

## 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission for Population and Development

### Side event hosted by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in Partnership with United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA)

**Date:** Friday, 3 May 2024

**Time:** 1:15pm - 2:30pm (lunch time)

**Venue:** UN Secretariat Building (Room Conference room 7)

#### Localizing the SDGs: Women in Local Governance in India Lead the Way

India has over 3 million local government (Panchayati Raj Institutions - PRIs) representatives who have been elected to office, and nearly 50 percent of these are women.<sup>1</sup> Since the 73rd constitutional amendments in the 1990s, empowered decentralized governance has created space for people to participate in local government and influence decision-making.<sup>2</sup> Hundreds of thousands of women leaders have emerged at the grassroots levels who are making a striking difference and producing gender-sensitive development outcomes. The story of their leadership, enabling policy frameworks, and supportive community-based interventions needs to be told.

Affirmative action by many of these women leaders at the local self-governance level has enabled millions of women, and members of marginalized communities to participate in decisions related to the distribution of public goods and services and on issues of local development.

Experience from several states has indicated how PRIs have enabled effective channelization of programmes intended for poverty eradication and local area development to ensure the availability and access of services for most vulnerable communities including women and girls.

Evidence also indicates how women's involvement in Panchayats has led to a decrease in the likelihood of harmful practices such as child marriage.<sup>3</sup> Studies have indicated how parents' aspirations for their daughters changed when they witnessed a woman Sarpanch and how families adopted a more expanded perspective of life- options for their daughters - beyond marriage. Many adolescent girls' aspirations have also increased after exposure to women Sarpanches. They were less likely to want to marry before 18 years of age.

#### UNFPA's engagement:

UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. Our mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled ensuring rights and choices for all. UNFPA has been operating in India since 1974. As part of UNFPA India's 50th anniversary celebrations this year, the proposed

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=1658145>

<sup>2</sup> <https://accountabilityindia.in/sites/default/files/policy-brief/panchayatbrief1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [Political role models and child marriage in India - Castilla - 2018 - Review of Development Economics - Wiley Online Library](#)

event holds special significance in recognizing the strong partnership between India and UNFPA.

UNFPA, collaborates with the Ministry of Panchayat Raj (MoPR), Government of India, in promoting women and girl friendly panchayats. The objective is to incorporate gender perspectives into the planning and execution of Gram Panchayat Development Plans.

Among the various parameters used to evaluate the development, performance, and progress of panchayats by the Ministry, the concept of women-friendly panchayats is one of the nine criteria included in the Panchayat Development Index (PDI). It incorporates various socio-economic indicators to measure the well-being and development status of local communities under a panchayat's jurisdiction.

The women-friendly indicator encompasses factors such as sex ratio at birth, healthcare, education, income generation, leadership and empowerment, participation, crimes, and social protection.

UNFPA has provided support to the Ministry by organizing training and capacity-building programs for officials from the State Institutes of Rural Development through national and regional workshops. Within its focus states, UNFPA places particular emphasis on fostering girl-friendly panchayats, operating within the broader framework of women-friendly panchayats. This strategic approach aims to address and enhance the well-being of women and girls through targeted interventions and initiatives.

### **Objectives:**

During this side event, we will highlight the role and potential of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in accelerating the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. The key objectives of the side event include:

- To share valuable lessons and insights from India's experience with the Panchayat Raj Institutions, focussing on strategies for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through poverty reduction and inclusive development
- To enable policy recommendations aimed at designing effective programs and social protection mechanisms in countries in the Global South for promoting gender equality and ensuring women's participation in local development, drawing inspiration from successful practices observed in India's Panchayati Raj Institutions
- To share experiences and explore opportunities for strengthening financing of public services with specific emphasis on gender equality and the empowerment of women through their active participation in local development initiatives.

### **Key expected outcome:**

Policy brief outlining recommendations for expanding women's participation in local governance as a key to accelerating progress towards localization of the SDGs.

### **Target Audience:**

Government - policy makers and administrators, Donors and Partners, UN sister agencies, Civil Society Representatives. Potential to be streamed Online to a wider audience.