

Getting our feet wet!

Not just a few bugs and beasts... The effect of global climate change on humanity.

King Canute was a great and powerful leader though possibly blinded from reality by his sense of worth and self importance. Unwilling to acknowledge what was before him, he defiantly attempted to impose his will over the inevitable, the movement of the tide. Not surprisingly he got his feet wet!!

The progress of the G8 summit on global climate change has made me mindful of this story, we could alter a name here or there but quite literally the end result will be a lot more than a few wet feet.

Tucked away safely on a somewhat hilly island we can breath a collective sigh of relief... The predicted outcome of the reality of global climate change, for reality it is, is that sea levels are rising and will continue to rise around the world. The conservative estimates of 0.5 meters in the next 45 years, and 2 meters by 2100 will not greatly challenge the resourcefulness of the Department of Highways Ports and Properties, though it might challenge their budget!

But on a global scale, *half of humanity* inhabit the coastal regions of the world. The lowest lying areas the world are the most fertile and the most densely populated. Add to this the predicted increase in storm surges and even small rises in sea level will add to the vulnerability of these coastal zones.

From the petulant self indulgence of the King Canute scenario, we have the potential incomprehensible scale of a humanitarian crisis. Let me explain. If we take for example Bangladesh:

- In Bangladesh 7% of the countries inhabitable land is less than 1 meter above sea level, with a population of 6 million people.
- 25% is below the 3 meter level (with a population of 30 million).
- The predicted rise in sea level will mean that good land areas will be lost.
- 85% of the counties population depend upon good land for agriculture for their livelihood.
- The result will be large numbers of land refugees... but where will they go, when so many other countries are facing the same situation?

It stretches from the Nile Delta, where 1 metre rise will effect 12% of the countries arable land with a population of 7 million, to 30 million living in the coastal regions of China, 8

million in the Netherlands, 0.5 million in the archipelagos of small islands in the Pacific and Indian oceans, not to mention Pakistan, Western Africa, S. America and the whole of the US sea board. (The Pacific island of Tuvalu has already started evacuating its 11,000 population to New Zealand and Australia as a result of rising sea levels.)

If we were to stretch our imaginations to the ridiculous and visualise a just and fair world, where there were such a thing as a common voice for the poor and vulnerable of our planet, then there could well be a demand for compensation for the effects of such global irresponsibility. In the light of such a possible scenario maybe it is not surprising that the G8 leaders are struggling to accept even the reality of climate change let alone admit responsibility!

It has been estimated that it could cost the Netherlands ten thousand million Dollars to protect against sea level rise of just one meter. How are the governments in the developing world going to protect their people from the effects of our pollution?

The child in the play ground is always ready to point the finger and say "He did it Sir!". It's always easier to note who has higher emissions than we have. But progress on Carbon emissions will only be made when each and every one of us acknowledge our collective responsibility. It's easy to increase aid packages, they come from our surplus, but control on Carbon emissions demands personal sacrifices.

Nelson Mandela said, "I am no more virtuous or self sacrificing than the next man, but I found that I could not enjoy the poor and limited freedoms I was allowed when I knew that my people were not free. The chains on any one of my people were the chains on all of them. The chains on all of my people were the chains on me. For to be free is not merely to cast off ones chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others... I can only rest for a moment for with freedom comes responsibilities."

The freedoms we experience today bring the responsibilities of global climate change. For the sake of the people of the world how much longer are we each going to sit and defy the tide, whilst others are getting their feet wet?

For further details and resources on how to live a more globally sustainable lifestyle please contact the One World Centre: cheryl@owciom.org