaska. An example of one of the changes that have been made is “Weakened oversight of some state plans for reducing air pollution in national parks” which was put in place by the EPA (Popovich, Albeck-Ripka, & Pierre-Louis, 2020). This could negatively impact groups because much of the Alaskan territory is home to national parks. The heightened air pollution could ultimately expose natives to many health implications in the future. This is not the only revision made to EPA guidelines that could impact these groups. It is very important that the government keeps all of these environmental regulations in place so these native communities do not suffer the consequences.

Amazonian indigenous groups are facing some differing impacts of climate change. Indigenous peoples of the Amazon are extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change and

global warming because of their reliance on natural resources that the rainforest provides, as stated in the “*Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon*” in the Inter-American Development Bank journal. These groups often have limited access to the decision-making processes on climate change issues, even though they are the ones who suffer the most from the impacts (Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon). Policies to mitigate climate change have been put in place to help the livelihoods of indigenous groups, however, there are still many more efforts to be taken.

In the article, “*REDDy or not? The Effects on Indigenous Peoples in Brazil of a Global Mechanism for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation*” by the Journal of Sustainable Development, a study is conducted to gain information on the international debate over a mechanism for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) (Anderson 2009 18). Emissions from deforestation and forest degradation have gotten drastically higher in the past few centuries, leaving indigenous groups in the Amazon suffering the consequences. The study aims to answer the question, “What will be the effects on indigenous peoples in Brazil of an international policy mechanism for REDD?” (Anderson 2009 18). To obtain information the study draws upon research conducted using a qualitative prospective policy evaluation method to describe the possible risks and opportunities to indigenous peoples living in Amazonian Brazil, and to make recommendations for improving REDD (Anderson 2009 18). The research concludes that the indigenous tribes in the Amazon, specifically groups at Poznan were outraged and still refuse to proceed in the REDD process without a guarantee that their rights will be protected. Researchers state that these people should have a voice in what comes from REDD and that all decisions must be run by them, to protect their livelihoods and

the surrounding biodiversity. It is crucial that the indigenous tribes that reside in the Amazon rainforest of Brazil are taken into consideration in terms of the REDD act, mainly because they control such a large portion of that land in the rainforest. These groups heavily rely on the ecosystem that the Amazon provides, and climate change, global warming, and deforestation in particular are things that could completely disrupt their ways of living.

Climate change within the Amazon rainforest has already had a variety of negative impacts on the indigenous tribes, as shown in the news article “Indigenous tribes say effects of climate change already felt in Amazon rainforest”. As stated in the news article published by the British journal *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, native populations are reporting shifts in precipitation patterns, humidity, river levels, temperature, and fire and agricultural cycles (Butler, 2013). Arifirá Matipu, a Xingu tribesman that was interviewed states that “I am concerned with the change, today I am very concerned with forest fires... because the savanna and forest are burning,” (Butler, 2013). This quote is crucial when analyzing and understanding the severity of climatic impacts on tribes within the Amazon. Many natives in the area have made clear what has happened, and what needs change.

As the population grows and humans continue to overuse the earth's natural resources, climate change will accelerate rapidly, bringing along with it abrupt and irreversible changes. It's important to note how these impacts will change the lives of indigenous communities across the globe, specifically Alaskan and Amazonian groups. The Amazon Rainforest and Alaska region are two areas with a completely opposite biodiversity. The Alaskan and Amazonian indigenous groups face an assortment of environmental impacts as a result of climate change. These specific communities are vulnerable to many changes ranging from melting sea ice to deforestation.

Although these two regions of the world are so different, they are both well known for their diverse and abundant wildlife. It's crucial to understand the scope of climate change on these areas, so that conservation efforts can be carried out to support the environment and native communities. Indigenous communities now and in the past have come forward with their complaints and concerns as climate change worsens. Due to their reliance on the earth's natural resources, they are the most vulnerable to these impacts. Native communities have been particularly proactive through rallies, protests, and even implementing their own risk assessment plans. These are all steps in the right direction, but nothing major will happen if the government and the rest of the population does not take this issue seriously. Climate change is only projected to rise, so it is our duty as humans to protect this wonderful place we call home so that all life on earth will benefit.

Bibliography

Butler, R. A. (2013, April 30). Indigenous tribes say effects of climate change already felt in Amazon rainforest. *Mongabay News & Inspiration From Nature's Frontline* . Retrieved from <https://news.mongabay.com/2013/04/indigenous-tribes-say-effects-of-climate-change-already-felt-in-amazon-rainforest/>

CLIMATE CHANGE AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE AMAZON. (n.d.). Retrieved May 7, 2020, from <https://www.iadb.org/en/topics/gender-indigenous-peoples-and-african-descendants/climate-change-and-indigenous-peoples-of-the-amazon,3004.html>

Cho, R., Cho, R., T, B., & denker, J. (2020, January 2). 10 Climate Change Impacts That Will Affect Us All. Retrieved May 7, 2020, from <https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2019/12/27/climate-change-impacts-everyone/>

Halpert, J. (2018, October 12). Native Americans and a Changing Climate " Yale Climate Connections. Retrieved May 7, 2020, from <https://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2012/06/native-americans-and-a-changing-climate/>

Ki-Moon, B. (2007, September 24). Climate change and indigenous peoples . Retrieved May 7, 2020, from https://www.un.org/en/events/indigenousday/pdf/Backgrounder_ClimateChange_FINAL.pdf

Mcbeath, J., & Shepro, C. E. (2007). The Effects of Environmental Change on an Arctic Native Community: Evaluation Using Local Cultural Perceptions. *The American Indian Quarterly*, 31(1), 44–65. doi: 10.1353/aiq.2007.0012

Popovich, N., ALBECK-RIPKA, L., & PIERRE-LOUIS , K. (2020, May 6). The Trump Administration Is Reversing Nearly 100 Environmental Rules. Here's the Full List. *New York*

Times . Retrieved from

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks.html?searchResultPosition=2>

Stepien , A. (2014, April 10). Arctic Indigenous Peoples, Climate Change Impacts, and

Adaptation. Retrieved May 7, 2020, from

<https://www.e-ir.info/2014/04/10/arctic-indigenous-peoples-climate-change-impacts-and-adaptation/>