

GLOBAL DIRECTORY 2007/8

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Poor relations

Bristol East MP Kerry McCarthy asks how we can help the world's poorer countries prepare for climate change

● The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has launched 13 flash appeals this year, 12 of which have been related to weather. The emergencies have included severe flooding in Ghana, Uganda, Zambia, Sudan, Mexico and Pakistan, leaving millions of homes and acres of crops submerged; serious drought in Swaziland and Lesotho; and cyclones and hurricanes in Mozambique, Madagascar and Nicaragua. The world's poorest have fewer strategies to mitigate the wide range of climatic stresses, making them highly vulnerable to the direct and indirect impacts of climatic change.

Climate change is one of the most important challenges facing our generation, and it's the world's poorest – those least responsible for the problem – who are proving to be affected most. In Africa, for instance, carbon dioxide emissions are just over one-fifth of a tonne per person per year, while the average European produces more than eight tonnes and an American more than 20 tonnes.

Avoiding the issue of global warming when talking about development is not an option. As Parliamentary Private Secretary in the

Department for International Development (DFID), I'm really pleased that DFID is leading the way in responding to these challenges and is now focusing on efforts to enable poor countries to prepare for climate change. DFID is spending £24m over five years in the Climate Change and Adaptation in Africa Programme (CCAA), which works to improve the capacity of African countries to adapt to climatic changes. Without such efforts to prevent and prepare for these impacts, the future would be increasingly bleak for Africa.

We can't halt technological progress in the developing world. It would be wrong to do so when we've benefited so much from scientific and industrial advances ourselves. So I support very much the principle of 'contraction and convergence', whereby we accept that, as developing countries will inevitably increase their share of carbon emissions as their economies grow, we have a responsibility to reduce ours. But we also need to do what we can to ensure that economic growth in Africa and elsewhere is sustainable – by sharing new environmental technologies, encouraging and investing in Fairtrade producers and promoting sustainable agriculture.

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Business as usual in Dhaka, despite the heavy floodwater

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