

The census of India and other such stars on the Indian scene

Dr R K Pachauri, April 04, 2011

The 2011 census results have been made public, and there is a reason for concern on some aspects of what has been revealed and mild satisfaction in other areas. The increase in the percentage of those who are literate represents an appreciable gain even though in this day and age one would have liked to see literacy at the level of 100 percent. The rate of growth of the population as a whole has gone down, but on this basis projections would lead to our country getting even more overcrowded than it is. The one area of deep anguish and shame is the totally unfavourable gender issue which provides a very poor commentary on the values and principles of Indian society. I wish TERI was in a position to influence thinking in those regions where the census results in this regard are most deplorable, but unfortunately, this is an area in which I cannot come up with any pointers on what we can do. If others in TERI have some bright ideas, I would greatly appreciate hearing from you on how TERI could make a difference in correcting this set of shameful statistics in the future.

Quite apart from the contents of the census, what is particularly gratifying is the speed at which these results have been computed and made public. The census of India is a truly impressive exercise just as are the general elections, which are held regularly in the country. In this period of doom and gloom and cynicism about scams and corruption, it is appropriate for us to reflect on those activities which should give us some cause for satisfaction and justifiable pride. India's census, its massive elections and the postal system are remarkable institutions which never fail to deliver on a scale that is unprecedented anywhere in the world. Our performance in these areas is actually far more impressive than in several developed countries. Some of you might recall the time when Mr. Al Gore lost the Presidential election to George W. Bush because the so called "chads" in the paper ballot were not removed with the punching of the ballots and, therefore, could not be counted as valid votes. India has moved seamlessly into electronic voting on a scale which is truly mind-boggling. Another institution which functions surprisingly well is the Indian Railways, which having to do in the past with a totally hopeless leadership at the political level, and forced recruitment of thousands of henchmen of a Minister when he or she assumes office continues to perform well even with the hands of its officials tied by politicians.

I hope that while we feel a sense of pride at the continuing success of these institutions, I hope that as a society we would provide enough resources and pay adequate attention to them so that they continue to evolve to even higher levels of performance.