



## **Earth in crisis: environmental policy in an international context**

### *Injustice and inequality*

#### **Penny Boreham**

Dave, we had contributors in the film complaining of the injustice of the fact that Bangladesh is suffering from environmental damage inflicted, or exacerbated, by heavily industrialised countries – how aware were people you met in Bangladesh, would you say generally, about the cause and the whole picture?

#### **Dave Humphries**

I think the people in Bangladesh have differing levels of awareness about the causes and consequences of climate change in much the same way that you would find, say the United Kingdom or any other country, some people are very conversant with what's happening and others less so. What we found when we interviewed people in Khulna district was that some people had a very high level awareness of the causes and, in particular one of our interviewees, Nirapad Byne, a vegetable farmer and he showed us around his vegetable garden. He's now growing saline-tolerant crops because he can't grow his old crops because of the increased saline concentrations in the soil and when we'd finished talking to him on camera he then invited us to have fruit with his family and he then made it clear to us that he considered, quite rightly, that the developed countries had a disproportionate share of the responsibility for climate change because of their high per capita emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases and he asked us, very clearly, very firmly, but very hospitably to come back home and to make it clear to our governments that they need to take reforms to deal with this problem – that illustrates some different dimensions of justice. One is what we could refer to as intra-generational equity; in other words inequities between different parts of the world, between the developed world who have got the economic power to adapt better to climate change than poor countries like Bangladesh; there's inequity of causes there, that those who are causing the problem and not those that bear the consequences. There's another aspect too which is inter-generational equity, which refers to inequities between those that are living now and those that will be born later on and it's the present generation that's causing this problem, but it will be future generations that bear the ecological costs. We're already seeing some of the communities in Bangladesh starting to bear the ecological costs, but it's certain to get much worse as the century progresses. I don't think that the people that we interviewed are projecting all their problems onto the governments and people of the developed world; they're aware that they've always suffered from extreme weather events such as storms and cyclones. What they are aware, as Mariam indicated, is that there is an increasing frequency of these extreme weather events and that that has led to a change in their weather as they have understood it. There is a feeling that those who've caused the problem and this was a point made by a former ambassador to the United Kingdom who we interviewed, a gentleman called Sabihuddin Ahmed, that the developed countries should help the developing countries who are suffering these ecological and social consequences to adapt to the problem. So what happens in international negotiations on climate change, such as the negotiations that happened in Poznan in December 2008, is that developing countries ask the developed countries, the G8 countries and others, in the European Union for example, for financial assistance to adapt to these consequences for technological assistance, and they've been making these demands and requests for nearly two decades now and they've received very little in the way of financial and technological assistance from the developed countries, so there are some huge inequities here that play out over both time and across space.

In the early 1970's, the group of 77 developing countries made a demand within the United Nations that developed countries, the OECD countries, should transfer the equivalent of 0.7% of Gross Domestic Product, GDP, to developing countries to help them deal with social, economic and environmental problems. So far just four developed countries have met that target. OK, the United Kingdom, where we are now is not one of them, OK, it's got quite a respectable aid record but it has not met the UN target.

**Penny Boreham**

Jessica, the former ambassador who you just referred to, Dave, said that Bangladesh has one of the lowest global emission per capita in the world and that it was the bounden duty of northern countries to help them for this reason. Is this something that's very much highlighted in the course?

**Jessica Budds**

It is very much a theme in the course which focuses on inequalities around the world which are most evident between developed countries in Europe and North America and developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America, for example, like unequal terms of trade which keeps developing countries in poverty as they can't command good prices for their exports.

**Penny Boreham**

Mariam, I mentioned before today of this fact that people in Bangladesh have perhaps felt that injustice for generations and now there is a sort of scientific proof with this fourth assessment report that actually they are suffering partly because of the – is this something do you think that's in people's minds, that this awareness, this accumulation of perhaps a feeling of, a sense of injustice?

**Mariam Rashid**

Yes they do feel it as well and every time we go out into the fields they say like we have to suffer so much, but it's not our fault, like people who've had their homes washed away by cyclones and floods and they say like 'What did I do, I was just trying to make a living for myself on whatever I can and even that is taken away from me'. And they feel like governments and like industrial worlds they're not taking the responsibility that they should be taking because we can see like we did the NAPA, the National Adaptation Programmes of Action and we completed our NAPA's in 2005 and we identified fifteen priority projects which are supposed to be urgent and immediate needs of adaptation and these projects – the first one is slightly being implemented but there is so much bureaucracy behind the funding of a project that it still hasn't been implemented properly. So if these were urgent and immediate needs, then how come it's not being implemented on an urgent and immediate basis, because the fund is not there; even if the fund is there, some bureaucratic things are holding it behind. There are some other funds, they say like you have to have certain infrastructures in place and certain things have to be in place for us to fund this additional climate change. But the funds are what everyone says and these climate change conferences are not enough, they are just not enough.