



UPSC &amp; STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# Counting People Is Not Counting Disaster Risk — The 16th Finance Commission's Flawed DRI



1 April 2026

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

GS PAPERS

ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

**BharatNotes**Free UPSC notes, MCQs, PYQ analysis. **100% Free.**[bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com) →

ADVERTISE

**Advertise with Ujiyari**

Reach thousands of UPSC aspirants daily.

[epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)

# Counting People Is Not Counting Disaster Risk — The 16th Finance Commission's Flawed DRI

 The Hindu

1 April 2026

GS2

GS3

 The Hindu

5 tags ▾



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"Odisha has India's highest disaster hazard score yet receives less disaster funding than large low-risk states under the 16th Finance Commission's formula. Should disaster funding be population-weighted or risk-weighted?"*

## WHY IN NEWS

The 16th Finance Commission allocated ₹2,04,401 crore to State Disaster Response Funds (SDRF) — but the Disaster Risk Index (DRI) formula used to distribute this allocation has drawn sharp criticism. Odisha, which holds India's highest hazard score, received a reduced share compared to its risk level because the formula over-weights total state population rather than population actually exposed to hazards.

## THE EDITORIAL'S CORE ARGUMENT

The Hindu's editorial — "Counting People Is Not Counting Disaster Risk" — makes a deceptively simple point: distributing disaster funds on the basis of total state population, rather than the population living in hazard-prone areas, systematically discriminates against smaller states with high but geographically concentrated risk exposure.

**The paradox in concrete terms:** Odisha, the state most devastated by cyclones (1999 super-cyclone, Fani 2019), with the highest hazard score in the country, received *less* than its proportionate share of the new SDRF. Uttar Pradesh — a large, densely populated state with far lower cyclone or coastal hazard — received more simply because it has more people.

## THE 16TH FINANCE COMMISSION'S DISASTER FRAMEWORK

### How the DRI Formula Works (and Fails)

The Disaster Risk Index used by the 16th Finance Commission aggregates:

- ❶ **Hazard score** (frequency and intensity of floods, cyclones, earthquakes, droughts)
- ❷ **Vulnerability score** — problematically measured only by per capita income (inverse of wealth)
- ❸ **Population weight** — the overall state population, which dominates the formula

**The flaw:** Vulnerability in disaster science is not just about income. It includes:

- Quality of housing stock (kutchha vs pucca)
- Access to early warning systems and evacuation infrastructure
- Geographic accessibility (coastal vs landlocked, terrain)
- Social vulnerability (gender, age, disability, caste — who survives vs who dies in disasters)

By reducing vulnerability to per capita income alone, the Commission ignores the multi-dimensional reality of disaster risk that NDMA’s own frameworks acknowledge.

## What the Numbers Show

STATE	HAZARD SCORE	SDRF SHARE	POPULATION SIZE
Odisha	Highest in India	Reduced from 15th FC	~4.5 crore
Uttar Pradesh	Moderate	Increased	~22 crore
Maharashtra	Moderate-High	High	~12 crore

The formula’s population weight amplifies the advantages of large states — creating an inverse relationship between actual risk and funding in smaller but highly hazard-prone states.

## WHY THIS MATTERS — THE STRUCTURAL PROBLEM

### Disaster Management Act, 2005 — The Legal Framework

India’s disaster governance rests on:

- **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA):** Policy body under PM; issues guidelines
- **State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs):** Implementation in states
- **NDRF (National Disaster Response Fund):** Central fund; deployed for large-scale disasters
- **SDRF (State Disaster Response Fund):** State-level; used for immediate relief; partly funded by Centre

The 16th Finance Commission’s SDRF allocation (₹2,04,401 crore over 5 years) is the primary source of state-level disaster response financing. Getting the formula wrong has direct life-safety consequences.

## Odisha's Track Record — Why It Matters More Here

Odisha sits at the intersection of three major hazard zones:

- **Cyclone zone:** Bay of Bengal — responsible for 35% of global tropical cyclones that make landfall
- **Flood zone:** 10 major river systems; recurring Mahanadi floods
- **Heat wave zone:** Increasing frequency; extreme heat deaths

Despite this, Odisha has become a model for disaster preparedness — nearly zero-casualty cyclone evacuations (Fani 2019: 1.2 million evacuated in 48 hours vs 10,000+ deaths in 1999 super-cyclone). This preparedness requires sustained state investment — which underfunded SDRF allocations undermine.

### THE EDITORIAL'S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Hindu editorial proposes a three-part reform:

- 1 **Replace total-state-population weight with hazard-exposed-population:** Count only the people who actually live in flood plains, cyclone-prone coasts, seismic zones, and drought-prone areas.
- 2 **Build a composite vulnerability index:** Beyond per capita income, incorporate housing quality, gender ratio in evacuation (women are more vulnerable), age distribution, access to early warning, and past mortality rates.
- 3 **Mandate NDMA to develop standardised assessment frameworks:** So future Finance Commissions have a scientific basis rather than improvised proxies.

### THE BROADER FISCAL FEDERALISM ISSUE

This is not merely a technical formula problem. It reflects a deeper tension in India's fiscal federalism:

**Large states have structural advantages** in Finance Commission allocations because:

- Population is used as the primary metric across most devolution formulas
- Large states have more MPs, more political leverage
- Smaller, more specialised states (disaster-prone, mineral-rich, forest-heavy) are systematically disadvantaged

The 15th Finance Commission had acknowledged some of these distortions by introducing the Forest Cover and Tax Effort criteria. The 16th Finance Commission's disaster formula, however, regresses to a simpler and less equitable approach.

**UPSC RELEVANCE**

16th Finance Commission; NDMA; SDRF; NDRF; Disaster Management Act 2005; Odisha cyclone track record.

**MAINS GS-2:**

“Finance Commission allocations for disaster management — evaluate whether the current Disaster Risk Index formula adequately captures vulnerability and recommends reforms.”

**MAINS GS-3:**

“Population-based versus risk-based approaches in disaster financing — analyse the trade-offs and suggest an equitable framework for India.”

**INTERVIEW:**

“Odisha has achieved near-zero cyclone casualties through world-class preparedness but receives less disaster funding than low-risk large states. Is this a failure of federal design?”

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

### 16TH FINANCE COMMISSION (DISASTER FINANCE):

SDRF allocation: ₹2,04,401 crore (over 5-year award period 2026-31)

DRI (Disaster Risk Index): composite of hazard score + vulnerability (per capita income) + population weight

Criticism: population weight dominates; hazard-exposed population not used

Odisha paradox: highest hazard score → reduced allocation due to smaller total population

### INDIA'S DISASTER GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK:

Disaster Management Act: 2005

NDMA: National Disaster Management Authority — under PM; policy body

NDRF: National Disaster Response Force — Central; mobilised for large-scale disasters

SDRF: State Disaster Response Fund — primary state-level relief financing; 75% Central share for general states, 90% for NE + hilly states

NDRF (teams): National Disaster Response Force — 16 battalions; Central paramilitary; operational response

### ODISHA — DISASTER PROFILE:

Coastline: 480 km (Bay of Bengal — cyclone-prone)

Major disaster: 1999 super-cyclone — 10,000+ deaths; Fani (2019) — 1.2 million evacuated, near-zero casualties

10 major river systems; recurring Mahanadi/Brahmani/Baitarani floods

Disaster preparedness ranked among world's best for cyclone response

### FINANCE COMMISSION:

16th Finance Commission: Chairman M. Govinda Rao; constituted 2023; report submitted 2026

15th Finance Commission: N.K. Singh (Chairman); introduced Forest Cover and Tax Effort criteria

Constitutional basis: Article 280 — mandatory every 5 years

Devolution formula factors: Population (2011 census), Area, Forest Cover, Tax Effort, Demographic Performance

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Sendai Framework (2015-2030): Global disaster risk reduction framework; Target E: substantially increase number of countries with national/local DRR strategies by 2020

India's NDM Plan 2019 aligns with Sendai Framework; calls for multi-hazard early warning systems

Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI): India-founded (2019) at UN Climate Summit; 50+ members

Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF): state-level rapid response force — model for other states

Sources: [The Hindu](#), [NDMA](#), [PIB](#), [Finance Commission of India](#)

## RELATED DAILY ARTICLES

1 Apr [Current Affairs Today — April 1, 2026](#)

1 Apr [CEC Removal Motion — Constitutional Safeguards for...](#)

1 Apr [Income Tax Act, 2025 — India's New Tax Code Replaces...](#)

1 Apr [India's CCTV Certification Mandate — Digital Security,...](#)

[← PREVIOUS EDITORIAL](#)

[Social Media Platform Liability — When Design Becomes Defect](#)

[NEXT EDITORIAL →](#)

[A Reminder on Climate Action Amid Conflict — India's Updated...](#)



CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

## Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/04/finance-commission-disaster-risk-odisha-paradox/>

### ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

## BharatNotes

Free UPSC study platform — subject-wise notes across all 4 GS papers, Prelims MCQs, Mains answer frameworks, PYQ analysis & progress tracking. **100% Free • No Login Required.**

[Start Preparing → bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com)

### 📌 OPPORTUNITY

## Advertise with Ujiyari

Reach **thousands of serious UPSC & State PCS aspirants** daily through our PDFs, website, and social channels.

**Ideal for:** Coaching institutes • EdTech platforms • Book publishers • Exam prep apps

[✉ epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)

Write to us for rates & media kit

Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs · [ujiyari.com](http://ujiyari.com) · [bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com)