

## Making Sense of Our World

Sally-Ann Wilson

Like it or not we all live in an increasingly globalised world and as broadcasters there has never been a greater need to reflect honestly the realities of that world to our audiences. At the same time, advances in broadcast technology mean that it has never been easier, or cheaper, to bring the colour, sights and sounds of the wider world directly to our viewers and listeners. It therefore seems a trifle perplexing to me that many broadcasters are so focused on competing with the global digital entertainment giants for audience share that the high quality educational programming – which should and could still be entertaining of course – gets lost in the dark recesses of the schedules... if it is shown at all.

How the wider world is reflected in the UK has for some time been a matter of note to those concerned with improving global understanding and since its launch in 2001 the CBA-DFID Broadcast Media Scheme has been encouraging and supporting UK based programme makers and producers to report more realistically on global issues.

Funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development, the Scheme enables a minimum number of programme makers each year to take up Travel Bursaries in order to visit other Commonwealth countries and research programme ideas. While the Travel Bursary Fund is aimed at television producers, in this new media age all bursars are encouraged to return with material for radio, print and the internet as well as for TV.

With a meticulously planned trip to Bangladesh last autumn, bursars **Peter Summers and Paul Dixon** combined their media skills to bring the reality of climate change to a wider audience in the UK. Peter is a writer and film-maker and Paul is a photographer and they

have collaborated to form an initiative called 'Internuncio'. At the initiatives core is a subject that will be the focus of a special workshop during the CBA's General Conference in Nassau, Bahamas next year, the impact of climate change to humanity. Their work highlights the real benefits of a multi-media approach and here they share with you Aklima's story...

**"When fire takes your home  
you are left with the ashes.  
When water takes your home  
you are left with nothing at all."**

Ancient Bangladeshi Proverb

"We used to have trees, flowers and a vegetable patch," says Aklima Shorder, as she stares down at the river bank littered with tree roots, plastic bags and coconut shells left by the high tide of the Tetulia that now flows past her patched-up home. "Now there's nothing. It's all gone. This year the river will take our house. What will we do then? People will call us refugees."



**Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh has an official population of 12.5 million people. This does not include the estimated 3.4 million people living in the slums. The majority of people living here are environmental refugees that have lost everything they own.**

Picture: Paul Dixon

As Aklima says these words, she speaks with a real sense of shame and despondency. In Bangladeshi culture the family home is passed down through the generations, to allow a home to deteriorate, even if through no fault of your own, is heavily frowned upon. Aklima, is a young woman desperately trying to hold on as increasing tides and worsening erosion eat away at her existence, washing away her home, her family land, her way of life and her dignity. She is not alone.

Experts estimate that by the year 2050, 15 million people will have been displaced by rising sea levels in Bangladesh alone. The family usually eat one meal a day consisting of rice and chilli paste, sometimes a watery dhal. The garden provided essential supplements to their diet, mostly vegetables and fruit, but not any longer.

Aklima lives in a near-constant state of fear, waiting for the day when the river takes her home. But it can do more than that. Many people have lost family members when homes have been swept into the river in the dark of night. "It's very difficult for all of us. I'm scared for my child's future. I'm afraid he might drown when the floods come again."

Those that do lose their homes are left with very few options. Either stay with extended family, putting even greater pressure on meagre resources, or migrate to one of the larger cities to look for work. For now, Aklima waits. She stands, watching the river ferries pass a lot closer than they used to. Soon the ground beneath her feet will be gone and with it her home. "If we had help we could stay here. If we leave, we'll be immigrants. People will call us refugees."

Photographer Paul Dixon says: "We aim to be at the forefront of climate change, as and where it happens. We feel we have a duty to inform, to increase awareness and social understanding. If society understands the consequences, it is better placed to take action. Based on scientific and observed findings, we work closely with affected communities to produce documentary films and photo-reports for broadcast, publication, exhibition and film screenings. Personalising scientific fact - putting a human face to the effects of climate change, our objective is to increase dialogue and understanding. Bridging the gap between scientific knowledge and social awareness, our multimedia approach enables us to reach wider national and international audiences through the powerful media tools of broadcast, touring exhibitions, print and via our website." ▶▶



Picture: Paul Dixon

**With no land to grow vegetables the family now eats only what it can afford, and as a consequence, Shaon, 5, suffers from skin disorders resulting from malnutrition**

► **Bangladesh, a low-lying country slightly larger than England in size, is renowned as the most densely populated country in the world.**

Home to an estimated 150 million people, Bangladesh is also one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, particularly increases in sea level. About 80% of the country consists of floodplain with an elevation from less than one metre to three metres above sea level.

Approximately 21% of the population (31.5 million people) live in the coastal regions. These extremely vulnerable people are already noticing changes in the environment around them. High tides now regularly inundate homes and the land is increasing in salinity. Fresh water is becoming scarce and the intensity of land erosion is increasing.

Desperately trying to hang on to homes, possessions and livelihoods, these people have not heard of the term 'climate change'. Unaware of the causes behind their changing environment and oblivious to the predicted consequences, the impact of what we understand as climate change is already affecting lives. A movement of people has begun.

Environmental expert Dr Atiq Rahman of the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) has been analysing the impact of riverbank erosion and forced migration on the rural people of Bangladesh. "Riverbank erosion is a major, major, catastrophe in Bangladesh, often disregarded, often not discussed." Dr Atiq maintains that the issues being faced by the people of Bangladesh are complex and inter-twined with other social development issues. "Our studies have shown that one of the greatest values to a human being in modern society is an address. In the slums they don't have that. Their entire family tradition, all their values, just disappear. They are lost in the crowds."

A report commissioned by the World Bank in 2000 states that 'though Bangladesh contributes less than 1% of the total greenhouse gas emissions in the world, it is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change – particularly sea level rise.'

Climate change is not a series of isolated events; one-off media-friendly showpieces that disappear the moment the channel is changed. It is an ongoing and developing threat to the world community, which will affect everyone, regardless of race or nationality. If we are to address climate change we must act quickly, we are all required to play an important role.

*Funding from the CBA-DFID Travel Bursary Fund, enabled Peter and Paul to complete this, the first in a series of reports aimed at increasing awareness of the impacts of climate change on communities across the globe. They have already participated in a BBC Radio programme, produced a DVD and staged an exhibition in Cardiff, Wales with the material from their trip. The article above is a part of their original article entitled 'Environmental Refugees: a world on the move?'*

**Further information can be found at Internuncio's online resource: [www.internuncio.org](http://www.internuncio.org)**

## BANGLADESH CYCLONE

The CBA sends its sympathy to all those bereaved or affected by the recent Cyclone. Messages have been sent to Bangladesh Betar and BTV drawing attention to the CBA's Disaster Fund, which offers modest but immediate help for CBA organisations who have suffered damage in a natural disaster. Bangladesh Betar reports that Cyclone SIDR "had a devastating effect... it damaged some of our establishment, particularly two short wave transmitters at Kabirpur, with damage to Bangladesh Betar buildings in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and Barisal".



**In 2001, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calculated that 15 million people in Bangladesh would be displaced by a one-metre rise in sea levels**

Picture: Paul Dixon