

PRESS RELEASE

COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL OF INDIA

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CAG's Audit Report on National Social Assistance Programme Presented in Parliament

The Report No. 10 of 2023 of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India – Union Government (Civil) contains significant results of the Performance Audit of National Social Assistance Programme covering the period from 2017-18 to 2020-21 was laid in Parliament here today.

National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) is being implemented by Ministry of Rural Development since 15 August 1995 to provide social assistance benefit to the BPL households in the case of the old age, disabled, widows and death of the primary breadwinner.

The NSAP aims at ensuring minimum national standard for social assistance in addition to the benefits that the States are currently providing or might provide in future.

At present, NSAP includes five sub-schemes, of which, three are pension schemes as detailed under:

- (i) Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS),
- (ii) Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS), and,
- (iii) Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS).

The other two sub-schemes are not pension schemes, *viz.*

- (iv) National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)—a one-time assistance to the bereaved family in the event of death of the breadwinner, and,
- (v) Annapurna Scheme—food security to the eligible old age persons who have remained uncovered under IGNOAPS.

This Audit Report highlights the audit findings on implementation of the National Social Assistance Programme. A summary of the observations included in the Audit Report is given below:

- ❖ Total central expenditure for NSAP was ₹ 34,432 crore during 2017-21 whereas total States/UTs expenditure on Centrally Sponsored Scheme of NSAP was ₹ 1,09,573 crore during the same period.
- ❖ NSAP was either not fully implemented or being partially implemented in some of the States/UTs. In particular, NFBS was not being implemented in many States/UTs. NSAP was to be implemented in all urban and rural areas throughout the country, but it was either not being implemented or partially implemented by some of the States/UTs, leading to deprivation of NSAP benefits to the eligible beneficiaries in those areas.
- ❖ In the absence of proactive identification and non-maintenance of database of eligible beneficiaries as intended, the Scheme was being implemented in a demand-driven mode where benefits were provided to only those beneficiaries who applied for pensions/benefits under NSAP themselves. The eligible beneficiaries who were unaware/lack resources to apply for the benefits were left out of ambit of NSAP. Further, some States could not even cover beneficiaries equal to the cap fixed by the Ministry.
- ❖ Non-constitution of special verification teams and non-conduct of annual verification indicated ineffective checks at the ground level for weeding out ineligible beneficiaries. Absence of prescribed procedure for proactive identification of beneficiaries coupled with lack of Information, education and communication (IEC) activities resulted in delayed coverage/non-coverage of eligible beneficiaries from the ambit of NSAP and non-achievement of universal coverage of beneficiaries.
- ❖ Delays in submission of proposal by States for 2nd instalment impacted the release of funds by the Ministry which in turn affected the frequency of distribution of pension. Further, there were delays in release of funds by States/UTs to implementing departments even though the funds were to be released to implementing departments within three days.
- ❖ Funds of ₹ 2.83 crore earmarked for IEC activities under NSAP were diverted for campaigning of other schemes. Further, total funds of ₹ 57.45 crore were diverted in six States/UTs for other schemes/purposes.
- ❖ Funds amounting to ₹ 18.78 crore were lying idle for a period ranging from one to five years in eight States/UTs. Idling of funds at State/District level shows lack of financial monitoring on part of the States/UTs which manifested in irregular payment of pension to the beneficiaries.
- ❖ Funds amounting to ₹ 5.98 crore were incurred on inadmissible items in 10 States/UTs which indicated lack of financial discipline and violation of NSAP Guidelines.
- ❖ There were delays in identification of potential beneficiaries and sanction of pension to eligible beneficiaries. Non-disbursement of pension from pension effective date resulted in short payment of ₹ 61.71 crore to 92,602 beneficiaries in 11 States/UTs.
- ❖ Only 11 States/UTs disbursed monthly pensions as envisaged in NSAP guidelines. Four States were making quarterly pension payment whereas two States were making

annual pension payment. 17 States/UTs paid did not ensure periodic pension payment and paid pension on *ad hoc* basis. In 14 States, IGNOAPS pension of ₹ 30.47 crore was paid to 57,394 ineligible persons who were less than 60 years of age.

- ❖ In 17 States/UTs, IGNWPS pension of ₹ 26.45 crore was paid to 38,540 ineligible persons who were less than 40 years of age. Further, in six States/UTs, IGNWPS pension of ₹ 0.57 crore was paid to 413 persons other than widows, including male family-members.
- ❖ In 12 States/UTs, IGNDPS pension of ₹ 4.36 crore was paid to 5,380 ineligible persons who were less than 18 years of age. In 16 States/UTs, IGNDPS pension of ₹ 15.11 crore was paid to 21,322 persons whose disability was either below 80 *per cent* or could not be ascertained.
- ❖ Due to lack of control mechanism in respect of payment of pension at enhanced rate for the beneficiaries above the age of 80 years, cases of overpayment of pension of ₹ 0.63 crore to 2,151 persons in seven States/UTs and short payment of pension of ₹ 42.85 crore to 2,43,286 persons in 15 States/UTs were noticed.
- ❖ In 14 States/UTs, due to payment of more than one pension to an individual beneficiary, over payment of pension of ₹ 3.55 crore was made to 2,243 persons. In 26 States/UTs, payment of pension of ₹ two crore was made in cases of 2,103 beneficiaries even after the death of said NSAP beneficiaries.
- ❖ National Social Assistance Advisory Committee (NSAAC) held only three meetings during 2017-21. Due to non-existence of State Level Committee in 30 States/UTs, the monitoring and evaluation was not done as envisaged at state/UT level. Further, no periodic review of implementation of NSAP was conducted by State Nodal Departments in 18 States/UTs.
- ❖ Social audit was not conducted in 25 States/UTs, no remedial action was taken on findings of social audit where it was conducted. Institutional grievance redressal mechanism as per NSAP Guidelines was not in existence/ functional in 17 States/UTs.

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