IT'S MY BODY
Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Adolescent Girls through Sports

“My entire life, I have been taught to say NO to everything. But now, I want to say what I really want! I want to say YES to what I really want! I want to say YES to going to school...I want to say YES to going out...I want to say YES to playing football...I want to say YES to all those things that bring happiness to me!”

About CREA
Founded in 2000, CREA is a feminist human rights organisation based in New Delhi, India. It is one of the few international women's rights organisations based in the global South, led by Southern feminists, which works at the grassroots, national, regional, and international levels. Together with partners from a diverse range of human rights movements and networks, CREA works to advance the rights of women and girls, and the sexual and reproductive freedoms of all people. CREA advocates for positive social change through national and international fora, and provides training and learning opportunities to global activists and leaders through its Institutes.

CREA’s Strategic Initiative ‘Advance Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights’ has as its fundamental objective 'empowerment of women and girls to make informed decisions about their bodies, health, and lives, and to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) from a feminist perspective’. Building on its work in the fields of gender, sexuality, reproductive health and rights, and women's rights over the past 14 years, CREA initiated the It's My Body programme.

CREA's Theory of Change
CREA believes that building the self-confidence, leadership, and knowledge of women and girls about their sexuality and human rights, and creating feminist platforms to challenge oppressive norms and power structures will enable women and girls to make their own decisions, exert control over their bodies, and demand their rights.

Background
A lack of bodily autonomy is particularly evident amongst adolescent girls in India. Their right to bodily integrity is violated in multiple ways. Large numbers of adolescent girls, for example, are forced into work they have not chosen, either by their families or by employers. Many are forced into early marriage with boys or men they have never met or have had no influence in choosing—nearly half of India's women marry
before the legal minimum age of 18 years¹. Contraceptive services are absent in many parts of India, and it is men who generally have control over whether to use it. Many girls bear children at young ages and against their will—16% of girls aged 15–19 years have been pregnant or had children². Adolescent girls who have little or no educational background are particularly vulnerable, and lack the resources and opportunities that would allow them to make informed choices. For instance, only 30% of the women with no formal educational background, between the ages of 15 and 49 years, have heard of HIV/AIDS³. In areas where reproductive health services are available, social stigma often deters girls from using them.

Addressing SRHR from a rights framework, and being able to include issues of sexuality, consent, choice, and pleasure, is not only difficult but also very challenging, as it meets reluctance and resistance at all levels—families, communities, schools, health service providers, community-based organisations, government officials, and policymakers. As a result, most programmes related to SRHR for young people often remain limited to nutritional deficiency, anaemia, menstrual hygiene and health for women and girls.

Recently, there have been some positive developments, led by civil society organisations, including trying to frame more inclusive and comprehensive strategies that seek to address fundamental issues around gender, sexuality, and rights.

**Programme Description**

The *Count Me IN! It’s My Body* programme is designed to enhance access to public spaces and provide SRHR information to young girls (12-16 years) using sports as an entry point. Use of sports allows CREA to address and increase bodily autonomy among young girls, enabling them to exert greater control over their bodies. This helps them to make their own decisions related to their bodies, health, and lives. Use of sports also strengthens girls’ team working and leadership capacities, and enhances their mental and physical well-being and self-esteem. CREA ensures that disadvantaged girls, including poor, religious minority, tribal, lower caste, married and unmarried, in/out of school, and disabled girls, are part of the programme.

**Programme Objectives**

- Increase knowledge and understanding among adolescent and young girls about SRHR and human rights.
- Strengthen and improve abilities of adolescent girls to demand and access the SRHR information and services that they need.
- Strengthen and improve abilities and skills, such as decision-making, teamwork, and leadership, of young girls to make them more assertive in decisions related to their bodies and lives.
- Increase the pool of activists, practitioners, and women leaders, trained and equipped with the knowledge and skills to use a rights- and consent-based approach in their work, to advance the SRHR of adolescent girls and young women.

CREA is currently implementing the programme in collaboration with 15 community-based partner organisations in eight rural districts across Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh, thereby reaching out to over 6000 girls, directly and indirectly. The direct component of the programme comprises of sports and knowledge-building sessions with *kishori* (girls) groups on SRHR topics such as self-esteem, gender norms, body image, violence, and human rights. These 20 sessions, divided into three clusters, constitute a 10-month curriculum of the programme.

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“I really enjoy coming for these meetings, as I get to meet my friends, play football, and learn about new things!”

—Member of Kishori Manch, Block Simariya, District Chatra, Jharkhand

In addition to these sessions, the programme involves increased engagement with other community stakeholders, such as parents of the girls, local health service providers (HSPs), teachers, panchayat members, and district-level officials. This is achieved through quarterly meetings with parents and local HSPs, quarterly in-school events, and annual block- and district-level events organised jointly by the partner organisations and CREA.

“Since I joined this programme, I have started coming out for these meetings, making new friends, and demanding my rights from my family. I have been with this programme since 2009...since then, I feel, I have changed a lot. Now, if a collective member tells me that she can’t come for the meeting, I go and talk to her parents and convince them to send her. This collective gives us all a lot of strength and confidence to demand for our rights.”

— Member of Kishori Manch, Block Itkhori, District Chatra, Jharkhand

The Count Me IN! It’s My Body programme also aims to expand access to resources on SRHR for Hindi-speaking activists and organisations by producing and disseminating material in Hindi. CREA has produced a set of five primers—*Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Adolescent Girls; Sexuality and Rights; Reproductive Health and Rights; HIV/AIDS and Rights; and Criminalisation*—in a language and format that is accessible to community-based practitioners and adolescent girls.

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process is an integrated and on-going part of the programme. M&E components based on feminist theory and participatory methods are woven into the design of the programme.

**Implementing Organisations**

CREA is the primary implementer, undertaking all activities designed as part of the programme in collaboration with the following 15 partner organisations.

**Jharkhand**
1. Lok Prema Kendra (Hazaribagh)
2. Mahila Mandal (Hazaribagh)
3. Mahila Mukti Sansthan (Hazaribagh)
4. Nav Nirman Mahila Kendra (Madhupur)
5. Nurture (Jamshedpur)
6. Prema Bharati (Madhupur)
7. Srijian (Hazaribagh)

**Bihar**
1. Akansha Seva Sadan (Muzzafarpur)
2. Gaurav Gramaen Mahila Vikas Manch (Patna)
3. Nari Nidhi (Muzzafarpur)

**Uttar Pradesh**
1. Gramonnati Sansthan (Mahoba)
2. Mahila Swarozgar Samiti (Varanasi)
3. Saakar (Barelli)
4. Vanagana (Banda)
5. Virangana (Jhansi)