National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

Despite achievements in social and economic development, India is home to a large number of poor and destitute people. Among these, a large number of people – such as poor widows, disabled, elderly and sick people - have no means of livelihood and are in need of social security benefits from the state to sustain their lives. In the past, many state governments have taken steps to provide assistance to this section of our population. In 1995, the Central government launched the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) to provide financial assistance to the most under-privileged sections of our society.

Extent of the problem

- India accounts for 33% of the world's poor (living on less than $1.25 a day), with a large number of them belonging to vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled and widowed.
- With improving healthcare, life expectancy in India has steadily increased since independence, due to which the number of people past 60 years of age has increased from 57 million in 1991 to more than 100 million in 2011.
- As per the Census 2011, 8.2% of all females in India are either widowed, divorced or separated, while more than 2% of our population comprises of the disabled.

Components/Sub-schemes

All beneficiaries of NSAP must hold a BPL (Below Poverty Line) card. The Old-age pension scheme, Widow pension scheme, and the Disability pension scheme were introduced originally in 1995. The eligibility criteria for these schemes were subsequently relaxed in 2009 to include more beneficiaries. Apart from these, 2 more schemes were included in the NSAP – the Family Benefit Scheme and Annapurna Scheme (introduced in 2000). In 2015-16, a budgetary allocation of Rs 9082 crore has been made for beneficiaries under NSAP.

The latest eligibility criteria and entitlements under different components of NSAP are summarized below:

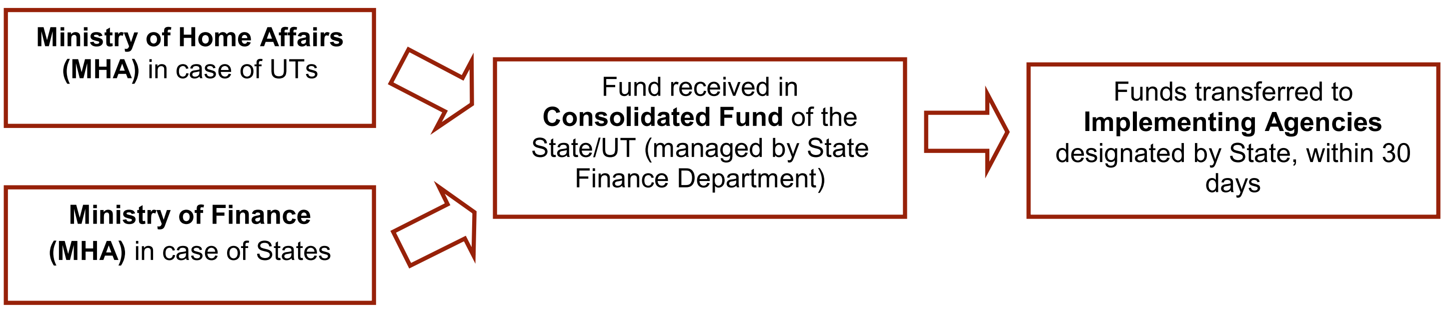
National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)	National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS)	National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)	National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)	Annapurna Scheme
Minimum eligible age is 60 years. **Rs 200 per month** all beneficiaries aged 60 – 80. **Rs 500 per month** for beneficiaries aged more than 80.	Minimum eligible age is 40 years. **Rs 300 per month** for all BPL widow beneficiaries aged 40-80 **Rs 500 per month** for beneficiaries aged more than 80.	Minimum eligible age is 18 years. **Rs 300 per month** all beneficiaries aged 18 – 80. **Rs 500 per month** for beneficiaries aged more than 80.	**Rs 20000** granted as **one-time** assistance to a household in the event of death of breadwinner (between 18 and 60 years of age). Amount is granted to the **eldest surviving head** of the household.	Eligible senior citizens who have remained uncovered under (IGNOAPS) are beneficiaries of Annapurna. Beneficiaries are entitled to **10kg of food grains per month free of cost.**

Funding Mechanism

Under the scheme, Central Assistance is granted to States **on the basis of the BPL population**. The upper limit to beneficiaries is fixed for each State/UT on the basis of Census 2011 figures and the poverty levels determined by the Planning Commission (according to the latest Tendulkar formula). The State governments can choose to include more beneficiaries and provide financial assistance to them through their own resources.

Presently, NSAP is implemented as an Additional Central Assistance (ACA) scheme, where funds from the Centre are directly transferred to the States as a **single allocation** combining all 5 sub-schemes of NSAP. Within that, States have the freedom to allocate this amount between different sub-schemes as per their requirement. The States are also allowed to use 3% of the total expenditure on administrative expenses.

The funds flow under NSAP as follows:



Recently, the **Ministry of Rural Development** has issued new guidelines for Central Assistance to States. These measures seek to *improve the utilization of funds released to States.* Some of the highlights are as follows:

- Under the new arrangement, funds would be released in 2 equal installments.
- The 1st installment shall be released only to those States which have taken the 2nd installment in the previous year.
- The 2nd installment would be released only if the States produce Utilization Certificates for at least 60% of the funds issued in the 1st installment.
- The release of either installment may also depend on the State meeting any other conditionality as finalized by the Ministry.

Framework for Implementation and Monitoring

At the Central level, the Ministry of Rural Development is responsible for ensuring smooth implementation of the schemes. Since this is an ACA scheme, State governments have considerable autonomy in terms of identification of beneficiaries, appointment of implementing agencies at the state and sub-state levels, and sanction of funds. Each State uses its own mechanism for these purposes.

Under the new guidelines issued by the Ministry of Rural Development (March 2014), the implementation process is proposed to be strengthened through the following initiatives:

- **Special Verification Teams** could be constituted by States for the purpose of verification of existing beneficiaries. The final list of applicants should be discussed in the Gram Sabha/Ward Sabha and widely publicized.

- **Gram Panchayats/Municipalities** should be given a central role in the identification of beneficiaries, and for that, elected heads and representatives at the local level should be sensitized. Further, wherever Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for other schemes like NRLM/NULM have been created, they should be involved in the process of identification of beneficiaries.

- The **Zila Parishad** would be responsible for implementing the schemes at the district level, while the Block/Gram Panchayat could be the implementing agency at lower levels.

Apart from the above, the revised guidelines propose to create a more robust institutional framework for monitoring and evaluation of schemes under NSAP. The institutions proposed at Central, State, District and local levels are given below:

Proposed Institutional Structure for NSAP Monitoring and Evaluation (2014 onwards)

1. **Advisory Committees:** Advisory Committees will be established at 3 levels – Central, District and State.

   The Central level Committee would be called National Social Assistance Advisory Committee (NSAAC) which would review the implementation of schemes and suggest policy recommendations from time to time. NSAAC would include representatives from other related Ministries or Departments like Health and Family Welfare, Social Justice and Empowerment, Labour etc, apart from representatives from civil society.

   The State level Committee would perform a similar role at the State level and report to the government of India. This committee would have representation from concerned State departments, Zilla Parishads and NGOs.

   The District Level Committee would be headed by the CEO of the Zilla Parishad and include District level officials of all concerned departments, representatives from Panchayat Samitis and Municipalities, and independent experts. It would submit reports to the State Nodal Department.

2. **State Nodal Department**: The Nodal Department at the State level would be responsible for coordinating with the different implementing departments for the different sub-schemes under NSAP.

3. **Area Officers:** They are officers from the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) designated for field visits and interaction with beneficiaries and local representatives.

4. **National Level Monitors (NLMs):** These are third party monitors appointed by MoRD to undertake field visits to review the implementation of schemes in the field with the assistance of the concerned State Nodal Departments.

Convergence

In India, social security for the deprived and marginalized can be ensured only if a convergence between different schemes can be created. A convergence between stand-alone initiatives would help in 2 ways: a) It would reduce administrative costs as different schemes could be linked together at the administrative level; and b) it would provide a more holistic social security net for those who need assistance. Consequently, it has been proposed that all NSAP beneficiaries have to necessarily be enrolled in Rashtriya Swastha Bima Yojana (RSBY) or State level health insurance schemes, State livelihood missions should enroll all NSAP beneficiaries, and all NSAP beneficiaries should automatically get the benefit of food security.

Way forward for NSAP

To address the existing gaps in NSAP in terms of design, coverage, implementation and delivery, a number of other initiatives have been proposed by committees such as the Task Force appointed by Ministry of Rural Development (report submitted in March 2013) and the Estimates Committee of Parliament (2013-14). Many of these have been accepted by the Ministry and are part of the new guidelines for NSAP (2013-14). Some of the more important recommendations are:

- **Identification of beneficiaries –** According to the report of the Estimates Committee, the process of identification of BPL population is faulty, and leads to inclusion of many undeserving people at the expense of deserving ones. Therefore, identification of beneficiaries could be based on the Socio-economic and Caste Census (SECC) which was conducted in 2011 by the Ministry of Rural development. The SECC ranks different households on a set of 7 socio-economic parameters and the state governments are supposed to identify the deserving set of people on that basis.

- **Eligibility –** The age criterion for the widow pension scheme could be relaxed to include widows between the ages 18-40, who may need such assistance to raise their children and earn a livelihood. Also, by the end of the 12th Plan period, it is hoped that old age pension would be universalized to include all categories of senior citizens.

- **Quantum of assistance under pension –** It has been suggested that the quantum of assistance under IGNOAPS be increased to Rs 300 per month for the 60-80 year age group to bring it at par with the other two pension schemes. Similarly, disability pension may be increased for those suffering from severe disabilities. Further, the Task Force has also recommended that in view of rising inflation, the rates of assistance under these schemes be linked with the inflation rate.

- **Social Audits as a monitoring/ grievance redress mechanism –** Social Audits have already been legally institutionalized in schemes like NREGA. Such a mechanism has also been proposed by Ministry of Rural Development for NSAP. The announcement of social audits would be made by the District Officer 30 days in advance. For each social audit, the Gram Sabha/Ward Sabha will elect a Social Audit Committee (SAC) from among its members who are also beneficiaries under NSAP, with adequate representation of women, SCs and STs. The SAC will read out its findings publicly in the Gram/Ward Sabha, and also present Action Taken Reports in case of any grievances/complaints.

- **Use of Information Technology –** IT could be used for the purpose of last mile delivery of pension into bank accounts of beneficiaries, and also for the purpose of monitoring the progress of the schemes through MIS. Both of these initiatives have been included in the latest Ministry of Rural Development guidelines.

Sevana Social Security System- Kerala

Sevana is the application software developed by the Information Kerala Mission and used by all local bodies in Kerala for civil registrations (birth and death) and for all social security services within the state. All data related to beneficiaries, sanctioned pensioners' list, application forms etc. can be found on the website.

The use of IT increases transparency and minimizes the chances of corruption or embezzlement of funds. It also ensures timely delivery of social security benefits for all beneficiaries.