

AUDITING IN THE AFTERMATH OF COVID-19

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Pandemic Covid-19 jolted the world over the last year. It forced the governments worldwide to reshape their public policy measures towards combating emergencies never seen in the previous 100 years. World Health Organization (WHO) issued a Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan to address the pandemic situation. Consequently, the national governments worldwide made their Preparedness and Response Plans Covid-19 and announced relief packages worth massive amounts.

The enormous expenditure on relief activities, restoration of the economy, and health measures within a brief period provided the national, sub-national, and local governments with opportunities to learn robust financial management system that ensures accountability, transparency, and efficient public service delivery. It also offered SAIs a chance to re-align themselves with new realities on modern lines.

Covid-19 expenditure audit provided SAI Pakistan with an opportunity for remaining relevant to the contemporary issues of national and international importance. It also offered SAI Pakistan an opportunity to re-organize and re-align itself to further take-up future challenging audit issues. SAI Pakistan focused on examining the preparedness and response of the government entities during the pandemic situation.

It highlighted significant public service delivery issues, contract management, procurement, financial management, internal controls, and mismanagement. It made an objective introspection to bring reforms into the organization for playing its influential role in promoting accountability, transparency, and adding value to the national resources.

Auditing of public sector entities in the post-Covid-19 scenario shall be based on the top public sector auditors' experiences and lessons across the globe. SAI Pakistan faced several risks and challenges during the execution of pandemic audit activity related to access to record and data, audit coverage, health conditions of its employees and capacity issues, etc. SAI Pakistan will address these risks in the next audit year planning. More focus will be on more desk audit activity using modern technological tools like Audit Command Language (ACL), capacity building of its auditors, effective coordination mechanism with auditee organization, and Audit Management Information System implementation.

SAI Pakistan, under the auspices of Mr. Javid Jehangir, Auditor General of Pakistan, has taken a giant leap towards modernization in recent days when it has awarded a contract to a world-renowned firm for computerizing all its business processes. Audit Management



Information System (AMIS) will ensure real-time monitoring of audit activity, improved coordination between Field Audit Offices and the SAI Headquarter, better coordination with Public Accounts Committee, quality audit planning, and quality audit reports. SAI Pakistan introduced a Continued Professional Development Program (CPD) to build its human resources last year. Now CPD is being revamped by incorporating new courses to train its auditors in Covid-19 expenditure audit areas. Quality Management Framework is being overhauled to enhance the quality of reporting.

The approach of issue-based auditing is being adopted, on the Covid-19 expenditure audit pattern, along with the traditional mode of transaction-based auditing. The citizen participatory approach is being adopted to identify audit areas of public interest. A framework for ethics has been implemented to ensure the integrity of the auditor. SAI Pakistan is on a rapid path of modernization in the light of international best practices and its experiences of dealing with emerging and challenging environment like Covid-19.

SAI Pakistan will complete its regularity, financial attest, and covid-19 expenditure audit reports by the end of February 2021 and send them to the President of Pakistan for laying before the Parliament. SAI Pakistan will enter into the planning phase in March to plan the audit activity for the next audit year starting from 1st July.

Auditor General of Pakistan will chair a national-level conference of heads of all 30 Field Audit Offices (FAOs) of federal, provincial, and local governments to outline broader contours of the post-Covid-19 audit activity next audit year. The conference will provide a platform for the heads of FAOs to share their experiences and lessons learned during the audit of pandemic expenditure. The conference will set the following year's audit activity direction based on which audit activity will be planned. The successful SAI Pakistan experience in conducting and producing quality reporting of Covid-19 expenditure will undoubtedly help add value to next year's audit activity.