

THE HINDU April 3, 2014

Updated: April 3, 2014 19:07 IST

India by the numbers: Change on the margins

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knowledge.allianz.com The NCAER data highlighted five major transformations in the country.

The NCAER's new dataset has opened a window on to parts of the Indian story that we've known little about for nearly a decade.

For the last two weeks, *The Hindu* has reported exclusively on an exciting new dataset, the National Council for Applied Economic Research's (NCAER) India Human Development Survey (IHDS) 2011-12. It's an exciting dataset for three big reasons.

One, it's a 42,000 household-strong nationally representative survey with questions on both economic and social issues. Two, it has substantial panel data – which means data that allows for comparison over time – because the NCAER researchers went back and interviewed 80% of the households they spoke to for the first round of the IHDS, in 2004-5. Three, it is a credible and independent body giving researchers, the media and readers access to information that we otherwise depend almost entirely on the government for.

The NCAER gave *The Hindu* access to the data ahead of its publication. Their researchers wrote five opinion pieces for us looking at five major transformations in the country: the [status of women](#), whether the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Scheme is [doing its job](#), the [revival in the Public Distribution System](#) despite its flaws, auditing the [performance of public education and healthcare](#), and on what is happening with income growth and inequality (forthcoming).

Using the NCAER data (but reporting independently on it), I wrote five news stories for the paper:

1. [The first](#) showed that an alarming number of women have little say in the fixing of their marriage, and other constrained freedoms. There was also [an infographic with it](#) that illustrated the data.
2. [The second](#) showed that a combination of farm and non-farm work is now, for the first time, the most common form of employment in rural areas (as against agriculture alone)
3. [The third](#) showed that the amount children learn in school is mediated by caste, class and location – and is falling, all round.
4. [The fourth](#) showed that there has indeed been a big increase in incomes, while access to services has crept along. This is of note particularly because this is India's only source of income data – the NSSO measures consumption only – thereby revealing India's first credible income data in seven years. An [accompanying infographic](#) showed what class differences mean in concrete terms.
5. The final part (forthcoming) gave a more realistic picture of what the Indian middle class really looks like.

For a data journalist, it's been a real joy having such high quality data to work with and play with for the last few weeks. We hope you've read along and found numbers that shone a light on to something you didn't know.

Keywords: [National Council for Applied Economic Research](#), [India Human Development Survey](#), [education](#), [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Scheme](#), [economic issues](#), [social issues](#)