



## 'Your old material and the ecology of Sunderbans'



"We live in a disaster prone area. High tide is a regular phenomenon here. This mangrove wall is our only shield from disasters." Thakur Das Burman, Kalitala village, Sunderbans says looking at the tree lined expanse, in front of him.

Sunderbans, the largest mangrove forest and the only mangrove tiger land on the globe is also a world heritage site in West Bengal. This delta has a unique ecology rich in flora and fauna. Its home to more than 260 species of animals from Royal Bengal Tigers, crocodiles and pythons, to name a few.. For the rest of the country Mangroves play an important role in carbon absorption; they use their upper roots to absorb carbon from the swampy soil and maintain the ecological balance in the environment.

Today the mangroves of Sunderbans are under a severe threat from encroaching corporate interests and poachers and the negligence of local administration etc. A lot of species have gone extinct while many are on the verge of extinction.



The change in natural environment has its direct impact on the pattern of disasters here.

The increased intensity of extreme events in the Sunderbans, potentially due to climate change, poses great challenges to the safety of the human settlements in the delta. The devastating results has been seen in the 2009, Aila cyclone. In the last 30 years approx. 7,000 people have been

displaced from their original homes and/or islands in the Sunderbans Delta as a direct result of sea level rise, coastal erosion, cyclone incidences and coastal flooding.



Before

Reaching Kalitala, the last village on the Island Dulduli, (in Sunderbans area of 24 North Pargana) takes hours of travel, including changing of almost seven modes of transportation from train to thela rickshaw to boats.

It was one of thousands of villages which were completely devastated by cyclone Aila.



After

Like many other indigenous communities the people of Kalitala had also lived in harmony with their flora and fauna for generations. After cyclone Aila when Goonj reached this village isolated from all rescue & relief

agencies for a long time, the people identified a problem they could work on. The brick road in the middle of the village that intersected and connected the last embankment on the river Kalindi was washed away by the cyclone. So when the water receded after the cyclone the construction of that road was the first thing that was undertaken under Goonj's CFW initiative. People got together to collect the scattered bricks and start the

construction of a 1.5 km motor able road on their own. This road provides connectivity to crucial services like Public Health Centre, market, coaching centre, school and sources of drinking water.



In 2011, as a part of Goonj's rehabilitation efforts mangrove saplings were planted in an area of across the length of 800x200 feet under 'Cloth for Work' initiative, in the Cyclone Aila affected part. Three years later, we found that the saplings had blossomed into lush green mangrove.

In the coming years these trees will not only prevent soil erosion and act as a shield to natural calamities for the village, they will protect the

habitat and also help withstand cyclone or floods for the village. Enriching the local ecology the forest will also contribute to the local economy apart from providing a safe sanctuary to various flora and fauna.



Every year hundreds of village communities across India work on their own community needs under Goonj's flagship initiative 'Cloth for work' where the material collected from the cities becomes a motivating force.

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