

OVERVIEW

The Government of India launched Project Tiger, a centrally sponsored scheme, in April 1973 to protect tigers and to ensure a viable population of tigers in India. The Management Plans were to form the bases for the implementation of the project. These were not approved by the State Governments and the Central Government in many cases. The Annual Plans of Operation also did not always have correlation with the management plans. The activities on the ground were very often dictated by the immediate needs of the project and the funds released by the Government. The State Governments did not, in many cases, release their share of funds. Cases of diversion of central funds for other purposes were also noticed during audit.

The norms decided in 1972 to create Tiger Reserves stipulated an average area of 1500 sqkms. The actual areas of the Tiger Reserves were mostly less than the prescribed area. 15 out of the 28 Tiger Reserves created had area less than half the prescribed area which was definitely not conducive for conservation, protection and sustenance of a viable tiger population. Besides, the boundaries of many of the Tiger Reserves had not been demarcated nor the areas falling within the Tiger Reserves notified legally.

The Project Tiger Directorate did not have the wherewithal to undertake any monitoring of the implementation of the project. It had only seven personnel including non-ministerial staff and could not even process the periodical reports and returns received from the Tiger Reserves or to critically examine the Management Plans and issue appropriate directions. Implementation of the project was thus entirely in the hands of the State Governments whose priorities did not always coincide with those of the Project Tiger Directorate.

Relocation of the people living within the Tiger Reserves as well as removal and prevention of encroachment is essential to ease the biotic pressure on the tiger population. Efforts in this direction did not succeed primarily because of lack of resources. Against the requirement of around Rs.11000 crore to relocate 64951 families living within the Tiger Reserves, the allocation in the Tenth Five Year Plan was a meager Rs.10.50 crore. Even this money was not properly utilized by the State Governments.

The implementation of the project was severely hampered by understaffing at the level of Tiger Reserves. The personnel actually employed were also found to be overaged, undertrained and underequipped in many cases. The intelligence and communication network at the Reserves level was also weak.

Many tiger reserves neither prepared the tourist management plans nor assessed the tourist carrying capacity of the reserves despite guidelines issued by the Project Tiger Directorate. The conflict between promotion of tourism and earning of revenue on the one hand and ecological protection of the tiger habitat on the other was thus not resolved.

Various activities under the village eco-development component of the India Eco- Development Project were not carried out efficiently and avoidable extra expenditure of Rs.5.17 crore was noticed in audit.

The census of tigers was generally carried by counting pugmarks which is not considered a fool-proof methodology. The census was not conducted annually in most of the Tiger Reserves and it was also not uptodate.

In the 15 Tiger Reserves created up to 1984, the total number of tigers increased from 1121 in 1984 to 1141 in 2001-02, a rate of increase which highlights the ineffectiveness of the measures taken under the Project Tiger to attain a viable tiger population. During the same period, the overall tiger population in the country declined from 3623 to 2906.