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The Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme had failed to achieve its targeted objective of accelerating completion of large irrigation projects and delivery of the benefits of irrigation water to the farmers, despite lapse of more than 13 years since its inception and release of nearly Rs. 26,000 crore of GoI assistance. While progress in completion of major, medium, and minor irrigation projects already taken up under AIBP was very poor, fresh projects were being taken up under the programme and funds provided for such new projects, without adequate attention being focussed on existing incomplete projects. Even the irrigation potential reportedly created under AIBP projects was not being fully utilised, and the Ministry of Water Resources did not have project-wise data regarding utilisation of irrigation potential. In the case of minor irrigation projects, the Ministry did not have project-wise details regarding either creation or utilisation of irrigation potential and could only furnish lump sum figures on a year-wise and State-wise basis.

There were numerous deficiencies in planning and approval of AIBP projects, particularly in the formulation of DPRs as well in the calculation of Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) to assess the economic viability of projects. Project execution was also deficient, with lack of synchronised execution of different project components (dam and headworks; main and branch canals; distributaries; and water courses), construction of canals in patches with substantial gaps, and delayed completion of railway and highway crossings. Non-fulfilment of pre-requisites, viz. timely acquisition of the complete land required and obtaining forest and other clearances were other major hindrances to project execution.

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Financial management was poor, with the majority of grants during 2005-08 being released to just six States without adequate linkages to project completion. There were also large scale instances of diversion of AIBP funds for other purposes, grant of undue benefits, and other cases of irregular and unauthorised expenditure. Monitoring and evaluation systems, both at the Central and State levels, were also deficient; in the case of minor irrigation projects, monitoring by CWC was insignificant.

The GoI needs to take firm steps to ensure the achievement of the targeted objectives of AIBP, by focusing on completion of existing projects (rather than taking up more fresh projects), and ensuring and monitoring utilisation of irrigation potential already created, so that the huge funds invested in these projects are put to productive use.

