



General Studies-2; Topic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Relevance of Census Data

Introduction

- There are debates around caste census when the regular Census itself has not been conducted owing to the pandemic.
- This is the first time that India has not conducted its decadal Census since the exercise began.

Significance of Census

- **Census is the basis for reviewing the country's progress in the past decade, monitoring the ongoing Schemes of the Government and plan for the future.**
- This more-than-century-old decadal exercise is a matter of pride and distinction for this country.
- Census has lot of potential in policymaking and the exercise is not merely about counting the population.
- The fundamental demographic attributes around which the Census data are structured offer a lot of scope for interpretation and understanding future trends as well.
- Census offers two units of analysis: at the individual level and at the household level. A lot can be inferred from these attributes.
- Census-based information on residence, age, gender, administrative units, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, help policymakers make interventions.

Losing Significance of Census

- The limited information collected, and the under-utilisation of Census data, have limited the role of the Census in policymaking.

- Its potential is hardly tapped by policymakers. It has been reduced to just a count of the population.
- Census-based information was important at a time when there was no alternative way of gauging the dynamics of population change alongside its varied features like employment, education, etc.
- There is also a lack of interest by the scientific community in a nuanced exploration of the data.
- Its importance is further diminished when numerous large-scale surveys are conducted periodically and are funded by the various ministries of the Government of India.
- They allow for a detailed analysis of the socio-economic issues of significance since the raw data are made available in the public domain.
- The fundamental reason why the Census has lost significance is because the data collected are not disseminated on time.
- For instance, the data on internal migration collected in the 2011 Census were made available to the public in the Economic Survey 2016-17.
- With the uncertainty in conducting the Census, the demand for including caste enumeration within the Census adds to the confusion.

Concerns / Challenges

- While the alternative sources of information have enriched our understanding of population dynamics and facilitated focused interventions through programmes and policies, the Census has lost its potential relevance.
- Information is released late owing to bureaucratic regulations.
- There is also a lack of interest by the scientific community in a nuanced exploration of the data.

Way Forward

- The design of the Census, when held can be improved.
- A digital Census would ensure better quality, coverage and quick results in this digital age.
- On the whole, count and characteristics are equally important, but the characteristics that are modifiable hold the key towards change.