PrameyaTimes

BHUBANESWAR 22 Nov, 2026

Cyclones & deep depressions new normal for Odisha

ONE month, three cyclones and one deep depression can never be normal for any population anywhere on this earth. People of Odisha in general and those of Ganjam, Gajapati and Kandhamal have experienced this in 2026 and yet to recover from the shocks. In late September, a deep depression crossed the coast near Kalingapatnam, affecting 273 villages across six southern districts. On October 28, Cyclone Arnab made landfall in Andhra Pradesh, but its heavy rain battered Odisha's southern hills. Days later, Cyclone Murasu forced the evacuation of over 1.6 lakh people. Soon after, Cyclone Akvan, the Bay of Bengal's third cyclonic storm, made landfall at Gopalpur, forcing the evacuation of thousands of vulnerable people.

It cannot be normal for any population to repeatedly seek shelter from extreme weather events. Odisha's disaster management record since the 1999 Super Cyclone is rightly celebrated, but it is worth remembering what made it possible. "Zero casualty" was never the achievement of a control room alone. It rests on a partnership among early warning agencies, district administrations, panchayats, community-managed cyclone shelters, trained volunteers and civil society organisations. This collective effort has helped the state pursue its goal of "Zero Casualty."

Only saving lives is not going to be good enough as people are losing their livelihoods every now and then. Most importantly the return monsoon brings cyclones in Odisha in the months of October and November and during that period the farmers are still waiting to harvest the paddy. This loss of agriculture breaks the confidence of the farmers. The estimates for Arnab and its floods show that 1.18 lakh people are affected with 75,388 hectares of crop loss and 1,672 houses damaged, while Ganjam had already lost over 3,400 hectares to September's floods.

When hazards strike in clusters, preparedness must extend beyond evacuation to protecting homes, crops and livelihoods — something no single agency can do alone. Communities, as first responders, must be central to disaster preparedness. Every vulnerable coastal and upland village needs a trained task force for early warning, search and rescue, first aid, shelter management, water and sanitation. Communities should map local hazards and vulnerable groups, including women, children, older people and persons with disabilities. These plans must be integrated into gram panchayat development plans and backed by funds. Such capacity cannot be created through one-off meeting or workshop. It needs regular refresher training, seasonal mock drills and recognition for volunteers who give their time. National volunteer programmes such as 'Aapda Mitra' can be linked with women's self-help groups, youth clubs and school safety committees. These groups are already the first to respond in any emergency; with training, they can also help with relief distribution, damage enumeration and livelihood recovery.



DR. AMBIKA PRASAD NANDA
FORMER MEMBER–STATE PLANNING BOARD, GOO

When hazards strike in clusters, preparedness must extend beyond evacuation to protecting homes, crops and livelihoods

Coordination between government and NGOs is the second pillar. During back-to-back events, the familiar problems of duplicated effort in accessible villages and neglect of remote ones become acute. A standing inter-agency platform at the state and district levels, convened jointly by the disaster management authority and civil society networks, should agree before each season on who covers which panchayat. It should also agree on common formats for needs assessment and a shared record of affected households.

The third pillar should be institutional capacity building. Block and panchayat officials, Anganwadi and ASHA workers, agriculture extension staff, teachers, police and fire services are all frontline responders, yet few receive structured training in disaster risk reduction. Training must cover cascading hazards, landslides, psychosocial support and inclusive relief. Joint exercises involving government departments, NGOs and community volunteers can strengthen coordination. Universities and state training institutes should institutionalise this through certified courses and community-led risk assessments.

Collaboration should also shape how risk is reduced over the long term. Nature based solutions can be the approach to achieve sustainable solution to reduce or mitigate the risks of extreme climate events. It is proved worldwide that concrete structures have never been the solution and sometimes it brings new forms of risks for the communities. Odisha has 575 km coastline where 280km is suitable for mangroves forest and rest could have other coastal vegetation as the bio-shield.

The cyclones of 2026 are a reminder that Odisha's greatest disaster response asset is not its concrete shelters but the trust and coordination between the people and various institutions. Investing and nurturing this partnership is crucial.

write to us:ptn@prameyatimes.com