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World Economic Forum agrees to make changes in criteria for gender gap reports

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President Droupadi Murmu with Union Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani in Delhi on Monday. ANI

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The World Economic Forum (WEF) will take into account the participation of women at panchayat level to rank countries in its future Global Gender Gap reports, which will better India's position at the global level. The international body is re-examining and changing the indices for the ranking according to a written assurance given to Union Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani who had led an Indian delegation to Davos recently, and reiterated the "flaws" in the ranking system.

"To completely ignore political participation at the panchayat level in India is bringing about a flawed and unjust view on women empowerment. It is one thing for a system not to exist... but quite another for a system to exist but be completely disregarded. The WEF has now agreed to include this for ranking which is a huge victory for India. It will also benefit countries globally and give a more factual picture of women empowerment," said a senior government official.

There are 1.4-million women in the Indian panchayat system whose political contribution will now be enumerated, added officials.

So far, the WEF looked at four major verticals to assess gender gap in a country — economic participation, political participation, health and education levels. For women’s political participation, the WEF looks at the number of women in the Union Cabinet and members in both houses of Parliament.

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“It did not even consider Ministers of State, women MLAs and state ministers, which, we believe, is a big omission and needed to be rectified,” added officials.

EXPLAINED

Panchayat Push

In the WEF 2022 report on global gender gap, India ranked 135, falling even behind Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. Officials feel the inclusion of data on women’s participation at the panchayat level will surely push India’s ranking up on the global stage.

Saadia Zahidi, the managing director of the Centre for the New Economy and Society that produces the ranking on behalf of the forum, has written to Irani saying that in the coming years, the WEF will collaborate with the Indian government on issues raised by the minister at the forum, “to assess in a globally comparable way participation of women in local political decision-making”.

The WEF will also showcase on its digital platform’ the impact achieved by the Indian government through its gender-budgeting system, “promoting gender

equality in all sectors and at all levels of governance”. For this, the WEF will collaborate with the 15th Finance Commission.

The WEF will also establish a ‘Skills and Gender Parity Accelerator’ in India to identify and scale up targeted public-private initiatives that will prepare the Indian workforce for the future, Zahidi said in her letter.

“India is the only country in the world that has a gendered dispersal of funds and gender budgeting. It was important to be considered. We negotiated that these indicators be included, and the WEF has agreed. India has also communicated how various schemes—such as Jan Dhan Yojana, Mudra, and Stand Up India—has had an impact on women empowerment,” added the officials.

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