

Bangladesh

Introduction

The 2015 World Development Appeal highlights the serious effects of climate change which are already being felt in some of the world's poorest countries, demonstrates some of the adaptation initiatives which are helping people to cope, and calls on all of us to work for climate justice, that is, a shouldering of responsibility by those whose lifestyles have contributed most to climate change.

Bangladesh, with its tropical monsoon climate and extensive coastal lowland region, has long been vulnerable to extreme weather patterns. Cyclones, and their accompanying storm surges, have been familiar if occasional phenomena. What has changed, however, is the unpredictability, frequency, and severity of weather events linked to global warming. What is new are the rising sea levels. And now, where climate change is concerned, Bangladesh is on the front lines.

Annual rainfall in the low-lying coastal zone is decreasing, but it is also becoming more erratic. Intense and heavy rainfall events are more frequent. Minimum and maximum average temperatures are rising. And the frequency of tropical cyclones is predicted to increase. All of this means that an already vulnerable population is increasingly at risk, as food security is undermined, and whole communities are displaced.

Project

The **Bangladesh Nazarene Mission** works through a network of over 55 churches in the district of Mongla, a low-lying coastal zone of Bangladesh, close to the Bay of Bengal.

One of the main problems faced by people who live in the coastal zone, in addition to erratic weather patterns, is the significantly increased salinity of both soil and water. As the sea level rises, and storm surges reach further inland, the salt content of both agricultural soil and river water also begins to reach dangerous levels. Fresh water fish are unable to survive, and traditional crops become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to grow. People's health is affected, as their traditional sources of food are threatened and overall water quality deteriorates. The high salt content of both soil and water can also result in a higher rate of miscarriage among pregnant women.

Through its integrated Disaster Preparedness and Climate Change Adaptation program, BNM is helping local communities to become more resilient in the face of climate change, both by being better prepared for severe weather events, and by constructing livelihoods more resistant to weather-related damage.

Forecast: *hope!*

For many women, the first step is to join with other women in forming a Self-Help Group (SHG). Gender inequality has been and remains deeply embedded in Bangladesh, and the capacity of women to run small businesses, or to take equal responsibility for community development, has often been unrecognised or actively undermined. When the women act together, however, and form a SHG, they are then able to set up a collective micro-credit fund from which small loans will eventually become available.

While the fund is being established, the women receive training in the setting up and day to day running of small business ventures. They learn new gardening practices, enabling them to grow vegetables even in areas prone to saline incursion. They experiment with new crops, when cultivation of the ones they were familiar with is no longer possible. They learn to farm crabs in small ponds, and are trained in poultry rearing. Momata Bala, who is featured on this year's World Development Appeal card, opened a tea stall with her husband.

Above all, however, the women are able to learn resilience and acquire self-confidence, in the face of an uncertain future. In spite of their efforts, the scale of the changes which their villages will have to face in the coming years will be largely determined by what other, richer nations and communities now do or fail to do, and not by people like Momata herself.

But thanks to their partnership with BNM, the people of Mongla district now trust that they will be able to adapt, to support one another amidst all the uncertainties they face, and to find new ways of going on. The forecast for their lives has changed, and they now dare to forecast: *hope!* It is our privilege to be able to support them through the 2015 World Development Appeal.