

Sea change: Flooding in Bangladesh

The South Asian country of Bangladesh will be devastated as the climate changes. Local people claim that recent increases in the number of floods have been caused by the rise in the Earth's temperature.

If the climate continues to change, more and more of Bangladesh will go underwater.

Washed away

Flooding and erosion are part of life in Bangladesh, and are vital for the renewal of land. However, severe floods with devastating effects on people's livelihoods used to happen once every twenty years. They are now occurring every five to seven years, taking place in 1987, 1988, 1995, 1998 and 2004. Dr Atiq Rahman of the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies says: *"We simply do not know if climate change is definitely increasing the*

erosion by our rivers ... what we can say is that patterns of rainfall and flooding have changed in the past few years. Severe floods used to come once every 20 years, but now seem to occur around every five to seven years."

"Lives in Bangladesh will be devastated though no fault of the people concerned. We are not causing the climate change that is killing our people. The average Bangladeshi produces 0.3 tonnes of carbon dioxide per annum."

Bangladesh High Commissioner to the UK

The increased flooding corresponds with what climate scientists predict will happen to Bangladesh as the world gets warmer. Higher sea temperatures will make cyclones more frequent and intense, rising sea levels will both flood low-lying land and slow the speed at which rivers can remove water from the land, and rainfall could increase by 10 to 15 per cent by 2030. All of which will mean increased flooding across the country.



Flooded Street in Naogaon City, Bangladesh

Floods in 2004 were some of the severest seen in decades, leaving 1,000 people dead and 30 million people homeless. It is estimated that the floods caused £4 billion of damage. Lessons had to be suspended in 18,000 primary schools.

Alongside yearly floods, rising sea-levels could be calamitous.

A 45cm sea level rise would reduce Bangladesh's land area by 11 per cent and force 5.5 million people to migrate.

A 100 cm rise would remove 20 per cent of the land area, causing 15 million people to migrate. And millions more people will be forced to live in flood endangered areas.

Global injustice

Climate change means the people of Bangladesh are suffering a terrible injustice; the loss of their land because of the carbon emissions of rich countries and companies.

Abdul Razzak lives on Char Bangla, one of thousands of islands in the Ganges River delta, which are being washed away as the sea level rises. Abdul and his family consume few fossil fuels. They have no electricity, use candles for light and get around by walking or in a boat powered by a single oar at the stern.

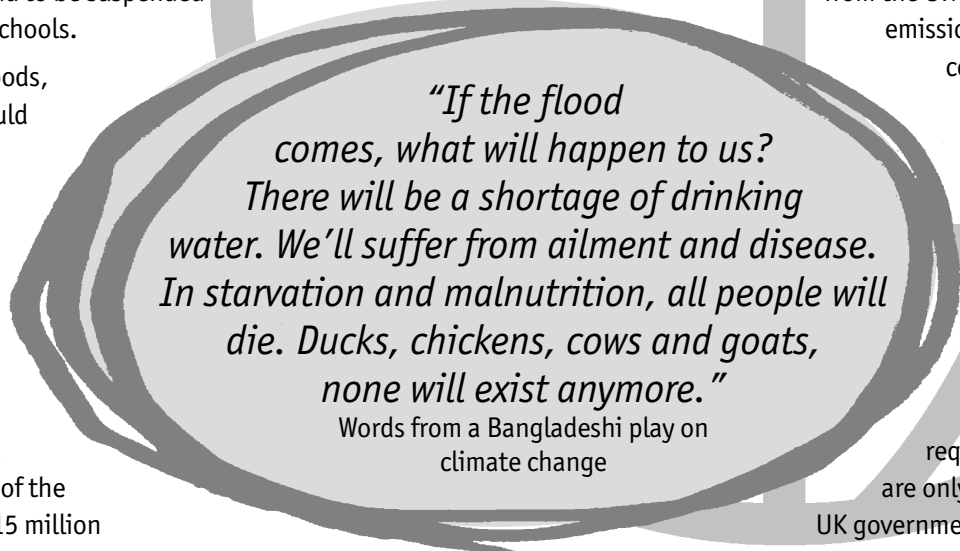
For Abdul, there is no doubt where the responsibility lies: *"We are angry with the people who are doing this. We are angry with the people building these factories that will make us sink into the sea."*

The injustice being done to Bangladesh is true of other areas of the world set to be hit by rising sea levels. A 4°C rise in global temperature could lead to up to 300 million more people suffering from coastal flooding each year,

most of them in developing countries. Cities at risk include Banjul in the Gambia, Dhaka in Bangladesh and Manila in The Philippines. Yet carbon emissions from the UK dwarf the emissions from such countries.

If the flooding of Bangladesh is to be prevented, large cuts in carbon emissions from the UK are required. Such cuts are only possible if the UK government puts in place laws which shift the UK towards

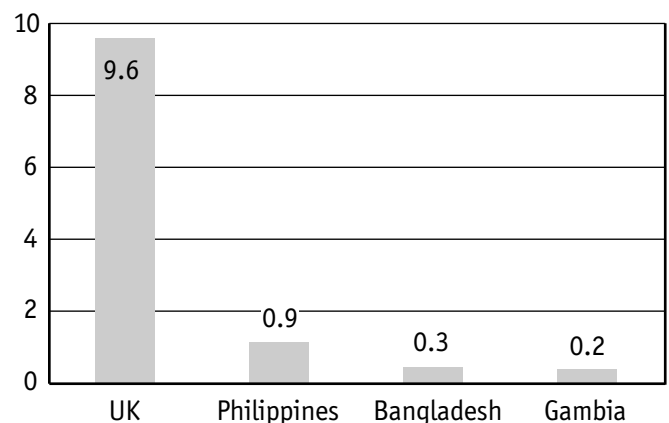
being a low carbon economy. As Moudud Ahmed, the Minister for Law and Justice in Bangladesh, has said: *"The developing countries like Bangladesh are facing a detrimental and hazardous situation due to the unbridled emissions of industrialised nations."*



"If the flood comes, what will happen to us? There will be a shortage of drinking water. We'll suffer from ailment and disease. In starvation and malnutrition, all people will die. Ducks, chickens, cows and goats, none will exist anymore."

Words from a Bangladeshi play on climate change

Carbon emissions per person per year (tonnes)



Take action with WDM to end climate injustice.