



CHANGE AGENTS FOR Equality

Building the Capacity of Elected Women
Representatives to Address Sexual and
Gender-Based Violence in India

INTRODUCTION

This case study demonstrates CREA's ability to strengthen the capacity of local elected women representatives (EWRs) in India to address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in their community. The broader aim is to invest in and influence feminist leadership and decision-making at the community level.

CONTEXT

Within rural and peri-urban Indian contexts, the following institutional and social barriers feed into and hinder the ability of EWRs to voice the needs of women and girls impacted by violence. First, women are not seen as legitimate leaders or decision-makers and are hence expected to be passive participants in the system (formal and non-formal). Second, male members of a family often use an EWR's position to further their own agenda. Third, within households, communities, and governance structures, there is considerable stigma attached to speaking openly about SGBV. This is problematic, as local governance systems hold the power in regard to reporting cases of violence, directing health service providers to provide information and resources, and creating space for women to talk about these issues.

Between 2015 and 2018, CREA worked with 600 EWRs across three states in India to: (a) strengthen their ability to critically analyse the roots of violence and inequality; and (b) shift the traditional way in which women are expected to navigate power relations in both formal and non-formal institutions and spaces.

RESULTS

As a result of CREA's efforts to strengthen feminist leadership and decision-making at the community level, there has been an increase in the engagement and participation of EWRs in local governance structures¹. In effect, this has led to a higher incidence of registered cases against child marriage, sexual harassment, and domestic violence, as well as open discussions around the same². In 2018, the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) in one of CREA's target states in India requested the organisation to conduct trainings for locally elected representatives and provide language



A local elected woman representative (EWR) with her daughter at a community meeting in Uttar Pradesh, India in 2017

around SGBV issues. Currently, SIRD is also employing CREA's training and resource materials.

EXPERTISE AND EFFECTIVENESS

Since its inception 20 years ago, CREA has focused on capacity-building as a key strategy for effecting change within decision-making arenas, be it at the local, national, or global level. As such CREA has trained both EWRs as well as its local partners on issues pertaining to SGBV against women and girls, gender, patriarchy, women and law, feminist leadership, and local governance.

EVALUATION AND LEARNING CAPACITY

CREA's programming with local EWRs takes the shape of 3.5-year cycles. While the organisation is currently in its third cycle of the programme, the training curriculum has been continuously revised based on assessments from review meetings with EWRs, review meetings with local partners, and monthly reports from local partners. These revisions are made throughout programme implementation, not only at the end of a cycle.

TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

In recognition of the fact that local organisations are uniquely placed to identify needs on the ground, CREA ensured that planning and implementation efforts were



During a session with local elected women representatives (EWRs) in Bihar in 2016

owned and driven by local organisations. In terms of decision-making, local partners were involved across all stages of programming (conceptualisation, resourcing, implementation, and evaluation). Trainings for EWRs were also conducted with local partners in attendance, and while meetings with EWRs were organised by CREA, they were facilitated by local organisations. Programme documentation, assessments, and reports are shared with partners via periodic review meetings.

KNOWLEDGE AND ADDED VALUE

The intervention was linked with CREA's ongoing work with adolescent girls and complemented by the organisation's longstanding partnerships with local organisations. This enabled CREA to build links between various stakeholders — including local health service providers, schools, and other community members — and facilitate discussions among them (including discussions between the girls and the EWRs), while also comprehensively addressing the rights of the women and girls as per needs they voiced. Additionally, trainings and knowledge resource materials are designed to be accessible regardless of literacy level.

INCLUSIVE APPROACH

While organising capacity-building activities with EWRs, as well as within the broader community, CREA ensured

the presence and active participation of women and girls from marginalised communities, particularly those from minority religions and castes (most of whom are generally excluded from such convenings).

SUSTAINABILITY

CREA prioritised capacity-building as the core strategy for the programme. However, CREA also recognised that individual capacity-building alone will not suffice if equal attention is not paid to creating an enabling environment within which EWRs can be supported. Thus, to ensure sustainability of the intervention, CREA in tandem with its local partners engaged with families, elected male representatives, local women's rights organisations, and local self-help groups through formal meetings, home visits, and targeted informal conversations.

- 1 During the baseline assessment, less than 10 percent of the EWRs from the intervention sites mentioned their role as EWRs in linking to women and girls' issues, including education for girls, addressing violence against women, and other women's empowerment-related aspects. However, in the endline, a strikingly high percentage of the exposed EWRs (94.5 percent) could relate their role as local officials in addressing gender-based discrimination and violence against women (VAW).
- 2 A key outcome included the regularisation of women's group meetings. Although these are formal fora created under the local governance system, they were hardly functional prior to CREA's work with the EWRs. These meetings have been significant in bringing the issues of women and girls to the forefront of the broader agenda of village development.



ABOVE Elected women representatives (EWRs) in Soda village near Jaipur, India in 2019

COVER IMAGE Capacity building and awareness raising session on violence against women and girls held in Jharkhand, India, 2016



crea

www.creaworld.org

EMAIL crea@creaworld.org

FACEBOOK [creaworld.org](https://www.facebook.com/creaworld.org)

INSTAGRAM [@think.crea](https://www.instagram.com/@think.crea)

TWITTER [@ThinkCREA](https://twitter.com/ThinkCREA)

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.