

IRRIGATION PROJECTS DELAY LED TO JUMP IN COSTS: CAG

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Different types of Irrigation & Irrigation systems storage

Tardy implementation of projects under the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) between 2008-2017 led to an almost threefold jump in the cost of these projects to Rs. 1.20 lakh crore, according to a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), tabled in Parliament on Tuesday.

The AIBP was initiated in 1996 as a Central scheme to speed up the implementation of large irrigation projects, including dams and canals, especially those which were beyond the resource capability of the States.

The Union Ministry of Water Resources is responsible for framing policy guidelines for implementation while State Governments are associated with planning and implementing irrigation projects and schemes.

From 2008-2017, of the 201 major and medium projects approved, only 62 were completed. Of the 11,291 minor irrigation schemes sanctioned, only 8,014 were completed. As a result, only about 35% of India's irrigation potential was utilised. Of the 118 major projects surveyed by the CAG, 105 suffered from a "time overrun" with some projects being delayed by more than 18 years.

The audit of the AIBP revealed lacunae in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the programme. Projects and schemes were included under AIBP in violation of the programme's guidelines, resulting in irregular release of Rs. 3,718.71 crore. There were also deficiencies in the preparation and processing of Detailed Project Reports such as inadequate surveys, inaccurate assessment of water availability, Irrigation Potential and Command Area and the lack of activity-wise construction plans.

'Financial irregularities'

The CAG also pointed out "financial irregularities" such as diversion of funds amounting to Rs. 1,578.55 crore, parking of funds totalling Rs. 1,112.56 crore and "fictitious and fraudulent expenditure" of Rs. 7.58 crore. There were also instances of short/non-realisation of revenue amounting to Rs. 1,251.39 crore. "The monitoring by Central and State agencies was lax. There were shortfalls in number of monitoring visits by Central Water Commission (CWC) and reports were not prepared in all projects evaluated. Further, compliance to issues highlighted in the CWC reports were also pending."

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