

Stories from those affected by climate change

This resource is a series of stories and pictures from people whose lives have been affected by the impacts of climate change. The cruel reality of climate change means that it is those people that have contributed least to the causes of climate change that are being hit first by the effects. They are also those with the least capacity to adapt and manage the problems caused by climate change. This is a collection of their stories, in their own words, with accompanying statements describing the situations. These have been collected by Oxfam staff working in these countries.

Bangladesh: Char Atra, before the flood



Hasina Begum, 35, washes her hands with her son, Char Atra, Bangladesh.

"The flood takes place more now in comparison to before. In the past, the flood used to come later in the year, now the flood comes in earlier and faster. When it comes, the water leaves much later on. It destroys the crops; everything is destroyed by the flood. Nothing stays - the trees that I plant, the seedlings that we sow. The water comes in again and destroys it all. Finished. They don't grow any more."

Hasina is already experiencing climate change - she has had to move several times because of river erosion. In response, Hasina joined the Shanti Mohila Committee (Women's Peace Group), which receives training from a development organisation on preparing for and coping with floods (including preventing diarrhoea), vegetable gardening, livestock rearing, and preventing early marriage. As well as the training, Hasina has received cow vaccinations to keep her cows healthy.



Sulfia Khatun, 35, with her husband Hashem Mollha, 40, daughter Hashi, and son Rubel.

Their 2 elder sons work to support the family. Mintu is a day labourer (road construction), Santu helps with household chores and collects grass for the animals, Rubel is disabled and stays at home, Hashi is in class 3.

Sulfia - *“My eldest son supports the family because my husband does not have the physical strength to work this season doing soil work for road construction. I collect the chilli harvest and we milk the cow and sell the milk at the market.*

“We have been in this house for two and a half years but throughout our lives we have been forced to move eight times due to river erosion. The land we used to own washed away into the river and we no longer own any land. It is impossible for us to move forward when we face disaster after disaster. We cannot stand on our own two feet and we’re dependent on others. In the last floods we were forced to sell housing materials to live.”

“There are many jobs to prepare for the rainy season; we need to raise the animal shelter, raise the kitchen and the poultry shelter to give protection from the flood water. We haven’t fixed our bed to the floor so that we can add more bricks during the flood and raise it above the water in the house.

“Before the flood we will keep some spare animal food but I’m worried there might be an outbreak of disease during the floods and the young calves will die.”

Residents of Char Atra and Uttar Tarabunia, river islands on the Padma River, report increased frequency and intensity of flooding, cyclones and river erosion. They also speak of changes in the seasons, with rain falling at the ‘wrong’ time, and summers that are too cold and winters that are too warm. This is leading to crop failures and loss of income.



Dost Mohammad, 50, Farmer, Alipur, Hajiganj, Chandpur

"Half of my paddy has been damaged by rodents," says farmer Dost Mohammad. Dost says that when the nearby river Dakatia overflows, rat attacks on the paddy fields intensify. Crab attacks on the paddy fields have also increased in the past five years. "With no alternative, we have to use insecticides on the flood water" he says. Dost says that for the last seven years the number of mice has increased as their predators, such as snakes and wild cat species, are washed away by the regular floods.

In the past Dost earned a tidy winter income by selling a variety of vegetables such as lalshak, puishak, maira, jhinga etc. However, for the last five years, insect attacks have destroyed most of the winter crops. According to locals, extreme temperatures during summer and winter are making it increasingly difficult for them to raise livestock. If the animals can survive the monsoon floods and heat, within months they encounter extreme cold and little rain.



Hasina Begum, 35 years old

“Living on a char island is always vulnerable, but it is getting worse. The cyclones are more frequent, and they are stronger than they used to be. We are also getting a lot of fog, out of season. Now the fog is unpredictable and it is destroying the crops.”

Portrait of Hasina Begum, 35, mother of four, using a tubewell. Hasina has been forced to move home five times due to river erosion, in the area of Char Atra (island), Shariatpur, Bangladesh.

Malawi



Estela Njolo, 52-year old

“The weather’s not like when I was a child, there’s been a big change. Rainfall doesn’t come when we expect it. It should come when the maize is tasselling (growing the hairy tufts that protrude from the cob) that’s when it needs all the water. This year we’ve had good rains and a good harvest, I’ll admit. But it’s May, and it’s still raining! We need sun now to dry the

harvested maize.”

Estela is a widow and is having trouble finding the money to pay for her elder son at polytechnic, where he’s studying journalism. Four more children are living at home – they need 5000 (£18) a year each for school fees.

“When I was a child we had more, and things were more consistent. There were trees everywhere for firewood. People were more content; they used to help each other. Now they don’t. Only the creator knows what will happen.”

Mozambique



Alexandre Chissico

“Climate change has brought about the problems because the seasons do not happen as they did in the past. Now that it is too warm, there is little rain. With no rains our production is really compromised. I was born in a dry area where my parents were farming. We produced maize, cowpeas, and groundnuts. But now we concentrate in lower areas, where there is more water. I grow sugar cane, bananas and vegetables, and try to sell these. In the past we used to know that winter would start in April. Now we don’t know when the rains will fall. This is something we’re witnessing but we are not able to tell why. And now grasshoppers have started to decimate all our crops, even the bananas.”

Haiti



Luc Justin, 58, team leader of the Civil Protection Committee of Borgne

"People who live in this area sleep with one eye open because when it rains they fear they might be flooded. People hope that they can stay safe when it floods and the civilian protection programme helps them feel secure. Committee members give advice on how to stay safe and make announcements using megaphones. When there are signs of flooding we tell people to forget their possessions and leave to safe places, including school buildings, churches and the police station. We are confident the training we receive is saving lives."

"During Hurricane Dean 162 houses were destroyed in the rural areas close to this area as well as many hectares of coffee, crops and plantation. At least 240 gardens were destroyed. We managed to help people evacuate. We are proud of the work that we do and we know our community is also proud of us."

Many parts of Haiti are vulnerable to natural disasters, such as hurricanes, floods and landslides. Relatively small, but no less devastating, local disasters hit rural areas with regularity. Local civil protection committees work on emergency training and simulations, response plans, community information campaigns and the provision of basic emergency response equipment. These committees also implement one-off projects, such as flood protection walls, to protect communities against the impact of disasters.



Ismelia Jeune 22, secretary of the Civil Protection Committee of Borgne

"I want to help people because this is my community. I love my community and want to create a better environment. This area floods a lot and people feel safer knowing that we have training on how to save lives and are in a position to help."



Erlande Florestal, 16, with daughter Erlandie Daisy, 4 months

"The sea took my home which I shared with my grandmother [Isemenie Batiste]. We have no money and are unable to build a new house. Now that we have lost our home we have nothing and I have no idea where we will go next."

"My house was totally destroyed by Hurricane Dean. I lived in that house most of my life and I was very sad when I lost everything. I used to make money by selling coal at the market, I didn't make a lot but it was enough for my granddaughter and I'm an old woman now and I worry about my granddaughter and great granddaughter – I've lived my life but what will happen to them? I want my great granddaughter to have a better life than I've had."

Isemenie Batiste, 77, great grandmother to Erlandie

In August 2007 Hurricane Dean hit the coastal area of Baintet, Haiti, destroying homes and livelihoods. The majority of the considerable damages were recorded in the agricultural and fishing sectors, in addition to the destruction of more than 1,050 homes.

Peru



Olga Tamara Morales, 38. Potato farmer, Utupampa, Ancash, Peru

"There is less and less water now. Before, when we would irrigate the land, it would last two weeks, now it only lasts four days because the sun is so strong. So we need more water. Water used to come from Huascaran (the highest mountain) but now it's coming less and less. The snow on Huascaran is only up, up, up above, and each day it goes further up. Huascaran is dying because of the heat. We don't need water in winter, though there is still less - but we really need water in the summer."

Olga lives and farms on the steep slopes of the Andes, near the Cordillera Blanca. Her community gets its water from the glaciers, so this region will be greatly affected by glacial retreat. In Utupampa, the community has introduced drip irrigation to make better use of the water in the dry season.

Trinidad



Meiy Sau

"When I was a child, I never saw this flooding happen," he said shaking his head. "It is not only me who is worried, but everyone. What will happen to my grandchildren...what will happen to everyone's grandchildren here?"

Mr. Meiy Sau was in his best shirt and trousers the day he talked about the flash flood that ruined his house and farm. He travelled the three kilometres to the distribution point to get help from Oxfam after a flash flood destroyed his rice field. At 63 years-old, Mr. Sau had not seen a flood like this since 1972. In fact, he says he never saw a flood this big. With many grandchildren of his own to help look after, he wonders out loud about their future.