

In this follow-up to Infochange's exclusive series on the impact of climate change on villages along the Orissa coast, **Richard Mahapatra** reports on the migration of families across Kendrapara district as the sea reaches their doorsteps



The swift incursion of the sea has gobbled up the village of Satabhaya in Orissa's coastal Kendrapara district. The village is at present surrounded by seawater, and only eight families are left here. "They too are negotiating a safer place to migrate to," says Sashmita Das, sarpanch of the village panchayat.

Infochangeindia.org was the first to highlight the plight of villages in this area that are being submerged by the sea. The report was part of a detailed study on the impact of climate change on Orissa. The article on Satabhaya linked global warming and the resultant rise in sea levels with the sea's ingress into the land

â€¢ [Disaster dossier: The impact of climate change on Orissa](#)

â€¢ [Falling off the map: Orissa's submerged villages](#)

â€¢ [Sea levels are rising: People's perceptions and scientific projections](#)

In the last four months, more than 100 families have been rendered homeless as the sea marches on, relentlessly submerging homes and agricultural lands. Families from Satabhaya and Kanhupur villages have migrated to Okilpara village, eight kilometres from the coast. "Since January this year, the sea has been unusually furious. The incursion has been faster than in 2007," says Das.

The village panchayat estimates that since January, 93 families have left Kanhupur village. In Satabhaya, around 25 families moved out when the sea reached their doorsteps. Left with no options, not even a government rehabilitation package, people have been settling in nearby villages like Okilpara. And, as earlier reported, this has triggered conflicts.

According to local estimates, the sea has advanced at least 30 feet into Kanhupur village this year alone. Two borewells that were used by local residents to gauge sea levels are already

submerged. The panchayat office in Satabhaya (where I stayed in 2006 whilst researching the article) is just a few metres from the sea now. In 2006, the sea was around 200 metres from the office.

During high tide in Satabhaya, seawater enters the 800-year-old Panchubarahi temple that was located two kilometres from the sea 10 years ago. In 2006, the sea was around 200 metres away; in January and April this year tidal waves entered the temple.

On April 2, the turbulent sea grabbed substantial parts of both Satabhaya and Kanhupur villages. During September 20-23, 2007, the villages lost 25 houses during a low-pressure phase. "The sea advanced at least 10 feet into Kanhupur village on September 21. It wiped out the government-run primary school. One of the borewells catering to the drinking water needs of both villages was consumed by the sea," says Asish Senapati, a local reporter working with an English daily.

Kendrapara collector Kashinath Sahu concedes that rehabilitation has not been possible despite government assurances. "The resettlement colony for displaced people is yet to come up. Major areas in and around Satabhaya come under classified forestland, and this has led to delays in resettlement," he says.



Between 1963 and 1999, Orissa experienced 13 major disasters which killed 22,228 people and left 34,21,000 homeless

Orissa is slowly waking up to the real threat of sea erosion. And the link between it and climate change. In the last one year there has been massive sea erosion in Puri, Gopalpur and other areas of Kendrapara district. The marine drive in Puri was badly damaged last year due to sea erosion.

An Orissa assembly committee on natural calamities has sent a draft memorandum to the Union government asking for Rs 7,000 crore to help save the coastal villages from sea erosion. The committee has also asked the department of oceanography to study the causes of rising sea levels and suggest ways to tackle the problem.

*(Richard Mahapatra is based in New Delhi and writes on environment and development. In 2006 he was awarded an Infochangeindia Research Fellowship for reportage on the impact of climate change in Orissa)*

**InfoChange News & Features, April 2008**