Chapter IV

Compliance Audit on post Amphan Relief and Restoration works

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Compliance Audit

Disaster Management and Civil Defence Department

4 Compliance Audit on post Amphan relief and restoration works

4.1 Introduction

The Super Cyclonic Storm[199] (SuCS) "AMPHAN" made landfall on 20 May 2020 near Sagar Island along the West Bengal-Bangladesh coast. After making landfall the SuCS moved towards Bangladesh. Heavy rainfall was experienced over coastal Odisha and Gangetic West Bengal on 20 and 21 May 2020. Wind-speeds of maximum 133 kmph were reported on 20 May 2020, which led to widespread damage.

The super cyclone affected 16 out of the 23 districts[200]of the State of West Bengal, of which North and South 24 Parganas were severely affected. Nearly 60 *per cent* of the State population was affected and 99 human lives lost, apart from destruction of dwelling houses, agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, animal resources, forest, power, irrigation canals, health infrastructure and industrial sectors.

Government of West Bengal (GoWB) in their Memorandum of June 2020 reported that Amphan affected 25,245 villages under 2,554 Gram Panchayats, 99 Municipal Corporations/ Municipalities spread over 280 blocks of 16 districts of the State, they reported damage to the extent of ₹ 1,02,442 crore and sought for central assistance of ₹ 35,018 crore from National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) as per the NDRF norms.

The Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) in its report (September 2020) recommended central assistance of ₹ 2,500.29 crore, which was further discussed (October 2020) by the Sub-Committee of the National Executive Committee (SC-NEC)[201] and a central assistance of ₹ 2,707.77 crore recommended from NDRF, subject to adjustment of 50 *per cent* of balance available in the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) account as on 31 March of the preceding financial year.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India (GoI) released ₹ 2,250.28 crore (₹ 1,000 crore in May 2020 and ₹ 1,250.28 crore in November 2020) from NDRF account to the SDRF account, after adjusting 50 *per cent* of balance (₹ 457.49 crore) available in SDRF as on 31 March 2020.

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[199] *As per Standard Operating Procedure of the India Meteorological Department Super Cyclonic Storm is a storm with maximum sustained wind speed of 120 Knots and above (≥222 kmph).*

[200] *Bankura, Birbhum, Hooghly, Howrah, Jhargram, Kolkata, Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia, North 24 Parganas, Paschim Medinipur, PaschimBurdwan, PurbaBurdwan, Purba Medinipur, Purulia and South 24 Parganas.*

[201] *The sub-committee is headed by the Home Secretary and is comprised of the Secretary (Border Management) of the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Secretaries of the departments of Agriculture and Cooperation, Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Drinking Water Supply, Ministry of Finance, Food and Public Distribution, Health, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Ministry of Power, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Rural Development, Ministry of Water Resources and the Joint Secretary (DM) of the Ministry of Home Affairs, as the Member Secretary.*

House Building (HB) grant constituted the highest quantum and proportion of expenditure, followed by assistance given to agriculture, horticulture, fisheries and animal resources. The Disaster Management and Civil Defence (DMCD) Department provided HB grant for damage of houses, while the assistances for damage to crops, fisheries, animals, horticulture were provided by the concerned line departments. Sector-wise resources allocated by GoWB for providing assistance is summarised in ***Appendix-42.***

4.2 Background for Audit

Several PILs were filed in the Calcutta High Court alleging irregularities and corruption in distribution of relief and diversion of funds meant for Amphan relief. These PILs culminated in a judgement on 01 December 2020 by a division bench of the Court, which requested the C&AG to "*conduct such enquiry as is necessary to ensure that there is financial audit and performance audit of the utilisation of the Amphan relief and ensure that there is an appropriate audit report of the performance as well as accounts*". The High Court provided a timeline of "*within an outer limit of three months from the date of receipt of a copy of the order*".

Subsequently, the State filed a recall petition asking for revision of the HC order of 01 December 2020 on the grounds that the audit was premature since the financial year was not yet over and Utilisation Certificates (UCs) for funds received for Amphan were not due. The Court in its order dated 20 January 2021, disposed of the recall petition filed by the GoWB without modifying its earlier order for an audit by the C&AG except to clarify that "*the time limit fixed in the order is only to be treated as a directory guideline for the C&AG and not otherwise*". The Court further stated that the C&AG "*will do the needful to complete the audit as directed, within a reasonable time*". The audit was, accordingly, conducted and the findings of audit were forwarded to the DMCD, GoWB and Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI, in February 2022. The replies received, after issuance of the findings (February 2022), have also been incorporated in this Report.

4.3 Audit Objectives

The objectives of the Audit were to check whether:

- The sanction and utilisation of fund towards relief was done following extant provisions and orders.
- The assessment of losses from Amphan was realistic and based on norms.
- The process for selection of beneficiaries was transparent and as per norms prescribed in this regard and relief delivery mechanism and restoration works were effective.
- There was adequate internal control and monitoring mechanism for the relief and restoration work.

4.4 Audit Criteria

Criteria for evaluation have been selected from:

- Disaster Management Act, 2005;

- National Policy on Disaster Management, 2009;
- District Disaster Management Plans;
- West Bengal Disaster Management Manual;
- Norms of National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF);
- Memorandum on Super Cyclone Amphan (June, 2020);
- Guidelines and other instructions issued by Government of India (GoI) and GoWB;
- Report of the Inter-Ministerial Central Team;
- West Bengal Treasury Rules, 2005;
- IMCT Report.

4.5 Scope, Methodology and Sample Selection

Audit was conducted in two phases (February to March 2021 and July to mid-September 2021) covering activities for the period from May 2020 to March 2021 through test-check of records of DMCD Department along with four major departments[202] involved in management of relief work.

Based on the largest number of beneficiaries, six districts[203] were selected which covered 90.45 *per cent* of the total Amphan affected beneficiaries *i.e.* 42,42,498 beneficiaries out of 46,90,218 total beneficiaries.

GoWB provided assistance both in kind as well as money credited directly to the bank accounts of the identified persons. Assistance in kind was mainly in the form of tarpaulin, clothes, food materials and miscellaneous items like Disaster Management Kit[204], special grain, children's garments *etc*. Stock registers across the districts were examined for the purpose of identifying the inflow of relief materials and distribution of the same.

The following kinds of assistances were provided in the form of cash through direct benefit transfer into the bank accounts of the beneficiary households affected by Amphan:

a) House Building (HB) grant for fully damaged and partly damaged houses;

b) Assistance to farmers, including those engaged in horticulture (for crop damage);

c) Assistance to fishermen for damage to nets, boats, hundis[205] *etc*. ;

d) Assistance to families for loss of livestock.

Audit examined records of the State and district level offices of Disaster Management and other line Departments (Agriculture, Food Processing Industries and Horticulture, Animal Resources Development and Fisheries). Beneficiary data received from DMCD Department, Agriculture, Horticulture,

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[202] *Agriculture, Animal Resource Development, Fisheries and Food Processing Industries & Horticulture.*

[203] *Hooghly, Nadia, North and South 24-Parganas, Purba and Paschim Medinipur.*

[204] *Disaster Management Kit consists of one plastic bucket, plastic mug, plastic jug, Steel plate, steel glass, kerosene stove, utensils etc.*

[205] *Aluminium container used for storage of fish or fingerlings.*

Fisheries and Animal Resources Departments and different districts, blocks and municipalities were analysed using Interactive Data Extraction and Analysis (IDEA) tool.

For the purpose of selection of blocks from the selected districts, blocks were arranged in descending order of the total number of beneficiaries. Blocks were stratified in three strata and thereafter random sampling adopted for selection of one block from each of the three strata; one Urban Local Body (ULB) each was also selected based on random sampling. A total of 18 blocks and 6 ULBs were selected for Audit. Forty households (beneficiaries under different kinds of assistance) were selected randomly from each of the selected blocks for beneficiary survey and information collected through a standardized questionnaire jointly with the district authorities. These households were selected based on their names appearing either in the accepted beneficiaries or rejected beneficiaries list, and who had applied for relief and assistance.

The audit objectives, criteria, scope and methodology of the audit were discussed with the heads of the DMCD Department and Land & Land Reforms and Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department in an Entry Conference held on 09 February 2021. Exit Conference was held on 12th April 2022 to discuss the audit observations and recommendations.

4.5.1 Limitations and Constraints faced in Audit

In the initial phase of audit, during the month of December 2020 and January 2021, when the sampling of districts was done, information on district-wise list of beneficiaries of different kinds of grants were not made available by GoWB and therefore information on different kinds of beneficiaries, as available in the website (http://amphan.semtwb.in/) was used for sampling of districts. Documents, records and data relating to assistance were subsequently made available to Audit between February and September 2021.

Though the audit teams were deputed in the DMCD Department/ Directorate and in the district offices from January 2021, the teams faced constraints to perform audit work due to initial delay in providing records by the District and Departmental authorities on grounds of recall petition filed by GoWB. Further, with the announcement of the West Bengal Assembly Elections in March 2021, the district authorities became engaged with the election process, which had also hampered the smooth conduct of audit work. Though the second phase of audit was planned after completion of the election process, the same could not be taken up due to imposition of restrictions on all outdoor activities including movement of people and vehicle in the State from May 2021 almost until mid-July 2021 due to the surge in Covid-19 cases. Therefore, audit was finally carried out in the following two distinct phases; the First Phase being conducted between February and March 2021 and Second Phase being conducted between mid-July and mid-September 2021.

4.5.1.1 Non-production of records relating to damage assessment of ₹ 1.02 lakh crore

As per Memorandum, GoWB made assessment of damage to the extent of ₹ 1.02 lakh crore on account of Super Cyclone Amphan. Though the DMCD Department stated that assessment of damage was on the basis of report of the concerned district authorities, no such reports was made available to audit. The norms applied to arrive at the colossal figure of ₹ 1.02 lakh crore was also not shared by the department. Due to absence of district-wise damage assessment reports and norms adopted for calculation of the damage assessment figure, the correctness of assessment could not be evaluated in audit.

4.6 Relief Assistance

The following kinds of assistance were provided in the form of cash through direct benefit transfer into the bank accounts of the beneficiary households affected by Amphan:

a) House Building (HB) grant for fully damaged and partly damaged houses;

b) Assistance to farmers, including those engaged in horticulture (for crop damage);

c) Assistance to fishermen for damage to nets, boats, hundis[206] *etc*.

d) Assistance to families for loss of livestock.

The break-up of the assistance paid (category-wise) to districts is shown in **Table 4.1**:

Table 4.1: Sector wise assistance disbursed

(₹ in crore)

Name of the district	House Building	Agriculture Assistance	Horticulture Assistance	Fisheries	ARD	Total
Hooghly	59.58	32.79	0.17	0.41	0.29	93.24
Nadia	35.60	37.66	0.61	0.22	0.05	74.14
North 24 Parganas	579.26	44.17	0.16	1.05	8.63	633.27
Paschim Medinipur	55.36	70.60	4.66	0.14	0.01	130.77
Purba Medinipur	300.03	58.15	19.69	0.66	0.90	379.43
South 24 Parganas	787.94	55.59	35.67	13.60	4.28	897.08
Total (A)	**1,817.17**	**298.96**	**60.96**	**16.08**	**14.16**	**2,207.93**
Bankura	3.78	0.00	0.49	0.00	0.00	4.27
Birbhum	2.63	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.63
Howrah	60.08	12.59	4.24	0.92	0.31	78.14
Jhargram	1.00	12.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	13.13
Kolkata	7.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.84
Malda	0.60	0.00	0.45	0.00	0.00	1.05
Murshidabad	3.59	0.00	0.00	0.21	0.00	3.80
Paschim Burdwan	0.95	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.95
Purba Burdwan	6.93	28.91	0.00	0.01	0.10	35.95
Purulia	0.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.90
Total (B)	**88.30**	**53.63**	**5.18**	**1.14**	**0.41**	**148.66**
Grand Total (A+B)	**1,906.07**	**352.59**	**66.14**	**17.22**	**14.57**	**2,356.59**

(Source: Information furnished by the DMCD Department)

[206] *Aluminium container used for storage of fish or fingerlings.*

House building comprised the single largest category of assistance, bulk of which (93.69 *per cent*) was provided to the districts of South and North 24 Parganas, Purba and Paschim Medinipur, Nadia and Hooghly, which were selected for detailed audit.

Audit Findings

The audit findings are discussed in the following paragraphs:

4.7 Unrealistic and exaggerated assessment of damages

The Director General of Audit (Home Education and Skill Development), New Delhi, having audit purview of the Disaster Management Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI and the National Disaster Management Authority, was requested to review the Memorandum submitted by the State Government for seeking Central Assistance and the Report of the Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) on the basis of which funds were released from NDRF. From the review it was seen that GoWB assessed damage of ₹ 1,02,442 crore, and sought central assistance of ₹ 35,018 crore as per the NDRF norms in their Memorandum under different sectors such as ex-gratia payment of deceased persons, dwelling houses, agriculture, horticulture, fishery, power *etc*.

The IMCT visited the State between 4 and 6 June 2020 to conduct on-the-spot assessment of the damages caused by the super cyclonic storm Amphan. During the visit, the team had undertaken field inspection of several villages and embankments, interacted with the officers of the GoWB, district administration, Gram Panchayats, local population and delegates of various political parties. The IMCT after their visit submitted (September 2020) its report to the MHA, GoI.

From the IMCT Report (12 September 2020), it was seen that the assessment of damages done by GoWB for claiming central assistance of ₹ 35,018 crore was exaggerated and unrealistically high and it was not supported by proper evidence of damage. As a result, the physical damage was moderated by IMCT to a large extent in all the sectors and the amount of central assistance was reduced accordingly which are detailed below:

- **Housing Sector**: GoWB claimed assistance of ₹ 18,188.86 crore under the housing sector against 24,29,136 housing units[207] damaged due to Amphan. However, IMCT did not observe losses to any pucca houses; nor noticed fully, severely damaged kutcha houses to the scale, as assessed by GoWB. Damages estimated for 1,13,974 fully/severely damaged pucca houses[208] were not at all considered by IMCT. Based on their field inspection, IMCT restricted the total number of fully damaged kutcha houses (five *per cent*); severely damaged kutcha houses (15 *per cent*) and partly damaged pucca/kutcha houses (90 *per cent*). Subsequently, the HLC approved (November 2020) ₹ 1,210.55 crore[209] against 5,52,889 damaged houses.

[207] *18,92,946 fully/severely damaged houses, 4,99,558 partly damaged houses and 36,632 damaged huts.*

[208] *7,688 fully damaged and 1,06,286 severely damaged pucca houses.*

[209] *₹ 1,064.33 crore for fully/severely damaged kutcha houses, ₹ 4.71 crore for partially damaged pucca houses, ₹ 126.49 crore for partially damaged kutcha houses and ₹ 15.02 crore for damaged huts.*

- **Agriculture/horticulture Sector**: Assistance of ₹ 2,431.20 crore[210] was sought for agriculture sector. Further, assistance of ₹ 273.76 crore was sought for horticulture sector. Assistance of ₹ 5.30 crore sought for agricultural marketing infrastructure, not covered under the NDRF norms, was not considered by IMCT. Claim for de-silting of 87,141 hectares of agricultural land could not be substantiated by the GoWB to IMCT. Affected area worked out by IMCT was 71,177 hectares (taking 81.68 *per cent* of the estimated affected area of 87,141 hectares held by Small and Marginal Farmers) and recommended assistance of ₹86.84 crore. Further, IMCT did not accept damage of severe magnitude to cropped areas as recommended by the GoWB. Based on field visits, aerial view of the fields, Crop Harvesting Status Report of the Directorate of Jute Development (DJD)[211], post Amphan field visit reports of officers of the DJD in affected districts, comparison of crop cutting results of previous seasons and discussions with the farmers, IMCT ascertained that 60 *per cent* of crops including summer paddy, vegetables and fruits *etc*. would have been harvested before 19 May 2020 (day before super cyclone). Thus, only 30 *per cent* of the total assessed area was considered and input subsidy of ₹ 579.10 crore was recommended by IMCT which was also approved by the HLC.
- **Fisheries Sector:** Out of the total assistance of ₹ 1,550.76 crore sought under fisheries sector, claim of assistance for loss of household goods of fishermen and de-siltation of flooded area to the extent of ₹ 109.46 crore (₹ 29.50 crore for loss of household goods plus ₹ 70.96 crore for de-siltation) was not covered under NDRF norms. The Fisheries Department also claimed ₹ 1,402.81 crore for 1,47,509 damaged huts at the rate of ₹ 95,100.00 which was not considered by IMCT since damage of huts was already covered under housing sector.
- **Animal Husbandry Sector:** The State sought assistance of ₹ 245.09 crore for Animal Husbandry sector which included ₹ 221.69 crore for damage to cattle sheds attached to houses (₹ 73.34 crore) and cost of other cattle and poultry shed damaged including farms under West Bengal Poultry Federation (₹ 148.35 crore). However, no damage to any cattle shed was shown to IMCT during their visits. Assistance on account of damage to cattle sheds, feed and fodder was not recommended by IMCT since the details about loss of fodder and distribution of feed and fodder could not be confirmed by the local authorities. Finally, IMCT recommended for ₹ 23.24 crore under this sector which was also approved by HLC.
- **Drinking Water:** GoWB claimed ₹ 369.38 crore[212] for 1,119 piped water supply schemes and 14,309 tube wells in 12 districts at rates higher than prescribed norms of NDRF. Detailed break-up of damaged infrastructure including bifurcation of the damaged items and budget provision/resources under the regular budget in the matter as sought by IMCT was not provided

[210] *₹ 2,319.59 crore for crop damage/agriculture input subsidy, ₹ 106.31 crore for de-silting of agricultural land and ₹ 5.30 crore for agricultural marketing infrastructure damage.*

[211] *Nodal office of Ministry of Agriculture & FW, GoI for monitoring of overall agriculture situation in West Bengal.*

[212] *₹ 502.42 crore less (₹ 82.60 crore for emergency water supply add ₹ 50.44 crore for providing water pouches/bottles).*

by GoWB. Therefore, only 50 *per cent* of the piped water supply schemes was considered by IMCT and assistance of ₹ 8.39 crore at ₹ 1.50 lakh per unit for 559 piped water supply was recommended for repair works. GoWB sought assistance of ₹ 133.04 crore[213] for providing drinking water supply in rural and urban areas without any details or proof; number of days water pouches was supplied *etc*. and was found to be "*unrealistic*" by IMCT. Similarly, the cost of providing water tankers was also found to be on the higher side. Therefore, only ₹ 26.61 crore of the reported cost of relief was considered by IMCT.

- **Roads and Bridges:** GoWB claimed ₹ 418.07 crore[214] for roads sector at higher rate than prescribed in NDRF norms. No substantial damages to road/bridges/culverts under KMC area was found by IMCT during their visit and thus claim of ₹ 190.00 crore sought by GoWB was found not to be reasonable and therefore no assistance was considered. For PWD roads/ bridges also substantial damages was not noticed by IMCT. Further, the length of 475 km of assessed road damage of ₹ 60.55 crore under P&RD was found to be on higher side and accordingly only 50 *per cent* of such assessed road length was considered by IMCT which recommended only ₹ 30.27 crore against ₹ 60.55 crore. Finally, IMCT recommended ₹ 54.08 crore for the entire Road and Bridges sector.
- **Irrigation & Waterways Sector:** GoWB claimed ₹ 22.37 crore for 1,491 irrigation schemes. During field visit IMCT observed that the assessment was on the higher side and restricted it to 50 *per cent* of the assessed number of projects. The IMCT recommended ₹ 11.18 crore for repairing of Minor Irrigation infrastructure under this sector and the same was also released as assistance.
- **Power Sector**: GoWB sought assistance of ₹ 1,345.25 crore[215]. Based on field visit and interaction with the officials and local people at districts, IMCT restricted the claim of physical quantities to 50 *per cent* of the assessed quantities and HT poles were not considered as it was outside the purview of NDRF norms. Re-usable quantities were also taken into account and ₹ 214.17 crore was recommended.
- **Forest Sector:** GoWB's claim for assistance of ₹ 1,033.15 crore was not considered at all as it was outside the NDRF norms.
- **Education Infrastructure:** GoWB sought assistance of ₹ 219.60 crore for reported damages of 11,291 primary and 3,349 secondary schools. However, substantial damages to school infrastructure was not observed by IMCT and the claim was restricted to ₹87.84 crore.
- **Health Infrastructure:** GoWB's claim for assistance of ₹ 119.03 crore for health sector included infrastructure other than Primary Health Centers (PHC) buildings which were not permissible as per NDRF norms. Therefore, only PHCs were considered by IMCT and recommended ₹ 8.45 crore.

[213] *₹ 50.44 crore for water pouches plus ₹ 82.60 crore for water tankers.*

[214] *₹ 167.52 crore under Public Works Department (PWD); ₹ 190 crore under Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) and ₹ 60.54 crore under Panchayat and Rural Development Department (P&RD).*

[215] *₹ 1,235.25 crore for damages to HT Poles, LT Poles, distribution transformers and conductors and ₹ 110 crore for restoration of electric poles.*

- **Anganwadi Centers:** GoWB's claim of ₹ 253.56 crore for 12,678 centres under this sector was restricted to ₹ 25.34 crore *i.e.* 10 *per cent* of assessed damage, as no such damage was observed by IMCT.
- **Assistance for urban facilities restoration, damage caused to industries and MSME sector and repair restoration of transport, fire, emergency infrastructure *etc.*:** GoWB's claim of ₹ 7,887.18 crore for this sector was not at all considered by IMCT as the same was not covered under the NDRF norms.

Based on its report, IMCT recommended (September 2020) Central Assistance of ₹ 2,500.29 crore, which was further discussed (October 2020) by the SubCommittee of the National Executive Committee (SC-NEC). Finally, Central Assistance of ₹ 2,707.77 crore was recommended from NDRF, subject to adjustment of 50 *per cent* of balance available in the SDRF account as on 31 March of the preceding financial year.

From the IMCT Report, audit observed that the assessment of damages done by GoWB for claiming central assistance of ₹ 35,018.00 crore was exaggerated and unrealistically high and it was not supported by proper evidence of damage. As a result, the physical damage was moderated by IMCT to a large extent in all the sectors and the amount of central assistance was reduced accordingly. Sector wise assistance sought by GoWB *vis-a-vis* recommended by IMCT and SE-NEC is given in **Table 4.2:**

Table 4.2: Kinds and Quantum of Assistances projected by the State, recommended by IMCT and approved by SC-NEC

(₹ in crore)

Sl No	Items/Sector	Assistance projected by State Govt.	Assistance recommended by IMCT	Assistance approved by SC-NEC
1	2	3	4	5
1(i)	Ex-gratia payment to families of deceased person	3.96	3.96	3.96
(ii)	Grievously injured persons	0.28	-	0.28
2.	Clothing and utensils	29.50	-	29.50
3.	Search and rescue operations	82.65	12.80	23.54
4.	Cost of relief articles - distribution of DM Kit	210.77	0.00	109.00
5.	Expenditure incurred to combat cyclonic storm - hiring boats, clearance of debris and water, disposal of dead bodies/ carcasses	123.48	25.43	25.43
6.	Relief measures - temporary accommodation, food in relief camps *etc.*	106.98	106.98	106.98
7.	Provision of emergency water supply	133.04	26.61	26.61
8.	Agriculture Sector			
(i)	De-silting of agriculture land	2,431.20	86.84	86.84
(ii)	Agricultural - input subsidy		504.91	504.91
(iii)	Horticulture - input subsidy	273.75	74.19	74.19

Sl No	Items/Sector	Assistance projected by State Govt.	Assistance recommended by IMCT	Assistance approved by SC-NEC
1	2	3	4	5
9.	Animal Husbandry and Poultry	245.09	23.24	23.24
10.	Fishery - de-silting/repair of fish farms/fish seed farms	1,521.26	15.33	73.29
11.	Housing	18,188.86	1,210.55	1,210.55
12.	Repair/restoration of damaged infrastructure			
(i)	Roads	418.06	54.08	54.08
(ii)	Drinking water supply	369.38	8.39	8.39
(iii)	Irrigation	22.37	11.18	11.18
(iv)	Power	1,345.25	214.17	214.17
(v)	Primary school	219.60	87.84	87.84
(vi)	Primary health centers	119.03	8.45	8.45
(vii)	Anganwadi centers	253.56	25.34	25.34
(viii)	Industries and MSME sector	3,437.88	0.00	0.00
(ix)	Urban facilities restoration	4,099.96	0.00	0.00
(x)	Forestry and forest installation - roads and land	1,033.15	0.00	0.00
(xi)	Transport, Fire and Emergency Infrastructure, SHG, tree godown etc.	349.33	0.00	0.00
	Total	**35,018.39**	**2,500.29**	**2,707.77**

Therefore, it is evident that damages for all the sectors assessed by GoWB in their Memorandum were found to be unrealistically high and could not be substantiated by available records. Further, the claims were not prepared considering the NDRF norms in many cases and were found to be arbitrary. Damage assessment reports based on which the figure of ₹ 1.02 lakh crore was arrived at, were also not produced to audit though called for. It was stated by the DMCD Department that the Memorandum was prepared on the basis of the reports of the district authorities. As a result, against the GoWB's claim of ₹ 35,018.39 crore as per NDRF norms, IMCT recommended assistance of ₹ 2,500.29 crore and SC-NEC finally recommended central assistance of ₹ 2,707.77 crore from NDRF.

The Department, however, stated (April 2022) that the IMCT report was not shared with the State Government. The reply is not tenable since the Department had not sought clarification on the amount finally released towards Amphan assistance.

4.8 Irregularities in Distribution of House Building grant

As per Para 14.10 of the West Bengal Disaster Management Manual and DMCD Department's order[216], HB grant is paid to indigent families living below poverty line and whose total family income does not exceed ₹ 2,500.00 per month, to rebuild or repair their damaged/ destroyed dwelling houses as a result of natural calamities and accidental fire.

[216] *Memo No. 1129(24)-DMCD-11017(99)/20/2020 dated 24.06.2020.*

As per Para 14.11 of the West Bengal Disaster Management Manual, a joint inspection team consisting of one representative each of the Pradhan of the concerned Gram Panchayat, Sabhapati of the Panchayat Samity and Block Development Officer (BDO) (for rural areas) or from the concerned Municipality/ Urban Area Authority and the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO), should be formed to enquire into the damages to the houses along with the pecuniary condition of the victims. They would submit draft priority lists for HB grant in "Form-C", to the concerned BDO or the SDO. The BDO or the SDO would prepare and approve the final lists in "Form-B" after disposal of the claims and objections, if any.

Further, submission of photograph of damaged house along with the owner of the house is mandatory for processing the claims for HB grant as per extant norms[217] of DMCD Department. Fund for HB Grant, available from the concerned District Magistrate, were to be distributed on the basis of the approved priority lists. Fresh applications were also invited from beneficiaries who were aggrieved with the earlier decisions on their claims by concerned BDOs/SDOs through special camps. Applications were also received in gram panchayat/ municipality wise drop boxes kept in the offices of BDOs/SDOs during 6-7 August 2020. Special teams were also formed to ensure completion of all field enquiries by 12 August 2020. All applications were to be accepted or rejected based on field enquiry.

House Building (HB) grant was disbursed by GoWB at two rates, ₹ 20,000 for fully damaged houses and ₹ 5,000 for partially damaged houses. Audit conducted test check in six selected districts where HB grant of ₹ 1,853.47 crore (95.12 *per cent*) was released out of total HB grant of ₹ 1,948.51 crore in 16 districts.

4.8.1. Wide variation between the assessed and actual beneficiaries for HB grant

As per Memorandum of Super Cyclone Amphan, GoWB sought central assistance of ₹ 18,188.86 crore for 24,29,136 damaged houses (18,92,946 fully/ severely damaged houses, 4,99,558 partly damaged houses and 36,632 damaged huts) in respect of 16 districts.

Audit obtained district-wise number of beneficiaries assessed against which HB grants were paid for the 16 affected districts from the DMCD Department ***(Appendix-43)***. Analysis of the actual number of beneficiaries receiving the HB grant with that of the damaged houses data as assessed in the Memorandum, the following variations were found:

(i) 5,69,597 households of 16 districts were selected for HB grant for fully damaged houses against the assessed figure of 18,92,946. Thus, the actual number of households were less by 13,23,349 (69.91 *per cent*) than the assessed figure.

(ii) 15,33,787 beneficiaries of 16 districts were actually paid HB grant for partly damaged houses against the assessed figure of 4,99,558 beneficiaries. Thus, actual number of beneficiaries was more than the assessed figure by 10,34,229 (207.03 *per cent*). As evident from above, many households whose houses were fully damaged were deprived of the benefits of full

[217] *Order No. 885(18)-FR/6F-8/12 dated 07 May 2012.*

HB grant. On the other hand, the number of households provided with partial HB grant was three times the assessed number indicating that the assessment of damage was not properly conducted.

Therefore, it is evident that either many 'partially damaged houses' were included in the category of 'fully damaged houses' during the phase of assessment or these households were included at a later stage for reasons not on record.

In Purulia district, which is the westernmost district of the State, all the affected houses were assessed to be fully damaged. Purulia being an outlier district, was not severely affected by super cyclonic disaster. Even in the more affected western districts like Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur, assessment included partially and fully damaged houses. Assessment and disbursement of 100 *per cent* fully damaged houses without a single partially damaged house throughout the said district seemed to be unrealistic.

The DMCD Department forwarded the reply of the South 24-Parganas district which stated (January 2022) that soon after Cyclone Amphan, a preliminary assessment was made to submit requirement of fund to the DMCD Department to provide immediate relief to affected people. However, at the time of disbursement through field enquiry actual beneficiaries were categorised into fully and partly damaged houses and HB grant also given accordingly.

The reply is not tenable since the assessment report prepared by the DMCD contained wide variations in regard to the assessed figure, *vis-a-vis* the actual assistance rendered. In case of South 24 Parganas, the variation for fully damaged houses was as high as 77.21 *per cent*, which indicates that the assessment may have been exaggerated.

4.8.2 House Building grant not provided at uniform rates in two different phases of distribution

The DMCD Department allotted (between 28 May and 29 December 2020) ₹ 1,948.51 crore as HB grant to 21,03,384 beneficiaries in 16 districts affected due to Amphan.

On scrutiny of the allotment orders, it was found by audit that DMCD Department initially (between 28 May and 30 May 2020) allotted ₹ 1,000 crore (51.32 *per cent* of total allotment of ₹ 1,948.51 crore) against four allotment orders in which HB grant was sanctioned at ₹ 20,000 to 5,00,000 beneficiaries for each damaged house.

Subsequently, the DMCD Department in their order[218] (June 2020) revised the rate of HB grant to ₹ 20,000 for fully damaged houses and ₹ 5,000 for partly damaged houses and ₹ 906.07 crore was disbursed over 16 lakh people. Therefore, while only five lakh households were given the benefit of ₹ 1,000 crore, over 16 lakh people (21,03,384 *minus* 5,00,000 = 16,03,384) were given grant of ₹ 906.07 crore; *i.e.*, while around 25 *per cent* affected people received over 50 *per cent* of the grant benefits, the balance amount was distributed among 75 *per cent* of the affected people.

[218] *Order No. 1141-DMCD-11011/1/2020-DM SEC-Dept. of DMCD dated 25 June 2020.*

Thus, there was no uniformity in the rates of HB grant in two different phases of distribution of HB grant. The disparity of rates reflected the indecisiveness of GoWB for releasing assistance to the beneficiaries of HB grant. This is indicative of the fact that dual standards were adopted by the DMCD Department in distribution of HB grant, which was not only discriminatory in nature but also in contravention to the principles of equity.

During beneficiary survey in three selected blocks[219] of Paschim Medinipur and South 24 Parganas, it was found that in eight cases, beneficiaries with partially damaged houses were found to have been given HB grant at the rate of ₹ 20,000 in the first phase, since the DMCD Department had not fixed any rate for partly damaged houses. The details of these cases are given in the **Table 4.3**:

Table 4.3: Details of households who had received HB grant at higher rate despite having houses partly damaged

Sl No	Name of District	Beneficiary Name	Block, GP, Village	Damage as per Form-B/ Beneficiary Survey	Amount Paid (in ₹)	IFMS Bill No
1	Paschim Medinipur	Ram Hansda	Debra, Debra-II, Chakkumar	Partly	20,000	14/RL
2		Santu Bhowmik	Debra, Debra-II, Alishagarh	Partly	20,000	32/RL
3		Kabita Sing	Debra, Duan-II, Hamirpur	Partly	20,000	14/RL
4		Sefali Pramanik	Debra, Debra-II, Alishagarh	Partly	20,000	14/RL
5		Rabi Kisku	Debra, Debra-II, Chakkumar	Partly	20,000	14/RL
6	South 24 Parganas	Archana Pramanik	Namkhana, Buddhakhali	Partly	20,000	Not paid through IFMS
7		Sundari Pramanik	Mograhat-I, Sherpur, Sherpur	Partly	20,000	
8		Ashima Das	Mograhat-I, Sherpur, Sherpur	Partly	20,000	
				Total	**1,60,000**	

(Source: Beneficiary survey and Form-B of respective blocks)

The above cases are only illustrative in nature found in three blocks of two districts during beneficiary survey or scrutiny of "Form-B" in the six selected districts. Possibility of occurrence of similar cases in other blocks and districts cannot be ruled out in audit.

The Department forwarded the reply of District Magistrate, South 24 Parganas only which stated (January 2022) that out of three cases, recovery has been made from one beneficiary and in case of remaining two beneficiaries, recommendation was for payment of fully damaged houses and accordingly they were paid ₹ 20,000 each. The reply is not tenable as during joint beneficiary survey conducted by audit team along with the departmental staff, the said two beneficiaries admitted that their houses were only partially damaged due to Amphan.

[219] *Debra block of Paschim Medinipur, Mograhat-I and Namkhana blocks of South 24 Parganas.*

4.8.3 HB Grant of ₹ 251.38 crore paid to ineligible beneficiaries not belonging to indigent category

Audit scrutinised the list of 8,58,296 beneficiaries contained in "Form-B" of 95 blocks and 52 ULBs in the six selected districts.

Audit observed that 3,12,088 beneficiaries (36.36 *per cent*) who did not belong to indigent category in 95 blocks and 52 ULBs in the six selected districts had received assistance of ₹ 251.38 crore. Thus, inclusion of beneficiaries having monthly income of more than ₹2,500 in "Form-B" was in contravention of the eligibility criteria set by the GoWB. Similar payments to non-indigent persons in other districts cannot be ruled out. Form B for the remaining blocks and ULBs were not produced to audit and therefore it is evident that the overall quantum of assistance paid to non-indigent category could be much higher. Details of non-indigent beneficiaries provided with HB grant are shown in ***Appendix-44***.

On this being pointed out, DMCD Department forwarded various orders relating to Amphan and stated (March 2022) that "indigent" word was referred in only one order of July 2020. The Department further stated that the said order was issued for giving stress on physical verification of damaged houses before disbursement of HB grant as indigent families were to be given priority and it did not mean that HB grant was to be restricted only for indigent families. However, reply is not tenable because as per the order (June 2020) of DMCD Department, HB grant was required to be paid to indigent families only.

4.8.4 Irregular parking of fund outside Government Account

All the beneficiary related assistance for Amphan was required to be directly transferred to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries through DBT by the concerned treasuries[220].

During audit of HB grant of six selected districts it was found that four out of the six district authorities made payment of HB grant to the beneficiaries through treasury vouchers generated through Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS). However, the district authorities of North 24 Parganas[221] and South 24 Parganas[222] withdrew (between May 2020 and January 2021) the entire allotted fund of HB grant of ₹ 1,383.23 crore (70.99 *per cent* of the HB grant of ₹ 1,948.51 crore allotted by the State) from the treasury against 12 vouchers and parked the amount in scheduled commercial bank accounts of the district authorities for making DBT from those accounts.

Such withdrawal of fund from treasury and parking it outside the Government Account was highly irregular in the light of the West Bengal Treasury Rules, 2005.

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[220] *Para 4.002 of the West Bengal Treasury Rules, 2005 provides that unless the Government after consultation with the Accountant-General (Accounts & Entitlement), West Bengal, directs otherwise, money may not be withdrawn from Government Account without written permission of concerned Treasury Officer or Pension Disbursement Officer or Pay and Accounts Officers, Kolkata or an officer of the Indian Audit and Accounts Department authorised in this behalf by the Accountant-General (Accounts & Entitlement), West Bengal.*

[221] *₹ 578.23 crore.*

[222] *₹ 805.00 crore.*

In South 24 Parganas district, ₹ 34.68 crore remained unutilised as on 21 January 2022. The district, however, submitted UC for the full amount, excluding ₹ 10 crore which was surrendered. For North 24 Parganas balance lying unutilised, if any, in the bank accounts could not be analysed due to non-receipt of bank statements. However, UC for the entire amount was submitted by North 24-Parganas district.

On this being pointed out, District Magistrate, North 24 Parganas stated (January 2022) that due to paucity of manpower, payment through IFMS could not be followed. District Magistrate, South 24 Parganas stated (January 2022) that payment of HB grant to large number of beneficiaries through treasury system was difficult. Payments were made from the bank account through IT intervention to prevent duplicate payment. The reply is not tenable as the procedure of parking money outside treasury system is against Treasury Rules. Further, the districts regularly make payments of other schemes to beneficiaries through IFMS. The State should consider to have a system of DBT that is linked to the IFMS in all cases for the sake of transparency and proper accounting of Government money.

The above resulted in wrong and incomplete submission of UCs, thereby resulting in improper utilisation of funds and presented an incorrect picture of the assistance rendered.

4.8.5 HB grant of ₹ 18.07 crore involved multiple payments to 9,226 beneficiaries

As per order[223] of the DMCD Department, the list of beneficiaries should contain the name, address, contact number and bank account number with Indian Financial System Code (IFSC). Further, the Principal Secretary of the DMCD Department directed[224] (August 2020) the district authorities to submit a duplication check report to ensure that no cases of HB grant were credited twice to the same household by performing "Compare & Check Exercise" on the digital data.

From IFMS vouchers and bank scrolls, Audit obtained data of 19,38,238 beneficiaries out of 20,13,741 beneficiaries in the six selected districts. The data obtained were analysed through IDEA tool and it was found that in 18,891 cases, HB grant was credited more than once and ranging up to nine times into the bank accounts of 9,226 beneficiaries. This resulted in multiple payment of ₹ 18.07 crore and disbursement of undue financial assistance. Audit also found that no mechanism was exercised by the district authorities to ensure that duplicate payments were not made.

The above phenomenon of multiple payments was seen in all the districts selected for audit and hence possibility of such occurrence in the remaining districts cannot be ruled out. This indicated not only serious deficiencies in the process of selection of beneficiaries but also absence of adequate checks and balances before making DBT to prevent such multiple payments.

On this being pointed out, District Magistrates of five of the six selected districts (except South 24 Parganas) accepted the audit observation and stated (between

[223] *Memo No. 1129(24)-DMCD-11017(99)/20/2020 dt. 24 June2020.*

[224] *Memo No. 299-PSDM & CD/2020 dt. 21 August 2020.*

December 2021 and January 2022) that notices have been issued to all the beneficiaries to refund the excess amount paid and the concerned BDOs/SDOs have been directed to take legal action against the beneficiaries who have not refunded the excess payment. District Magistrate, South 24 Parganas did not furnish any specific reply.

4.8.6 Doubtful transaction of ₹ 4.99 crore

Bank account number identifies the relationship between a customer or an entity and a bank. The structure of account numbers across banks is different. The Department of Pay and Settlement System of Reserve Bank of India (RBI), shared (December 2012) a Report[225] on the Structure of Account Numbers across banks in India. The following observations regarding doubtful transactions were noticed in the Audit:

- **South 24 Parganas:** The bank scroll of 8,62,394 succesful payments of HB grant to beneficiaries was analysed and it was found that the Structure of Account Numbers in respect of 133 (67 fully damaged and 66 partly damaged) beneficiaries mentioned in the bank scroll were found not in consonance (account numbers containing characters/alpha-numeric characters) with the structure prescribed by RBI. As a result, DBT of HB grant to those 133 bank accounts amounting to ₹ 16.70 lakh was doubtful. In reply, the District stated (March 2022) that payment in respect of 129 out of 133 beneficiaries were unsuccessful. However, information on subsequent action taken on such unsuccessful payments was not provided.
- **Paschim Medinipur:** From the analysis of IFMS vouchers Audit observed that payment of HB grant of ₹ 4.82 crore to 7,548 beneficiaries was unsuccessful. The district authorities stated (September 2021) that unsuccessful transactions arose due to incorrect bank details. The cases of failed transactions were communicated to the concerned authorities for rectification of necessary details. After receiving the rectified information, the targeted beneficiaries were stated to be paid without generating separate vouchers. The district authorities could not furnish the trail of subsequent successful payments of ₹ 4.82 crore; instead, correspondence with Blocks/ Subdivisions with details of failed transactions was furnished.

In the light of the above, Audit could not ascertain as to how ₹ 4.99 crore (₹ 0.17 crore *plus* ₹ 4.82 crore) was shown as expenditure towards HB grant. Occurence of similar phenomena in other districts could not be ruled out.

4.8.7 Same photographs of damaged house used against multiple beneficiaries

The DMCD Department made[226] submission of photographs of damaged house along with the owner of the house mandatory for processing of claims for HB grant. The inspection teams were also required to take photographs of the damaged houses.

[225] *Report of the Technical Committee to Examine Uniform Routing Code & Account Number Structure.*

[226] *Order No. 885(18)-FR/6F-8/12 dated 07 May 2012.*

Audit collected photographs of the beneficiaries and/or their damaged houses from the district authorities of the selected districts either in Form-B or in CDs separately. Audit obtained 3,70,491 photographs of damaged houses in respect of 147 blocks/municipalities of five districts, except for South 24 Parganas where no photographs were made available.

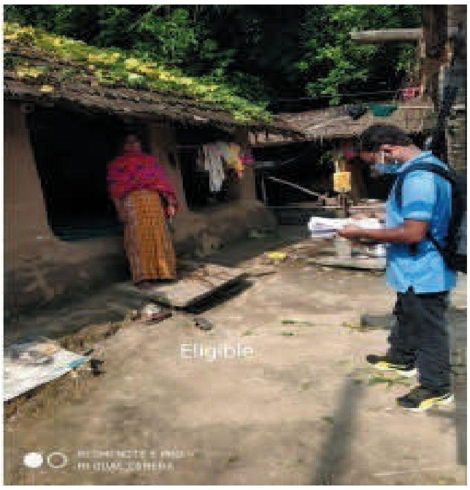
Audit analysed 31,457 photographs and found that in 3,126 cases, same photographs were used against multiple beneficiaries. A few instances of use of same photographs against multiple beneficiaries are shown below:

Moriam Bibi (Form-B Fully, Sl. No. 1469), K. Jalpai, Mahisadal Block, Purba Medinipur

Rejak Dutta (Form-B Fully, Sl. No. 1470), K. Jalpai, Mahisadal Block, Purba Medinipur

Fig. 4.1

Tarafan Bibi Malithya, (Form B Sl. No. 53) Dogachhi Dabtipara, Karimpur-II Block, Nadia



Rangila Bibi Sekh, (Form B Sl. No. 163) Gamakhali, Karimpur-II Block, Nadia

Fig. 4.2

Presence of duplicate photos in 3,126 cases indicates that undue benefit of HB grant might have been extended. However, quantum of such undue benefit could not be ascertained as the photographs were not cross linked with the serial numbers of Form-B. Some instances of such cases are shared in photographs 4.3 to 4.6 below:

Badal Bhunia (Tararui GP), Dantan-I Block, Paschim Medinipur

Dibakar Bera (Dantan II GP), Dantan-I Block, Paschim Medinipur

Fig. 4.3

Tapas Jana (Tararui GP), Dantan-I Block, Paschim Medinipur

Pratima Bisi (Dantan-I GP), Dantan-I Block, Paschim Medinipur

Fig. 4.4

Kamala Ruhidas, Kakdihi Bazar Village, Shahid Matangini Block, Purba Medinipur

Pratima Hazra, Andulia Village, Shahid Matangini Block, Paschim Medinipur

Fig. 4.5

	
Dipes Jana, B M Chak village, Chandipur Block, Purba Medinipur	**Susanta Manna, Narandari Village, Chandipur Block, Purba Medinipur**

Fig. 4.6

The District Magistrates of Nadia, Paschim Medinipur and Purba Medinipur stated (January 2022) that duplication of photographs occurred due to clerical mistakes, which has been rectified subsequently. However, records regarding rectification were not produced to audit.

4.8.8 HB grant paid to beneficiaries despite no damage

DMCD Department through an order[227], directed appropriate number of special teams of officials to be constituted under the direct supervision of senior officers from the district/sub-division. Field enquiry was to be done by the special team and the list of accepted and rejected claims displayed in the block/municipality.

Audit obtained digitised data of 2,21,702 rejected beneficiaries of HB grant of 49 blocks/municipalities[228] of two districts[229] out of six selected districts. However, bank details of only 2,02,128 beneficiaries[230] were available for 39 blocks/municipalities[231]. The claims of these beneficiaries were rejected by the authorities on grounds of no damage. Through IDEA software Audit cross verified the bank details of 2,02,128 beneficiaries with that of IFMS vouchers and found that ₹ 93.95 lakh was paid to 1,576 beneficiaries[232] whose claims were rejected.

[227] *277-PSDM&CD/2020 dated 01 August 2020.*

[228] ***Nadia:17 Blocks** (Chakdah, Hanskhali, Haringhata, Kaliganj, Kalyani, Karimpur-I, KarimpurII, Krishnaganj, Krishnannagar-I, Krishnannagar-II, Nabadwip, Nakashipara, Ranaghat-I, Ranaghat-II, Santipur, Tehatta-I, Tehatta-II) and **Four ULBs**(Gayeshpur, Haringhata, Krishnanagar, Ranaghat) and **Paschim Medinipur: 21 Blocks** (Chandrakona-I, Chandrakona-II, Dantan-I, Dantan-II, Daspur-I, Daspur-II, Debra, Garbeta-I, Garbeta-II, Garbeta-III, Ghatal, Keshiary, Keshpur, Kharagpur-I, Kharagpur-II, MedinipurSadar, Mohanpur, Narayangarh, Pingla, Sabang, Salboni) and **Seven ULBs**(Chandrakona, Ghatal, Kharagpur, Kharar, Khirpai, Medinipur, Ramjibanpur).*

[229] ***Nadia:** 20,892 in 21 Blocks/ULBs and **PaschimMedinipur:** 2,00,810 in 28 Blocks/ULBs.*

[230] ***Nadia:** 3,609 in 11 Blocks/ULBs and **PaschimMedinipur:** 1,98,519 in 28 Blocks/ULBs.*

[231] ***Nadia: Nine Blocks**(Chakdah, Karimpur-I, Krishnaganj, Nabadwip, Nakashipara, Ranaghat-I, Ranaghat-II, Santipur, Tehatta-II) and **Two ULBs**(Krishnanagar, Ranaghat) and **PaschimMedinipur: 21 Blocks** (Chandrakona-I, Chandrakona-II, Dantan-I, Dantan-II, Daspur-I, Daspur-II, Debra, Garbeta-I, Garbeta-II, Garbeta-III, Ghatal, Keshiary, Keshpur, Kharagpur-I, Kharagpur-II, Medinipur Sadar, Mohanpur, Narayangarh, Pingla, Sabang, Salboni) and **Seven ULBs** (Chandrakona, Ghatal, Kharagpur, Kharar, Khirpai, Medinipur, Ramjibanpur).*

[232] *1,440 beneficiaries (₹ 85.35 lakh) of Nadia and 136 beneficiaries (₹ 8.60 lakh) of Paschim Medinipur.*

In North 24 Parganas, payment of ₹ 1.36 crore was made to 682 ineligible beneficiaries for fully damaged houses. The ineligible beneficiaries applied for refund of HB grant since they were not eligible. Consequently, the district authority recovered ₹ 1.25 crore from 626 ineligible beneficiaries. The cheques submitted by the balance 56 ineligible beneficiaries, were either not presented for encashment by the district authorities or the instruments bounced due to dishonour.

This indicates that due diligence was not observed by the districts authorities in beneficiary selection.

The DMCD Department forwarded replies of the District Magistrates of Nadia and Paschim Medinipur in this regard. The DM, Nadia accepted the audit observation and stated (January 2022) that ₹ 8.60 lakh has been recovered from 43 beneficiaries. The DM, Paschim Medinipur stated (January 2022) that on field verification of 24 beneficiaries it was seen that the houses of those beneficiaries were actually damaged due to Amphan and verification of the remaining beneficiaries was in progress. The reply is not tenable as the houses were inspected by four -man committee and their claims for HB grant rejected on the grounds of no damage.

4.8.9 HB grant of ₹ 1.79 crore paid to beneficiaries without any enquiry/application

In North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas HB grant for fully/partly damaged houses were recommended to 1,775 beneficiaries by Member of Parliament (MP)/Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Member of Zila Parishad (ZP) and Municipal Councillors. No enquiry report from the four-man committee on the extent of house damage in respect of the above 1,775 beneficiaries was found on record. The local authorities made payment of HB grant of ₹ 1.79 crore to the beneficiaries without damage assessment report.

Thus, beneficiaries were selected arbitrarily without following the procedures that resulted in undue payment of ₹ 1.79 crore.

The DMCD Department forwarded the replies of the District Magistrates, North and South 24 Parganas. DM, South 24 Parganas accepted (January 2022) the audit observation. In case of reply of DM, North 24 Parganas, the Chairperson, Board of Administration, Taki Municipality stated (December 2021) that the files containing applications could not be made available to audit as they were misplaced, however, after audit those were searched and found. The reply is not tenable as the Chairperson, during audit (September 2021) replied that payments were made to the affected persons on the recommendations of the councillors without inviting any applications. Further, copies of those misplaced applications were not produced to audit till date (November 2022).

4.8.10 HB grant not paid as per report of Enquiry Committee

Reports of enquiry committees along with other records were test checked in 18 blocks and six municipalities of the six selected districts. In three blocks[233] of North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas in respect of 4,548 beneficiaries[234] it was observed that:

[233] *Barrackpore-I block of North 24 Parganas, Kulpi and Magrahat-I blocks of South 24 Parganas.*

[234] *2,541 in Barrackpore-I, 1,333 in Kulpi and 674 in Magrahat-I.*

- HB grant of ₹ 5.90 lakh was paid to 64 beneficiaries (18 fully damaged houses and 46 partly damaged houses) who were not eligible for the grant as per the report of the enquiry committees.
- HB grant of ₹ 1.70 lakh was paid for partly damaged houses to 34 beneficiaries, though they were eligible for grant meant for fully damaged houses resulting in short payment of HB grant of ₹ 5.10 lakh.
- HB grant of ₹ 0.90 lakh was paid to 18 ineligible beneficiaries[235] of Magrahat-I block as per the enquiry committee.
- 678 beneficiaries[236] whose houses were either partly or fully damaged as per the enquiry reports were not paid HB grant of ₹ 39.60 lakh.

Thus, reports of the enquiry committees were not considered in the above cases, which resulted in undue payment amounting to ₹6.80 lakh to ineligible beneficiaries and short/ no payment of ₹ 44.70 lakh to eligible beneficiaries.

The DMCD Department forwarded the replies of District Magistrates of North and South 24 Parganas. DM, South 24 Parganas accepted the audit observation and stated that recoveries are being made. DM, North 24 Parganas stated (January 2022) that field verification was under process and payments would be made shortly to 658 beneficiaries who did not get the grant after such verification.

Release of assistance to ineligible beneficiaries and short payment of assistance to the eligible beneficiaries indicates that basic preliminary checks were not carried out, resulting in non-payment/short payment to eligible beneficiaries and undue financial assistance to ineligible beneficiaries.

4.8.11 Payment of ₹ 22.84 crore made without supporting documents

The West Bengal Disaster Management Manual does not prescribe any application format to be submitted by the affected persons seeking assistance. Neither the DMCD Department nor the district authorities prescribed such format for Amphan. A standardised application format captures uniform beneficiary information across the State. In absence of such a format, multiple formats (both hand-written and typed), single page applications submitted without necessary information or essential documents were observed across the selected districts. Critical information like date, address, contact number, monthly income of the beneficiaries, extent of damage, bank details, photographs of damage *etc.* were not found.

On the basis of single page applications and without essential documents (copy of Aadhaar/EPIC[237]), bank pass book *etc*, payment of ₹ 22.84 crore was made to the beneficiaries without ensuring their identity, extent of house damage and bank details in Magrahat-I block and Maheshtala Municipality under South 24-Parganas district. Neither any inspection report nor photographs of damaged houses was enclosed with the application forms.

On this being pointed out, the concerned BDO admitted the audit observation and stated (October 2021) that due to non-availability of power supply after Amphan, required documents could not be photocopied by the affected persons

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[235] *Government employees:2, Members of the same family: 2, Not traceable: 14.*

[236] *Barrackpore-I Block:666, Kulpi Block:12.*

[237] *Electors Photo Identity Card.*

and therefore no documents were submitted by them. Payment of grant without ensuring documentary evidence was in violation of extant provisions.

The above highlights the lackadaisical attitude of the authorities in releasing payments and the possibility of assistance having been released more than once and/or to the ineligible beneficiaries, cannot be ruled out.

4.8.12 Payment of HB grant irrespective of the quantum of damage

As per Para 14.18 of State Disaster Management Manual (SDMM) eligibility of beneficiaries for HB grant should be determined after taking into account the extent of damage caused to his/her dwelling house and his/her capability to undertake necessary repair work. The grant is payable to indigent persons only. Indigent person means a person who lacks financial resources to rebuild or repair the damaged/destroyed house without financial assistance from Government, provided the affected person has not got sufficient immovable property in the shape of land to provide the security for any assistance in the shape of loan.

Scrutiny of "Form-B" made available to audit by two district authorities[238] revealed that actual assessment of house damages was carried out by 16 blocks[239] and three municipalities[240] only. The remaining 30 blocks and eight municipalities had not assessed the extent of damage of house buildings as per the provisions of SDMM. On further scrutiny of assessment of loss for houses in four blocks[241] and one municipality, it was noticed that the quantum of loss of 998 houses[242] was assessed in the range of ₹1,500 to ₹19,000 but HB grant was paid at a flat rate of ₹ 20,000 per beneficiary, irrespective of the extent of damage assessed.

The above deviation from SDMM indicated erroneous field verification/ preparation of beneficiary list without ascertaining the extent of actual damages. The possibility of disbursement of excess payment of HB grant and extending undue financial assistance to 998 beneficiaries cannot be ruled out.

In reply DM, Purba Medinipur stated (January 2022) that at the initial stage the department had issued guidelines for a quantum of ₹ 20,000 against each damaged houses/huts, irrespective of any quantum of damage. The department had issued another guideline for payment of ₹ 5,000 against partly damaged cases and it was complied accordingly.

The fact, however, remained that the quantum of assistance of HB grant was not as per extent of damage as envisaged in the State Disaster Management Manual.

4.8.13 Mismatch in Bank Accounts as per Beneficiary List and IFMS Vouchers/Bank Scroll

As per procedure prescribed in the State Disaster Management Manual

[238] *Paschim Medinipur and Purba Medinipur.*

[239] **Paschim Medinipur: Blocks (Ten)** - *Chandrakona-II, Dantan-I, Daspur-I, Garbeta-II, Ghatal, Keshiary, Keshpur, Medinipur Sadar, Pingla and Sabang,* **Purba Medinpur: Blocks (Six)**-*Bhagabanpur-II, Egra-II, Khejuri-I, Moyna, Nandakumar and Nandigram-II.*

[240] Haldia, Panshkura and Tamluk Municipality.

[241] **Paschim Medinipur:Blocks (Two)** - *Garbeta-II and Keshpur.* **Purba Medinpur: Blocks (Two)** - *Moyna and Nandakumar.*

[242] **Purba Medinipur:Blocks (Two)**: Nanda Kumar: 135 and Moyna : 5, **ULBs (One)**: Haldia: 127; **Paschim Medinipur: Blocks (Two)**: Garbeta-II – 86 and Keshpur-645.

(SDMM), each case of application for HB grant was required to be inspected by a four-man committee who shall submit inspection report of damaged house in “Form-C”. Based on such report, the district/block authorities shall prepare draft priority list of eligible beneficiaries recommended for receiving the grant in “Form-B”. Finally, beneficiary list with the bank account details of the intended beneficiaries is prepared from “FormB” for releasing DBT.

Audit scrutinised both beneficiary list and IFMS payment vouchers/Bank Scrolls of HB grant in digitised format in four[243] of the six selected districts. Both the beneficiary list and IFMS payment vouchers contained bank account details of beneficiaries. Further, the bank details available in the IFMS vouchers/Bank Scrolls were cross checked with the bank details mentioned in the beneficiary list through IDEA tools. From the analysis it was seen that there was mismatch between the account numbers mentioned in the beneficiary lists and those found in the IFMS Vouchers/Bank Scrolls of successful transactions. The mismatch was as high as around 16 *per cent* in respect of South 24 Parganas, where mismatch in 1,40,894 cases, involving an amount of ₹ 120.39 crore was found, out of total 8,62,394 beneficiaries (cases of successful transactions)[244]. Similar discrepancy was found in 3,281 cases involving ₹ 4.68 crore in Nadia, Paschim Medinipur and Purba Medinipur districts.

This indicates serious lack of internal controls in the system of preparation of beneficiary lists and DBT payments made on the basis of such lists. Procedure to ensure correctness of account numbers of the beneficiaries could not be ascertained in audit in absence of details of transaction history either on paper or electronically. Lack of adequate validation checks in the process of payment may lead to risk of fraudulent payments.

On this being pointed out, DM South 24 Parganas stated (April 2022) that in many cases transactions were failed due to wrong bank account details of the beneficiaries. The details of those failed transactions were sent to the concerned BDOs/SDOs for rectification; after receipt of the rectified details from BDOs/SDOs, payments were made to the concerned beneficiaries. Details of 2,000 such cases were also submitted to audit. The reply is not tenable since the audit observation was on mismatch of bank accounts in successful transactions with beneficiary list. Further, records relating to the process of rectification of the bank account details by the BDOs/SDOs were not produced to audit; the updated beneficiary list with rectified account details was also not furnished to audit. Therefore, audit could not verify complete trail of rectification of account numbers of beneficiaries.

4.9 Irregularities in distribution of crop assistance

4.9.1 Multiple payments in the same beneficiary accounts

Distribution of assistance for crop damage was made to all the enrolled farmers of Krishak Bandhu Assured Income Scheme (KBAIS) as an additional instalment under the existing scheme in the affected districts. Electoral Photo Identity Card

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[243] *Similar operations could not be performed in Hooghly and North 24 Parganas Districts in absence of the complete beneficiary list.*

[244] *Nadia, Paschim Medinipur and Purba Medinipur.*

(EPIC) is mandatory for enrolment of farmers/share croppers in the KBAIS portal. The farmers/share croppers are also required to be in possession of valid documents of ownership of cultivated land to be eligible for enrolment.

Crop assistance of ₹ 352.59 crore was paid to 23.42 lakh beneficiaries in nine districts. Audit obtained data for crop assistance in the six selected districts. Analysis of the data revealed the following:

- Multiple assistance of ₹ 24.33 lakh was paid to 650 beneficiaries in nine districts on 1,311occasions in their registered KBAIS accounts. It was found that 648 beneficiaries received the assistance twice, one beneficiary thrice while the remaining one beneficiary 12 times in their bank accounts.

  The KBAIS portal restricts enrolment of a farmer/share cropper more than once with identical EPIC number. However, Audit observed that 2,697 beneficiaries in five districts had multiple KBAIS enrolments, one with their valid EPIC number and the others with varying EPIC numbers either comprising altered digits, which did not exist on the website of the Election Commission of India (ECI) or a completely different EPIC number. Thus, KBAIS enrolment obtained by the beneficiaries with different EPIC numbers were invalid. Since, the beneficiaries had several KBAIS enrolments, each of these beneficiaries got assistance several times.

- Crop assistance of ₹ 83.25 lakh was paid to 2,697 beneficiaries through 5,406 distinct transactions. During audit scrutiny, the EPIC details of KBAIS enrolments was not found in the ECI website in 3,011 out of 5,406 transactions; the amount of crop assistance involved was ₹ 46.94 lakh. Similar analysis could not be performed for Purba Medinipur due to absence of EPIC numbers of beneficiaries in the data made available to Audit.

  Thus, multiple payments to same beneficiaries and creation of numerous KBAIS account in one name were indicative of serious lapses in the KBAIS portal, which needs to be examined and corrective action taken as huge amount of fund used to be disbursed to beneficiaries through this portal every year under KBAIS.

  On this being pointed out, the Agriculture Department stated (April 2022) that disbursement of assistance was made to all beneficiaries available in the KBAIS data of nine districts in a very short time. As a result, some errors might have occurred due to shortcomings in the newly developed software of the portal. However, steps have been taken for recovery of excess payment. The Department further stated that subsequently, the portal software has been made more robust with introduction of checks at multiple levels.

4.10 Irregularities in distribution of Horticulture assistance

4.10.1 Irregular payment of ₹ 2.82 crore to 5,627 beneficiaries

Department of Food Processing Industries & Horticulture, GoWB decided[245] to provide financial relief to the affected farmers to repair the

[245] *Notification No. I/89457/2020 dated 29 May 2020.*

'*Paan-Boroj*[246]', which were damaged during Amphan. All betel-vine growers with substantially damaged '*Paan-Boroj*' were eligible for assistance. The assistance was limited to ₹ 5,000 per affected farmer for one damaged unit, irrespective of number of '*Paan-Boroj*' of the affected farmer. Beneficiaries would apply to the Assistant Director of Agriculture (ADA) of the concerned block and processing would be done by the ADA. The list of beneficiaries was to be approved by a three-man committee[247]. The Field Consultant (FC) was required to enquire the validity of the received applications and submit recommendations to the block level beneficiary selection committee.

Audit obtained digitised data of beneficiaries of six selected districts where assistance of ₹ 60.96 crore was paid to 1,21,923 betel vine farmers.

From the records of three[248] blocks in Purba Medinipur and South 24 Parganas it was found that 18,359 beneficiaries were provided horticulture assistance. Of these, 5,627 beneficiaries were paid ₹ 2.82 crore without any application and subsequent enquiry. The payments were made based on beneficiary list prepared for cyclone 'Bulbul' that hit West Bengal in November 2019.

Thus, payment of ₹ 2.82 crore to 5,627 beneficiaries on the basis of beneficiary list of previous cyclone and without conducting any enquiry was highly irregular. Moreover, in South 24 Parganas 1,727 beneficiaries from the above again applied and received assistance of ₹ 86.35 lakh for loss due to Amphan.

On this being pointed out, Joint Secretary, Horticulture Department stated (December 2021) that the districts have been directed to submit action taken report in this regard. However, such report is awaited (November 2022).

4.10.2 Multiple assistances to same beneficiary led to excess payment of ₹ 41.25 lakh in four test checked districts

From the analysis of 1,21,252 horticulture beneficiary data of four districts it was found that 797 farmers were given multiple assistance of ₹ 81.10 lakh in the same bank accounts. 770 farmers received the assistance twice, 26 farmers received thrice, while one farmer received assistance four times. The above resulted in excess payment of ₹ 41.25 lakh to 797 farmers.

On this being pointed out, Joint Secretary, Horticulture Department stated (December 2021) that the districts have been directed to submit action taken report in this regard. However, such report is awaited (November 2022).

4.10.3 Horticulture Input Subsidy provided only to betel vine farmers much in excess of assessed damage

As per Memorandum of Super Cyclone Amphan submitted by the GoWB to the IMCT, Horticulture input subsidy to the extent of ₹ 273.76 crore covering area of 1,86,362.87 hectare (damage more than 33 *per cent*) was sought from GoI in respect of five types of crops namely vegetables, betel vine, flowers and fruits (both perennial and non-perennial).

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[246] *Structures of betel vine cultivation.*

[247] *Consisting of BDO, ADA and the nominated representative of District Horticulture officer.*

[248] *PurbaMedinipur: Nandigram –I and Ramnagar-I; South 24 Parganas: Namkhana.*

However, the Agriculture Department, GoWB, allotted ₹ 81.29 crore for horticulture subsidy only to farmers in respect of betel vine covering 8,704.70 hectare. No allotment was provided for other horticultural crops (*i.e.* vegetables, flowers and fruits) covering area of 1,77,658.17 hectare affected due to Super Cyclone Amphan as shown below in **Table 4.4:**

Table 4.4: Horticultural Crop Area Damage Assessed and actual assistance provided by GoWB

Sl No	Name of Districts	Affected area as per Memorandum for which assistance was sought (in ha)	Affected area of betel vine for which assistance was provided (in ha)	Affected area other than beetle vine(in ha)	Percentage of area for which assistance was not provided
1.	Bankura	3,495.00	76.00	3,419.00	97.83
2.	Birbhum	7,300.00	0	7,300.00	100.00
3.	Hooghly	22,692.70	77.70	22,615.00	99.66
4.	Howrah	5,686.00	1,376.00	4,310.00	75.80
5.	Jhargram	1,325.00	0	1,325.00	100.00
6.	Malda	7,175.00	60.00	7,115.00	99.16
7.	Murshidabad	9,442.00	0	9,442.00	100.00
8.	Nadia	18,996.70	430.00	18,566.70	97.74
9.	North 24 Parganas	53,669.00	50.00	53,619.00	99.91
10.	Paschim Medinipur	13,713.00	958.00	12,755.00	93.01
11.	Purba Burdwan	3652.47	0	3,652.47	100.00
12.	Purba Medinipur	9,170.00	3,200.00	5,970.00	65.10
13	South 24 Parganas	30,046.00	2,477.00	27,569.00	91.76
Total		**1,86,362.87**	**8,704.70**	**1,77,658.17**	**95.33**

(Source: Memorandum on Super Cyclone Amphan and allotment orders of horticulture assistance)

Therefore, the affected farmers cultivating crops other than betel vine, which covers 95.33 *per cent* of the total affected area assessed by GoWB in their Memorandum, were not provided horticulture input subsidy.

Further, during the scrutiny of Memorandum it was found by audit that GoWB assessed and claimed horticulture input subsidy in respect of betel vine for ₹ 15.67 crore covering area of 8,704.70 hectares (damage more than 33 *per cent*) in respect of nine districts. However, the Agriculture Department, GoWB, made allotment of ₹ 81.29 crore for horticulture input subsidy to the betel vine farmers. Thus, ₹ 65.62 crore was allotted in excess of the assessed damage.

On this being pointed out, the Joint Secretary, Horticulture Department stated (December 2021) that assistance was provided for "Paan Boroj" structure supporting the growing of betel vine crops. Repairing of "Paan Boroj" structures do not fall under the purview of NDRF/SDRF norms. Further, there was no allotment under NDRF/SDRF in respect of affected farmers of vegetable, flowers and fruits.

The reply is not tenable as the assistance rendered was lopsided in favour of betel vine farmers, receiving an excess allotment of ₹65.62 crore as assistance for damages where the quantum of damage was 4.67 *per cent* only.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, while assessment of damage was done for all horticulture crops, assistance was paid only to betel vine farmers, much in excess of assessed damages while farmers of other horticultural crops were not considered for assistance at all.

4.11 Irregularities in Assistance to Fishermen

To alleviate the damages faced by the fisherman, caused by Amphan, GoWB provided relief in cash for damaged boats, nets and hundis (big pitchers used in fishing). Further, for treatment of each hectare of affected water body, 100 kg of Lime and two kg of Potassium Permanganate were provided in kind. The Fisheries Department disbursed ₹ 17.22 crore as assistance to 96,154 beneficiaries.

4.11.1 Multiple payments to 1,174 beneficiaries

During test check of beneficiaries list of South 24 Parganas, Audit found that 1,174 beneficiaries with identical names and bank account numbers received assistance more than once that resulted in excess payment of ₹ 43.49 lakh in 13 blocks.

Further analysis revealed that the lists were prepared by the Gram Panchayats (GPs) and forwarded to the block offices. Block offices prepared the consolidated lists based on such lists and submitted to the Treasury for payment. Multiple payments indicated that the check and validation system at the block level was inadequate.

On this being pointed out, BDO Namkhana admitted the audit observation and stated (September 2021) that such erroneous payments were made due to distribution of assistance to many beneficiaries within a short time period and limited staff.

4.11.2 Non-utilisation of allotted fund – ₹ 44.78 lakh

In terms of circular[249] issued by MHA, GoI, assistance to fishermen for damage/loss of nets was admissible at ₹ 2,600.

In South 24 Parganas, amount of ₹ 2,600 was released in two[250] installments. At Namkhana block it was noticed that although fund of ₹ 44.78 lakh towards second installment was received by the block but was not disbursed to 2,799 affected fishermen, resulting in lapse of the fund on 31 March 2021. Thus, the beneficiaries were deprived of assistance despite availability of fund.

On this being pointed out in Audit, BDO Namkhana accepted the observation and stated (July 2021) that since the fund was allotted under Old Age Pension Scheme for fishermen instead of Amphan damage, there remained confusion regarding disbursement of the fund to Amphan affected fishermen.

4.11.3 No action against failed transactions resulting in deprival of affected fishermen

From the scrutiny of IFMS portal of three selected block offices[251] in South 24 Parganas, payment of ₹ 11.60 lakh to 573 beneficiaries was unsuccessful due to discrepancy in their bank accounts. The block authorities did not initiate remedial action to obtain the correct bank account details for

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[249] *No. 32-7/2014-NDM-1 dated 08 April 2015 issued by MHA, GoI.*

[250] *First Installment: ₹ 1,000, Second Installment: ₹ 1,600.*

[251] *Kulpi, Magrahat and Namkhana.*

releasing assistance. Financial assistance of ₹ 11.60 lakh remained undisbursed and lapsed in March 2021.

On this being pointed out, the block authorities stated that attempts were made to contact those fishermen and to obtain their correct bank account details through Gram Panchayats. However, details of such communications could not be produced to Audit.

4.12 Doubtful payment for animal resources

In response to the audit requisition relating to providing details of beneficiaries (along-with all available details), the Animal Resources Department had provided a list containing names of the beneficiaries, single word address of the beneficiary, types of loss and amount. Though several duplicate names were found in the list, in absence of unique and important information on bank account numbers, mobile numbers, Photo ID number, the extent of excess payments/duplicate payments, if any, could not be verified. In the absence of bank account numbers, payments made to the beneficiaries through DBT to the bank accounts of selected eligible beneficiaries could not be verified in audit.

However, details of requisite information, like bank account numbers, IFSC code, mobile numbers *etc*., as required for successful DBT, relating to the 2,380 beneficiaries of South 24 Parganas (for second phase of assistance) were provided and following discrepancies were noticed:

a) Out of 2,380 beneficiaries, duplicate mobile numbers were found in 316 cases involving an amount of ₹ 0.17 crore.

b) duplicate bank account numbers were found in respect of 18 out of the 2,380 beneficiaries involving an amount of ₹ 0.02 crore. Further, assuming that these nine beneficiaries are eligible for at least one benefit, an overpayment of ₹ 30,000 would have been made, if the lower of the two benefits are considered as ineligible.

However, the district authorities claimed that applications were processed in two phases and do not constitute double payment as they pertain to different kinds of losses. Given the limited database made available by the Animal Resources Department, reasonable assurance that overpayments have not been made, cannot be given.

Department in its reply (December 2021) stated that concerned district officials have been requested to submit detailed report in this regard.

4.13 Evacuation Measures

After being alerted by IMD on 13 May 2020, about the formation of the cyclonic system, the State Government started close monitoring of the situation. Preparedness measures viz., initial sensitisation, activation of control room, coordination meetings were taken up. The vulnerable population were evacuated and moved to safer places.

Para 6.2 of the West Bengal Disaster Management Manual prescribes mitigation measures to be followed in the areas vulnerable to the cyclone. IMD Early Warning System could track the cyclone system almost a week (13 May 2020) ahead of the landfall of the cyclone, which gave enough room for preparedness in the coastal districts in West Bengal. Widespread awareness campaign was done by the members of the Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samities and Municipalities. Almost all the households who were surveyed in the six districts conveyed that they were made aware of the incoming cyclone and in many coastal districts, announcements through public announcement systems/mikes were done. The households surveyed had been asked to move to the nearby school/cyclone shelters. However, many of them (62.50 *per cent*) preferred to stay at home. An analysis of the households surveyed, based on their shifting is given below:

Table 4.5: Pre-Cyclone Evacuation of Households

Sl. No.	Name of Districts	Number of people did not shift	Number of people shifted to nearby schools/cyclone shelters	Number of persons shifted to relatives' places/ neighbor's houses	Number of persons did not respond	Total surveyed
1.	Hooghly	143	16	1	0	160
2.	Nadia	146	0	14	0	160
3.	North 24 Parganas	84	22	54	0	160
4.	Paschim Medinipur	108	49	2	1	160
5.	Purba Medinipur	44	40	76	0	160
6.	South 24 Parganas	75	72	13	0	160
Total		**600**	**199**	**160**	**1**	**960**

As can be seen from above, out of 359 persons evacuated 277 persons were from the coastal districts of North 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur and South 24 Parganas. Thus, higher proportions of households were shifted to safer places, which may have reduced casualties suffered from the wrath of the super cyclone Amphan. During landfall of cyclone, announcements of the disaster and preventive measures, broadcast for medical assistance, deployment of State Disaster Response Force & National Disaster Response Force Teams, Police, Civil Defence, *etc*. were taken up. After receding of the cyclone, relief and restoration measures were also taken up.

4.14 Relief Distribution in Kind

Apart from providing cash assistances to the Amphan affected households, GoWB had also provided relief materials in the form of tarpaulins, clothes, Special GR (Gratuitous Relief) rice, DM Kits and undertook restoration activities in view of damage to the irrigation, power and road infrastructure.

As per the "Memorandum of Super Cyclone Amphan" prepared by the DMCD Department, GoWB, in June 2020, relief materials/articles were allotted to different Amphan affected districts as shown in ***Appendix-45.***

4.14.1 Non-transparent Distribution of Relief Materials

Distribution of relief materials to the last mile could not be verified in audit in many cases because of non-transparent way of maintenance of stock registers and their end-distribution in many districts. While in North 24 Parganas, all the materials which were allotted to the district was seen as sub-allotted. Further, analysis of response from the beneficiary survey gives some pointers to the distribution process, as detailed in **Table 4.6**.

Table 4.6: Distribution of relief material vis-à-vis response of beneficiaries in survey

Sl. No. (1)	Name of district (2)	Figures as per State Government					Observations from beneficiary survey				
		No. of Beneficiary HHs of HB grant (3)	Tarpaulins distributed (4)	Average no. of tarpaulins per 100 HH (5)= {(4)/(3)} *100	DM kits Distributed (6)	Average no. of DM Kit per 100 HH (7)= {(6)/(3)} *100	HH provided with HB grant (8)	HH provided with tarpaulins (9)	Average no. of tarpaulins per 100 HH (10)= {(9)/(8)}	HH provided with DM Kit (11)	Avg. No. of DM Kit per 100 HH (12)= {(11)/(8)}
1	Hooghly	66,997	65,000	97	0	0	132	9	7	0	0
2	Nadia	41,644	15,000	36	0	0	139	3	2	0	0
3	North 24 Parganas	5,81,109	3,90,000	67	18,000	3	135	66	49	0	0
4	Paschim Medinipur	79,326	15,000	19	0	0	144	0	0	0	0
5	Purba Medinipur	3,40,174	1,00,000	29	7,000	2	139	92	66	4	3
6	South 24 Parganas	9,04,491	6,60,000	73	37,000	4	139	40	29	9	6
Total		**20,13,741**	**12,45,000**	**62**	**62,000**	**3**	**828**	**210**	**25**	**13**	**2**

It is expected that relief materials like tarpaulin and DM kits would be distributed to the households, whose houses have been damaged and wherewithal for living has been disturbed. It is seen that for every 100 such beneficiary households of HB grant, in the six selected districts, 62 tarpaulins were distributed on an average, whereas amongst the households surveyed in audit, the average was only 25. Beneficiaries in Paschim Medinipur district have responded to have not received any tarpaulin. Similarly, beneficiaries in North 24 Parganas responded that they had not been given any DM kit. Therefore, audit is unable to provide any assurance regarding distribution of relief materials in the aftermath of Amphan.

4.14.2 Loss due to short receipt of Tarpaulin

From the scrutiny of records of Amphan Relief Materials of North 24 Parganas it was found that 1,50,000 tarpaulins were despatched from the central stores at Malda and Siliguri to the district. However, the district authority received only 1,49,554 tarpaulins leaving a short fall of 446 tarpaulins.

This resulted in financial loss of ₹ 3.22 lakh to government exchequer (calculated at the rate of ₹ 722 per tarpaulin).

On this being pointed out District Authority stated (September 2021) that the correct shortfall in tarpaulins would be 381. However, no documentary evidence was provided to audit in support of their reply.

4.14.3 Irregular submission of UCs against relief contingency fund for Amphan

DMCD Department, GoWB sanctioned ₹ 7.75 crore for South 24 Parganas towards relief contingency for Amphan in four different batches. Audit found that Utilisation Certificates (UCs) against the entire sanctioned fund of ₹ 7.75 crore were sent by the district authority to the DMCD Department in different batches. Audit, however, found that, UCs for ₹ 1.04 crore was submitted from one to 161 days before sub-allotment of the fund by the district authority. Details of allotment of relief contingency fund of Amphan and submission of UC were as under **Table 4.7**:

Table 4.7: Sanction Orders vis-à-vis Utilisation Certificate on Relief Contingency

Sl. No.	Sanction Order	Amount (₹ in lakh)	UC No. & date sent by the district	Balance lying un-disbursed as on the date of UC sent (₹ in lakh)
1.	201-DM/FR/DMCD dated: 19-05-2020	60.00	FR-361 dated: 10-06-2020	20.00
2.	227-DM/FR/DMCD dated: 30-05-2020	500.00	FR-602 dated: 26-08-2020	(₹ 12.50 lakh suballotted on 26 August 2020)
3.	259-DM/FR/DMCD dated: 09-06-2020	200.00	FR-688 dated: 25-09-2020	68.50
4.	531-DM/FR/DMCD dated: 22-08-2020	15.00	FR-621 dated: 02-09-2020	15.00
Total		**775.00**		**103.50**

(*Source: Information furnished by DMCD Department and DM, South 24 Parganas)*

Thus, UCs sent in respect of ₹ 1.04 crore of relief contingency fund for Amphan was irregular and not in order. Reply of the district authority is yet to be received (November 2022).

4.15 Restoration Works

As per the report submitted by the State Government the super cyclone Amphan caused huge damages to dwelling houses, agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, animal resources, forest, power, irrigation canals, health infrastructure and industries. Audit mainly concentrated on the infrastructural work done by the Power Department and Irrigation and Waterways Department; the observations in this regard are as follows:

4.15.1 Restoration Works undertaken by Power Sector

GoWB in its Memorandum assessed that 88,357 High Tension (HT) Poles, 3,51,156 Low Tension (LT) Poles, 10,280 Distribution Transformer (DTR) and 1,89,169.08 Km of conductors were damaged due to Amphan. Accordingly, GoWB sought assistance of ₹ 1,345.25 crore *i.e* ₹ 1,235.25 crore for damages to HT poles, LT poles, distribution transformers, conductors, removal of debris and ₹ 110 crore for restoration of electric poles.

West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (WBSEDCL) admitted that the assessed damage of ₹ 1,235.25 crore mentioned in the Memorandum was purely on estimation basis, without documented details. After the cyclone was over, a report was taken from all the distribution units on the quantum of actual damage to the existing infrastructure. The actual damage across all distribution units was ₹ 240 crore which was only 19.43 *per cent* of the estimated figure. The aforesaid expenditure was incurred from the fund of WBSEDCL and Detailed Project Report (DPR) containing the detailed expenses was sent (February 2021) by WBSEDCL to the GoWB for sanctioning ₹ 240 crore in their favour.

As per information provided by WBSEDCL, capital expenditure of ₹ 253.06 crore was incurred by 43 divisions while revenue expenditure of ₹ 6.13 crore was incurred by 26 divisions under WBSEDCL on account of repair and restoration work during the financial year ending on 31 March 2021.

4.15.2 Restoration works undertaken by Irrigation & Waterways Department

Around 160 km length of river embankments and sea dykes maintained by the Irrigation & Waterways Department (I&WD) had been damaged due to Amphan at 37 Blocks in the districts of Purba Medinipur, North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas. Breaches to embankments of varying length, ranging from 20 m to 2500 m occurred in 92 places, mainly in Patharpratima, Gosaba, Basanti, Kultali, Mathurapur-II and Canning-I Blocks in South 24 Parganas and Hingalganj, Sandeshkhali-I, Sandeshkhali-II, Hasnabad (including Taki Municipal area), Minakhan, Basirhat-I, Basirhat-II and Baduria Blocks in North 24 Parganas. I&WD assessed (May 2020) the restoration cost amounting to ₹ 73.12 crore considering works of palliative nature. This estimate was later revised to ₹ 79.65 crore. DMCD Department however, allotted (July 2020) fund of ₹ 100 crore to I&WD from SDRF to combat the disastrous situation due to Amphan. I&WD in its reply (March 2021) stated that ₹ 79.65 crore from SDRF fund was allocated by the Department (while actual sub-allocation to six Irrigation Divisions executing the work was found to be ₹ 66.93 crore), out of which expenditure of ₹ 64.90 crore was incurred.

4.16 Internal control mechanism

Internal control is an integral component of an organisation's management processes to provide reasonable assurance that the operations are carried out in economic, efficient and effective manner. Deficiencies in the internal control mechanism are discussed in the following sub-paragraphs:

4.16.1 Control deficiencies in the process of management and disbursement of Relief Assistance

During audit of selected blocks and municipalities in the six selected districts, the following deficiencies in internal controls were noticed in respect of the management of disbursement of relief assistance, which are detailed in two parts viz, Administrative Deficiencies and Information Technology or System Control Deficiencies:

4.16.1.1 Administrative Deficiencies

Audit observed following administrative deficiencies:

- The West Bengal Disaster Management Manual does not prescribe any general format in which the applications are required to be submitted by the affected persons for seeking assistance. Neither the DMCD Department nor the district authorities prescribed such format for Amphan. Prescription of application format is required for capturing uniform beneficiary information across all the districts. Due to absence of prescribed format, different formats (both handwritten and typed), including single page applications without any supporting documents, were submitted by the beneficiaries across the selected districts. The applications did not contain vital information like date of application, monthly income of the beneficiaries, nature of damage, bank account details, mobile number, photographs of damaged houses *etc* in a considerable number of the applications test-checked during audit of selected blocks of six districts. Further, results of verification of damaged houses by enquiry committee and acceptance/ rejection of application was not found to be noted on the applications in 301 (30 *per cent*) out of 963 HB grant applications checked in audit for beneficiary survey. In many cases, reports of verification committees were not found on record, though benefits were distributed to the applicants. The details of applications checked are given in ***Appendix-46.***
- It was further found that, there was absence of unified application form for seeking multiple assistances. As a result, an applicant seeking multiple assistances had to submit applications to different wings/departments of the district authority in the difficult situation of the aftermath of a natural disaster.
- Documents required to be submitted along with the applications were also not prescribed. Prescribed documents are required for ensuring correctness of information provided in the application forms by the beneficiaries.

All the relief assistance was provided to the beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). Therefore, copy of the bank passbook was required to be obtained by the district authorities to ensure correctness of the account details of the beneficiaries. During audit of the selected blocks in six districts it was found that copy of bank passbook/ bank details of the beneficiaries was not available with the application form in 265 (27.52 *per cent*) out of 963 cases test checked during audit. Further, it was found that there was mismatch in bank account numbers as mentioned in the beneficiary list and the bank scroll/ IFMS vouchers, which was as high as 16 *per cent* in South 24 Parganas district. Thus, mechanism for ensuring correctness of account details of the beneficiaries was found to be deficient.

- It was found that no register was maintained by the blocks/municipalities either manually or digitally for entering all the applications received at their end. The application forms for HB grants were not found to be serially numbered and were also not cross referenced with Form-C and Form B. This deficiency would cause hindrance in identification and taking out a particular application from the heaps of applications in case of scrutiny by higher authorities.
- Cross linkages among applications, Form-C (Inspection Report relating to families affected due to natural calamities proposed to be given HB grant), Form-B (Detailed particulars of families affected by natural calamities proposed to be given HB grant) and digitised beneficiary data was found to be deficient as there was no provision for capturing Application Form Number, unique identity number (Aadhaar Number, PAN number *etc*.) and bank account details of applicants in Form-B and Form-C prescribed in the West Bengal Disaster Management Manual. Capturing of those details in FormB and Form-C would help in ensuring that persons other than those included in the said Forms are not given assistance.
- There was no provision for scrutiny of beneficiary data with that of application forms, Form-C and Form-B by the higher authorities to ensure correctness of beneficiary data before making payments to them. During test check of records of selected blocks/municipalities it was found that no such scrutiny was exercised by the block/district authorities resulting in several cases of multiple payments being made to same beneficiaries. Cases were also found where beneficiaries, though not recommended for payment in Form-B, had been paid HB grant by the block authorities. Further, payments were found to be made to beneficiaries not belonging to indigent category. These cases cropped up due to absence of scrutiny of data by the higher authorities.
- The Special Secretary, DMCD Department nominated[252] (June 2020) three supervising officers and seven nodal officers for supervising the process of selection of beneficiaries and disbursement of HB grant in seven[253] districts. These officers were required to visit the assigned district

[252] *Order No 1103/1(11)-DMCD/O/EOC and 1099-DMCD both dated 17 June 2020.*

[253] *Hooghly, Howrah, Nadia, North 24 Parganas, Paschim Medinipur, Purba Medinipur and South 24 Parganas.*

and carry out random checking of houses for which grant was given. They would also inquire into complaints about HB grant and ensure that it was disbursed in compliance with SDRF norms and orders of GoWB. The supervising/Nodal officers were also directed to submit an inspection/tour report and bring to the notice of the Special Secretary on deviations, if any. Proceedings of the meeting (June 2020) between Special Secretary and Supervising/Nodal Officers on the above subject, revealed that all the officers present in the meeting stated that there was no anomaly observed on their visit regarding amount, process and other modalities of HB grant disbursement. This is indicative of the fact that supervision and oversight activities carried out by the Department were deficient, which failed to fulfill the intended objective of the Department.

The Department stated (April 2022) that the whole relief work of Amphan was conducted during Covid pandemic period wherein there was shortage of manpower due to complete lockdown and later due to rostering of staff.

The reply of the Department should be viewed in light of the fact that natural calamities are a recurrent feature. Therefore, it was incumbent on the Department to have standardised relief application formats and prescribe the standard operating procedures for processing the applications beforehand.

4.16.1.2 Information Technology or System Control Deficiencies

- The DMCD Department did not formulate unique verifiable numbers like Virtual Aadhaar Numbers or Aadhaar Numbers and job cards of beneficiaries issued by NREGA, mandatory for claiming assistance and therefore, such unique number was not available in most of the applications. Consequently, no unique verifiable number was captured in the digitised beneficiary data in the selected districts.
- The district authorities did not exercise due diligence of "Compare and Check exercise" on the digitised beneficiary data prescribed by the DMCD Department before releasing payment, to ensure that multiple data against the same beneficiaries are not included in such data. The above absence resulted in undetected and multiple payments in 18,891 cases involving 9,226 beneficiaries of HB grant.
- In KBAIS, EPIC number of farmers was made mandatory for registration in the portal to uniquely identify a farmer. Duplicate registration in the portal with the same EPIC number was not possible. However, it was noticed that KBAIS portal was not integrated with the portal of Election Commission of India. As such, there was no mechanism to validate EPIC data of farmers registered in the system. The above deficiency resulted in multiple registrations in 3,011 cases involving 2,697 farmers, in the KBAIS portal by providing either manipulated EPIC or EPIC of other persons.

As discussed above, Audit observed several internal control deficiencies in the administrative, operational and monitoring controls in management of relief measures. Internal control arrangements were found to be weak and did not provide complete assurance against irregularities.

4.17 Conclusions

The super cyclone Amphan of May 2020 had hit the coast of West Bengal causing substantial damage.

Several PILs alleging irregularities in relief distribution were filed, which led the Calcutta High Court to direct the C&AG to conduct "financial and performance audit" of such relief. An audit of the relief and restoration work taken up by the State Government was conducted across several departments and selected districts. GoI approved ₹ 2,707.77 crore as central assistance from NDRF and released an amount of ₹ 2,250.28 crore.

Assistance was paid to beneficiaries through DBT for house-building, crop damage including horticulture crops and for fisheries, of which House building comprised the single largest category. Bulk of the assistance (93.69 *per cent*) provided was distributed in the districts of South and North 24 Parganas, Purba and Paschim Medinipur, Nadia and Hooghly, which were selected for detailed audit.

The lack of adequate institutional mechanisms and processes including internal control and monitoring mechanisms necessary to ensure efficient and timely relief and rehabilitation on the occurrence of a disaster were evident in the disaster relief activities. There were deficiencies in damage assessments, and in numerous cases funds were released either to ineligible beneficiaries, or double/ multiple benefits were given to the same households.

Applications for HB grant were to be submitted to Panchayat/BDO/Municipality offices along with supporting documents. Payment of ₹ 22.84 crore was found to have been made without ensuring submission of requisite documentation in South 24 Parganas. In South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas there were many cases where HB grant was paid based on recommendations of local leaders and without conducting the mandatory local inspections or the inspection reports of the local enquiry Committees were not considered. Beneficiaries whose claims were rejected by the concerned authorities on ground of no damage received HB grant, which indicated that due diligence was not observed to prevent payments to rejected beneficiaries.

Over 50 *per cent* of total HB allotment was distributed among 25 *per cent* of the total beneficiaries in the first phase, while the balance funds were distributed in the second phase to 75 *per cent* of the beneficiaries. This resulted in iniquitous and unjust distribution of limited resources.

Against the provisions of West Bengal Treasury Rules, 2005, entire allotted fund of HB grant of ₹ 1,383.23 crore, meant for North and South 24 Parganas, were drawn from the treasuries by the district authorities, and parked in bank accounts of the district authorities.

Mechanism to identify beneficiaries claiming multiple assistance for same loss/ damage was found to be deficient, resulting in multiple payments to same beneficiaries in several cases. This phenomenon was observed across all sectors in which assistance was provided through DBT.

In the five test checked districts 2,697 beneficiaries were found to have multiple KBAIS enrolments, resulting in multiple payments.

Assistance for damage to "*Paan Boroj*" was provided to 5,627 beneficiaries on the basis of beneficiaries list prepared for cyclone 'Bulbul' in 2019.

The internal control mechanism of the Government for relief work was found to be deficient. The DMCD Department did not prescribe unified format of application for assistance, which resulted in different formats of applications even for the same assistance, as was most evident in the case of HB grant. No unique identifier (like Aadhaar) was made mandatory to identify beneficiaries seeking assistance. There was no cross verification between applications forms, inspection reports in "Form-C" and recommended beneficiary list in "Form-B". No mechanism to monitor applications received, admitted and rejected were found on record.

There was no audit trail that could trace a specific transaction from the stage of application through its verification, acceptance and successful payment into beneficiary bank account, which is essential to provide assurance of the process of providing relief assistance. A well-designed system, in the form of a software or web application, which does not allow duplicate entries of any of the verifiable unique numbers, like Aadhaar, EPIC, Bank Account No., Mobile No., land details of applicants, could have prevented multiple payments in several cases. A single-window system and comprehensive pre-designed application for claiming different kinds of assistance would have made the process less strenuous for applicants and facilitated ease of monitoring by authorities.

The State Government needs to revisit the system of relief payments at the district levels and below and their effective monitoring by controlling Departments so as to address the control issues observed by audit.

4.18 Recommendations for System Improvement

Government should look at taking urgent steps to ensure that the system of disaster management and disaster relief is fair, robust and transparent and that the prescribed rules and procedures are scrupulously followed so that an assurance can be derived from the system. The suggested actions include:

1. ***Strengthening the mechanism for assessing and reporting of damage due to a disaster from the districts for planning effective mitigation measures.***
2. ***Prescribe a unified comprehensive application format for relief assistance and also the documents to be submitted in support of claims for such assistance; devising a single-window, software or web-interface where the district, block or Panchayat authorities could enter the details provided by applicants and generate a unique application number, which may be tracked by the applicants as well as higher authorities which may be available at the Block/Panchayat Offices and also displayed on the website of the Government for easy reference and retrieval.***
3. ***Ensure that the system of beneficiary selection is streamlined and followed scrupulously to ensure transparency and fairness; unique identifier number like Aadhaar could be used for this purpose to prevent multiple payments and duplication.***
4. ***Ensure that mandatory scrutiny of records by the controlling authorities before making payments are carried out and that there is accountability***

in the process; effective steps may be taken to discourage non-compliance with existing rules and processes.

5. ***Strengthen mechanisms for monitoring stock and distribution of relief materials.***
6. ***In view of the several instances of irregular/doubtful payments, the Department should investigate the process of disbursement of relief in detail and adopt suitable control mechanism and order recovery of relief from ineligible beneficiaries. Necessary enquiry should also be initiated by the Government for fixing responsibility for the irregularities.***