One Earth Two Worlds

John Barraclough and Dave Dalton

An Oxfam Publication
One Earth, two worlds

Everyone agrees that the environment is important, is under threat, and must be saved. There is less consensus about how to save the environment, about what the threats are, and about how to balance saving the environment against other important objectives. It is not even clear what people mean when they say the word environment.

People in this country and other relatively rich, industrialised countries (what many people call the North) think of the environment in connection with problems like air pollution, global warming, acid rain, holes in the ozone layer, and the loss of wildlife habitats to development, especially road-building. If people in the North ever think of the environment in the South (the poor countries of the world, also known as the Third World) they probably think of the destruction of the rainforests and the consequences for the indigenous people and wild creatures living in those forests.

Tragic as the fate of the rainforest dwellers is, they are only one group of people facing major environmental problems or threats in the South. There are many more:

• people living in shanty-towns without any of the services we take for granted, and without even legal rights to live there;
• people in rural areas without land to farm;
• people who live by herding animals, pushed by their more powerful neighbours on to land without sufficient grazing;
• people whose homes and farmland are threatened with destruction as a result of massive projects like dams;
• people farming on exhausted soils which are vulnerable to erosion as a result of over-cropping and deforestation;
• people whose fishing grounds no longer provide them with a living;
• people living in low-lying coastal areas who face disaster if the sea-level rises because of global warming.

This book is about those people, and many others. They are poor. And they are struggling to defend themselves and their environment.

Contents

Part One: Poverty and environment in the South
Under pressure
Borrowing from our children
Hands and mouths
Global problems, local solutions

Part Two: People as planet managers
A sea of troubles
Water and rights
Seeds of hope
Freeing trade
Nurturing enterprise
Where credit’s due
Living with disaster
Acting locally, thinking globally

Part Three: The role of the North
One Earth, two worlds
Northern blights
We make the rules
It is better to light single candle than to curse the darkness

Above: Map of the world showing countries in which Oxfam works (dark grey) and the broad division between The North and The South.


Published by Oxfam (UK and Ireland), 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ. Oxfam is a registered charity no. 202918.

Cover photography by James Hawkins/Oxfam (left) and Jeremy Hartley/Oxfam (right)
Under pressure

Poor people have every reason to protect their own environment. They depend upon it more directly than the rich, and are more immediately affected by its destruction or deterioration. But environments in the South — rural and urban, forests and water courses and seas — are under pressure, very often from the poorest people, because they in turn are under pressure.

That pressure takes many forms.

Many people are under the pressure of having no alternative. A farmer may well know, from long experience and careful monitoring of her crops, that to grow one more crop on exhausted soils may be to lose the soil itself with the next heavy rainfall. But if her alternative is no crop at all, what is she to do? Millions of farmers and herders are pushed on to marginal land because the best land has been taken by the rich and powerful, often to grow cash crops for export. Millions are landless labourers, and must carry out whatever farming practices their employers decide: using fertilisers and pesticides which damage the environment, and sometimes their own health, for instance. There are two billion landless people in the South.

Refugees and displaced people often bear very heavily on the environment around the camps to which they have fled — often in countries as poor as those they have left. Some camps, such as those in Tanzania and Zaire to which Rwandan refugees fled in 1994, have populations in the hundreds of thousands suddenly located in what were previously sparsely-populated areas. The people need wood for building, and firewood for cooking and warmth. Soon there are no trees left.

Others are trying to defend themselves and their local environments against pressures from outside. The immediate pressure may come from local elites. Pressures take many forms: logging rainforest, mining, fishing, industrial development that pollutes the surrounding area, or hydro-electric schemes that flood valleys and displace their inhabitants.

The motive may be profit for the elite, or a misguided notion of 'development', or a mixture of the two. Often the local powers are acting under pressure, in turn, from the North. There is a pull and a push. The North imports and consumes the products — timber, beef, iron ore, shrimps ... And the North exports money to finance big schemes, and also exports a concept of development which justifies those schemes: a concept which includes limitless economic growth, free markets, and top-down, 'expert' decision-making.

Powerful institutions in the North like governments and transnational companies, and powerful international institutions like
the European Union, United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund, which are dominated by Northern governments, are behind much of the pressure that directly or indirectly affects the environments of the South and the people who live there.

Often the role of the North is much more direct. Industrial processes which are too polluting by Northern standards are transferred to Southern countries with fewer restrictions. Products such as pesticides, banned in the North, are sold in the South. The crudest example of all is Northern toxic waste, which has been exported to the South.

Poor people are forced into damaging their own environment, or are unable to defend it against damage caused by outside pressures, because to be poor is to be powerless.

*Spraying pesticide, Nicaragua*  
Mike Goldwater/Oxfam

---

The dam that killed the peach trees

George Rakuoane lost his orchard when a road was built over it to service the new Katse Dam in Lesotho. The project, backed by aid from the World Bank, the European Union, and the British government, employs over 2,500 people, and hopes to bring prosperity and opportunities as well as electricity to many thousands more. George was given three saplings for each of his 15 peach trees, and about £500 for the three years while the trees matured. But he had no land left to plant the saplings on, so they died.

"Maybe my grandchildren will see the rewards, but for the old like me, the project has brought only suffering. The project doesn't know how to work with the community. If we had been consulted, things could have been better." Big dam projects all over the South create many problems, especially displacement of people, and Oxfam often works with the victims to get proper compensation.
Borrowing from our children

Are poor people caught between the devil and the deep blue sea? Do they only have two options: to remain poor, or to be ‘developed’ in ways that damage their environment and in some cases make them destitute?

There is a third alternative: sustainable development. It has been defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” or more simply “we do not inherit the world from our parents, we borrow it from our children”.

Fine words; but how to put them into practice? For a start, by recognising that traditional ways of life are usually sustainable. Development will be sustainable if poor people are involved in decision-making. They know their own environment best, and will not knowingly damage it. They know their own problems and needs, and will not accept a development plan that doesn’t solve their problems and meet their needs. They know what they are capable of, and what extra skills and resources they will need to make a better life for themselves and their children.

Helping people to look after their environment really means helping them to escape from their poverty. No-one can be expected to think about next year or the next generation if there is no food on the table today. At the grass-roots level, tackling poverty and protecting the environment go together because both depend on empowering poor people. That means helping them to claim their rights, make their voices heard, and make their own decisions involving everyone in the community.

*Top left:* Training session for farmers.  
*Top right:* Using the levelling device to plot contours.  
*Bottom left:* Planting tree seedlings behind the diguettes.  
*Bottom right:* An increased harvest, after all the hard work.
Diguettes for victory

If a farming family lose their soil, they become destitute. That was what thousands of families faced in the Sahel area of Burkina Faso. This area is very dry but, ironically, most of the soil is lost when a sudden downpour washes soil away.

It wasn’t always like that. Boureima Sawadogo, 92 years old, remembers when “the seasons were good and the harvest was abundant”.

As so often with environmental problems, the causes were many: population growth, changing patterns of land tenure, deforestation, and long periods of drought that were disastrous even by the standards of the Sahel. Tried and tested ways of surviving just weren’t working and the future looked bleak.

The solution is wonderfully simple. Building barriers across the direction of flow of the rainwater slows it down. The water seeps into the soil rather than washing it away. Trees and crops grown behind the barriers prosper. There is water in the wells. The cycle of environmental decline is not just halted — it is reversed.

Building the barriers — lines of stones known as diguettes — is not as simple as it might sound. The land is nearly flat, so it is hard to place the diguettes exactly along the contour lines. If the diguettes aren’t quite in line, water flows round the end of them, so they don’t work properly.

Enter Oxfam’s Projet Agro-Forestier (PAF). As its name suggests, PAF started by trying to encourage tree planting. The farmers were more interested in increasing cereal yields. As Halidou Compoaré explains: “It’s not that we don’t appreciate the value of trees ... but if I die from hunger, who is going to look after the trees I have planted?” Or as someone else put it: “We have two thorns: one in the foot and the other in the backside. Help us remove the one in our backside first. Then we can sit down to remove the one under our foot ourselves.”

Whether you grow crops, trees, or both, you have to get the diguettes lined up properly. The breakthrough was a simple levelling device based on planks and a see-through plastic tube filled with water, that could be made and used by farmers after a two-day training course.

And the diguettes work! In the words of farmer Mahama Guiro: “The land which was once bare is now full of life.”
Hands and mouths

Many people in the North, and some in the South, see the major environmental problem facing the South as the size and growth of the population. The argument is that since people and their activities cause environmental damage, more people cause more damage. So the best way to protect the environment is to halt the rate of population growth.

Population growth, poverty, and environmental problems are interlinked, but the relationship is complex. A child born in a rich country will do far more damage to the environment during his or her lifetime than a child born in a poor country, because people in rich countries use up far more of the world's natural resources.

Similarly, a child born into a community which has benefited from sustainable development will do less harm to the environment than a child born into a poor and powerless family.

This is not to say that population growth is not a problem — for the environment, and for women. It is a problem for women who have more children than they would like, or have their children too close together. Oxfam believes that it is the right of individuals, particularly of women, to be able to choose the number of children they want, when to have them, and when to stop having them. The best way for people to get a safe birth
Peace, Emmanuel, and Oxfam-trained volunteer midwife Pauline, Bufuka, Uganda. Pauline advised Peace on nutrition during her pregnancy, and made sure Emmanuel got his vaccinations.

planning service with dignity is through basic health programmes grounded on an understanding of people’s needs.

Oxfam is particularly concerned that the uptake of birth planning services be voluntary; experience has shown that coercive birth-control programmes, as well as being morally unacceptable, are often unsuccessful.

Poverty is related to population growth in several ways. Many people see children not just as extra mouths, but as extra hands to help the family earn enough to survive. Children who survive into adulthood are often the only security in old age. In this light, high child-mortality rates can be seen as a reason to have more children. Because of these links, targeting contraceptive use is only effective if it is part of a poverty-reduction programme of sustainable development including the empowerment of women. The Indian state of Kerala has a birth rate one third lower than the national average through just such a strategy.

What are we waiting for?

We have known for many years that three simple and affordable measures would help women to plan their families:

• make contraception available to those who want it;
• educate girls, because experience shows that better-educated women are more likely to have smaller and more widely-spaced families and healthier children;
• keep children healthy, because the strongest argument for family planning is a healthy toddler.

These simple things — basic rights — are beyond the wildest dreams of millions.

• An estimated 100 million women in the developing world would use contraceptives if they could get them. A consequence of the unmet need is the huge number of illegal abortions — estimated at 50-70 million per year and mostly in developing countries.
• Of the 300 million children in the South not in school, two-thirds are girls.
• Every year thirteen million babies do not survive their first year; two-thirds of these deaths could be prevented by basic health care.
Global problems

- Every year an area of land equivalent to the size of Ireland is turned into desert. If destruction continues at current levels, almost a fifth of the Earth's crop land will have disappeared by the year 2000.
- Every year an area of tropical forest the size of England and Scotland is cleared.
- Every year 24 billion tonnes of topsoil is lost by erosion.
- Thirty per cent of all existing plant and animal species are threatened with extinction over the next 40 years.
- Throughout the world, health is seriously threatened by water polluted with human and industrial waste. One quarter of the world's population has no clean drinking water.
- If present levels of carbon dioxide emissions continue, global temperatures could rise 1°C by 2025, a rate greater than at any time in the last 10,000 years. In Bangladesh and Egypt alone, 50 million people could be made homeless by flooding caused by rising sea levels.
- Twelve to fourteen million people in the South have already had to abandon their homes because of environmental degradation.
- Eighteen million people are refugees, and a further 24 million are displaced within their own countries.

... local solutions

Seeing the environmental problems of the South in the context of poverty means that sustainable development projects take many forms, depending on the problem, and the solution local people have come up with. In the following colour section there are case studies from 14 out of more than 70 countries in which Oxfam works. That's 14 projects out of more than 3,000 Oxfam supports every year. They give a flavour of the wide range of Oxfam's work, from the mountains of Peru to the plains of Bangladesh, from the desert of Mauritania to the coast of the Philippines. The common thread is that with a little help, people can find solutions, can tackle their poverty, can make a living in a sustainable way, and can protect their environment.
Five hundred families live on Aroma, the main rubbish dump for Manila, capital of the Philippines. They try to earn a living as scavengers, collecting plastic, glass, and metal which they sell to scrap dealers for recycling.

"Must we starve our children to pay our debts?" asked President Nyerere of Tanzania 20 years ago. For two decades the industrialized nations – the North – have effectively answered "yes" as they sucked interest payments on debt out of Africa that have totalled $10 billion in this period.

The President might also have asked whether Africa (and the rest of the developing world – the South) must destroy its environment for the same reason. This is just one part of the price the South pays for a world organized by the North, for the North. The massive, unpayable Southern debt is only the most recent result of this imbalance of power. Colonialism, slavery, poverty, famine, and conflict could also be added to the list.

Today’s global environment crisis is evidence that the massive wealth and overconsumption of the North cannot be sustained. The irony is that the North claims to be the Planet’s guardian, asking the South to stop plundering its forests, rivers, and seas – while also demanding debt repayments.

Economic policies devised in the North have been pressed on Southern nations calling for, among other measures, increased exports of raw materials and cuts in state spending on social programmes. In Oxfam’s experience, the very people who could be the planet’s best stewards – the poor – are footing the bill for this economic “medicine”.

Small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fisherpeople, and rubber-tappers have evolved ways of managing their resources over generations to allow their children to utilize the same land, trees, and seas. Now they have to abandon these practices overnight to pay their – and their country’s – bills. Unequal land distribution, slow progress in land reform, and the promotion of large-scale cashcrop agriculture are also pushing the poor beyond the limits of environmental sustainability.

Increasingly, as the global village shrinks, national economic decisions are made not by local people and their governments but by powerful international bodies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and transnational companies. These organizations are largely accountable only to their shareholders or to their wealthier members. The power is no longer with the people who matter: those who have a vested interest in passing on a viable Earth to the next generation.

If a solution to the planet’s environmental crisis is to be found before it is too late, Oxfam believes that the answer will involve putting people first, and poor people first of all. They are in the front line of planet management: while the poor are denied the means and the right to a sustainable livelihood, the planet’s future is bleak indeed.
A sea of troubles

"If you were working hard and committed to providing for the needs of your family, all you had to do was get into the lake and harness its bounty." Pedro Salazar is talking about the Philippines' Laguna Lake, the largest tract of inland water in Southeast Asia, which once provided food and a living for more than 11,000 families. The profits from small-scale fishing were never great, but you could earn enough to get by; enough to survive.

Now things are different. A flood-control programme for the nearby capital Manila has cut off the lake's lifeline to the sea. This, combined with industrial development around the lake, has had devastating effects. Fish stocks have declined and the lake's fragile ecosystem has suffered. Unless urgent action is taken the entire lake - and the chance for anyone to make a living - will be dead by the year 2000.

Across the Philippines there are similar stories to be heard. This archipelago of more than 7000 islands was once rich in marine life, and ranked twelfth in world fish production. The effects of extractive industries, such as mining and logging, industrial pollution, and rapid urbanization have combined to wreak massive environmental destruction. Aid packages, such as the flood-control programme, are designed to boost the country's economy, and they offer some hope. But all too often they ignore the immediate and devastating effects on the poorest people and the environment.

As factory ships overuse traditional fishing grounds, small fishing communities find themselves with few options. Many people have to borrow money to survive or find new, often precarious, business enterprises. But many who keep fishing have to resort to destructive measures such as dynamiting and using poisons; sacrificing their future security for short-term survival.

In spite of the odds, there are fishing groups who have banded together to protect their interests, and to try to repair some of the environmental damage. Local "rondas" (day and night patrols) guard against illegal trawlers encroaching on coastal waters; fishing cooperatives work together to market their catches and campaign against water pollution; and communities have even built "artificial reefs" from concrete and old tyres, providing new grounds for fish to feed and spawn.
Laguna Lake in the Philippines is dying; its link with the sea has been severed and industrial development has had devastating effects. As fish stocks decline, the fishing communities along the shore are threatened.

Fisherpeople in Southern India

The fishermen of Manakundy village in Southern India belong to the Kanyakumari Fishermen's Federation. It was established to help small fishing communities compete with the owners of mechanized boats that trawl the coastal waters for anchovy. The Federation auctions the fishermen's catch on the beach and makes sure they are paid the same day. This removes the delay involved in dealing with merchants, who pay for fish in instalments and prolong the fishermen's debts.
The Alfole district of Mauritania is a region of villages scattered across a parched landscape. On the edge of the Sahara Desert, agriculture is a precarious business. Drought has always been an occupational hazard for the people who live here. Many of the subsistence farmers are former slaves, whose livelihoods rely on the infrequent and unreliable rains.

When at last it does rain, downpours can cause flash floods in minutes. Large floodwater dams, built by the French in colonial times to supply water for irrigation, have collapsed over the years. So the local people have adapted the idea to meet their own needs. They build *diguettes*—low stone or earth walls—along the contours of the land to trap run-off water. This increases the moisture in the soil so that crops can grow—a water-harvesting technique. Unfortunately, in drought years the *diguettes* do not guarantee a reasonable harvest; food may be in short supply for months at a time.

In 1983, Oxfam began to work with poor people in the Alfole to improve the *diguettes* and to develop other water-harvesting schemes. It gradually became clear that simply improving the water supply was of limited benefit without wider changes, both social and economic. Although water was a concern for the farmers, they had other priorities. They wanted better health care, new grain stores, and improved ways to market and sell their produce locally. Their main worry was being in debt to rich merchants who would buy the farmers' crops in advance, then sell them back at vastly inflated prices in times of scarcity.

To Oxfam, the Alfole's main problem at first seemed to be an environmental one—lack of water. Applying a technical solution to what appeared to be a technical problem uncovered far wider needs that required social action. A decade after the water-harvesting began, the people of the Alfole had evolved a wide range of community initiatives to find solutions to their problems. Women's groups are especially active, running small shops that cater for the community's basic needs, rather than relying on travelling traders who charge extortionate prices. Cereal banks have also been set up. The grain can now be stored the whole year round, freeing the farmers and their families from the profiteering of the grain merchants.

*Water and rights*

The Alfole district of Mauritania is a region of villages scattered across a parched landscape. On the edge of the Sahara Desert, agriculture is a precarious business. Drought has always been an occupational hazard for the people who live here. Many of the subsistence farmers are former slaves, whose livelihoods rely on the infrequent and unreliable rains.

When at last it does rain, downpours can cause flash floods in minutes. Large floodwater dams, built by the French in colonial times to supply water for irrigation, have collapsed over the years. So the local people have adapted the idea to meet their own needs. They build *diguettes*—low stone or earth walls—along the contours of the land to trap run-off water. This increases the moisture in the soil so that crops can grow—a water-harvesting technique. Unfortunately, in drought years the *diguettes* do not guarantee a reasonable harvest; food may be in short supply for months at a time.

In 1983, Oxfam began to work with poor people in the Alfole to improve the *diguettes* and to develop other water-harvesting schemes. It gradually became clear that simply improving the water supply was of limited benefit without wider changes, both social and economic. Although water was a concern for the farmers, they had other priorities. They wanted better health care, new grain stores, and improved ways to market and sell their produce locally. Their main worry was being in debt to rich merchants who would buy the farmers' crops in advance, then sell them back at vastly inflated prices in times of scarcity.

To Oxfam, the Alfole's main problem at first seemed to be an environmental one—lack of water. Applying a technical solution to what appeared to be a technical problem uncovered far wider needs that required social action. A decade after the water-harvesting began, the people of the Alfole had evolved a wide range of community initiatives to find solutions to their problems. Women's groups are especially active, running small shops that cater for the community's basic needs, rather than relying on travelling traders who charge extortionate prices. Cereal banks have also been set up. The grain can now be stored the whole year round, freeing the farmers and their families from the profiteering of the grain merchants.
Some of the 500,000 people displaced into camps by Sri Lanka’s civil war are returning to their villages. Where they can, they are rebuilding their houses and renovating agricultural systems that were neglected for years. This includes work on the “tanks”—800-year-old irrigation reservoirs. Local groups supported by Oxfam organize the work. Care is taken to ensure that the poorest families are the ones who benefit. An able-bodied man from each family works on the project; if there is none, the woman head of household works, and child-minding groups are organized. Women and men are paid the same rates for their work.

In the Affoué region of Mauritania farmers must make the most of the sparse rainfall. Here, on the fringe of the Sahara, farmers build small dams of earth to trap water and enable crops to thrive.
Seeds of hope

More than 60 percent of Nicaragua's population is going hungry. After years of civil war, many poor people have either no land or no means to farm the little they possess. Meanwhile, for those peasant farmers who can grow crops, prices are low, fertilizers are too expensive, and the productivity of their land is declining.

Some government officials blame the peasants for being unproductive. Environmentalists blame them for damaging the land through deforestation and "slash and burn" farming. But a new movement is springing up in Central America to give alternatives, rather than blame, to ordinary farmers.

Campesino a Campesino or "Peasant to Peasant" encourages farmers to improve their land and crops through small-scale experiments, diversification, and regular exchange visits. A few technical professionals are involved, but the emphasis is on how working farmers can help each other. "Technical people from the city just show up at a farm, tell the farmer what to do, hop in their jeep, and they are gone," says member Juan Enamorado. "When we go to help someone in Campesino a Campesino, we spend the whole day working alongside them in the field."

When the farmers meet, they have much to talk about. Which crops are best to rotate to preserve the soil? What's the best recipe for home-made organic insecticide? What can you learn about the soil from its taste, feel, and smell? They can see each other's ideas in action, and learn more about how to make the best of the land.

The Campesino a Campesino programme is growing because it meets farmers' needs. It gives them not only information and ideas, but also greater economic strength - and thus a greater ability to survive. The most recent regional exchange brought together more than 200 peasant farmers from ten Central American and Caribbean countries. Meeting in Nicaragua, they travelled in cattle lorries, pick-up trucks, and horseback to take a practical look at local farms, discuss methods and experiments, and exchange tips.

What's happening in Nicaragua can be seen in many poor communities across the globe. Whether forced by economic circumstances, or drawn by new opportunities to make their future more secure, increasing numbers of poor farmers are making sure they play their part in safeguarding the land.
Park management: South Africa

Petrus Sander (above) is a stock farmer in the Richtersveld, South Africa—an area with a uniquely rich and varied ecology. When the Richtersveld was designated a National Park, Petrus' community was in danger of losing the grazing lands they relied on for a living. After winning a reprieve in court, they took two years to convince the authorities that the Park's success depended on local people having a stake in its future. Finally, the community won its right to grazing land, though with fewer animals, and to the plants they traditionally use for medicine. Most importantly, Petrus' people now help to manage the Park and receive some of its income.
Freeing trade

Like thousands of small farmers, José Rivera Campoverde has little choice about what he grows. His three-hectare plot of land high in the Peruvian Andes is very fertile, and José is a skilled farmer. But there are only two crops which can earn him the small amount of cash he needs to survive—coffee and coca (the raw material for cocaine).

There’s big money to be made from coffee, but not for people like José. Most of the profit goes to dealers, middlemen, and salesmen—the people who control the market. They all rely on paying the minimum to the original producers.

Coffee is grown in more than 40 countries in the South, including some of the poorest nations in the world. For many, it is the main foreign currency earner, and the country’s economy depends on it. But, like the individual farmers, the producer countries are vulnerable. The buyers call the shots, setting tariffs and taxes to discourage Southern producers from processing the coffee themselves—the area where most of the profit lies.

José is working hard to get a better deal for himself and other poor farmers like him. His co-operative already helps its members to share costs, skills, and equipment, and to press for a higher price for their crops. But now selling to an Alternative Trading Organisation (ATO) offers even more benefits.

Cafédirect is an ATO which brings together four groups, including Oxfam Trading, to put fair trade into action. Buying from co-operatives like José’s, it gives more of the profit back to the producers than mainstream traders do, and, where necessary, pays in advance to help farmers survive the critical period between harvest and sale. It’s made a real difference to José’s life. “Before, most of us could not afford medical treatment,” he remembers. “The higher price we get now means that our co-operative can afford to pay a doctor to give us treatment. For me, I can afford more food for my family, and send my children to school with pens and notebooks for the first time.”

This sort of fair trade is good for the environment, too. The farmers in José’s group depend on their land for their future. To make sure it will last for generations to come, they use fewer chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and wherever possible use traditional, environment-friendly techniques to improve land and yields.
Going bananas in the Caribbean

The small islands of the Eastern Caribbean depend on bananas for half their income. In 1992, they gained a reprieve from economic catastrophe when the new Single European Market continued to allow tax-free banana imports to Europe. The island's bananas are grown on small family-owned plots. Without protection, they would not be able to compete with Latin American banana plantations, where mass production and low wages mean cheaper fruit. EC tariffs on Latin American bananas keep the Windward Islanders from being bankrupted. Many islanders are concerned about the future and wonder if they should grow a different crop. Yet without markets and support for diversification, this would be a risky venture.
Nurturing enterprise

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Some 85 percent of the population live in absolute poverty; the average life span is just 54 years.

A series of military-backed governments has kept Haitians from having a say in the affairs of their country. Efforts by poor people to organize into self-help groups bring the risk of retribution from paramilitary thugs. Despite these grave obstacles, community organizations are active – and successful. One such group is FONHADES (Haitian Fund for Economic and Social Development) which trains craft-workers and artisans living in poor neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital.

FONHADES has five trainers who teach bookkeeping and management skills to groups of self-employed workers, including tailors, seamstresses, cobblers, and pot makers. Once groups of workers have organized themselves, they can apply for small loans to purchase tools and supplies. They organize credit circles among themselves which can become self-financing.

“We do not determine the needs or priorities; the groups do that,” said Mehu Garçon, one of the trainers. “Working together rather than individually, they can increase their production, if they have viable management. This can improve their lives and help their families.”

Throughout the poor countries of the world, more people are turning to this kind of small-scale production, or "micro-enterprise", to make a living. Economists debate whether micro-enterprises can provide an escape from poverty, but for many people working in them there is no other option. They must make a success of it.

Most Haitians cook on charcoal stoves. With a loan from the credit circle, metal-workers buy scrap cars and, using tools bought through the project, they make simple stoves from the old cars to sell in the market. Through the credit circles, the craft-workers learn how to make business decisions and improve their production methods.

In the community, the credit circles form networks of people with common interests; a slow process because craft-workers often regard each other as competitors. In the long term, FONHADES aims to organize a national association of these "micro-enterprises", offering another vital voice for Haiti's poor.

▼ Chile's sea coalers

Chile is a Latin American economic success story, but the benefits of its boom have yet to trickle down to its poorer citizens. On the beach at Pueblo Hundido, sea coalers dredge for the thin black dust discharged into the ocean by a nearby mine. Some of the coal dust is bagged and sold; the rest is burned at home. Drowning and pneumonia are occupational hazards. A women's group supported by Oxfam is helping sea coalers and others to find less dangerous, alternative ways of making a living.

From cars to cooking stoves – car panels are recycled in Haiti, one of the many micro-enterprises that may offer the poor a way out of poverty.
Where credit’s due

Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, is recovering from decades of war; it is also struggling with the effects of World Bank policies intended to reform the country’s economy. To qualify for loans from the Bank, the government has accepted a programme of so-called “structural adjustment” of its economy. Among other things, this has meant reducing food subsidies, pricing food beyond the pockets of the poor.

One of the city’s poorest quarters is Kebele 29 (a kebele is an administrative unit). It was settled several generations ago by migrants from the countryside, desperate for work or a chance to trade in the nearby City Market. Many of the Kebele women lost their husbands in Ethiopia’s civil war, and are now the family breadwinners. Family incomes are very low; a day’s injera, the local bread, costs half a day’s earnings. Small-scale trading is their only hope of survival. Some women make handicrafts out of recycled glass and metal; others bake injera, or brew beer.

Like any business, the schemes need capital. But banks do not know how to deal with such small and, for them, risky enterprises. “They are used to dealing with literate people who have regular incomes,” says Oxfam Project Officer, Zenash Goshu. “They find it difficult to understand the poverty the women live in.” And banks demand security for loans, which the women do not have.

To help them get credit, Oxfam and the local council set up a revolving loan fund run by Zenash. The 130 members of the scheme are expected to pay half a day’s earnings to the fund each month, on which they are paid 6 percent interest. Loans, at 12 percent interest, are negotiated through a local committee. Despite their poverty, every creditor is up to date with repayments, and the committee calls in any bad debts. “The best collateral of all,” according to Zenash, “is peer pressure”.

Zenash gives advice on marketing and has introduced basic business practices, such as keeping records. “But it’s difficult for them to see how this can help,” she explains. "They have so little time left over from their work, and most can't read. They say to me 'Well, we're still alive, so we must have made a profit'”.

The national bank is now convinced that poor women are a good credit risk, and will run the programme when Oxfam withdraws in the near future.
A savings and loan scheme run by the community in one of the poorest parts of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, has enabled people to pull down their old houses and build better homes.

• Inner-city training: Senegal

Like many Southern cities, Dakar in Senegal has seen a huge number of people arrive in search of work over the last few years. Pushed from the countryside by conflict and environmental breakdown, and pulled by the promise of jobs, most of the migrants have only added to the growing population of urban unemployed. At the Association Senegalaise d'Aide à l'Insertion des Nécessiteux, a technical training centre, Oxfam supports a project that aims to equip young people with skills that will improve their job prospects. Graduates of the scheme have already set up their own carpentry, electrical, and secretarial businesses.
Living with disaster

Cyclones are a fact of life in Bangladesh. Even so, the one that lashed the densely populated southeast coast in April 1992 was unusually severe. In the worst cyclone to hit the country for more than a decade, floods left more than 150,000 people dead and 4 million homeless.

Hatiya Island in the Bay of Bengal is little more than a sand bar, but it is home to 300,000 people. The cyclone destroyed 90 percent of their homes, and flooded vast areas of crops with salt water. But the islanders were better equipped than most to recover from the catastrophe.

For the Hatiya islanders, as for most poor Bangladeshis, the big issue is land. If they have land, they have a lasting possession, a source of income, and the chance to build more secure housing. Once a cyclone has passed and the floods receded, whatever else they have lost, the land at least will still be there. The local group called Dwip Unnayan Sagstha (DUS) knows this well and helps communities to protect themselves before, during, and after cyclones.

Working with the landless majority, DUS advises on claiming land and encourages people to build embankments and plant trees. The group also offers loans to small traders, promotes savings schemes, and gives training as an integral part of their cyclone protection work. All this brings self-reliance and security, and helps forge stronger communities which are better able to recover when the inevitable disaster happens.

The benefits of land ownership to poor people are similar the world over, but in Bangladesh a unique phenomenon presents particular problems — and occasional opportunities — to the poorest communities. Most poor Bangladeshis live in the fertile but precarious flood plains of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers. Here the waterways weave their paths across the low-lying land, washing away soil from one spot, only to deposit it elsewhere in the delta. Each year thousands of people lose their homes through river erosion. The other side of the coin, however, is that new land is constantly being created from the shifting silt. By law, this “khas” land is set aside for the landless, but in practice it is often appropriated by landlords. Again, DUS helps the communities. Equipped with knowledge of their rights and how to make land claims, the poorest frequently win the land that is due to them.
Self-help in exile: El Salvador

One million people were uprooted during El Salvador's civil war. They moved to other parts of the country, or fled to other nations, including neighbouring Honduras, where Oxfam supported a community of 8000 people. They set up workshops to make their own clothes, shoes, utensils, furniture, and even homes. With the use of self-help teaching methods, literacy rose from 15 to 85 percent during their nine years in exile. They built a strong, self-reliant community that was able to insist on returning to El Salvador on its own terms – even before the war officially ended in 1992.
The people featured in the previous pages are doing their utmost to improve their lives in the face of environmental decline. Oxfam’s role is to support communities as they identify problems and find practical solutions to overcome them.

Of the 3000 groups that Oxfam supports worldwide, the 14 described here show what can be achieved by offering help ranging from direct funding to advice and training. They demonstrate the resourcefulness and initiative of ordinary people once they organize themselves. They show the reality of sustainable development: how communities may be helped to meet their present needs while at the same time safeguarding the environment for future generations.

The 14 accounts are also sobering. They remind us that there are limits to what people can achieve before they come up against barriers to further development in the shape of local politics, lack of rights, national policies, and international economics. There are also factors, such as war and civil conflict, that conspire to destroy people’s efforts. Half of Oxfam’s grants help communities that are in some way victims of conflict. In Africa this figure is 70 percent.

Acting locally, thinking globally

Community self-organization and action to tackle local issues, such as the environment, are crucial – both to identify problems and to find solutions acceptable to all.

The efforts of the individual groups featured in these pages clearly have a local impact and are life-enhancing. But even taken as a whole, and if their experiences are shared across the South (something that Oxfam is actively encouraging), mass grassroots action for change is only a partial answer to our current global crisis.

Acting locally and thinking globally, as the saying goes, will deliver a better future only if local groups are also supported by larger institutions. This means more than just Oxfam and the non-governmental organizations that are springing up across the South: it means genuinely accountable bodies, ranging in size from the village council to the UN Security Council. At the same time, basic rights to clean water, housing, education, health care, and protection from abuse must be accorded to all.

The concept of planet management is a broad and challenging one. It needs great time and great effort to implement. Time is not on our side; but the efforts of the poor – the mass of planet managers – give some hope for a sustainable future.
Whose planet is it anyway?

The stories in the previous pages are encouraging and inspiring. But despite their courage, ingenuity, and hard work, many poor people in the South are getting poorer, and their environments are under increasing threat. The forces working against them are very powerful. The next few pages look at the role of the North in damaging the global environment and in harming Southern environments both directly and indirectly. As a background to this, let's see just how big are the disparities in wealth, power, and consumption between the South and the North.

North
(North America, Europe, Japan, and Australasia)
- 25 per cent of world population
- 80 per cent consumption of energy
- 86 per cent of world industry
- five countries control 60 per cent of world industry
- water use 350-1,000 litres per person per day
- 40 per cent water used for industry
- 500 million earn more than $20,000 a year
- consumes 70 per cent fossil fuels, 85 per cent chemical production, 85 per cent military spending, 90 per cent automobiles
- for every 100 teachers 97 soldiers
- military spending 1991 $762 billion
- rich nations pay 4 per cent interest on foreign debt

South
(Latin America and Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and Middle East)
- 75 per cent of world population
- 20 per cent consumption of energy
- 14 per cent of world industry
- water use 20-40 litres per person per day
- 93 per cent water used for food production
- 3 billion earn under $500 a year
- 800 million illiterate people
- 14 million children die of malnutrition every year
- 100 million affected by famine 1990
- military spending $123 billion
- poor nations pay 17 per cent interest on debt

Shocking as these statistics are, they underestimate the problem in two ways. Aggregate figures like these don't show the inequalities in power, wealth, and income between men and women, and between rich and poor, within the countries of the South and the North.

New York uses more petrol in a week than Africa uses in a year. Carbon emissions per person per year are 5.13 tonnes for the USA, 0.19 tonnes for India.
Northern blights

If everyone on the planet were to achieve the consumption level of people in the United Kingdom two additional planet Earths would be needed. But since we only have the one Earth, whose carrying capacity is already under strain, then either the South must remain poor for ever, or the North must consume less.

The Earth’s carrying capacity is made up of resources and sinks. Resources include land used for agriculture, forests, and grazing; clean water, in rivers, lakes, and underground; fishing grounds in seas and rivers; ores and minerals; and energy sources, especially the fossil fuels, coal, oil, and natural gas. Sinks are the ways in which the Earth absorbs pollution created by human activity; for instance, tropical rainforests absorb carbon dioxide formed when fossil fuels are burned.

The life-styles of Northern countries rely on resources and sinks far beyond the boundaries of the countries themselves. Northern lifestyles are fundamentally unsustainable. The area of land needed to support a particular country’s life-style has been called its ‘ecological footprint’. This is clearly apparent when we look at the countries of origin of products on supermarket shelves. Most people know that our manufacturing industries rely on raw materials from all over the world, but it is less widely realised that our farmers import large quantities of fertilisers, fish-meal, and oil-seeds produced in other countries. Less obvious still is the impact, well outside our borders, of pollutants flushed into rivers and seas, and emissions from our cars and power stations.

Many impacts of Northern lifestyles, such as the destruction of the ozone layer by CFCs, and global warming, are on a world scale. The major cause of the continued deterioration of the world’s environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production in industrialised countries of the North, and the increasing industrialisation of countries like China and India in the South. If, as is widely predicted, global warming causes a rise in the sea-level, low-lying countries will suffer. But those in the North, like the Netherlands, will be able to afford to protect themselves better than those, like Bangladesh, in the South.

One country’s ecological footprint is at the expense of all others. Land in the South devoted to growing cash-crops such as coffee for export to the North cannot also grow food crops for local consumption. More seriously, land lost to mining, or clear-felled forest, is gone forever, denied not just to the current generation but to all future generations. Economically powerful countries can impose their footprints in this way.
A footprint in Jamaica

In the hills of Jamaica there are bauxite mines. Bauxite is the ore from which aluminium is made. The ore goes by train to Ocho Rios on the north coast. Then bulk carrier ships transport it to North America, where it becomes the raw material of aeroplanes, kitchen foil, and fizzy drink cans.

The Jamaican government gave a 99-year lease to the US firm Kaiser Bauxite in the 1940s. When they acquired the land, they had to give the people who lived there compensation. Most families took the money and moved. But a few people didn’t want to leave their houses. Today they are surrounded by bauxite mines. Before the mines came, this was good arable land. Although the company claims to restore the land, it is only good for rough grazing. The mines also pollute people’s drinking water.

The bauxite mining area, so big it can be seen from space, is a part of the ecological footprint of the giant industrialised economies to the north of Jamaica.
We make the rules

It's not just our cars and supermarkets, and our farms and factories, that put pressure on the South's environment. Our politicians and civil servants, acting in our name, add to the pressure by what they do and what they don't do.

UNCED

UNCED — the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development — took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. It was billed as "the last chance to save the world". If it was the last chance, then the world is doomed. Southern governments, and development and environmental organisations from North and South, urged that Northern governments take radical decisions, and above all commit substantial new resources, to help the South. Instead there were a few good ideas, a lot of empty rhetoric, and some of the major pressures on poor people and their environment were not even discussed.

Unhelpful

Northern governments don't give enough aid, and the aid they do give isn't of the right sort. Over 20 years ago the United Nations set a target for the rich countries of the North — to give 0.7 per cent of their Gross National Product as official aid to the poor countries of the South. Only four countries are meeting that target at present, and the United Kingdom has never met it. Not only is this aid inadequate, but much of it is inappropriate. Not enough of it goes to really poor countries, and to help poor people. Some aid is tied to exports from the donor country, and some goes to projects which damage the environment. The Pergau Dam in Malaysia is a prominent recent example.

Unpayable

The countries of the South owe $1,500 billion to the banks and governments of the North and to international financial institutions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB), whose decision-making is dominated by powerful Northern countries. For many Southern countries their debt is simply
unpayable. Servicing the debt — paying interest, and any repayments that are due — takes up to 100 per cent or more of the money they earn from their exports. And what has happened to all the money that was borrowed? Some was spent on worthwhile projects, but some was stolen, some spent on weapons with which to oppress their own people or menace equally poor neighbours, and some on environmentally-disastrous schemes like big dams.

Unfair

Countries of the South pay their debts, and buy everything else they need, with money earned from their exports. But they don't earn much from exports of commodities like coffee or copper, and if they try to export manufactured products like textiles then Northern countries put tariff barriers up to protect their own industries. The rules of world trade are made in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), soon to be replaced by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) — both of them dominated by the interests of powerful nations of the North. One of the rules they have made is that trade takes precedence over environmental concerns.
“It is better to light a single candle
than to curse the darkness”

Oxfam works in many ways, both in the North and the South, with and for poor people. You probably do your bit for the environment — by using unleaded petrol or recycling paper and glass, for instance. It may be harder to think of ways in which you can use your power as a consumer and a citizen to help to protect the environment in the South, but through Oxfam, you can.

Oxfam supports some 3,000 development projects in over 70 countries every year. Some of them tackle environmental problems directly, as we have seen. All of them tackle poverty. In making decisions about which projects to support, Oxfam staff look at the environmental factors as well as many other considerations. In 1993-94 Oxfam spent £73.7m on its overseas programme.

You can help Oxfam’s emergency, development, research, and advocacy work by making a donation. There are schemes which enable supporters to follow the work of specific development projects. To find out more, ring 01865 313131.

Oxfam wants to see Fair Trade: small-scale producers in the South getting a decent price for their products. Oxfam’s Bridge programme buys crafts and foods from Southern producers on Fair-Trade terms. Crafts producers are given high priority, as they often have no other source of income. Bridge staff here and overseas provide advice and training on design, marketing, and other practical matters, including the environmental impact of production. Bridge sales in 1993-94 were £11.6m.

Oxfam also works to persuade more people to buy Fair Trade products, both in Oxfam shops and in supermarkets.

You can buy Bridge goods in 625 Oxfam shops and through the mail-order catalogue. Look out, also, for products carrying the Fairtrade Mark, which helps shoppers to identify products which give a better deal to producers in the South. They’re in Oxfam shops, and in many supermarkets.
Oxfam's chain of 850 shops brings recycling to the High Street by giving useful things a second life. Clothes, books, toys – even furniture and electrical goods – are donated by the public and sold at prices affordable by people on low incomes, to raise money for Oxfam's work. Clothes which are not sold aren't wasted. They go to the Wastesaver recycling plant in Huddersfield, where they are sorted. Some are sent to people in need, usually in emergency situations. The remainder are sorted into different grades and sold to the textile industry. Oxfam also recycles stamps and coins, so there is very little that the shops can't accept. Oxfam shops are run by volunteers — 30,000 in total.

You can recycle your unwanted possessions by taking them into your local Oxfam shop. While there, you might want to offer some of their other goods a second life! And if you have any time to spare, you could volunteer to help in the shop.

Oxfam staff research the causes and consequences of poverty, including environmental issues. Their conclusions, based on Oxfam's work with poor people, lead to recommendations about the policies of our government and the international organisations – European Union, United Nations, IMF, and World Bank – in which our government is influential. We also work with our Southern partners to influence the policy of Southern governments.

Oxfam's recommendations include:

- The UK government should set a timetable for reaching the UN aid target of 0.7 per cent of GNP.
- The UK government should immediately cancel between 80 per cent and 100 per cent of the debts owed to it by the poorest countries, and press other creditor governments to do the same.
- The IMF should sell gold stocks to finance the write-off of debts owed to it by the poorest countries.
- The new World Trade Organisation should have open, democratic, and accountable decision-making processes, and should ensure that environmental concerns are not subordinated to trade considerations.
- The EU and UK should fulfil the commitments made at Rio, and in particular help to provide the necessary resources for sustainable development in the South.

You can support Oxfam's advocacy work by joining the Oxfam Campaigning Network. We keep you informed about the issues that affect the world's poor people, and tell you about effective actions you could take to support Oxfam's advocacy work, both on the wider issues and in support of specific communities like the Indians of the Amazon rainforest. If you'd like to know more, phone 01865 312603.
Further reading

Books from Oxfam on environmental issues:

*Gaia Atlas of Planet Management* (ed Myers N)


*Women and the Environment* (ed. Reardon G),
Focus on Gender Series, Oxfam, 1993.

Available from Oxfam Publishing, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ.

Free leaflets:

*Our Environment, Our Future*

*Oxfam, Poverty and the Environment*

*Fair Trade: The Bridge Programme*

*Recycling*

*People and the Environment* (describes some Oxfam-supported projects)

Available from Oxfam Supporter Services at the address given above.

For information about campaigning activities in your area, write to or telephone the Regional Campaigns Manager at any of the Oxfam offices listed below:

5th Floor, Fleming House
134 Renfrew Street
GLASGOW G3 6ST
Tel. 0141 331 2724

10 Mornington Villas
BRADFORD BD8 7HB
Tel. 01274 491858

231 High Street
Erdington
BIRMINGHAM B23 6SS
Tel. 0121 384 2384

63 Cotham Hill
BRISTOL BS6 6JR
Tel. 0117 970 6703

58 St John's Hill
Clapham
LONDON SW11 1VJ
Tel. 0171 585 0220

46-48 Station Road
Llanishen
CARDIFF CF4 5LU
Tel. 01222 757067