



CAG Report Summary

Ground Water Management and Regulation

- The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) released its audit report on ‘Ground Water Management and Regulation’ in December 2021. The report provides findings from the performance audit of ground water management and regulation for the period 2013-18. It also evaluates the implementation of schemes on ground water management. Key observations and recommendations of CAG include:
 - **Ground water level:** The stage of ground water extraction (ratio of utilisation of ground water to recharge) in India has increased from 58% in 2004 to 63% in 2017. The stage of extraction was higher than the national average in 13 states/UTs. Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan had a stage of extraction of more than 100%. This indicates that extraction has surpassed the recharge of ground water. The report noted that if left unchecked, this may completely exhaust ground water resources in these states/UTs. At the district level, 267 districts across 24 states/UTs had stage of extraction ranging from 64% to 385%.
 - **Assessment of ground water:** The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) was to assess ground water resources every two years. CAG noted that, during the audit period, assessments were conducted in 2013 and 2017. CGWB did not conduct an assessment in 2015 leading to a gap of four years between assessments in 2013 and 2017. The CAG recommended that these assessments should be done at prescribed intervals.
 - CGWB assesses the water level in the country through its observation wells. It was proposed to increase these wells to 50,000 by March 2017. However, by March 2019, only 15,851 such wells were established. It recommended that the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation should increase number of observation wells with digital water level recorders.
 - **Legislation on ground water:** As water is a state subject, the legislation for regulation and development of ground water is to be enacted by states/UTs. The Department had circulated Ground Water (Regulation and Control of Development and Management) Bill, 2005, which was a Model Bill, to all states/UTs for regulation and development of ground water. The audit report found that as of December 2019, 19 out of 33 states/UTs had enacted legislation on ground water. In four of these states, the legislation was only partially implemented. CAG recommended that the Department should pursue with the remaining states to bring laws/regulations for ground water management.
- In 2017, a committee was constituted by the Department for re-drafting the Model Bill. However, as of December 2019, the Bill was under review as per the suggestions of NITI Aayog. CAG recommended that the Department should expeditiously revise the Model Bill.
- **Ground water regulation:** The Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) is responsible for regulation and control of ground water development and management. It issues no objection certificates (NOCs) for ground water extraction to industries and infrastructure projects. The audit report observed that in 474 cases renewal of NOC was due during 2013-18 but the proponents did not apply for renewal. CGWA did not take action against such project proponents and even after the expiry of NOC these entities continued to draw ground water. There were several cases where conditions specified in NOCs were violated. However, show cause notices were issued to only 99 project proponents between 2013-18. CAG recommended that CGWA and state agencies need to develop effective coordination with other agencies to ensure permissions to extract ground water are obtained. The central and state agencies need to enforce penal provisions under Environment Protection Act, 1986/state acts/rules for compliance of NOC conditions.
- **Schemes on ground water management:** The Ground Water Management and Regulation Scheme was a central sector scheme for aquifer (water bearing formations) mapping and management of ground water. Against the approved outlay of Rs 4,051 crore in 2012-19, the actual expenditure under the scheme was Rs 1,110 (27% of approved outlay). CAG observed that limited expenditure and inability to meet financial targets under the scheme indicates deficient performance. CAG recommended that the Department should review its strategy for utilising allocated funds and completing planned activities under the scheme. Under the scheme, an area of 24.8 lakh sq km was identified for aquifer mapping. As of September 2020, CGWB covered an area of only 13 lakh sq km (52%). CAG recommended that the Department should develop a strategy to complete aquifer mapping.
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Under the SDGs, by 2030, India has to increase water use efficiency and ensure sustainable withdrawal and supply of fresh water. CAG recommended that the Department should assess progress made under each target under the SDGs and review the mandate of CGWB to strengthen the organisation.

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