

ENVIRONMENT, FORESTS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT (FOREST WING)

3.6 Information Technology Audit of computerisation in Forest Department

3.6.1 Introduction

The Forest wing of Environment, Forests, Science and Technology Department embarked upon a massive computerisation programme as part of implementation of Andhra Pradesh Forestry Project (APFP) taken up with the loan assistance of World Bank. The salient features envisaged included online monitoring and evaluation of various forest activities, synchronisation of physical and financial planning, and strengthening data collection capabilities of forest survey teams.

3.6.2 Development and implementation of ICMIS package

The department appointed (1994) Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) as Management Information System (MIS) consultant at a cost of Rs 34 lakh with a stipulation to develop and implement a suitable MIS package within 16 months.

Infructuous expenditure of Rs 62.02 lakh on the abandoned ICMIS package

The department did not specify its information needs and asked the consultant (TCS) to study their requirements and develop a suitable MIS package. TCS developed a package known as Integrated Computer based Management Information System (ICMIS) which was launched (June 1996) at Hyderabad and extended to all Circles and Divisions in February and March 1997. During the project implementation, however, it was noticed that the ICMIS package did not meet all the requirements of the department, necessitating its revision several times, incurring an additional expenditure of Rs 6 lakh. Even this refined ICMIS package failed to meet intended objectives of the department so much so that the World Bank commented and recommended in December 1997 that the package was fraught with many inadequacies and should be scrapped as it would not serve as an useful tool. In its subsequent supervision missions also, the World Bank pointed out many inadequacies in the improved and modified ICMIS package. Despite this, the Department had accepted the final version on 30 September 2000, the day on which the APFP project itself ended. Thus a package, essentially intended for monitoring the implementation of APFP was never implemented till its closure. The department paid an additional sum of Rs 18 lakh to the vendor in 2001 towards the maintenance of non-operational ICMIS package for the period September 1999 to September 2000. The application software procured at a cost of Rs 4.02 lakh also became wasteful as the package itself was abandoned. Thus in all, expenditure of

Rs 62.02 lakh incurred on the package became infructuous. The department took up (October 2001) *de novo* development of suitable MIS package mainly in-house with technical assistance from personnel drawn from various private institutions. A new package called Forest Management Information System (FMIS) was developed and two out of eight modules were implemented throughout the State from April 2002 onwards.

3.6.3 Procurement and distribution of Hardware

Large number of computers were procured without assessing the requirements; distribution to various field offices was not properly monitored

It was envisaged to implement ICMIS in the department in four stages (Stage I- up to division level; Stage II - up to range level; Stage III- network establishment covering all offices; and Stage IV - up to functional divisions). However, Hardware was procured in instalments without assessing requirement of each stage through APTS⁹¹ paying 5 per cent of value of hardware as service charges. A large number of computers were procured in the last month of completion of APFP project. The new computers were distributed to field offices, in many cases where even the civil infrastructure facilities were not available and to functional divisions like Wild Life where the requirement was not justified by the volume of work. No stock registers were maintained though 522 computers were procured (total expenditure details of procurement were not made available to Audit) and distributed to field offices. Installation reports from field offices sought in October 2000 were still awaited as of July 2003. It was observed that due to lack of coordination between the department and the APTS, the computers and other peripherals were delivered with delays and in some cases in damaged condition. The complaints received from field offices were not attended to during the warranty period by APTS. The supply of hardware and software was not properly synchronised whereby divisions/ranges were having hardware without software and vice versa.

3.6.4 Deficiencies in data

The data of the FMIS operational in the department was fraught with many deficiencies

Audit scrutiny of the FMIS data at present operational in the Department revealed the following:

- (i) there were gaps in data codes in the master table, which were supposed to be continuous;
- (ii) there were duplicate values for unique fields - out of 3344 beat names fed into the database as many as 474 names got repeated and 26 out of them had the same section code also; as many as 528 out of 4926 VSS⁹² names got repeated;

⁹¹ Andhra Pradesh Technology Services Limited

⁹² Vana Samrakshana Samithis

- (iii) as many as 844 records in Forest Schedule of Rates (FSR) master out of 6784 records FSR item rate itself was recorded as zero;
- (iv) the database contained zeros in bank account numbers, range masters, blanks in various codes and codes recorded in VSS master were at variance with those recorded in the beat master;
- (v) there was junk data in many fields such as branch code, bank code, VSS names, etc. and even the dates of formation of VSS were recorded as zeros.

Thus, the FMIS package developed with in-house talent did not become fully operational and is fraught with many deficiencies.

The above points were referred to the Government in September 2003; reply had not been received (November 2003).