



CAG Report Summary

Conservation of Coastal Ecosystems

- The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) released its audit report on ‘Conservation of Coastal Ecosystems’ in August 2022. Key observations and recommendations of CAG include:
 - **Institutional framework:** The National Coastal Zone Management Authority (NCZMA) was constituted by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change as an ad-hoc body for protecting coastal environment. CAG noted that NCZMA has failed to carry out its functions due to an ad-hoc status and manpower constraints. Further, its role has shrunk to mere deliberations or decision making on reclassification of Coastal Regulation Zone. CAG recommended that the NCZMA and State Coastal Zone Management Authorities (SCZMAs) be made permanent bodies with full-time members.
 - **Project clearances:** Industries have to seek approval for undertaking activities in CRZ. CAG observed that certain projects were approved in spite of inadequacies in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports. The inadequacies include: (i) preparation of EIA reports by non-accredited consultants, (ii) use of outdated baseline data, and (iii) insufficient analysis of environmental impact in EIA. Other issues with project approvals include: (i) non verification of information provided by private consultants, and (ii) deficiencies in public hearings (where people express their concerns about the environmental impact of the project). CAG noted that the process of granting project clearance could not ensure fully that proposed projects would not have an adverse impact on the coastal ecology. CAG recommended that the Ministry ensure in-depth ecological evaluation of projects by project proponents before granting them clearances. Project proponents refer to agencies that propose to establish a project.
 - **Monitoring projects:** Monitoring a project after its approval is essential in verifying the outcomes of the implemented mitigation measures. CAG observed that in 18 of the audited projects, the project proponent failed to comply with conditions mentioned in the clearance and those laid down by the respective SCZMA. Further, project proponents failed to furnish half yearly compliance reports and annual environmental statements. CAG noted that SCZMAs either did not take actions against CRZ violations or action was ineffective. Further, NCZMA did not monitor the activities of SCZMA related to monitoring and follow up of violations. It recommended that the Ministry may revisit the roles and composition of agencies to strengthen the post-clearance monitoring process.
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):** As per the 14th SDG of the United Nations, India has certain targets to conserve coastal areas. These include preventing and reducing marine pollution by 2025. NITI Aayog was responsible to oversee SDG implementation. It carried out stakeholder mapping to aid decision makers in assessing the interests of different stakeholders. CAG observed that the stakeholder map lacked significant stakeholder organisations. It recommended a review of the stakeholder mapping to ensure inclusion of all relevant institutions.
- Quality data is vital to track the progress on implementation of SDG targets. CAG observed that there were data quality issues with respect to SDG indicators. Further, most coastal states had not come up with localised indicators based on their development priorities and data requirements. CAG recommended that localisation of indicators be prioritised in all stakeholder states.
- **Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project:** In 2010, the World Bank extended financial assistance to India worth Rs 896 crore (78% of the project cost) for the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project (ICZMP). States such as Gujarat, Odisha and West Bengal were chosen for the pilot. The objective of the project was capacity development and piloting integrated coastal zone management. CAG observed several deficiencies at the central and state level in the project. These include: (i) inadequate monitoring and protection measures of coastal resources, (ii) insufficient manpower at selected institutes, and (iii) non execution of critical projects that had potential of reducing coastal pollution.
- **Protection of vulnerable ecosystems:** CAG sampled two coastal districts from each of the nine coastal states to assess the health of vulnerable and fragile marine ecosystems. It observed that state governments did not prepare management plans for vulnerable ecosystems such as coral reefs and turtle nesting sites. CAG recommended state governments to prepare management plans for protection of vulnerable ecosystems.

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