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Enhancing Cyclone Resilience

A Systems Thinking Examination of Odisha's Disaster Management Framework and Its Worldwide Applicability

INCOSE AOSEC · 2025

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PUBLICATION DATE

July, 2026

SUBMISSION #

58

INCOSE PUBLICATIONS

Enhancing Cyclone Resilience: A Systems Thinking Examination of Odisha's Disaster Management Framework and Its Worldwide Applicability

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Abstract

The evolution of Odisha from a cyclone-prone state to a benchmark in disaster resilience illustrates the effectiveness of systems thinking in navigating intricate emergency scenarios. This article employs systems thinking methodologies, notably causal loop diagrams (CLDs) and stock-and-flow representations, to dissect Odisha's cyclone response progression. Notable achievements, including no fatalities in Cyclone Dana (2024), underscore the value of integrated strategies. We present an expandable international framework for cyclone and hurricane risk reduction, drawing from Odisha's practices and adaptable to various settings, supported by comparisons, quantitative data, and local narratives.

Keywords – CLD (Causal Loop Diagrams), OSDMA (Odisha State Disaster Management Authority).

Introduction

Systems thinking offers a comprehensive method for tackling multifaceted issues by emphasizing connections, cycles, and unexpected results within a setup. Odisha, located on India’s cyclone-prone Bay of Bengal coast, has transformed from a region devastated by the 1999 Super Cyclone, which claimed nearly 10,000 lives, into a global model for disaster resilience. This transformation, achieving zero casualties in Cyclone Dana (2024), exemplifies the application of systems thinking—a holistic approach to understanding complex, interconnected systems through feedback loops, delays, and emergent behaviors. This paper, prepared for an international systems thinking conference, adopts a case study approach to analyze Odisha’s cyclone management, model it is using causal loop diagrams (CLDs), and propose a scalable global risk mitigation blueprint in the aftermath, Odisha adopted innovative measures and facilities, turning into a leading example of strength. This article seeks to:

- Investigate Odisha's cyclone resilience mechanism through a case study lens.

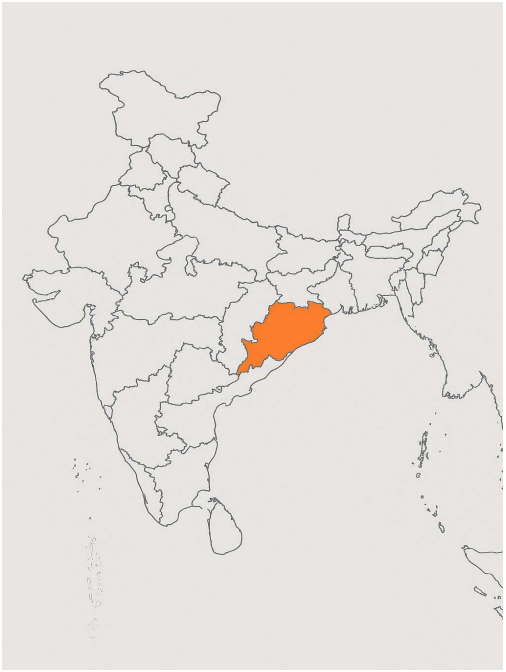
- Represent the mechanism via causal loop diagrams and stock-and-flow models.

- Pinpoint essential elements, strategic intervention areas, and unique aspects via comparisons.

- Suggest a risk reduction strategy applicable on a global scale for similar threats, bolstered by data and stories.

Background and Context

Odisha’s 480-km coastline makes it highly vulnerable to tropical cyclones, exacerbated by climate change-driven sea surface temperature (SST) rises [IPCC, 2023]. The 1999 Super Cyclone exposed critical gaps in preparedness, prompting the establishment of the Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) in 2000. Since then, interventions like 909 multi-purpose cyclone shelters, annual drills training over 500,000 volunteers, and advanced early warning systems have reduced casualties from 10,000 in 1999 to 21 in Cyclone Phailin (2013), 64 in Fani (2019), and zero in Dana (2024) [OSDMA, 2025; The Hindu, 2024]. This case study examines how systems thinking underpins this success, offering insights for global application.



Literature Review

Systems Thinking in Complex Problem Solving

link and evolve. It uses instruments like causal loop diagrams (CLDs) and stock-and-flow representations to depict changing environments. Cycles that reinforce or stabilize, combined with time lags, determine how the network behaves, making this method suitable for managing unpredictable situations like natural calamities. Recent bibliometric analyses reveal a growing emphasis on network-based visualizations to uncover patterns in resilience studies [MDPI, 2020].

Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Models

International guidelines, such as the Sendai Framework for Reducing Disaster Risks (2015–2030), stress evaluating threats, improving administration, funding durability, and boosting readiness for effective recovery. Odisha's method excels in combining local readiness efforts, alert mechanisms, and durable structures, markedly lowering storm-related losses. Evidence synthesis reviews highlight the role of holistic perspectives in combining diverse data sources for robust models [PubMed Central, 2022].

Role of Causal Loop Diagrams in Disaster Modeling

Causal loop diagrams (CLDs) are essential for illustrating disaster scenarios, showing how factors like storm strength, public confidence, and resource allocation connect. By revealing cycles that magnify or moderate effects, CLDs aid in crafting focused plans and lasting solutions, confirming that actions consider the entire network. Assessments in related fields emphasize evaluating skills like network analysis in model development [Wiley Online Library, 2021].

Systems Thinking Perspective on Odisha’s Transformation

Historical Context and Interventions

The 1999 Super Cyclone highlighted Odisha's exposure, sparking major overhauls. The formation of the Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) marked the start of a forward-looking strategy. Primary actions encompassed:

- Erecting versatile storm refuges

- Conducting readiness exercises

- Partnering for improved forecasting

- Rehabilitating coastal ecosystems to cushion against wave impacts

These steps have yielded substantial improvements, with storm-related incidents dropping dramatically in recent years.

Emergent Outcomes and Counterintuitive Results

Despite regular intense storms, Odisha has seen a sharp decline in negative effects. For example, one major cyclone involved relocating many individuals swiftly, resulting in minimal harm compared to past events. This surprising progress arises from linked tactics that bolster communal durability and assurance, demonstrating the strength of a networked viewpoint in crisis oversight.

System Variables and Parameters

Variable	Description
Cyclone Intensity	Severity of storms, influenced by ocean conditions and environmental shifts
Early Warning Systems	Prompt and precise notifications to local groups
Communication Effectiveness	Scope and sharpness of advisories through various channels
Community Trust	Faith in officials and setups, impacting adherence
Evacuation Compliance	Readiness to heed relocation directives
Government Investment	Finances for readiness and recovery

Media Coverage	Raising knowledge and assurance via channels
Preparedness	Education and preparation steps
Infrastructure Resilience	Robustness of refuges and paths
Community Vulnerability	Economic and social aspects heightening danger
Damage Level	Scale of material ruin from storms
Casualties	Toll on lives
Economic Losses	Economic consequences of ruin and restoration

Table 1: Key Variables in Odisha's Cyclone Resilience System

System Architecture: Components and Interactions

Odisha's crisis handling is a connected network, with OSDMA serving as the main coordinator. Meteorological forecasts activate notifications sent through multiple means and supported by trained helpers, directing people to secure locations. Coastal vegetation restoration helps soften storm effects, while training sessions prepare for action. This linkage minimizes human impact and destruction, highlighting how each part reinforces the overall setup.

Causal Loop Diagram of Odisha's Cyclone Management System

Key Variables and Causal Relationships

The CLD represents Odisha's network with central elements like readiness level, public assurance, relocation adherence, resource allocation, alert mechanisms, and information spread. Main links include readiness level boosting relocation adherence and lessening human impact, public assurance improving relocation adherence and group participation, resource allocation advancing alert mechanisms and facility durability, alert mechanisms refining readiness level and information spread, and information spread fortifying public assurance.

Feedback Loops

The CLD uncovers cycles that reinforce or balance, including trust and readiness reinforcing one another, resource allocation developing alert mechanisms which advance readiness level, information spread growing public assurance which raises relocation adherence, storm strength raising harm extent leading to human impact which prompts resource allocation for readiness level, harm extent causing financial impact which drives resource allocation for facility durability, human impact leading to resource allocation for alert mechanisms boosting relocation adherence, and public assurance promoting relocation adherence decreasing human impact and strengthening public assurance.

System Delays and Nonlinearities

Time lags appear in resource allocation to facility durability as constructing refuges requires extended periods, gaining from prior events to readiness level as strategy changes happen slowly, and public as-

surance to relocation adherence as assurance development needs ongoing positive results. These lags create non-linear effects, where outcomes appear progressively, necessitating forward planning.

Leverage Points

Strategic actions include education initiatives in learning centers improving readiness level and group participation, neighborhood storm refugees raising refuge access and relocation efficiency, and channel involvement amplifying information spread and public assurance. These actions bolster balancing cycles and offset reinforcing ones.

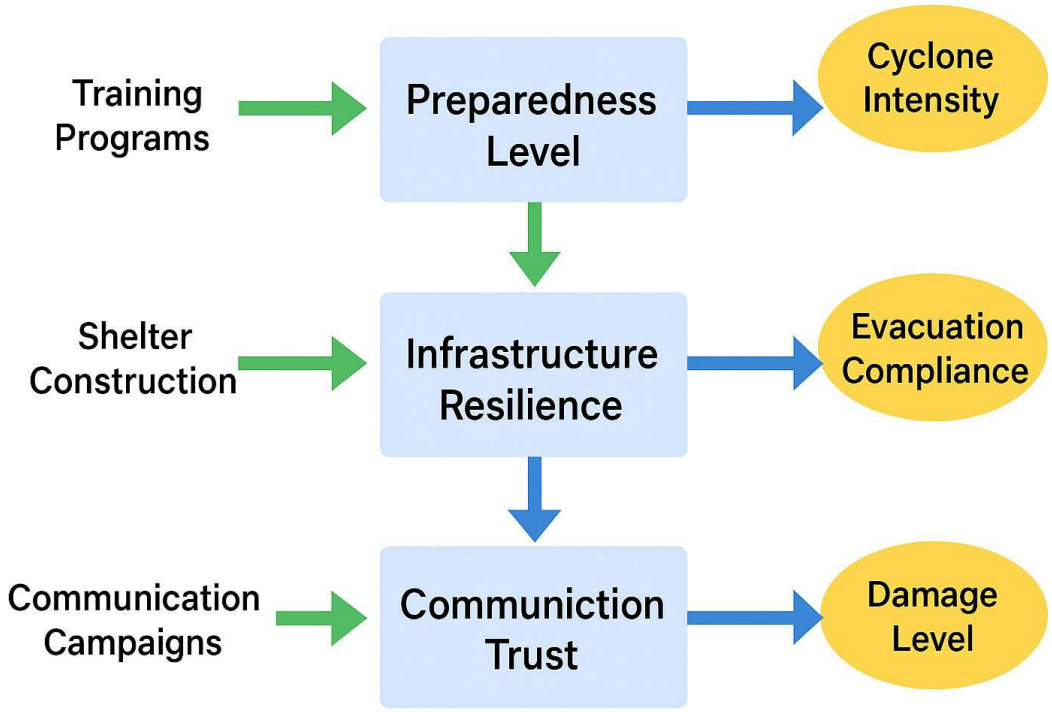


Figure 1: Stock and Flow Diagram illustrating Odisha's cyclone resilience system using systems thinking.

Description: This illustration outlines main links and cycles among central elements, such as readiness level and public assurance. Cycles show how assurance and readiness reinforce one another, while balancing cycles demonstrate how resource allocation counters storm strength and human impact. Time lags and strategic areas are noted to inform actions.

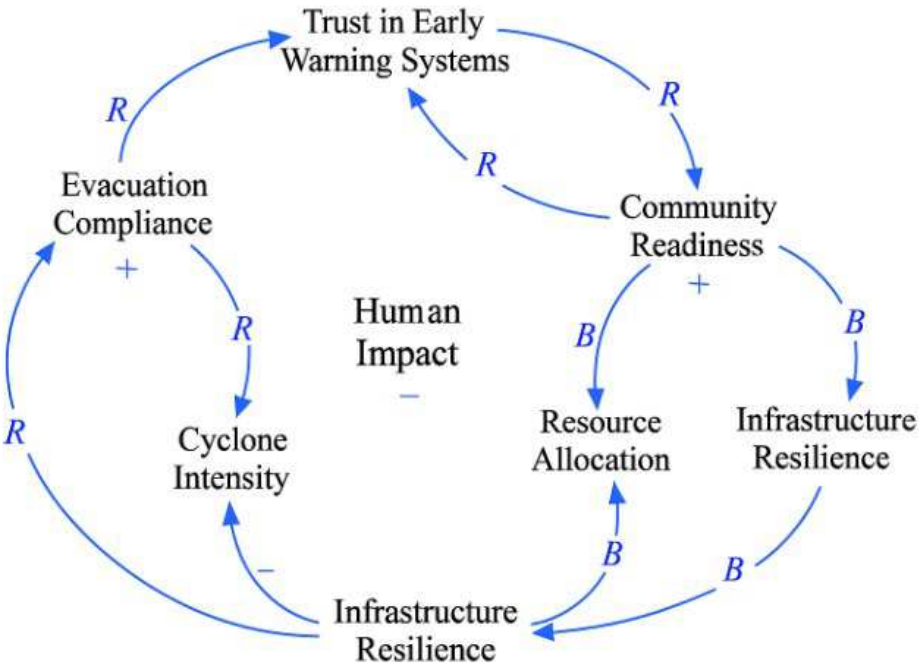


Figure 2: Casual loop Diagram (CLD) using systems thinking.

Risk Mitigation Blueprint for Global Disaster Management

Blueprint Components

Based on Odisha's framework, this plan offers an adjustable structure for storm risk lessening internationally, with setting up specialized groups to organize activities, funding artificial intelligence and orbital information for precise predictions, employing text messages and local aides to guarantee advisories arrive everywhere, building refuges that function as local centers, performing exercises and threat learning, applying stormproof construction rules, rejuvenating coastal vegetation and wet areas to soften wave forces, forming protection and reserve funds, advancing joint work, and reserving finances for rebuilding.

Implementation Challenges and Mitigation

Using this plan worldwide encounters obstacles with collaborating with worldwide entities or businesses to address resource limits, customizing methods to regional customs to handle social variations, and applying affordable choices like broadcast notifications to manage tech shortfalls. These tactics guarantee the plan's effectiveness in any location.

Lessons Learned and Global Implications

Odisha's model gives a pattern for storm-susceptible areas internationally with funding regional ability as group education and readiness are basic, sustaining group assurance as clear message exchange and effective relocations build faith, and combining tech as sophisticated alert structures improve reaction abilities. The CLD method permits adjustment to varied settings, making Odisha's tactics expandable globally.

Conclusion

Odisha's transformation from a cyclone-prone region to a global model of disaster resilience demonstrates the power of systems thinking in managing complex emergencies. Using causal loop diagrams (CLDs) and stock-and-flow models, the study shows how interconnected variables—such as public trust, readiness, evacuation compliance, and infrastructure resilience—create reinforcing and balancing feedback loops that significantly reduce human and economic impacts. Strategic interventions like early warning systems, community education, and ecological restoration have achieved impressive results, including zero fatalities during Cyclone Dana in 2024. The CLD analysis identifies key leverage points such as media engagement and local shelters, while also considering system delays and nonlinearities that affect long-term success. Based on Odisha's experience, the paper presents a globally adaptable blueprint for cyclone and hurricane risk mitigation, highlighting AI-driven forecasting, community-based preparedness, and resilient infrastructure. Despite challenges like resource limitations and cultural differences, the framework offers scalable solutions for various regions. Ultimately, Odisha's journey emphasizes the importance of integrated, forward-looking strategies and affirms systems thinking as a strong approach to disaster management worldwide.

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Biography

Sharad Rayguru. Sharad is a Lead Systems Designer at Philips Healthcare India, specializing in systems engineering and model-based systems engineering. He has driven R&D initiatives, enhanced best practices, and conducted impactful research showcasing the value of systems engineering in medical devices R&D. Sharad holds a degree in Mechanical Engineering, a master's in Control Systems, is a member of TLI Cohort 9, and an experienced Systems Engineering practitioner.

Nirmalya Mishra is Engineering Technical Leader – Systems Engineering (CSEP) at Wabtec Corporation with 11+ years of experience in systems engineering and product development for railway systems and EV infrastructure. He holds a master's from IIT Kharagpur and has contributed to patented technologies and award-winning projects.