

# **PROJECT TIGER**

## **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.

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

There were wide gaps between the financial projections made in the Management Plans and the Annual Plans of Operations and the actual release of funds by the Project Tiger Directorate and the State Government. (Para 4.3)

As per the decision of the Special Task Force in 1972, Tiger Reserves should consist of a sizeable core area and a buffer zone around the core. These requirements were not met in many Tiger Reserves. Most of the Tiger Reserves do not have a designated, functional buffer zone, which is essential for redressing the park-people interface problems and to elicit local public support for conservation. (Para 6.1, 6.1.1)

Out of the six new Tiger Reserves approved for creation by the Government in the IX Plan, only four were created. (Para 6.1.3)

Since tiger population breeds well and grows rapidly in habitats that are without disturbance, 64,951 families including 17,650 families living in the core areas were to be relocated outside the Tiger Reserves. Relocation of 64,951 families needs Rs 11,041 crore against which only Rs 10.50 crore was provided in the X Plan. (Para 6.2.1)

Though directives regarding computation of visitor carrying capacity had been issued, many Tiger Reserves have unregulated tourism. Very little effort has gone in for recycling the tourism receipts to the stakeholder host communities. (Para 6.5.2, 6.5.3)

Though the need for a network of corridors connecting the Tiger Reserves and the adjacent forest areas, to enable tigers to migrate through the corridors was recognized in 1985, there is slow progress in the efforts for creation of the corridors. (Para 7.5)

Irregularities involving Rs 12.06 crore were noticed under the village eco-development component in Pench, Buxa, Gir and Nagarhole. (Para 7.6.2.1, 7.6.2.2)

Funds of Rs 13.90 crore accumulated under Village Development Fund in Buxa, Ranthambore, Nagarhole and Periyar were not utilized for post project sustainability. Besides there was short realization of Village Development Fund of Rs 89 lakh at Nagarhole (Para 7.6.2.4)

Even after more than three decades of Project Tiger, the research activities in various Tiger Reserves were adversely impacted by lack of requisite laboratories or research officers. (Para 7.7)

Protection measures in the Tiger Reserves were weak due to absence of measures to combat poaching, poor communication network, inadequate provision of arms and ammunition, deficiencies in creation of strike force, poor intelligence gathering, inadequate patrolling camps and tardy progress in concluding the cases of wildlife crimes. As a result, poaching of tigers continued and touched an annual level of 22 over a period of six years. (Para 8,8.1.1 to 8.1.5 and 8.3.1)

Most of the reserves suffer from deployment of aged field staff, which has adversely affected the protection efforts. (Para 8.3.3.2)

MoEF had not taken any action to strengthen the organizational structure of the Project Tiger Directorate in as much as against 38 posts identified in the initial project report in 1972, it was functioning with only seven personnel against the sanctioned strength of 13 posts as of May 2006. (Para 8.4)

The watch over majority of exit/ entry points at airports, seaports, land ports and check posts was inadequate to monitor the illegal passage of wildlife and wildlife products through these points. (Para 8.5.3.3)

The Steering Committee, the Apex body which reviews the progress of the Project Tiger met only four times during 1997-2006, as against 18 meetings required to be held at an interval of six months. (Para 9.1.1)

The system of watching the receipt of returns regarding tiger estimation from the reserves and the compilation of figures at the Project Directorate was poor. (Para 9.2.1.2)

The concurrent monitoring mechanism for the assessment of the effectiveness of the management plan and its various components at the various Tiger Reserves by the Project

Directorate was completely derailed due to non-receipt of the monthly progress/summary reports and the quarterly, half yearly and annual reports from most of the Tiger Reserves. (Para 9.3)

In the fifteen Tiger Reserves created upto 1984, the total number of tigers increased from 1121 in 1984 to only 1141 in 2001-02, a rate of increase which shows the ineffectiveness of the measures taken by Project Tiger authorities to attain a viable tiger population. During the same period, the overall tiger population in the country declined from 3623 to 2906. The Project Tiger authorities have not even developed any accepted norms for sustaining a viable tiger population. (Para 10)

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

All Tiger Reserves should have a well-formulated management plan encompassing long and medium term targets. The annual plans of operations should be based on the management plans to ensure appropriate allocation of resources. While enabling a planned approach to tiger conservation, the annual plan of operations should also provide a measure for achievement of targets against efforts made. Efforts may be made to complete the detailed mapping of Tiger Reserves early so that the management plans are based on reliable information. The boundaries of the existing reserves should be notified

The system of allocation of financial resources to Tiger Reserves needs to be streamlined. The Project Tiger Directorate should establish formal criteria for allocation of funds and prioritize the Tiger Reserves based on their risk perception. The issues relating to late release of central funds, diversion of funds and short release of counterpart funds by the States need to be addressed at appropriate levels to ensure that tiger conservation efforts become fruitful.

The Government should make a firm commitment to relocate the local families/villages from the core and buffer areas of the Tiger Reserves and draw a comprehensive resettlement plan for the purpose, adequately supported by a credible financial package. Stringent steps need to be taken to evict the encroachers.

The Government should frame a comprehensive tourism management policy for the Tiger Reserves clearly spelling out the roles of the Project Tiger Directorate and the State authorities. Tourism should be regulated such that human impact on conservation efforts of ecologically sensitive areas is minimised.

The Government should lay down a clear-cut agenda for coexistence by addressing the needs of the people sharing habitat with tigers and at the same time ensuring that eco-sensitive areas are protected from human disturbances, without diluting the conservation efforts.

Efforts should be made to improve communication and intelligence network, to create a strike force and to provide adequate arms and ammunition to the project personnel.

For effective patrolling of the reserves, number of camps/ chowkis and forest guards and foresters in the camps should be augmented. The staff deployed should be physically fit, capable of carrying out patrolling duties and adequately trained.

Efforts should be made to augment the manpower capacity at the Project Tiger Directorate to equip it as an effective oversight agency.

Monitoring mechanisms at the Centre and the State levels need to be strengthened. An effective system of follow up of recommendations should be instituted and the accountability of officials at various levels needs to be enforced.

Census/ estimation of tigers should be done regularly. Techniques of tiger estimation need to be refined so that the reliability of census data is enhanced.