



Women ON THE FRONTLINES

Closing Civic Space and Feminist Organising in Sudan

INTRODUCTION

Between 2012 and 2018, CREA strengthened the lobby and advocacy capacity of over 50 Sudanese activists through its Feminist Leadership, Movement Building and Rights Institutes in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) and East Africa. The Institutes' trainings focused explicitly on the collective mobilisation of women for democratic rights. Despite the ongoing crackdown and closure of several civil society organisations by Sudanese authorities, CREA continued finding ways to engage with and include Sudanese feminist activists in its trainings.

CONTEXT

Many of the young activists who attended CREA's Institutes operated in tandem with the Salmaah Women's Resource Centre in Sudan. However, with its closure in 2014, CREA's trainings and Institutes served as trusted spaces for Sudanese activists to continue developing their advocacy agenda while building networks and alliances with other feminist activists from MENA and East Africa. Against the backdrop of Sudan's intensifying political restrictions, this was of the utmost consequence, as civil society actors in the country faced increasing government scrutiny and regulation.

RESULTS

On 19 December 2018, Sudan witnessed the beginning of massive civil unrest and widespread street protests against then-President Omar al-Bashir's regime¹. Almost all of the 50 activists who attended CREA's trainings played an integral role in the revolution — they occupied streets, led demonstrations, launched and fuelled aggressive social media campaigns, and built community support groups. **Of note, one participant became the leader of a neighbourhood youth committee, while another led a medical team that ran emergency mobile clinics. This network of activists also made gender and women's rights key priorities in their advocacy agenda. For the first time, their participation was framed as a 'feminist project', as they used their platforms to engage the public in discussions around power, patriarchy, and feminism.**

EXPERTISE AND EFFECTIVENESS

CREA's Institutes are recognised globally as spaces in which participants can further understand the conceptual underpinnings of their work and invest in strengthening the links between theory and practice. In the past 16 years, CREA's Feminist Leadership, Movement Building and Rights Institutes have produced over 1,000 alumni from 15 countries in the Global South. With CREA's support and active guidance, alumni have gone on to become critical movement actors working across a diverse set of issues, including women's rights, HIV/AIDS, livelihoods, peace and security, women's political participation, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

EVALUATION AND LEARNING CAPACITY

The curricula for CREA's Institutes are consistently revised to meet the needs of evolving political contexts. As such, the organisation has learned how to: (a) strengthen our own capacity to finetune and appropriately contextualise its feminist leadership curriculum, particularly as it relates to young women organising in restricted civic spaces; and (b) effectively build and support resilient movements that actively include or are led by young women.

TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

Faculty from CREA's Institute included a team of feminist activists who have done trailblazing work in the fields of civil liberties, economic and social justice, democracy and political rights, and criminal justice. Faculty leveraged their networks to connect Sudanese activists with other organisations and social movements with common strands of work.

CREA also used several measures to ensure the safety and security of participants. While working with the Sudanese activists, trainings were conducted outside Sudan and participants were divided into small groups while travelling outside the country. In consideration of the context CREA refrained from circulating photographs or other documentation, and prioritised keeping



ABOVE Participants in the midst of a discussion at the Feminist Leadership, Movement Building & Rights Institute, MENA, hosted in Lebanon in 2017

COVER IMAGE Participants in the midst of a discussion at the Feminist Leadership, Movement Building & Rights Institute, East Africa, hosted in Kenya in 2018



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CREA builds feminist leadership, advances women's human rights, and expands sexual and reproductive freedoms.

Founded in 2000, CREA is a feminist human rights organisation based in the Global South, led by Southern feminists, which works at the grassroots, national, regional, and international levels.