

UPDATE FROM THE CYCLONE HIT SUNDERBANS, WEST BENGAL

11 June 2009

In answer to the urgent request for help, Global Tiger Patrol recently received (see <http://www.globaltigerpatrol.org/tigerhelp.htm>), some immediate funds were sent out to Project Lifeline Sunderbans. With these funds Mrinal Chatterjee proposed buying 1,000 litres of fuel for the GTP funded boat to distribute 15,000 litres of drinking water and one meal per day for 300 islanders for 10 days. Mrinal Chatterjee expressed his gratitude, "The GTP boat 'Bholanath' is giving a tremendous service in supplying drinking water to the marooned islanders since the Aila day on 25th May 2009. It is the main source of water supply at least in the Satjelia island."

Here is an update, which shows that the story is not over yet:

The ground floor of the camp and buildings was under 6 feet of water and a civil engineer is being consulted to assess if there is any permanent damage. Although the water has subsided from Project Lifeline Sunderbans' buildings, the high tides are continuing to enter the island regularly as the kilometres of earthen embankments have not been able to be restored yet.

Agricultural land has been damaged probably for at least two years. There are currently no arrangements for the storage of drinking water and most of the village fresh water ponds need to be restored, as they have been flooded with salt water. Although the imminent monsoon season will provide fresh water, it will make life miserable and hard to accomplish all that needs to be done to restore life in the Sunderbans.

Although the prime need is food and water at the moment, reconstruction of village huts is equally important before the monsoon sets in, otherwise things will get out of control. Another valuable service being provided is the Base Hospital. As of today, five government doctors are camping there with a good stock of life saving drugs. At the moment, 14 islanders have been admitted, however, this number is increasing day by day.

One female tiger took shelter at Jamespur (the village adjacent to Project Lifeline Sunderbans HQ) on the evening Cyclone Aila hit. The forest department was able to tranquilise it and released it deep into the forest, the following day. They also captured some deer in the fringe islands. Mrinal Chatterjee said, "I strongly feel that this 'Aila' has caused severe damage to the wildlife, especially in the further down islands, considering the level of water-rise and wind speed on that 'Aila' day."