

Operation Kachhapa: First Work Report For 1999-2000 Turtle Season

Reporting Period : 1st November,1999 to 24th November,1999.

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The Super cyclone, which hit Orissa on October 29, 1999, devastated vast areas of coastal areas including the main towns of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar. Most of the roads to the district towns and villages were cut off for more than a week and the interior coastal villages were only accessible by boat more than fifteen days after the cyclone had hit. The roads were completely destroyed, having been washed away by the strong tidal waters. Operation Kachhapa's office at Cuttack was without electricity or piped water supply till November 12, 1999. Many parts of Cuttack were under 8 to 10 feet of water and thousands of trees had fallen on the roads and the electric poles were also broken. The telephones started working only from November 7, 1999.

Mr. S.K. Pani, our Project Officer, left for his village on the November 2 to find out about his family members. Ersama town, which is 15 kms from the coast, was under 12 feet of water during the cyclone. When he returned on 6th, we learnt that he had to take a army boat to come to the main road (Cuttack-Paradeep road) from where he hitched a ride on a truck to reach Cuttack. Harrowing reports were heard from him about hundreds of dead bodies which had washed up at the villages once the tidal waters receded. He said it was dangerous to take any food and go back to family at his village since hungry villagers were looting food on the way. He reported that entire villages of mostly Bangladeshi fishermen had been wiped out from the coast when the huge tidal wave surged inland for more than 20 kms

We then attempted to visit areas where Operation Kachhapa works during the turtle season. An attempt was made on 6th November to visit Bandar fishing base on the left bank of

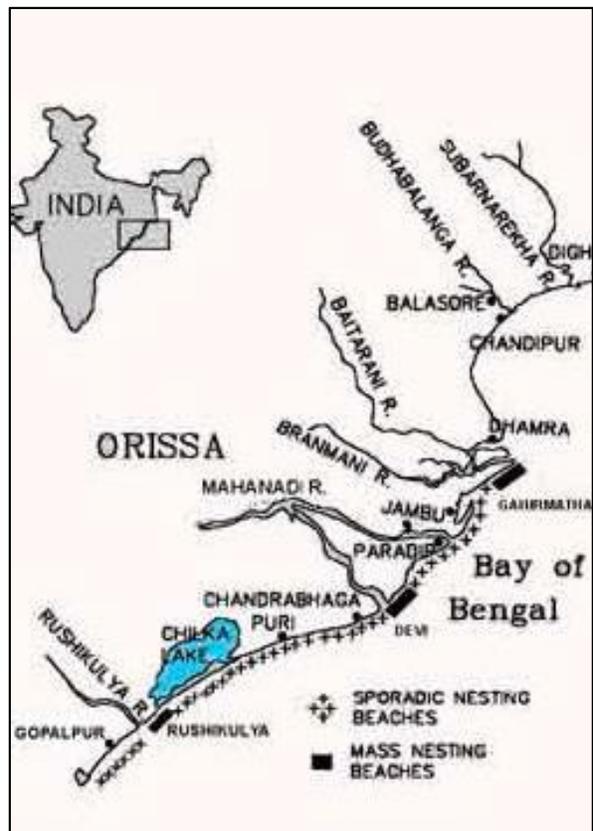
Devi river but the roads were not accessible after Balikuda since flood and tidal waters were flowing over the road. An attempt was made on 7th November to visit Nuagarh fishing base and also Gundalba and Sahana villages on the right bank of Devi river mouth but the roads were found to be still inaccessible after Astaranga due to fallen trees and houses. Besides, vast areas which had been inundated with tide still had accumulated water and could not be crossed. On 8th November, the third foray was made towards Kujang and onwards to Jatadhar mouth area. However, similar obstacles were met with at Kujang. The Cuttack Paradeep road was open but the road leading from Kujang to Nuagaon where Jatadhar mouth is situated was closed and under water at many places. There were signs of devastation everywhere since with dead bodies and cattle carcasses lying all along these routes.

On 12th November, I contacted the Chief Wildlife Warden's office to ascertain the position of the Gahirmatha nesting areas and the Operation Kachhapa personnel who used to stay at Satbhaya village. It was reported to us that all the personnel were safe since the village of Satbahaya had been evacuated. Further, the nesting beaches are Ekakula Nasi were intact. Though tidal waves had come till Rajnagar, the office of the DFO was intact. There was extensive damages to the guard beat houses in the forest areas of the Division. Kujang Range Office had collapsed and there was wireless system was damaged.

On 18th November, a survey trip was launched to identify beneficiaries in Gundalba and Sahana villages. Since the roads to these two villages were partially washed away by the tidal waters, it was with great difficulty that

we reached the villages. It was learnt that the two villages were under four to five feet of water during the cyclone. Extensive discussions were held and proper lists of beneficiaries of these two villages were identified. Some fishing families had lost their fibre boats and engines and depended entirely upon the relief supply of rice from the government. All the hatched houses in the two villages had collapsed. It was reported to us that a new mouth of river Devi had opened up south of the main mouth. It was also learnt that out of the 52 trawlers of Nuagarh base, only 4 trawlers were intact and the rest were heavily damaged. The first dead turtle of the season in this stretch of the coast was found. Andhra trawlers were fishing very close to the shore (within 1 km). The local fishermen reported that due to the absence of trawlers from Paradeep and Nuagarh, the Andhra trawlers were coming in large numbers to fish in these waters.

On 20th November, we visited Gundalba and Sahana villages to distribute relief materials. 240 blankets were distributed to the families of fishermen and others of both villages. We visited Astaranga on 24th November, 1999 to distribute baby food and biscuits to the villagers of Gundalba. A boat trip was also made to the mouth of river Devi and we saw the two new mouths which had opened up south of the original mouth and south of Nadia Khia island where the turtle camps are set up. The coastal shelter belt comprising of casuarina trees was completely destroyed.



The local fishermen reported the sighting of corpses on the river mouth. Fishing operations by trawlers of Nuagarh had not commenced so far. The Andhra trawlers had moved to deeper waters and we could not see any trawler within 5 kms of the coast.

(Reports of mortality have started coming in and several hundred dead turtles have already been counted on the coast. Operation Kachhapa and the Forest Department are attempting start patrolling operations – Eds.)

Indian Fisheries Over the Past 50 Years

Part 1: The impact of mechanisation on the coastal fisheries

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India, with her 6000 km coastal line and innumerable rivers, lagoons, lakes, reservoirs and ponds, has one of the largest population of fisher people in the world. The total