

NATURAL DISASTERS

What can we do?

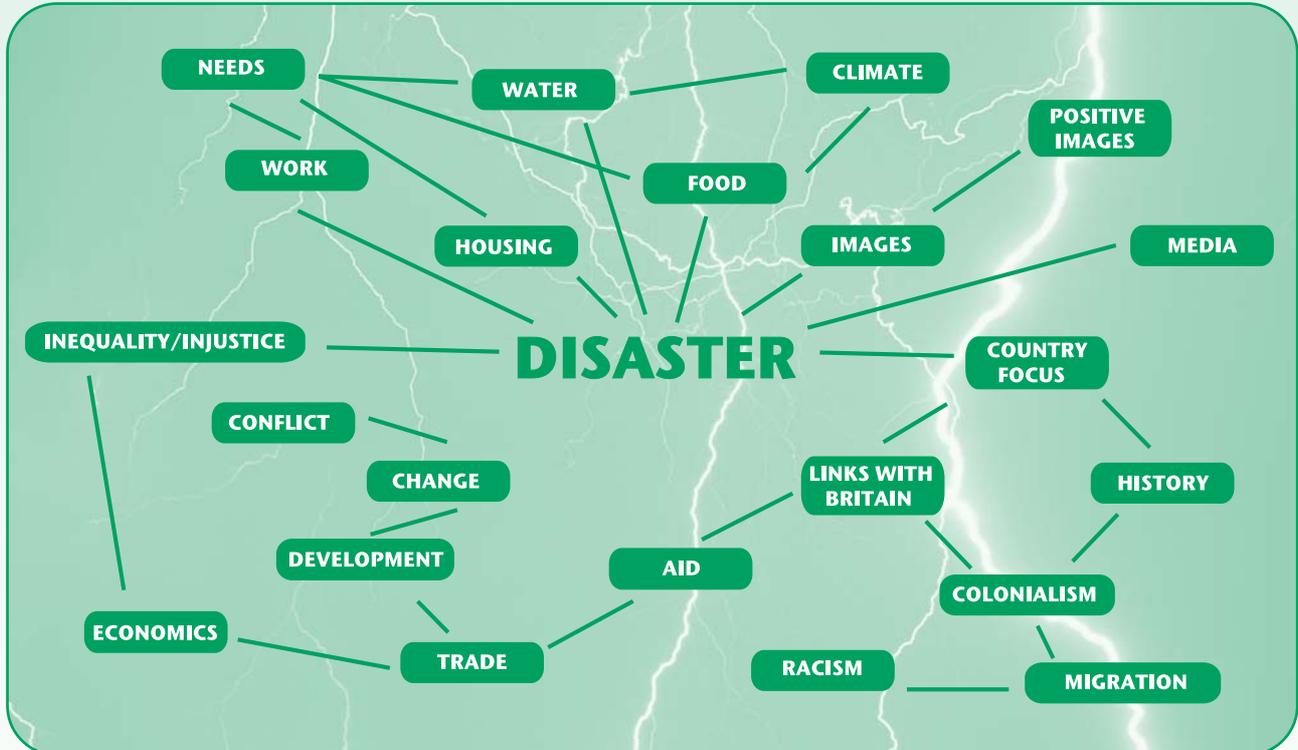
This resource is to support primary teachers in responding to natural disasters.

When natural disasters occur and have a high media profile, children are presented with images and issues that can raise worries and questions. As teachers, we need to be prepared to respond to these concerns.

This resource aims to support teachers in beginning to answer children's questions and to encourage children to look beyond the consequences of a disaster and more towards the causes and possible lessening of its effects.

Children invariably have a strong sense of right and wrong and fair play and want to do something practical to help. By encouraging them to research and question it is hoped that the children will begin to realise there are more effective ways of responding to disasters than just fundraising. For example:

- Gain knowledge about the background of the disaster
- Find out about the causes of the disaster
- Find out about the likely repercussions – short and long term
- Prompt those around you to ask questions
- Challenge stereotypes and clichés
- Campaign for policy change
- Follow up news stories – what has actually happened since the story broke.



Although this diagram may seem complicated, all the points are linked and impact upon the way peoples are affected by natural disasters.

There is no prioritising in this resource and clearly we cannot deal with, or address everything, but it is hoped that further links and information suggested will encourage a deeper look into the causes and consequences of disasters.

Looking at media coverage – photographs of victims of disasters

The perception of the scale of a disaster is led by the media. We hear of catastrophes and we feel helpless. It is important for children to be introduced to the fact that the media is a powerful device for stirring people's conscience. Often solutions are over simplified, stress the passivity of those in need and focus on the misery of individuals. Pictures are very powerful and a particular image often comes to symbolise a particular disaster.

The following activities aim to enable young people to gain a greater understanding of the context in which news stories happen. Photographs are good resources for opening up issues for debate. Children's thoughts can be expressed - what does the photo mean to them? Why are some people more affected by disasters than others? Why don't some people have enough food? Why are some people poor while others are rich? The answers are complex but should not be brushed aside. Be aware that images and text used can be inaccurate and can reinforce stereotypes and cliches. The dignity of the people portrayed in the photos needs to be preserved by the teacher even if the image does not naturally lead you down that path. Careful consideration must be given to the language used to describe the people - factual accuracy and tone. Remember, the people in the pictures are active partners in the world and not just recipients of aid.

Suggested activities:

- Gather a selection of newspaper photographs covering the story. Look at the similarities and differences of the choice of photos in different newspapers. Discuss why that particular photo has been used, what impact does it have on the reader - is this the aim of the photo?
- What do the children think is outside of the frame? Draw what they imagine to be there.
- Spend 5 minutes writing their responses to the photograph; if pupils could speak to the people/person in the photo what would they say? What questions would they ask? e.g. when did they last eat, how far have they travelled, are they with their family?
- Give children a photograph from the story, ask them to write a caption to go with the photograph. Discuss. Are any of the captions positive?

For more activities on looking at media coverage -

www.dep.org.uk/globalexpress

For more information see also:

[Dealing with disasters: teaching about disasters and development for ages 11 – 16, Oxfam 2000.](#)

Hurricanes

Hurricanes develop over warm oceans that are over 27 degrees in temperature: the moisture coming from the sea acts as a kind of fuel producing the energy of a hurricane. Air passing over the sea warms and picks up moisture, then rises. As it rises the air cools. The moisture condenses, releasing heat energy. At this point the system becomes unstable: the air moves higher and with increasing speed. The warm air from the sea continually supplies this process. Gradually a whirlwind motion begins. When the wind reaches 75mph, the storm is upgraded to a hurricane. When it hits land, the fuel of the moisture from the sea is cut off and the hurricane loses its power and dies down. The reason hurricanes cause disasters is that they build up over many days, are difficult to track and affect so many countries in varying degrees. They cause wide spread flooding and wind damage.

Suggested activities:

- Map where in the world hurricanes occur most frequently - western hemisphere, particularly the Caribbean, Central America.
- Read reports/think about the causes and

consequences of a hurricane. Could the disaster have been avoided or lessened?

- Discuss what appeals the children have seen on television for help/aid. Ask the children to imagine they are part of an international relief agency, discuss which are the three best ways in which they can help - in the short term and in the long term. Pupils write a report for their 'agencies' about their findings.
- Invite a speaker from British Red Cross, Oxfam etc to share their expertise with the children. Would the professional agree with the children's suggestions for help?
- Monitor what happens in the media about the hurricane. Does the story lose the headlines and become 'old'? How long does it take and why?

Remember that the local people know and understand their land and climate and are determined to reconstruct their lives.

For further activities see:

www.dep.org.uk/globalexpress - Edition 12

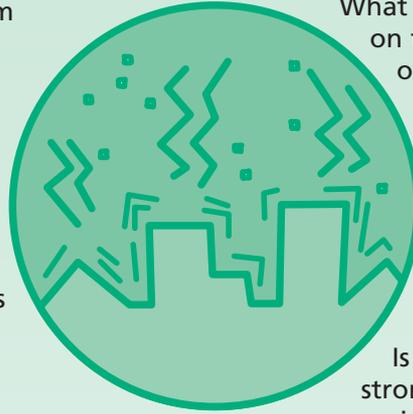
www.worldaware.org.uk/education/projects/wbg.html

Earthquakes

Earthquakes are relatively random natural disasters. Information is gained from Richter scales and readings from epicentres but predictions of where and when an earthquake is likely to occur are at best vague. The consequences of an earthquake can vary depending on the country and area of the country that is hit. Not surprisingly, more wealthy areas feel less of a long term effect than poorer areas. Recently, issues such as the effects of unscrupulous builders have been brought to the attention of the public through press coverage.

Suggested activities:

- Give children materials, price lists and a budget to spend. Children buy desired materials and construct buildings varying in height and



materials. Place these buildings into a village/town. What do the children notice about the effect on the buildings when the surface they are on is agitated? Do the ones closest to the epicentre of the 'earthquake' fall more quickly than the others? Does the height/quality of the building materials matter?

- If the children were town planners/builders, what information does the experiment give them? Is it worth using flimsy materials or stronger materials/cheap or more expensive? Although it is more costly to use expensive materials, which is more important - human lives or profit?

For further activities see:

www.dep.org.uk/globalexpress - Edition 24
www.globaleye.org.uk

Water and floods

Sometimes disasters are divided into those which seem to be the fault of humans - like conflict - and those beyond human control, like floods. But poverty is partly to blame for a flood becoming a disaster. Floods in Bangladesh kill so many people because they are too poor to live in sturdy houses on higher flatter ground farther from rivers and the coast. Richer people have taken the best land. When natural disasters occur, water plays a crucial role - usually there is either too much water or there is not enough.

The importance of land to people in countries where there is no social security system cannot be overestimated. When many people are forced to move off their land through flooding, drought or some other disaster, there is a greater risk of hunger and famine. In many places there is no employment, people live on their own resources - on their land. To have no land is to lose one's livelihood.

Suggested activities:

- What media coverage have the children experienced about flooding, at home and abroad? What are the consequences of floods - homes ruined or lost, lives lost both human and animal, water damage in buildings that are left, polluted water, illnesses and so on.
- List the possible effects of a flood in a rich area and then a poor area. Discuss.

'Water choices' role play.

- Give each group (4/6) a bucket of water and tell them this is the only water they are going to be able to use today. They must decide how they are going to use the water.
- How much are they going to drink? How much are they going to need for washing - themselves and clothes?
- How much are they going to need for cooking and washing up? Are there any other things that may need water today e.g. garden? Will it matter what the weather is like in terms of the use of the water?

For further activities look at:

www.dep.org.uk/activities

www.scfuk.org.uk

- facts and figures about water usage.

www.dep.org.uk/globalexpress - Edition 10



Famine

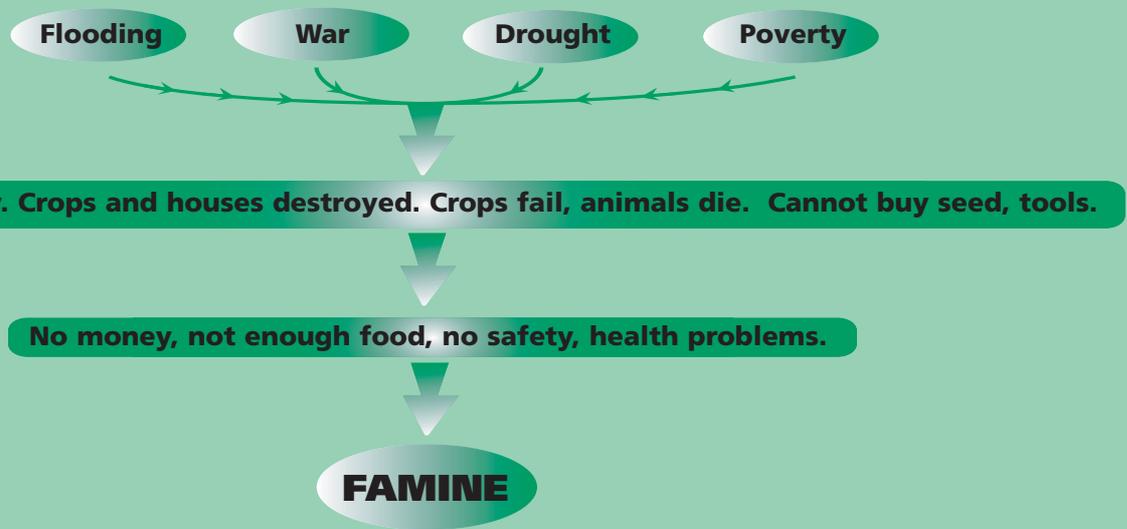
Famines are sometimes blamed simply on drought, but there are many other reasons why people don't have enough to eat. They may have had their land taken away from them. They may have had to cut down trees to earn money, causing their land to become eroded and less fertile.

Famine is the most obvious consequence of natural disasters and the area where media reporting has the most influence. If children have greater knowledge of famine and its causes, are prompted

to ask questions and have their assumptions challenged, they are better equipped to bring about the future changes that will eventually eradicate famine and hunger. 1 in 4 of the world's people still live in desperate poverty and die due to lack of basic necessities. Famines that hit the headlines are shocking but it is just as shocking that, every night, 800 million people go to bed hungry. There is enough food in the world for everyone. Poverty is not inevitable it has been created by people and it is up to people to sort it out.

Suggested activities:

Give the children a flowchart showing the causes of famine (remember not all causes are present each time but there are nearly always at least two).



Looking at the following phrases: No home. No work. No land. Unable to plan ahead. Little education. Likely to get ill. No choices. Where would they place the phrases in the flowchart? They can use phrases more than once and there are no right or wrong answers.

- Discuss the children's responses.
- Discuss three short-term solutions and three long-term solutions. What, in the long run will have the most effect? What can the children do?

- Research past famines - what was the media coverage like? Where did the famine happen? Had this place experienced famines before? What were the causes of the famine?

To find out more about famines and suggested activities go to:

www.dep.org.uk/activities

www.scfuk.org.uk

- facts and figures and assembly ideas.



Disaster Preparedness

This section is included to remind people that it is more important to tackle the causes not just the symptoms of disasters. Weather is often the last of a series of factors that can cause a disaster.

- Increasing poverty means that many communities do not have the resources to invest in preparing for disasters and struggle to recover from one disaster to the next.
- Poor planning and land use forces people to settle in unsafe areas, such as riverbanks, coastal belts or on steep hillsides where people are more vulnerable when a disaster occurs.
- Population growth and migration expose an increasing number of people to hazards. An increase in the density of built environment has made cities in particular more at risk to disaster.
- Climate change is leading to a rise in weather related disasters, particularly storms and floods.
- Disaster response can save lives in the aftermath of disaster but responding effectively to the threat of hurricanes, floods, drought, earthquakes etc. must start locally and well before disaster strikes.

Suggested activities:

- Children role play the different stages of a cyclone preparedness programme for the

evacuation of large groups of people. Discuss why training is needed and why the people involved ideally need to be local people.

- Research the importance of cyclone shelters, building flood proof housing and what these are made of, costs etc.
- Design and make flood proof houses - in a water tray test out the models. What issues do the tests raise?

To find out more about Disaster Preparedness

look at: www.redcross.org.uk

The web site gives examples of 'Disaster Preparedness' programmes. It advocates responding effectively to the threat of hurricanes, floods, drought, earthquakes etc. that this must start locally and well before disaster strikes. For example, in Bangladesh there is a Cyclone preparedness programme. Government satellite data is used to predict the movement of cyclones in the Bay of Bengal. These are relayed over a network of radios, up to 30,000 Red Cross volunteers are trained and equipped to give out warning messages to evacuate people to the safety of cyclone shelters where relief and first aid is available to those who need it. Statistics are given as examples of how the programmes are saving lives, protecting economic assets and safeguarding livelihoods of vulnerable populations.

More practical suggestions

Referring back to the statement and the diagram at the beginning of this resource, we are aiming for adults and children to think more widely about their responses to disasters in the media. Many want to stage a fundraising event because it seems the most obvious way to help. A practical, long term way children, parents and staff can begin to make the most positive difference to people who are most badly affected by disasters is through fair trade.

There are excellent activities on the following web sites:

www.jusbiz.org/resources - range of free resources. The following are all activities which can either be downloaded from the site or played online:

Exposed: an excellent opportunity for children to do their own research on the clothing trade across the globe. Pages include information on 'So, what does the boss earn per year?', 'What about the workers?', 'Child labour' as examples.

Banana Game: introduces the banana chain, showing what happens to a banana before it reaches the consumer, and to 'introduce the reality' of 'who gets what' in the chain.

International Debt: a role playing exercise for teaching about international debt.

Tourism Game: a role playing exercise examining the potential costs and benefits of a proposed tourism development project for a hypothetical country from the 'South'.

www.bananalink.org.uk

Offers a photo gallery of the production line of bananas - packing, chemicals used, out in the field, living conditions of the workers, consumer and Fair Trade banana production in Dominica.

www.globalfootprints.org

Do the student quiz, work out the impact you have on the world and see what actions you can take to improve your global footprint.

www.globalgang.org.uk

Different areas for children to explore for practical ideas including Global Gossip, Homework Help and Real Life.

Disaster Response for KS1

None of the listed web sites had suggestions for KS1 probably because the issues raised around disasters can be extremely complex and political. Some of the activities for KS2 can be modified for KS1. Everyday PSHCE and geography activities will be a good starting point for many of these discussions.

Young children can be worried and upset by images in the media and at this age it would be more appropriate to deal with simple activities that begin to build awareness of the causes and effects of natural disasters. It is best to begin activities and discussions by finding out what the children's feelings/concepts are on the subject first.

The following are some ways in which teachers can begin to open discussions.

Climate

Use observational skills to introduce children to different climates using photo packs e.g.

Kaptalamwa/pictures from the media:

- Look at the similarities and differences between the picture and the children's experiences.
- Why do the children think all the buildings have flat roofs? Why do we have sloping roofs in the UK? How does weather affect the design of the buildings?
- Do the people in the picture wear the same clothes as us? Can you guess the type of weather they have by looking at the type of clothes?
- Do you recognise any of the plants, fruit or vegetables growing in the picture/being sold in their market? Do we grow any of them in our

gardens? If not, why not?

- If they could speak to the people in the photograph, what would you say/ask?
- Have the children seen any news about flooding in the UK/abroad? How did they feel about the people involved? Was the flooding worse in the UK or elsewhere? Why?

By introducing the children to different climates they can be reassured that it is unlikely that natural disasters on the scale they may have seen in the media will affect them in the UK. They can then be led into discussing what they think the people who are affected may need most now and in the future.

Fair play

To develop the children's empathy for inequality and sharing of resources

- Split the class into 3 groups. Give one group 3 sweets each, one group 2 sweets and one group 1 sweet each. Do not say anything as you give the sweets out. Many children will have mentioned something by the time you have finished giving the sweets out.
- Give the children time to voice their feelings. Ask them how they felt if they were in the group with 3 sweets, 2 sweets and 1 sweet. Did each group

think about the others at all - were they pleased to be in the group with 3 sweets? Embarrassed or shocked? What about the feelings of the children in the other two groups? How could they as a class make everyone feel safe and equal again?

- Have there been times when they have experienced unfair play? Have they ever treated anyone unfairly? Did they think about the other person's feelings? Did they try to fix it? (This could be extended by asking the children if they know of anything that is unfair in the world today e.g. distribution of wealth, food... see KS2 activities).

Puppets

Working through the medium of puppets enables children and adults to raise issues that otherwise may be too difficult to talk about.

This activity can introduce the ideas of fair play and power. If you are powerful, does it give you the right to treat people badly?

- Set up a story whereby a large/more powerful puppet is behaving unfairly in the playground. This puppet has more toys than anyone else and is picking and choosing who s/he is going to play

with and which game they are going to play.

- How do the other puppets feel? - pleased or relieved to be chosen to play with the big puppet, do they want to choose the game themselves some times? How do they feel when they are not included the next time? Do they worry about the other puppets? What can the other puppets do to make it fair?

(This could be extended by looking at the wealth of some nations compared to others. See KS2 activities).

To develop children's understanding of the importance of taking responsibility

- This activity encourages children to discuss the importance of responsibilities and how our actions can affect others. This will lead into thinking about how we affect the wider community.
- Most classes have shared jobs/responsibilities - e.g. giving out books, setting out playground equipment. What happens when the person with the job does not carry out their responsibilities properly? How do we feel? Are there any complaints made?

- What affect does it have on the individual/group? Do individuals begin to look after themselves or the whole group? Does someone else take over the responsibility? How does the person who has not carried out the responsibility properly feel? Should we forgive them/give them a second chance?

(This could be extended to position of power and the roles people and countries have in the world - pollution, fair trade, human rights).

To begin to tackle stereotypes, cliches and environmental issues using children's story books

There are many superb children's books that deal with issues gently and informatively. Those listed below are to remind teachers of some classics.

Not so fast Songolo, Niki Daly, Victor Gollancz, 2001 - set in urban South Africa. Map the journey/shopping trip of Songolo and his grandmother. Does it sound familiar to the children? Are they surprised that some South African children have the same experiences as them?

Shaker Lane, A & M Provensen, Julia MacRae, 1991 - opens discussions about why people move - through choice or because of external factors. Children write speech bubbles for some of the residents of Shaker Lane to begin to think about other people's perceptions of their move. Imagine themselves in the situation - what would they say/feel?

Giraffes can't dance, G. Andreae, Orchard Books, 1999 - it is OK to be different. Sometimes we help need to believe in ourselves. Have there been times when children have felt they cannot do something - discuss feelings, did they overcome the hurdle, how? Learn parts of the poem and put music to the verses - music that will mirror the mood of Gerald through the poem. The children can then put a dance to the music and verses.

Dinosaurs and all that rubbish, Michael Foreman, Puffin Books, 1993 - tackles the pollution caused by industrialisation and the richness and vulnerability of life on our planet. Make a list of causes of pollution. What things could people do to lessen the impact of pollutants on the environment? What things are children personally responsible for and what are adult and collective responsibilities?

The Storm, Kathy Henderson, Walker Books, 1999 - this picture book tells the story of the destructive power of a gale force storm seen through the eyes of a child who lives in the affected area. Write some thinking bubbles about the feelings of the characters in the story. Look at the pictures and describe how you would feel if you were there too?

Why, Nicholi Popov, North South Books, 1996 - a wordless picture book that looks at the escalation of

conflict, the development of increasingly destructive military technology and the ultimate futility of war. What would you say to the characters if you could talk to them? What could they have done to avoid the conflict happening? Write a play script and make simple puppets to enact the story. Write words to go with the pictures in the story.

Window, Jeannie Baker, Julia MacRae Books, 1991 - introduces the issues of changing landscapes from forest to city; how we affect the environment and how we can make a difference. Linking with local history work, study local maps - how has the landscape changed in your area? Has it changed for the better or for worse? Are there more shops, roads, houses etc? Children can copy the collage style of the author and make their own window picture.

Another fine mess, T Bonning, Gullane Books, 2001 - reminds us that we need to look after our environment and that wise rubbish disposal is crucial. Look at the rubbish bin in the class room (use rubber gloves!). What has been thrown away? What could be recycled? Ask another class if you can carry out the same exercise with their rubbish bin. Now make a chart of the type of rubbish that could be reused and how. Collect clean rubbish (boxes, packaging etc.) to make 3D models. Display models as part of an exhibition to encourage the school community to recycle more of its rubbish.

The richest crocodile in the world, Daniel Postgate, Collins, 2003 - opens discussion on sharing. Do we need to be rich to be happy? Set up a situation where all the class except one child has a task to do and the one child is allowed to play a game. Is it much fun? How long does the child want to play before they become bored? Read the story and discuss. Can the children think of a time when they would have more fun if some one had been with them? Can the children retell a special time they have had and think about why that might have been - family occasions etc? Is it better to share experiences and things with others? The class could have their own game of hide and seek in the playground and teach each other their favourite game.

Glossary of useful terms

Aid - money or goods which people and governments in richer countries give or lend to people and governments in poorer countries.

Campaigns - activities which aim to persuade people in power to change the way things are.

Community groups - people who have joined together to solve their problems.

Conflict - disagreement or people trying to settle a problem through violence instead of through talking.

Developing countries - not a precise term but such countries are now often referred to as the 'South' or Majority World, usually means those countries whose people have least material wealth.

Development - the process of people changing their lives for the better.

Emergency - an event which puts many people's lives

in danger and which needs to have something done about it quickly.

Famine - a shortage of food so serious that people die from hunger.

Poverty - not having enough money and other resources to live on, and not being able to make many choices about your life.

Recycle - re-use something instead of just throwing it away.

Refugee - someone forced to leave their home, usually because of conflict, and seek safety in another country.

Rights - things which all people should have, like food, health, care, and a say in their future.

Volunteers - people who work without being paid.

USEFUL website addresses:

These addresses are useful for additional information and links

www.bananalink.org.uk

About trade, human/environmental costs, alternatives, photos and resources.

www.citizenship-global.org.uk

A portal site for teachers to explore the global dimension of Citizenship Education.

www.globalfootprints.org

Ideas and activities making steps for the whole school community towards a sustainable future.

www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet

Support and resources for bringing global issues into the classroom.

www.globalgang.org.uk

Interactive website with range of activities and sources of information for children.

www.dep.org.uk/globalexpress

Up-to-the-minute magazine for teachers of 8-14 year olds on world events and global issues in the news.

www.globaleye.org.uk

Information and learning activities in a global context.

www.foe.co.uk

Gives solutions for environmental problems, campaign information and recent news bulletins.

www.nead.org.uk

Shows links that exist between peoples in the world - environment, economics, culture and history. Raises issues of inequality and the causes of inequality.

www.scfuk.org.uk

News, campaign information, information on recent emergencies.

www.jusbiz.org

Information and activities about global and ethical issues for students of Business Studies and Economics.

www.maketradefair.com

Ideas for action, information on campaigns and up to date reports.

www.dfid.gov.uk

A Government Department promoting sustainable development leading to eliminating world poverty.

www.kuapakokoo.com

Site explaining cocoa farmers' co-operative in Ghana, linked to 'Dubble' chocolate bar.

www.fairtrade.org.uk

Lists products and producers of fair trade, resources, images and includes interviews of those involved in the chain.

www.redcross.org.uk

International and UK activities given, preparation for potential disasters and emergencies.

www.worldaware.org.uk

Gives curriculum guidance on understanding global perspectives and international development and sustainable development.

www.citizenship-pieces.org.uk

Initiatives celebrating pieces of good citizenship practice in Tower Hamlets.

Printed on environmentally friendly paper
produced from a sustainable source.