SECC 2011

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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 programmers 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 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.

3 General Findings and Specific Analysis

The first findings of SECC were revealed on 3 July 2015 has shown worrying levels of rural poverty. The data has been referred for analysis by an expert group before making it public.

The criteria adopted by SECC provide for automatic exclusion and inclusion on basis of certain parameters; and grading of deprivation based on 7 parameters.

(a) Households with Kutchha house
(b) No adult member in working age
(c) Household headed by female and no working age male member
(d) Household with handicapped members and no able bodied adult
(e) Household with no literate over 25 years
(f) Landless households engaged in manual labour
(g) SC/ST households.

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 deprivation range from lack housing facility and education, to absence of any male earning member, to households depending mainly on manual labor 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 labor 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.

4 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) 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.

3) 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.

4) 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.

5) 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.

5 Way Forward

1) The government has signaled 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.