“After this training, I would especially work towards the advancement of women and help them to claim their rights. I will inform them about government schemes and services, and help them to access these.”

—EWR, Hazaribagh district, Jharkhand

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 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**

Women and young girls in rural areas of Jharkhand, India, continue to live in a highly rigid and deeply patriarchal society. They are unable to move freely out of their homes, and lack power and authority to make decisions, voice their consent, or express their choices openly in the community. They face violence, stigma, and discrimination on a daily basis because of their gender, caste, and socioeconomic status.

Jharkhand is marked by low female literacy, poverty, under-development, and high rates of violence against women (VAW), deeply entrenched in socio-cultural practices like dowry and witch-hunting.
Young girls are deprived of opportunities and of their rights to education, health, and nutrition, because of the deep-rooted preference for sons. Many are forced into early marriage with boys or men they have never met or had no influence in choosing. Trafficking of girls is also emerging as a significant concern.

Given the poor state of governance in the state, systems of redress and justice for women, despite being mandated by law, are poorly implemented. Women and girls lack access to government schemes and services due to lack of information and mobility. This is particularly acute in districts affected by Maoist conflicts and where the local administration remains ineffective.

Post the 2010 local government elections, Jharkhand has 58% elected women representatives (EWRs). The new EWRs can play an influential role, as they now have an official mandate to be part of the official district level planning and budgeting processes. However, there is an urgent need to build their capacity, both with regard to their role as office-bearers in local government bodies as well as on gender-related issues for them to play this role effectively.

**Programme Description**

CREA's strategic initiative ‘Strengthening Feminist Leadership’ seeks to support the ability of individuals, particularly young and marginalised women, and organisations, specifically grassroots women-led CBOs, through action learning processes with a focus on gender, sexuality, and human rights. It has its foundations in the belief that women must be at the forefront of reform, and that women's voices, perspectives, and participation must help shape positive change.

Ibtida (‘the beginning’ in Urdu) was initiated as a leadership development programme in 2005 and is currently in its third phase. It aims to build leadership among women and create a network of women-led CBOs in the Hindi belt of India. Ibtida has been implemented in Bihar, Delhi, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. Through this programme, CREA visualises its role as that of a mentor to provide on-going support to small and medium-sized organisations. Some of the criteria that aids the selection of organisations to be part of the programme includes CBOs that primarily work in the Hindi-speaking belt of India; are women-led; and work with women as the primary constituency.

Building on this decade-long programme, CREA launched a more targeted intervention in 2012, entitled ‘Ibtida 3: Strengthening feminist leadership to realise women’s human rights at the community level in Jharkhand’. For the first time since its inception, the programme also focuses on building the leadership of EWRs. The programme is being implemented in four districts of Jharkhand with 12 CBOs and 300 EWRs. This two-pronged approach to build knowledge, capacity, and skills of organisations and EWRs will ensure better integration and development of more effective strategies to advocate for the rights of women and girls at the community level.

One of the main strategies of the programme is to organise trainings for partner CBOs and EWRs on gender, VAW, sexuality, and human rights. In addition, trainings are also been conducted to build the knowledge of EWRs about the constitutionally sanctioned roles and responsibilities, as part of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (Panchayati Raj) Act. The EWRs who receive this training, in turn, conduct village-level trainings for other EWRs as well as women’s self-help groups (SHGs) active in these villages. Some of the supplementary strategies, in addition to the trainings, include (i) resource development in the local language; (ii) exposure visits to other organisations that work with EWRs, thereby creating opportunities for interaction between EWRs that work in varying contexts; (iii) three-
day Basic Training on Gender and Sexuality in Ranchi; (iv) seven-day Sexuality, Gender, and Rights Institute in Delhi; and (v) multi-stakeholder consultations with government, donor, and civil society representatives. All these strategies together constitute the overall mentoring approach of CREA for the Ibtida programme.

Implementing Organisations (Jharkhand)

**Mahila Mandal (Chatra):** works on issues of microfinance and VAW with rural women in Chatra and Hazaribagh districts. Mahila Mandal works with over 7000 women, who have been collectivised by Mahila Mandal to form SHGs.

**Prerna Bharti (Deogarh):** works on issues of health, gender equality, education, anti-trafficking, environment, and VAW in 16 districts. The organisation works with marginalised communities, including Dalits and tribals, and young girls and women.

**Lok Prerna Kendra (Hazaribagh):** works on VAW, education, and health of tribal women and girls. The organisation has started health centres in many villages, where women health workers provide basic medical facilities to tribal women.

**Singhbhum Gramin Unnayan Mahila Samiti (East Singhbhum):** works with tribal community on leadership development programmes, microfinance, health, and VAW.

**Mahila Mukti Sanstha (Hazaribagh):** works with young girls and women on issues of health, education, and trafficking in Dalit and tribal areas of Jharkhand.

**Nurture Trust (East Singhbhum):** works with young girls and women on microfinance, vocational skills, health, and education. Nurture is evolved in designing and implementing innovative approaches for the upliftment of Dalit and underprivileged people.

**Samadhan (Hazaribagh):** works on microfinance, women issues, and health, and on strengthening leadership of EWRs. They work in four Panchayats and 12 villages in the Hazaribagh district.

**Jharkhand Mahila Uthhan (Hazaribagh):** works on domestic violence, awareness building on women's rights, and public distribution system. It organises activities for young girls on health and vocational skills, so that they become financially independent and are able to take decisions related to their lives.

**Kirti Sanstha (Deoghar):** works on creating awareness and building leadership of marginalised women and young girls in rural areas. The organisation undertakes programmes on livelihood, women empowerment, advocacy for self-governance, and promotion of women's rights.

**Prabha Bharti (Deoghar):** works with young girls and women on microfinance, health, VAW, and leadership building. It runs a shelter home for young girls and organises training on life skills.

**Gramoday Chetna Kendra (Chatra):** works on raising awareness and building leadership of EWRs. It works with young girls on education, especially with dropout girls. The organisation also runs a school.

**Asha Sansthan (East Singhbhum):** works with women and young girls, especially tribal girls, on education and health. It also works on building leadership of EWRs. It runs a shelter home for women.