

Estimates Committee Report Summary

National Social Assistance Programme

- The Estimates Committee (Chairperson: Mr Francisco Sardinha) submitted its report on the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) on February 5, 2014.

Background

- The NSAP was launched in 1995 to provide social assistance to individuals below the poverty line, especially the aged, disabled and widows. It consists of the following five schemes at present: (a) Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS), (b) Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS), (c) Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS), (d) National Family Benefit Scheme, and (e) Annapurna Scheme. In 2012-13, NSAP covered approximately 3.1 crore beneficiaries at a cost of Rs 8,447 crore.

Key observations and recommendations

- **Pension:** The contribution of the central government to the pension amount under various schemes should be increased. The amount should be indexed to inflation and raised regularly in a phased manner.
- The pension offered by the central government under IGNOAPS for the 60-79 age group should be increased from Rs 200 per person per month to Rs 300 per person per month.
- **Assistance to women:** At present, widows over 40 years are covered by the IGNWPS. The Committee recommended that IGNWPS cover all widows and that the pension amount be increased from Rs 300 to Rs 1,000 per month. It also recommended that single women above 40 years and divorced women (unemployed, without alimony) be covered under the NSAP.
- **Assistance to disabled:** The IGNDPS defines a disabled person as anyone with more than 80% disability. However, the Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 defines a disabled person as

anyone with more than 40% disability. The Committee recommended that the definition under the IGNDPS be changed to bring it in consonance with the Act.

- In addition, the Committee recommended that IGNDPS be extended to cover dwarves, born with physical infirmities.
- **Selection of beneficiaries:** NSAP targets individuals which are below the poverty line (BPL). According to the Committee, the current method of identification of BPL has been criticised for being inaccurate. It therefore recommends that the selection of beneficiaries be done using the Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) from 2014-15. The SECC was started in 2011 by the Ministry of Rural Development to identify BPL households.
- **Direct Benefit Transfer:** The Committee recommended that Direct Benefit Transfer, through which subsidies are transferred directly to beneficiaries, be extended to all beneficiaries of NSAP. It was introduced in July 2013 on a pilot basis for 80% of the beneficiaries.
- **Social Audit:** The Ministry of Rural Development is developing a social audit system for NSAP through which social audits will be conducted every six months. The Committee recommended that this system be established in all states at the earliest.
- **Beggary:** The Committee recommended that a study be undertaken to examine why beggary persists despite the existence of NSAP. Appropriate action should be taken to address this issue, based on the findings of the study.
- **Recommendations of task force:** A task force was appointed by the Ministry of Rural Development to evaluate the NSAP and it submitted its report in March 2013. The report addressed issues such as identification of beneficiaries, quantum of assistance and grievance redressal. The recommendations of the task force must be addressed at the earliest.

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