

Identifying Poor: Ramesh Tries to Assuage Civil Society Concerns

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NEW DELHI

The government is reaching out to civil society to avoid being caught on the wrong foot while identifying the poor. Rural development minister Jairam Ramesh has written to members of the Right to Food Campaign (RFC), addressing their concerns on the manner in which poor households are being identified in the socio-economic and caste census.

As part of this effort, a committee headed by Abhijit Sen has been set up to advise on the socio-economic and caste census (SECC). The committee includes members like Biraj Patnaik of RFC. Ramesh has also asked Sen to meet with campaign members to discuss this response to various important issues raised by



FIXING IT: Ramesh – File photo

RFC regarding the caste census.

The government's proactive effort to reach out to the RFC could be seen as an attempt to avoid the embarrassment it faced following the Planning Commission's affidavit to the Supreme Court on the poverty line.

In a detailed note, Ramesh has responded to problems that the RFC has identified in the methodology

adopted by the Census being carried out under the aegis of the rural development ministry.

Among the issues raised is the manner in which households are enumerated. The minister's note assures the RFC that the SECC is using a "flexible" definition of households, one that would allow "migrant and vulnerable households, even if they share food from a common kitchen, to be treated as separate households". It has sought to assuage the RFC concern on the enumeration of single member households as well. On issues, such as the predominant material used in the construction of shelters or homes, which could lead to the inclusion or exclusion of households as poor, the ministry has taken on board the concerns expressed.