

CREA — The Global South Organisation That Changed the Conversation

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Women Empowerment

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Most of the world's leading feminist human rights organisations are headquartered in New York, London, or Geneva. The frameworks they produce, the campaigns they run, the language they establish for global discourse on women's rights — these are generated predominantly in the global North and exported to the global South for implementation.

CREA was founded in 2000 in New Delhi on the explicit premise that this arrangement is a problem. Not because Northern feminist organisations produce poor analysis — some produce excellent analysis — but because analysis generated from within the lived experience of Global South feminists, about Global South communities, by Southern feminists who are accountable to Southern movements, is fundamentally different. It knows things that external analysis cannot know. It asks questions that outside observers do not think to ask.

Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action — CREA — is one of the few international women's rights organisations based in the Global South, led by Southern feminists, working simultaneously at grassroots, national, regional, and international levels. Over 25 years, it has become a reference institution for feminist leadership development and sexual and reproductive rights advocacy globally.

Who They Are

CREA was founded in 2000 by a group of feminist leaders who identified the need for an organisation in India working at the intersections of sexuality, gender, and rights. The founding insight: sexuality — specifically the control exercised over women's bodies and sexual lives — is not a secondary or peripheral issue in feminist politics. It is at the frontier. "We think sexuality is really at the frontier of women's rights," CREA's own framing states. "It is a huge area through which control is wielded over our lives. It is about all of us — every woman."

CREA has offices in New Delhi and New York and works across South Asia, East Africa, and the Middle East through partnerships with local movements and organisations. Their work spans four strategic initiatives: strengthening feminist leadership, advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights, preventing violence against women, and increasing the voice and visibility of marginalised women.

The Institutes: Training the Global Feminist Leadership

CREA's most documented contribution to global feminist capacity is its Institutes — short-term intensive training programmes that bring together activists, practitioners, and leaders from across the Global South. The Sexuality, Gender and Rights Institute (SGRI) is a week-long programme convened in different global cities. The Gender and WaSH Institute, held in Mumbai in 2024, connects feminist analysis with water and sanitation programming. FLAMBARI brings together feminist leaders from Africa.

The Institutes are not academic seminars. They are leadership development experiences that bring together people who are already working on feminist issues but who benefit from the specific combination of high-quality intellectual content, peer connection with feminists from other contexts, and the collective affirmation of a shared framework. Alumni of CREA's Institutes have documented the career and organisational impacts of participation — leadership decisions taken differently,

organisations reoriented, coalitions formed.

This training model — which builds leadership capacity rather than delivering services — is what makes CREA's influence disproportionate to its direct programme reach.

Each Institute graduate carries a CREA-influenced analytical framework into their own organisation and movement.

Disability Justice: The Expanding Frontier

CREA's recent work on disability justice — specifically the intersection of disability, gender, and sexuality — represents an expansion of the feminist frontier that few women's rights organisations have engaged. People with disabilities face specific forms of sexual violence, are denied sexual and reproductive autonomy, and are largely absent from both feminist and disability movement spaces.

CREA's Institutional Capacity Building project on Youth Sexuality, Reproductive Health, and Rights specifically targeted disabled people's organisations and women's rights organisations — building knowledge and capacity at the intersection of these two typically separate sectors. The Gender and WaSH Institute in 2024 similarly addressed disability inclusion within water and sanitation programming — a connection that most WASH practitioners have not made.

Elected Women Representatives

CREA's Meri Panchayat, Meri Shakti programme supports elected women representatives (EWRs) to assert their leadership in local self-governments (panchayats) in India. Women are legally required to hold one-third of panchayat seats in India — meaning hundreds of thousands of women are elected to formal local governance positions every five years. Whether these women actually govern, or whether their seats are occupied by their husbands or male relatives, depends on the support infrastructure they have access to.

CREA's programme specifically builds the capacity of elected women to be effective governance actors — understanding the legal scope of their authority, making decisions about budgets and programmes, engaging community members, and asserting their voice against the family and community pressures that often effectively disenfranchise formally elected women.

Why This Matters for Odisha

Odisha has significant panchayat reservation for women — and Odisha's tribal women representatives face the specific compound challenge of gender and caste marginalisation within local governance. The Meri Panchayat, Meri Shakti framework is directly applicable to Odisha's tribal women panchayat members, who are among the most structurally excluded elected officials in the country.

CREA's training institutes, while typically conducted outside Odisha, are accessible to Odisha's feminist and women's rights organisations as a leadership development resource. For JaBaSu's Knowledge Commons, CREA's analytical frameworks — on sexuality as a rights frontier, on elected women's governance capacity, on disability and gender — are directly relevant to Odisha's women empowerment sector organisations.

Contact and Further Reading

Website: creaworld.org | **Contact:** New Delhi headquarters and New York office

Key evidence:

- CREA website: creaworld.org/who-we-are — organisational overview and programme descriptions
- Devex profile: programme descriptions including all four strategic initiatives
- Channel Foundation grant documentation: feminist leadership institutes and SRHR focus

- LinkedIn: CREA — current programmes including Gender and WaSH Institute (Mumbai 2024) and FLaMBaRI

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