This article is partially the result of responses to a number of national and international reports and initiatives. Central amongst these is the Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace issued by UNESCO at its General Conference in Paris in 1976. This listed the “major problems of mankind” that all students should study as:

- equality of rights of people;
- maintenance of peace; types of war; disarmament;
- action to ensure the observance of human rights;
- economic growth and social development;
- conservation of natural resources;
- preservation of the cultural heritage of mankind;
- the role of the UN in solving such problems

I would argue that as a teacher of mathematics it is possible to meet the twin aims of developing mathematical skills, processes and understanding whilst at the same time developing an awareness of key global issues. Indeed in order to understand the complexity and interdependence of the world in the late twentieth century it is necessary to apply a great deal of mathematical skill and understanding.

During 1984/1985 I had the opportunity to work on a project with the aim of developing the curriculum in response to such issues. As a part of this it was intended to develop materials and approaches for the mathematics classroom from a global perspective. Hence issues related to world development, military technology/the arms race and human rights amongst others were considered. A computer data base was developed containing data on 127 countries including life-expectancy, infant mortality rates, levels of military expenditure etc. (20 items of data on each country). An accompanying series of problems was developed for students to work on alongside the data base focusing upon particular issues such as energy, population growth, the arms trade and others. The major statistical sources for the data are listed at the end of this article.

The materials were developed and trialled in five schools in the UK which included a multi-ethnic inner city comprehensive school. The process of refinement has become an ongoing one in an attempt to update the statistics contained on the data base in particular.

These issues are primarily global in nature but are also very much a part of the society of the UK in which our young people are growing up. The advances in technology and in telecommunications in particular have brought the concept of the "global village" to reality and directly into the living rooms of the citizens of the UK. Hence horrifying images of war, famine and disasters are a part of the experience of most young people on a tragically frequent basis. The work of the relief agencies and other pressure groups has added to the awareness of many young people and this is reflected in the concerns that many of them have about the threat of nuclear war and for the victims of war, famine and the abuse of human rights in particular. These concerns have manifested themselves in a popular way through the groundswell of support following the "Live Aid" concert and the more recent concert organised to commemorate the birthday of Nelson Mandela and to call for his release which was organised by the Anti-Apartheid movement.

The classroom examples which follow are drawn from the package of materials which were first developed in 1984/85. The responses from teachers and pupils are drawn from the classroom trials which were carried out at that time.

It is possible to select any number of fields to be printed out from the data base and also to search through the data with parameters set on one or more particular fields. For example the tables which follow provide information on the life expectancy (LIFEXPEC) and the percentage of the population with reasonable access to safe drinking water (WATER). Figure 1 provides this information on countries with life expectancy rates of less than 50 and Figure 2 refers to those with life expectancy rates greater than 70.

The issues raised merely by the presentation of the data in this form are very far reaching and the scope for discussion of these issues wide ranging. It is not that any particular answers are suggested but that an awareness of the scale of the inequality is appreciated and that important questions are raised by young people who are the future citizens and voters in our democratic society. However it is possible to analyse these figures more systematically and to seek out possible correlations. Therefore one development in this analysis might be to plot a scatter graph of these figures and also to interrogate the data base for further information. Hence the