



A Seat AT THE TABLE

Lobbying and Advocacy with Women
and Girls with Disabilities in Kenya

INTRODUCTION

This case study substantiates CREA's ability to convene and capacitate women-led disability groups in Kenya for effective lobbying and advocacy within international policy arenas. The broader aim is to ensure that marginalised voices, needs, and priorities from the Global South are taken into account and responded to within decision-making fora.

CONTEXT

Within UN advocacy spaces, the lived experiences and priorities of women with disabilities (WWD) — particularly those from the Global South — are often ignored by both decision-makers and women's rights organisations. In 2016, CREA began working with an informal Kenyan group of WWD activists, many of whom operated separately. The aim was to facilitate their joint preparation and submission of a Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), while simultaneously supporting the development of an advocacy strategy to lobby CEDAW members. This culminated in the formation of a unified, national-level network of WWDs called the Kenyan Network Advocating for the Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities¹ (hereafter referred to as the Kenyan Network). Shortly after, in August 2017, the Kenyan Network submitted the only Shadow Report from Kenya focusing on issues of women and girls with disabilities².

RESULTS

As a result of CREA's support for the Kenyan Network, **CEDAW's concluding observations and recommendations to Kenya³ categorically addressed the concerns raised in the Kenyan Network's Shadow Report.** To date, these recommendations are used by Kenyan WWD rights groups for national and county-level advocacy efforts with both policy-makers and medical service providers.

In the lead-up to Kenya's country review by CEDAW, CREA's first step was to organise and facilitate in-person meetings between various WWD activists from Kenya. These discussions culminated in the formation of the

Kenyan Network. CREA worked closely with members of the Network on drafting the report, providing feedback on content, language, and format. After the submission of the report, CREA supplemented the process by organising meetings between the Kenyan Network and CEDAW members in Geneva. This was to ensure that the concerns articulated within the report were reflected in the Committee's final recommendations.

EXPERTISE AND EFFECTIVENESS

CREA's work is located at the nexus of the women's rights, sexual rights, and disability rights movements, and we are able to draw on the expertise, analysis, networks, and experience of all three movements in the implementation of our work. CREA has been working as a lobbying and advocacy ally for women with disabilities. As such, while working with the Kenyan Network, CREA was able to harness and apply its abilities and expertise to: (a) bring WWD organisations and individuals together to identify and develop a common agenda; and (b) forge and cement links between local activism and global advocacy spaces.

EVALUATION AND LEARNING CAPACITY

CREA's strategy on disability and sexual rights draws directly from the priorities and needs articulated by East African disability rights groups, including the Kenyan Network. For the past three years, CREA has organised annual meetings to: (a) forge links and intersections between our respective agendas; and (b) revisit and revise CREA's own priorities and approach in order to meet evolving needs as articulated by local activists.

TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

Facilitating the participation of grassroots WWD movements within various UN processes, including in regional consultations, has been vital in including and amplifying diverse voices that otherwise get left out of advocacy spaces and conversations. By ensuring that these movements effectively participate in international decision-making processes, CREA ensures that their agenda is heard and responded to by both decision-makers and other movement actors.



CREA co-convoked a session on ‘Reimagining Movement Building: How Feminist Leadership within the Disability Movement is Broadening the Disability Rights Discourse’ at the Conference of State Parties in 2019

KNOWLEDGE AND ADDED VALUE

CREA’s work in Kenya spans a period of 18 years, and the organisation has forged deep-rooted alliances with both national and regional networks. CREA has cultivated relationships with movements at the margins and has capacitated organisations within these movements to advocate for their rights as active and legitimate actors in policy spaces and spheres of influence. CREA has leveraged its organisational capacity, access to resources, and reputational capital to facilitate local-to-global connections and enable national networks to successfully use international mechanisms as tools for national-level advocacy.

INCLUSIVE APPROACH

A key challenge for WWD movements is their consistent exclusion from the women’s rights movement. In the preparatory meetings leading up to the submission of the Shadow Report, CREA ensured the presence and active participation of national-level women’s rights organisations from Kenya. This led to women’s rights groups in the country recognising WWD as actors who must be included in advocacy around women’s rights, while broadening their own agendas to recognise the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities.

SUSTAINABILITY

Using the skills and perspectives gained from the CEDAW reporting process, the Kenyan Network began working toward being established as a formal structure, an undertaking that continues to date. CREA continues to work with the members of the Network to engage with other UN mechanisms including Special Rapporteurs, the Conference of State Parties, and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, CREA’s role as a capacitor for the Network extends beyond the scope of our collaboration with its members — the broader aim is for members to operate as active and autonomous agents of change.

- 1 The Network consisted of 11 disability rights organisations and 4 disability rights experts.
- 2 Kenyan Network Advocating for the Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities, “NGO Submission On Kenya to The Committee On The Convention On Elimination Of Discrimination Against Women for the 68th Session”, August 2017 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fNGO%2fKEN%2f29055&Lang=en
- 3 Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, “Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Kenya”, November 2017 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fKEN%2fCO%2f28&Lang=en



ABOVE March on International Day for Persons with Disabilities, that took place on 3 December 2018 in East Africa

COVER IMAGE Training of trainers with disability rights activists 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.