

Tiger Reserves in Odisha not under single command and control: CAG

Soumyajit March 27, 2013

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Bhubaneswar: The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on “economic sector” has severely castigated the implementation of Project Tiger in Odisha. Project Tiger is a wildlife conservation project launched in April 1973 by GoI with the objective to ensure maintenance of a viable population of tigers. Project Tiger was converted into a statutory authority as National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) through an amendment (2006) in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to ensure tiger conservation with legal backing. In Odisha, the Project Tiger is implemented in Similipal Tiger Reserve (TR) (1973-74) and in Satkosia TR (2008-09).

The CAG has noticed that during 2006-11, Rs 103.43 crore was proposed to GoI by the Field Directors (FD) of both the Tiger Reserves in their Annual Plans of Operations (APOs) for five years (2006-11) for Similipal and for three years (2008-11) for Satkosia. GoI approved Rs 31.62 crore (GoI share Rs 25.77 crore and State share Rs 5.85 crore) against which Rs 27.23 crore was released (GoI share Rs 22.44 crore and State share Rs 4.79 crore) during the above period for protection measures, habitat improvement, strengthening of infrastructure, relocation of villages and redressing man animal conflict etc. However, only Rs 23.37 crore was utilised by the FDs and Rs 3.86 crore remained unutilised. The CAG report says, “This indicated that there was lack of proper planning and deficiencies in financial management. As a result full benefits out of Central assistance for development of tiger projects could not be availed”.

The CAG report has further added saying, “As per tiger census (2004 and 2010) the tiger population in Odisha came down from 192 in 2004 to a mere 32 in 2010. Similipal and Satkosia TR were ranked as POOR in the assessment report of MoEF, GoI. The tiger population declined drastically due to inadequate protection measures and deficiency in project management not providing inviolate space, low pace of expenditure and delay in relocation of villages from core area (sic)”.

Lack of unified command and control system as per the guidelines of Project Tiger there should be a Field Director exclusively for each Tiger Reserve. Although the core area of Similipal sanctuary and the Tiger reserve is under the Wildlife organisation, the entire buffer zone of the Sanctuary which constitutes 60 per cent of the Similipal Sanctuary as well as the transition zone of Similipal Biosphere Reserve is under three Territorial Divisions. Similarly, in Satkosia Tiger Reserve there was no full time Field Director for the entire Tiger Reserve. It was under the supervision of Satkosia Wildlife Division and Mahanadi Wildlife Division reporting to the Conservator of Forests, Angul Circle and Conservator of Forest Bhubaneswar Circle respectively.

The CAG report says, “Thus the Tiger Reserves did not function under one single line of command and control and the dual administration in supervision of the Tiger Reserves in contravention of the Project Tiger guidelines affected the project implementation and protection inside the Tiger Reserve which has also been specifically mentioned in the assessment report of NTCA for Similipal Tiger Reserve”.

Non-deployment of Special Tiger Protection Force The NTCA considering the endangered status of tigers and the need for urgently stepping up protection in sensitive areas formulated a set of guidelines (May 2009) for deployment of Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) at Similipal Tiger Reserve with 100 per cent central assistance under the scheme Project Tiger. The CAG report says, “But no initiative was taken by GoO for raising of STPF during the period 2009-11. In May 2012 the GoO passed a resolution for establishment of the STPF as per NTCA guidelines after passage of three years. Thus the Tiger Reserve was deprived of central assistance for protection measures. Thus, poaching of elephants, illegal tree felling and mass animal hunting like Akhanda Shikar in the STR could not be controlled”.

Relocation of families from the core area as per guidelines of Project Tiger, the long term survival of tiger depended upon the availability of secure and inviolate areas free from human impact. A time bound programme for relocation of families living in the core area was necessary. As per the minutes of the meeting of Rehabilitation and Periphery Development Advisory Committee (RPDAC) held on 11 August 2009, four villages situated inside the critical tiger habitat of Similipal TR was to be relocated. Out of 149 families, 72 families only were relocated during the period from 1994 to 2003 with a balance of 77 families to be relocated. A fresh survey during September 2009 jointly conducted by Revenue and Forest officials reported an increase of 45 families taking the total to 122 out of which 61 families of Jenabil village were relocated in March 2010 leaving balance of 61 families yet to be relocated (March 2012).

The NTCA declared (February 2008) package amount at the rate of Rs 10 lakh per family to be relocated. It was also noticed that the GoI released an amount of Rs 9.03 crore (CSP) and GoO released Rs 1.87 crore (SP) between 1977-78 and 2010-11. Out of this Rs 10.40 crore was deposited with Collector, Mayurbhanj who utilised only Rs 4.62 crore for relocation of families and balance Rs 5.78 crore is still lying in civil deposit.

The CAG report says, “We observed that delay in relocation of families led to burden of additional liability (Rs 4.50 crore) on account of addition of new families in fresh survey, thus despite availability of funds, to inordinate delay in relocation of families from the core area. This was possible by sustained efforts and coordination between Forest and Revenue authorities. On being pointed out the Deputy Director, STR did not furnish any specific reply”.