



The **Methodist** Church



Anglicans in
World Mission



Bangladesh Bits

Letter 20. May 2009



Dipty Linda & James Pender

*Advisors with The Church
of Bangladesh Social
Development Programme*

C/o The Director
Christian Mission Hospital
Rajshahi 6000
PO: Rajshahi Court,
Rajshahi District
BANGLADESH

Dear Friends

These days climate change is everywhere; in newspapers, on TV and within school curriculum, in fact even if you wanted too you can't avoid the subject. Even in conversation if it's been wet, windy, flooding, hot or cold somehow someone will blame the weather on climate change. Like it or hate the issue of climate change has gone mainstream, political leaders, business leaders and economists are even concerned; things have come a long way since the issue was promoted by left wing greenies in the late eighties and early nineties.

When I studied my degree in Environmental Studies in 1992 we were taught that Climate Change was a 'possible' problem, the details were unclear and perhaps we should do something to prevent it as a 'safe precaution'. However, when I was back in the UK during 2006 shortly after the publishing of the *Stern Report* by a British economist on behalf of the British Government who astounded the world's business community with his predictions on how climate change would affect the world's economy, I realised things had changed, especially when later even oilmen like President George W. Bush endorsed the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change who unequivocally stated that climate change was now happening. People were no longer talking about 'IF' for climatic changes had already been measured and the link to modern human behaviour was unmistakable, but 'HOW' it was and would impact on the earth.

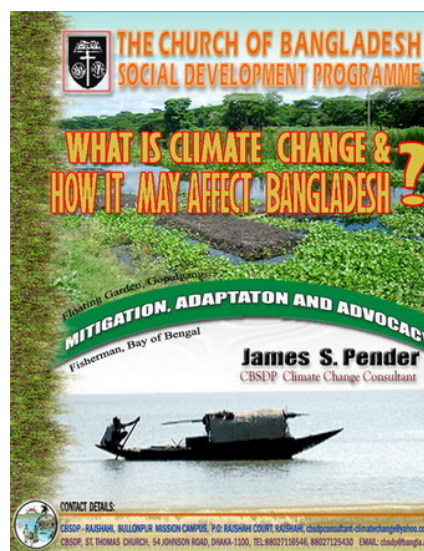
It can be all a bit confusing hidden in scientific gobbledygook but basically while we know human caused climate change is now happening we still don't know exactly what

will happen, how soon and precisely where. However, it is known that climate change in the next hundred years will be significant and by the year 2100 best estimates predict between a 1.8° C and 4 °C rise in average global temperature, although it could possibly be as high as 6.4° C. For the average Brit that does not sound too dramatic as our ever changing weather could lead to ‘four seasons in day’ as they say in Scotland anyhow. We are unlikely therefore to notice this kind of temperature difference in terms of ‘feeling warmer’, but for food production for example, this will be serious as harvests depend directly on climatic conditions (temperature and rainfall patterns) and could lead to food yields being reduced by as much as a third in the tropics and subtropics.

In terms of the impact of climate change few places in the world will experience the range of effects and the severity of changes that will occur in Bangladesh, which will include: Average weather temperatures rising; more extreme hot and cold spells; rainfall being less when it is most needed for agriculture, yet more in the monsoon when it already causes floods; melting of glaciers in the source areas of Bangladesh’s rivers altering the hydrological cycle; more powerful tornados and cyclones; and sea level rise displacing communities, turning freshwater saline and facilitating more powerful storm surges. The impact will be intensified by the fact that Bangladesh is both one of the most populated and one of the poorest nations on earth.

Bishop Paul Sarkar and Bishop Michael S. Baroi of The Church of Bangladesh, are both very concerned and have been highlighting the plight of Bangladesh as they travel to different countries for various church meetings and the latter, speaking of his fears about climate change said: “It would be a serious catastrophe for my country and for the whole region if much of the land in Bangladesh disappears under the sea. I become frightened to think that my grandchildren will have no place to live on this planet earth. I really want to be sure that they, and their children after them, will be able to enjoy the beauty of my country that I have enjoyed, and be able to have enough land to live and enough land for food”.

So on my return to Bangladesh in 2006 the moderator of the church gave me the task of looking into how climate change would affect the poor people that the church seeks to serve through its development programme. Unfortunately my findings are not very encouraging CBSDP’s projects in north-west (Rajshahi), west (Meherpur) and central (Modhupur) Bangladesh are becoming increasingly drought prone; its projects in Dhaka, Barisal and Gopalganj Districts in the south are suffering from increasingly devastating floods; while communities on the coast are becoming threatened for their very survival.



My Report on Climate Change (cover S. Mondol)

I visited such a community on the coast quite near to where the Church of Bangladesh has one of its congregations near to the city of Khulna during a field trip from the 3rd *International Conference on Community Based Adaptation to Climate Change* which was quite heartbreaking: In the twin villages of Kolotola and Amtola as sea level rises and water flowing down the rivers in the dry season gets less, water supplies, and even the soil is becoming salty. This means that they can no longer grow vegetables and rice

harvests are getting less and less, while they have to travel 6km for drinking water in the dry season from a pond where the water isn't 'good' but at least not so much salt to make it undrinkable. If this wasn't bad enough the reduction in dry season freshwater is reducing the productivity of the nearby Sundabans (the largest mangrove forest in the world, containing Bengal Tigers) on which people traditionally relied for building materials, medicinal plants, and firewood, as well as reducing the amount of fish in the river during the dry season. Worst of all plenty of water in the river with its strong currents in the wet season, means the river is meandering towards the village at a rate of about 2 feet per year. Natural processes are involved but with the effects of climate

change making them worse it cannot truly be called a 'natural disaster' in the making. When I asked Rattan the young man I was talking to what he would do when the river claimed his home? He simply shrugged his shoulders saying: "I will have nowhere to move to here, I guess I will just have to go to Dhaka city and try and find some work there".

Kolatola home threatened by the river



In rural Meherpur a long way from the coast, effects of climate change may be less dramatic but are none the less insidious, as we talked to village women in Govipur with Neil a visiting Methodist Minister, they showed that although of limited education and from simple farming families, they were in fact wise and insightful with their answers and clearly ladies who could read the 'signs of the times'. New weather patterns that were affecting the crops their families were growing included: Fruits coming earlier, harvests latter, the hotter season was now longer, heavy rains were commoner, storms were now devastating crops, as well as longer periods of thicker fog. This was serious trouble for these farming families as these changes threatens their livelihoods; for example fog damaged wheat by encouraging fungal disease, and killed flowers of valuable litchi and mango trees reducing fruit harvests.

When Rev. Neil asked the women what message they wanted him to take back to the UK these humble but confident ladies stated their message clearly and concisely: "People there should stop pollution, look after the environment and stop emitting greenhouse gases; for Western countries are increasing greenhouse gases but it is we in Bangladesh that are suffering!"



Wise Govipur Village Women

Sir John Houghton Chair or Co-chair of the Scientific Working Group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) between 1988-2002 reminds us of words of Jesus spoken after he had told the parable contrasting the faithful and unfaithful stewards: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). The challenge to our Christian churches and the opportunities with which they are presented are unmistakeable". As former US Vice-President Al Gore, stated in his Noble Prize winning film *Inconvenient Truth*: "If you believe in prayer, pray that people will find the strength to change (in response to climate change)" and then he quoted an African proverb: 'When you pray move your feet'!

I will tell you more about the response of the CBSDP in a future newsletter but would like you all to take action this month: Write to your MP, make a lifestyle change, pray for change... Access Tearfund, Operation Noah or Climate Stewards websites or if no computer call them to find out how you can make a difference and to receive resources!

How to Take Action on Climate Change...

- Tearfunds Climate Change Campaign: Tel: 0845 355 8355 or <http://www.tearfund.org/Campaigning/Climate+change+and+disasters/>
- British Churches Together Campaign – 'Operation Noah': Tel: Landline: 020 7324 4761 or 020 7324 4769 Mobile: 07968 131 639 or <http://www.operationnoah.org/home>
- Climate Stewards of A Rocha, *Christians in Conservation*: Tel: 020 8574 5935 or <http://www.climatestewards.net/cs-int-en/resources/extras/climateinfoaction.html>

More Information on Climate Change and Bangladesh/UK...

- Download James' report on Bangladesh & Climate Change at: <http://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/en/About-NCA/Publications/Reports/> OR <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/councils/worldmission/wmresources.htm> OR <http://www.eldis.org/go/display&id=41967&type=Document&emnotif100209>
- An article by James on adapting to climate change <http://webarchive.cms-uk.org/news/2007/acting-justly-on-climate-change-30032007.htm>
- See changes in the UK graphically – 'Climate Tracker' : <http://www.climatechangetracker.com/map.html>

Thank God...

- For the recent CBSDP Project Evaluation which we assisted
- That Linda's mum is better
- For a good progress in our work
- Linda's successful MLE language workshops

Please pray...

- Please pray for the complete recovery of my Father's sight after a recent stroke, as since the wedding it has deteriorated a little
- Pray that the Lord would keep watch on Linda's mum who is quite frail in good health and that Linda has God's peace.
- A recent External Evaluation of CBSDP that God would guide the team as they write up their observations and give wisdom to the Church of Bangladesh in making appropriate implementation of their recommendations.
- For Linda as she takes a course in Multi-Lingual Education in Payap University, Thailand (especially as she will be away from James for 2-3 weeks!) and for a refreshing holiday before the course.

- CBSDP Managers as they transfer between areas that they would settle in to their new locations well
- Pray for Tito the new manager in Rajshahi and our work to support him & projects here
- That God would guide James in developing the Climate Change Programme of the CBSDP
- That Linda would settle into the CBSDP, and be able to have positive impact on it's work
- God would bless our attempts to introduce MLE into Rajshahi schools and empower the Santal community focussing on their language.
- Pray that the effects of the Stop the Traffik networks in the UK, Bangladesh and elsewhere would be successful.
- That we will be able to wisely develop the arsenic mitigation project.
- That James would have time and motivation to improve his Bengali and Linda her English language skills
- Also, pray for our colleagues in the CBSDP, that God would supply his wisdom and blessing to their life and work.
- That the love of God would really touch the hearts of the men, women & girls we are working with and that we would be effective in our activities to uplift them.

James & Linda