

## AFTER FANI

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

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The Odisha government did a creditable job in minimising the immediate impact of Cyclone Fani, which made landfall in Puri 10 days ago. Besides disaster relief workers and police, the state's administration roped in civil society volunteers to evacuate millions of people, who were moved to cyclone shelters. It warned fishermen to not venture towards the sea and summoned personnel and equipment to clear roads and remove uprooted trees and other debris. But the challenge posed by Fani is not yet over. The cyclone has left behind a trail of devastation and suffering in 14 districts of Odisha. According to official records, more than a crore people have been affected, almost all the kuccha houses have been razed, rendering nearly 50 per cent of the people in these districts homeless, electricity and water supplies have been hit, most of the standing paddy crop is lost and sources of livelihood, including coconut orchards and fish boats, have been destroyed.

Like in its efforts to warn people about the cyclone, the Odisha government has involved the civil society in the rehabilitation effort. It has launched a web portal for crowd funding projects for this purpose. Women's self-help groups have been roped into the endeavour. The state government has also announced subsidies to restore agrarian livelihoods and assistance to fisher people to buy new boats and fishing nets. However, to restore the fishing economy, the government needs to look beyond the boat owners. Those who do not own boats will not have work till the vessels destroyed by the calamity are repaired or replaced. Landless agricultural labourers will, similarly, need employment before work on the fields resumes. As it reaches out to the people whose lives and livelihoods have been ravaged, the Odisha government's priority should also be to ensure that social inequalities are not aggravated in the cyclone's aftermath. It should act immediately on reports that the post-Fani stress has found expression in the deepening of caste faultlines and conflict.

Odisha is no stranger to severe cyclones. However, these storms usually occur in the last quarter of the year. Cyclones in April-May are much weaker than those that are formed in October-December. Fani has been ascribed to global warming by some experts. These are still early days for the science that links unseasonal high intensity storms to the very warm sea surface temperatures in the Indian Ocean. But, increasingly, climate scientists are coming around to a consensus that global warming will precipitate extreme weather events — like Fani — in the Indian Ocean. Odisha's response to the cyclone shows that the country has the scientific acumen to assess the intensity of such events — and the administrative resolve to minimise loss of lives. The challenge of Odisha, and other coastal states, is to ensure that peoples' suffering because of the vagaries of nature is minimised.

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