

Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011

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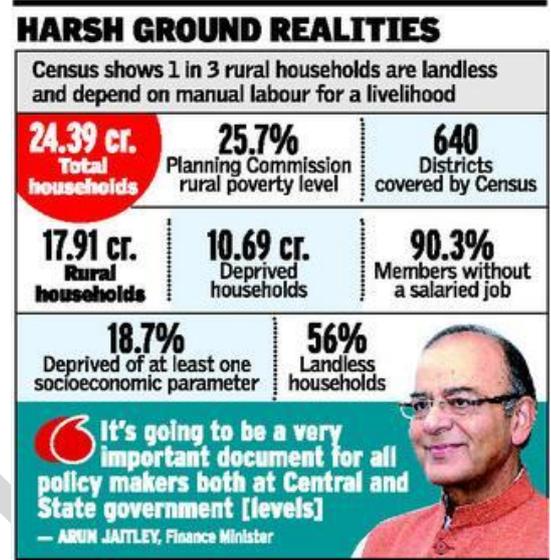
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1. Introduction

The Ministry of Rural Development commenced the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) in June 2011 through a comprehensive door to door enumeration across the country. This is the first time such a comprehensive exercise has been carried out for both rural and urban India. It has generated information on a large number of social and economic indicators relating to households across the country.

SECC 2011 is also first paperless census in India conducted on hand-held electronic devices by the government in 640 districts. The rural development ministry has taken a decision to use the SECC data in all its programmes such as MGNREGA, National Food Security Act etc.

SECC 2011 data will also be used to identify beneficiary and expand the direct benefit transfer scheme as part of its plans to build upon the JAM (Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana-Aadhaar-Mobile number portability) trinity.



2. Why SECC?

- The feeling was that the current definition of poverty — which was derived by identifying a basket of essential goods and services and marking the point in India’s income distribution where that basket could be purchased by an individual — was missing too much.
- For one, the numbers seemed absurdly low — set at Rs.816 per person per month in rural areas and Rs. 1,000 in urban areas by the Planning Commission by updating the Tendulkar methodology, the numbers amounted to a daily expenditure of around Rs.30, which caused public indignation. A new committee was formed which drew a new line, but the Rangarajan methodology too wound up at a poverty line not very different from the Tendulkar line.
- So, a broader and more dynamic definition of poverty seemed important.
- Also, while the general census was about individuals, the SECC was based on households and this gives a more accurate picture of the economic status of families.

3. Objectives

- 1) To enable households to be ranked based on their Socio- Economic status, so that State Governments can then prepare a list of families living below the poverty line.
- 2) To make available authentic information that will enable caste-wise population enumeration of the country, and education status of various castes and sections of the population.

It is relevant to note that the regular Population Census is carried out under Census Act, 1948. According to this Act, Government must keep individual's personal information confidential.

Besides aim of regular Population Census is to provide overview, it is not concerned with any particular individual / household. Thus, personal data given in Population Census is confidential.

On the contrary all the personal information given in the Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) is open for use by Government departments to grant and/ or restrict benefits to households. This required the right of verification of socio economic profile.

4. Criteria used in SECC 2011

SECC uses the parameters laid down by the S R Hashim committee appointed by the erstwhile Planning Commission of India i.e., automatic exclusion on the basis of 14 parameters, automatic inclusion on the basis of 5 parameters and grading of deprivation on the basis of seven criteria.

- 14 parameters of Automatic Exclusion: -
 - motorized 2/3/4 wheeler/fishing boat.
 - Mechanized 3-4 wheeler agricultural equipment.
 - Kisan credit card with credit limit of over Rs. 50,000/-.
 - Household member government employee.
 - Households with non-agricultural enterprises registered with government.
 - Any member of household earning more than Rs. 10,000 per month.
 - Paying income tax.
 - Paying professional tax.
 - 3 or more rooms with pucca walls and roof.
 - owns a refrigerator.
 - Owns landline phone.
 - Owns more than 2.5 acres of irrigated land with 1 irrigation equipment.
 - 5 acres or more of irrigated land for two or more crop season.
 - Owning at least 7.5 acres of land or more with at least one irrigation equipment.
- 5 parameters of Automatic inclusion:
 - Households without shelter.
 - Destitute, living on alms.
 - Manual scavenger families.
 - Primitive tribal groups.
 - Legally released bonded labour.
- Households based on 7 markers of deprivation:
 - Households with Kutchha house
 - No adult member in working age
 - Household headed by female and no working age male member
 - Household with handicapped members and no able bodied adult
 - Household with no literate over 25 years
 - Landless households engaged in manual labour
 - SC/ST households.

5. Key Findings

Data addresses multi-dimensionality of poverty, and provides opportunity for a convergent, evidence based planning with Gram Panchayat, as a unit. It is an opportunity for evidence based selection, prioritisation and targeting of beneficiaries in different programs.

Some of the findings of the SECC are as under:

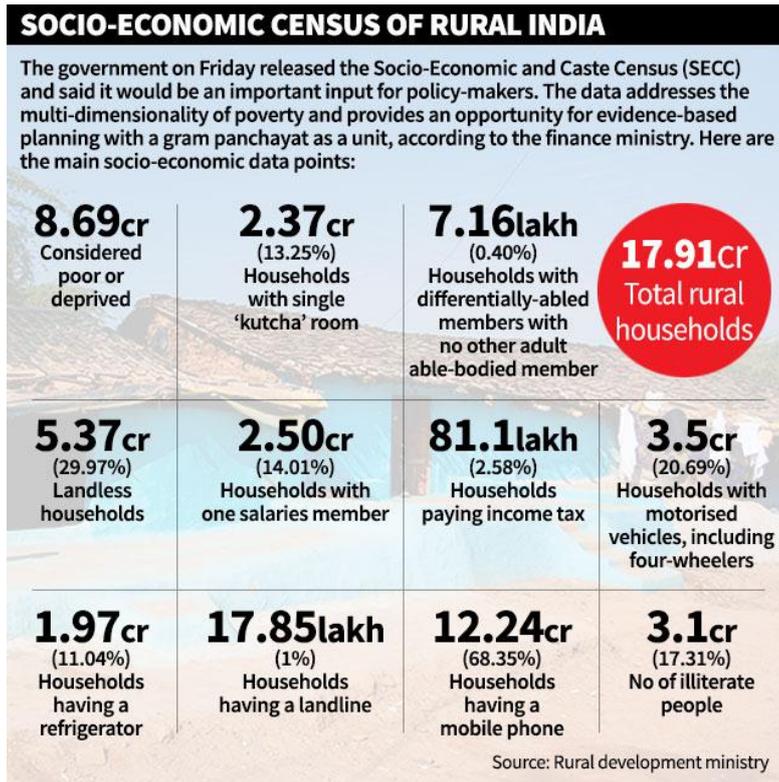
- 1) There are a total number of 24.39 crore households in India, of which 17.91 crore live in villages. Of these, 10.69 crore households are considered as deprived. The economic status of a household was computed through seven indicators of deprivation covering aspects of landlessness, housing, source of income, disability etc.
- 2) 49% of the households can be considered poor in the sense of facing some deprivation. These households show signs of poverty even though depth of poverty may be not enough to categorise them as poor. These deprivations range from lack housing facility and education, to absence of any male earning member, to households depending mainly on manual labour etc. This finding points to the need to have a comprehensive social security structure.

- 3) These extremely low income numbers follow from the nature of employment that most of rural India is engaged in. The vast majority – over 90% - of rural India, does not have salaried jobs.
- 4) Working in anything other than agriculture will be a tough ask, given the level of education – fewer than 10 per cent make it to higher secondary or above and just 3.41 per cent of households have a family member who is at least a graduate.
- 5) Only 30% of rural households depend on cultivation as their main source of income. Whereas, 51.14% derive sustenance from manual casual labour (MCL). Fragmentation of landholdings has made it difficult for even farmers to support themselves, let alone those dependent on MCL. Therefore, getting people out of farms will spur mechanisation and consolidation of land holdings, leading to increased agricultural productivity in the long run.
- 6) In nearly 75 per cent of the rural households, the main earning family member makes less than Rs 5,000 per month (or Rs 60,000 annually). In just eight per cent of households does the main earning member makes more than Rs 10,000 per month.
- 7) 56.25% of rural households hold no agricultural land. The numbers also point to the subsistence level of farming that rural India currently practices. Therefore, creation of gainful non-farm employment should receive top priority in policy making.

Thus, among the indicators, landlessness and a reliance on manual labour contributes the greatest to deprivation. In all, half of rural India is deprived on at least one of these indicators. The findings of the census are similar to that of the Rangarajan committee, a technical expert group set up in 2012. The panel had found that the percentage of people below the poverty line in 2011-12 was 30.95 in rural areas and 26.4 in urban areas.

6. Criticism of SECC

- 1) SECC 2011 data was criticized by few experts as it was not reliable. The methodology is not full proof and there are many errors and omissions in the draft data.
- 2) Experts have criticised conduction of the census by the ministry of rural development (MRD) rather than by the Registrar General, Census, or by the NSS. Both organisations have been doing survey/census work for the last sixty-five years; MRD is rather late in this game, and is prone to political compulsions rather than act as an objective, quasi-academic unit.
- 3) There is criticism that caste related data is deliberately withheld, similar to the religious data of 2011 Census of India, ostensibly because the findings could be politically controversial.



SECC FINDINGS

Socio-Economic and Caste Census data for urban India



BPL households as per Hashim panel approach (Automatically included, plus households that scored 4-12): 34.96%, or 22.18 million

Urban poor who could qualify for welfare schemes (Automatically included, plus households that score 1-12): 56.08%, or 35.58 million

- 4) Though, experts have appreciated the approach of defining poverty through deprivation, instead of consumption, but there are some data which contradicts the ground realities. For example, the number of manual scavengers are grossly underestimated.
- 5) Experts have pointed out that much of SECC's findings were already available through various other surveys. For e.g., The decadal Census, which interviews every Indian, was conducted in the same year and collected data on condition of houses, asset ownership, whether the family belonged to a Scheduled Caste or Tribe, marital and fertility status and education, among others. The National Sample Survey Office's regular nationally representative surveys collect information of land and asset ownership, consumption expenditure and nature of employment.
- 6) There are concerns that the SECC's partial release and inconsistent enumeration might potentially harm existing welfare programs. The data released has not covered all the districts and even some states.
- 7) As far as reliability is concerned, it is not confidential like the census, so respondents could have skewed their answers to be eligible for schemes or in case of caste, due to a number of social reasons.

7. Way Forward

- 1) The government has signalled that this data would be the basis for targeted allocation of entitlements under various poverty alleviation programs. This was meant to better identify beneficiaries of welfare schemes.
- 2) Thus, the SECC helps to move to principle of 'program specific indicators for program specific entitlements'. Recognizing many dimensions of poverty and tackling them with different programs, in multiple fields like health, education, sanitation, mid-day meal can be universal; others like affordable housing, disability can be targeted.

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