



PhotoVoice: Elevating Voices and Perspectives of Indigenous and Local Communities

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Socio-Ecological Systems Transformation in River basins of the sub-Arctic under climate change (SESTRA)

The Frozen Commons project explores the interconnected ice, snow, and permafrost landscapes that sustain Arctic communities and ecosystems by merging science, arts, and local and Indigenous Knowledge systems.



SESTRA RIVERS

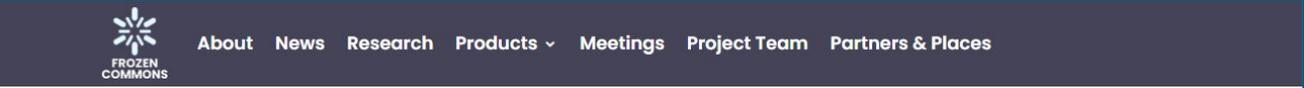
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Kuskokwim River, Alaska. Source: Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

Logos for partner institutions: University of New Hampshire, UAF (University of Alaska Fairbanks), UNI (University of Northern Iowa), and The George Washington University.



Frozen Commons: Change, Resilience and Sustainability in the Arctic



NNA Research: Collaborative Research: Frozen Commons: Change, Resilience and Sustainability in the Arctic (Frozen Commons, # 2127348).

The Frozen Commons project explores the interconnected ice, snow, and permafrost landscapes that sustain Arctic communities and ecosystems by merging science, arts, and local and Indigenous Knowledge systems. Defined as shared resources collectively used and managed by Indigenous Peoples, local communities, governments, and external stakeholders, these “frozen commons” are critical to life in the Arctic. However, as the region experiences unprecedented climate-induced changes, ice and snow melting and permafrost’s thawing signals profound disruptions to cultural, social, and



Tsagaannuur

- “TsagaanNuur”, means “White Lake,” it is home to the Dukha people.
- The Dukha are particularly known for their unique reindeer herding traditions and deep spiritual connection to the taiga ecosystems.
- However, changing climate conditions and shifts in land-use regulations have disrupted their traditional way of life, leading to a sharp decline in the Dukha population and threatening their cultural heritage.



Bayanzurkh

- “Bayanzurkh” means “Rich Heart,” is homeland of the nomadic cattle herders Darkhad.

- Their nomadic pastoral practices are characterized by seasonal migrations, the use of nomadic yurts, and a collective approach to pasture management – a system that is now under threat due to ongoing land degradation.



Photovoice workshops

- Knowledge co-production is a developing field with advances in many directions. Engaging communities as equal research partners often implies providing the research tools and building capacities for conducting research aligned with community needs and concerns.
- PhotoVoice is one of the ways for bridging community and research perspectives. It is a qualitative co-production research strategy used in community-based participatory research to document and reflect an individual's reality.
- The PhotoVoice workshops were designed to empower local communities to tell their own stories and share their own perspectives, even among those who had little to no experience in storytelling, photography, or visual arts.



PhotoVoice workshops on August 4-8, 2025, in Tsagaannuur and Bayanzürkh, Khövsgöl aimag,

- We organized this workshop as a part of the project “Frozen Commons”.
- The target group consisted of beginners, all adults over 18.
- Participants hailed from diverse backgrounds, but these differences became secondary in the context of the workshop.







Based on the experience of other PhotoVoice workshops that utilized professional cameras and required extra steps for users to navigate technologies, we decided to use mobile phones as the primary tool for image-making.

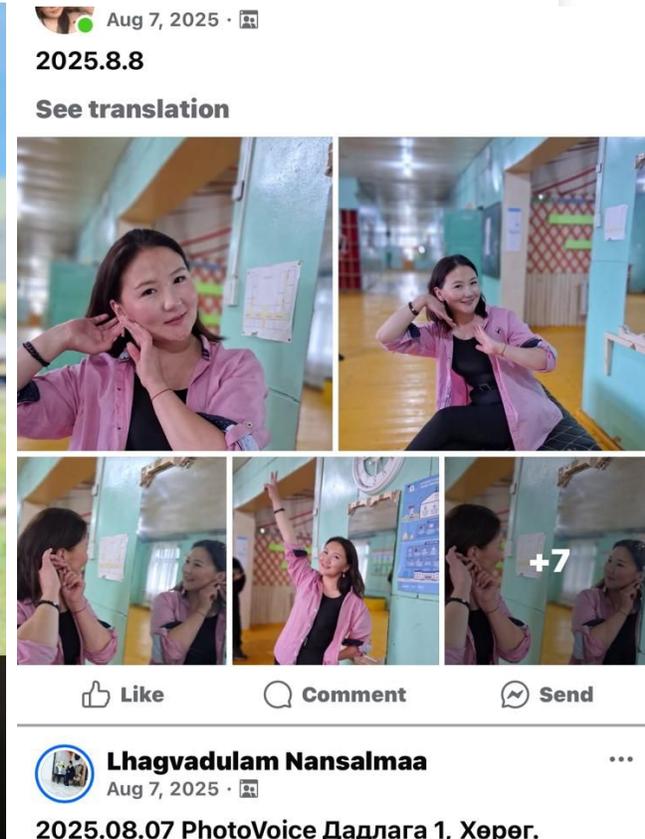
First day of workshop

- The opening day focused on the basics of image creation, basic frameworks, principles of photography, such as composition and visual framing.
- Ethical considerations, such as obtaining permissions and proper crediting, were also discussed.
- During the practical session, participants worked in pairs with less familiar colleagues to practice portrait photography and building rapport



Second day of workshop

- On the second day, participants deepened their skills by combining images with different types of text:
 - factual captions,
 - interpretive observations,
 - creative writing using Facebook and Instagram posts.
- The idea was to demonstrate how words and pictures could reinforce or alter each other's meaning.





- The main principle of the workshop was to focus on the experiences and opinions of the participants, providing them with the tools and support to become active storytellers and agents of change in their communities.
- The workshop emphasized that the benefits extended beyond the project itself, aiming at personal growth and validation.
- The message was clear: each person's voice is valuable and can effect change.



The main benefits that the workshop's participants gained are:

- opportunity for co-production, knowledge exchange,
- direct interaction with each other and the facilitator, the opportunity to share their knowledge and gain new knowledge,
- balances power relations between knowledge systems
- acquiring practical skills in working with a camera, perspective, social media promotion, etc.
- discussion of the possibility of creating and developing joint projects,
- action-oriented observations and solutions
- understanding processes and issues through community lens



Thank
you!!!

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