

Press Release

Experts seminar

Meeting challenges in holding a credible population census and way forwards

August 4, 2016: A seminar was held under the auspices of Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) in Lahore to discuss the technical and political bottlenecks in holding National population census.

Mr. I. A. Rehman (General Secretary HRCP), Mr. Peter Jacob (Executive Director CSJ), Mr. Raza Ali (Researcher and Analyst) Mr. Pervez Tahir (Ex. Chief Statistician) , Ms. Shazia Ahmed Khan (Gender Specialist SPO) Mr. Irfan Mufti (Deputy Director SAP-PK) lead the discussions participated largely by the media persons and civil society organization.

The speakers said that population census is an imperative not only for economic and social planning, social justice and other rights but also for security and safety of the country. Hence the success of the security operations is vitally linked with the information about the number and location of the population. Therefore, the position taken by the government (Bureau of Statistic) in response to Supreme Court's directive a couple of days back offering security of census personnel is not entirely tenable. Secondly, government's position about postponement can only be acceptable if the time in between is used for a good preparation that will ensure that Census do not entail division and conflict due to technical inaccuracies, undemocratic practices and administrative lapses.

The speakers and participants came up with the following suggestions.

- We believe that all challenges in holding the credible and dependable census can be met through transparent and democratic decision making which is possible through a good representation of segments of society. A participatory approach would be helpful in attaining the overall and broader objectives of national cohesion besides the census.
- Exercise of holding the census should adopt a people centered approach therefore decisions about it should manifest a broad participation of provinces, ethnic, linguistic and religious entities in process rather than merely results. The civil society organization, including media should be allowed to watch the interest of the people as vigilant watchdog.

- The machine readable paper being used for data collection was printed and imported eight years ago while there are concerns that in case the entire stock of it does not possess the required quality for computer reading, it might result in data losses. A forensic verification from independent sources should be carried out for complete satisfaction.
- The omissions and errors identified in questionnaires should be corrected at this stage using additional questionnaire and deletions, respectively. As far as errors, the term scheduled caste has been treated as a religion, whereas the constitution of Pakistan guarantees of non-discrimination on the basis of caste (Articles 22 (3), 26 (1), 27 (1), 38 (a) and (d)). There are ramifications of treating so called scheduled caste as a religion.

Knowing also fairly well that a large bracket of different marginalized castes among Hindu community would like to avail the concessions given by the state on that ground, it is advisable that the identity of their caste/ tribe be recorded in the sections where and in the manner, for instance, Meghwar, Kohli and Bheel.

- The question about religion ignores separate enumeration of Sikh, Buddhists, Kalash, Jews, etc. such omissions marginalize the smaller communities further. The nomads or gypsy communities and transgender persons include the other omissions. Hence additional questionnaire should be used to account for these communities.
- Enumerator's training should include special instructions, sensitizing them about importance of religious minorities in census, recording their correct and complete particulars.
- The Census Commission should prepare beforehand to supply, easy to access, free of cost, segregated based on gender, religion ethnic, language regarding not merely the headcount but also enjoyment of rights such as education, health, employment areas and other indicator that would be useful for measuring and planning social and economic development.

A position paper prepared by CSJ on National population census in Pakistan: Challenges and way forwards was shared with the representatives from media and civil society organizations.