



THE Power OF MANY

Joint Lobbying and Advocacy to Oppose a
United Nations Policy Position on Sex Work

INTRODUCTION

This case study illustrates the advocacy that CREA did with many strategic feminist organisations and sex workers' groups to ensure that UN Women refrained from adopting a policy that would hinder the rights of sex workers.

CONTEXT

In 2016, UN Women announced that it intended to draft a policy position statement on sex work. This was a significant cause for concern with sex workers' rights groups as the process was being led by the Deputy Director of UN Women, who was known to have a position opposing sex work as a legitimate form of work.

RESULTS

In response, CREA, with its partners, developed a statement that included five non-negotiable principles for formulating a policy around sex work. The crux of the statement was that any policy that either directly or incidentally impacted sex workers must be developed in consultation with, and with participation and representation of, sex workers.

With UN Women planning for an internal meeting to solidify its position, the time afforded for preparation of the statement and acquisition of signatures was extremely short. Through massive outreach and consultations led by CREA, the statement was signed by 190 diverse feminist and sex workers' rights organisations. **The statement was ultimately submitted by CREA and directly factored into UN Women's internal discussions. As a result of this mobilisation, UN Women decided against pursuing the policy¹.**

EXPERTISE AND EFFECTIVENESS

While CREA has, for many years, worked to foster more conversation between sex workers' rights groups and feminist groups, many feminist organisations are still uncertain about adopting a rights-affirming approach to sex work. The statement reflected an important process of building stronger connections between sex workers' rights groups and feminist groups and presenting a

united front affirming sex work as a legitimate form of work.

EVALUATION AND LEARNING CAPACITY

Our evaluation of this process was undertaken through a series of discussions with partners, particularly the Sex Workers Inclusive Feminist Alliance (SWIFA), an ongoing group of feminist organisations that have histories of supporting sex workers' rights. Responses from the evaluation indicated a growing commitment to advancing sex workers' rights from feminist, women's rights and labour rights organisations. The success of the initiative signified that the method of joint drafting and mobilising support using a 'petition' type process can be effective, if paired with one-on-one lobbying with influencers, including high-level UN officials, donors, and well-known activists. In response, CREA has amplified its support to SWIFA as a lobbying platform. In addition, we have engaged in growing advocacy directed at the 'moveable middle' of the women's movement, toward growing the community of women's rights groups that support — and actively advocate for — sex workers' rights.

TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

CREA worked with the All India Network of Sex Workers (AINSW) to co-create education and lobbying materials, which were translated into local languages to ensure accessibility. CREA and AINSW then held three regional consultations in India to gather signatures from sex workers' collectives that contributed to the signature campaign against the UN Women statement. All these documents were shared with sex worker organisations and networks.

KNOWLEDGE AND ADDED VALUE

CREA has deep knowledge of sex workers' rights issues and as a global feminist organisation has been an ally for the sex worker movement for over 20 years. For CREA, work related to sex work and sex workers' rights has held a focus around three areas. First, we have supported capacity-strengthening of local and national sex worker groups in India, Kenya, and Uganda to more



CREA-led training for sex workers' rights groups in Uganda in 2018

effectively engage in lobbying and advocacy at the national level. Second, we have emphasised the importance of challenging the view that sex work constitutes violence against women, especially with feminist organisations. Third, we have actively sought to ensure attention to sex work and sex workers' rights in global anti-trafficking debates, including in relation to the draft General Recommendation on Trafficking in the Context of Migration from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women².

INCLUSIVE APPROACH

As a first step to developing the collective statement, a meeting was convened on the sidelines of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) Forum in 2016 (a gathering attended by 2,000 feminist activists) co-convened by CREA, the Global Network of Sex Work Projects, Amnesty International, and Sangram-VAMP (an Indian sex workers' collective). among others. The outcome of the meeting was a decision to draft a joint statement that included non-negotiable principles for policy formulation around sex work. The statement was jointly drafted by women's rights and sex workers' rights organisations. All of CREA's work on sex workers' rights includes the participation of sex workers, with

extensive consultations with them on lobbying and advocacy campaign documents being produced by feminist organisations.

SUSTAINABILITY

As a result of this process, the Global Network of Sex Worker Projects decided to convene with SWIFA, with the aim of strengthening mobilisation and action. SWIFA has continued to meet regularly and engage in joint activities, including convening panels at the UN Commission on the Status of Women and engaging in advocacy related to CEDAW: for instance, organising a briefing session for Committee members with sex workers' rights advocates.

1 CREA Letter to UN Women dated 31 October 2016 <https://creaworld.org/announcements/response-un-women-s-call-consultation-seeking-views-un-women-approach-sex-work-sex>

2 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/GRTrafficking.aspx>



ABOVE Full House: 'Advancing Sex Workers' Rights to Social Protection' at the 63rd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, New York, where CREA participated

COVER IMAGE Sex Workers march in Kisumu, Kenya on the occasion of International Day of Sex Workers' Rights, 2019, where CREA participated as an ally



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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.