

BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

CENTRE FOR RIGHTS, EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

WANGECHI WACHIRA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



AFRICAN
WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT
FUND

Wangechi Wachira

Executive Director, Centre for Rights, Education and Awareness (CREAW)



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In 2013, the Centre for Rights, Education and Awareness (CREAW) in Kenya was facing closure. Nearly 5,000 cases affecting women that CREAW was overseeing were still within the legal system but the organisation – like many in the country – was in the midst of a funding crisis.

CREAW is a national, women’s human rights non-governmental organisation based in Nairobi, whose vision is “a transformed and just society”. Its mission is to champion, expand and make real women’s human rights with programmes grounded in core values of integrity, professionalism, passion, innovation, and synergy.

It is headed by leading

woman’s activist, Wangechi Wachira.

CREAW’s relationship with the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF) started in 2007 when another leading women’s organisation and grantee partner, FEMNET, suggested the organisation apply for funding for their women’s programmes.

“By the time we started the relationship around 2007, Kenya was going into a general election. AWDF funded a programme that worked to support women to be able to participate in decision-making processes,” recalled Wachira.

“Before the election, things were fine but after the elections, things went south. We were able to play a role in peace building during that



process. We went back to AWDF and said that women had come out in big numbers to vote but in the aftermath, women had been abused and violated. We wanted to go back to the communities and document the stories of the women we had worked with,” she explained.

“The country has made a lot of strides since 2007. In 2010, Kenya passed a Constitution and women were able to push for their issues at a constitutional level. Since then a lot of laws have been passed that deal with the issues of women. What remains, however, is to make sure that they are finalised, implemented and that the relevant government institutions take responsibility for them to be enacted,” said Wachira.

Wide-ranging achievements

Wachira has led the organisation through many achievements including when CREAW won the Civil Society of the Year Award (CSOYA),

2010 Best Management category and were runners-up in other categories. The next year, in 2011, CREAW managed to win awards in financial management, leadership management & governance and best learning organisation categories. In 2013, they once again received the financial management and stewardship award.

Wachira was also nominated in 2014 to be the co-convener of Africa Unite - a collective platform to synergise efforts towards raising public awareness, stimulating behaviour change and increasing political will and resources to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against women and girls in the country. Her nomination is testament to CREAW’s leading role in GBV.

“We are engaged with a range of partnerships including various civil society organisations, Government ministries, county government and development partners at the local, national, regional and international level.

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Some of the key institutions that my team and I have worked with include but are not limited to the Ministry of Gender and Youth, The Gender and Equality Commission, The Kenya National Human Rights Commission, Teachers Service Commission, County Governments in Narok, Kilifi, Meru, Nyeri, Meru, Kitui and Isiolo, The University of Nairobi Parklands campus, Georgetown University, and Smith College Massachusetts, among others,” explained Wachira.

The organisation has expanded dramatically growing from near closure in 2013 to a staff with 27 staff members and a budget in 2016 of USD 2 million. In addition, CREAM has expanded from outreach offices in three counties to seven counties in Kenya namely Narok, Meru, Nyeri, Meru, Kitui, Isiolo, and Nairobi.

Accountability champions

“In all these counties we have managed to recruit county accountability champions to engage with the county government on budget tracking, public participation and to strengthen accountability of the elected and nominated leaders,” said Wachira.

CREAW successfully contributed to the development of organisations working in the sector by publishing and making accessible key legislative acts including the Simplified Sexual Offences Act; Strategic Plan (2014); Haki Mashinani (2014); Police Reforms Booklet (2011); Running for Political Office (2016), Simplified Matrimonial Act (2016); Simplified Domestic Act (2016) Personal Safety and Security Manual (2013) and CREAM’s Significance and Impacting Lives Booklet (2014).

And the organisation has had a dramatic impact on the legal landscape. CREAM took the lead in public interest litigation cases on state violations of constitutional provisions of two-thirds gender representation in public offices. They also fought cases related to the violation of the minor girl’s right to dignity, health and education.

Progressive landmark rulings

“As a result of these cases, we got very progressive landmark rulings that goes towards promoting the rights of women and girls in Kenya,” Wachira said. In addition, they lobbied for the passage of the ‘Protection Against Domestic violence Act 2015’.

CREAW works directly with about 4,500 legal cases a year but is also supporting 100



women who are running for political office as well as many more who are running for non-elected positions.

“Our desire is to see women in elective positions such as governors, senators and members of parliament but also as supporters of women at the local governance level including members of the county assembly. We are looking at how we get women in to positions such as school boards, health boards and county authority boards,” she added.

“Our desire is to get women into elected and non-elected positions.”

Wachira herself is a good role model for women’s leadership. A mother of two, she holds a BA in Social Sciences and an MA in Gender and Development from the University of Nairobi. She has also attended prestigious international training programmes such as Training in Human Rights at the Raul Wallenberg Institute in Sweden and Strategic Management Training for NGO Leaders hosted by Harvard Kennedy School and the University of Navarra Spain.

“Personally, the [Capacity Building] leadership programme I went through with AWDF

was valuable because the organisation was going through a transition. CREAM was founded in 1998 and one founder member was preparing to leave during the time of the leadership programme,” Wachira said.

“By getting into this programme, I was better equipped to deal with the transition. It helped me in terms of preparation, understanding leadership, addressing the role of the executive directly ... even understanding that I would not be able to lead as Ann did but would have to lead as Wangechi,” she said.

The leadership programme allowed the organisation to also review their governance structures.

“We were also looking at how to bring on new board members as the founder board members were on a transition. The leadership programme was important to deal with governance levels and how to lead from the secretariat,” she added.

“The one change I would really talk about is the support we got from AWDF, especially in 2014. It was a difficult time for CREAM and other women’s rights organisations,” said Wachira.

Difficult conversations

“Many organisations went down in terms of funding. Some even shut their doors. I remember going to AWDF and explaining that we were almost about to shut. We had 5,000 women’s cases still pending in court,” she recalled.

“After having this difficult conversation – and AWDF did ask us why we had not anticipated these difficulties and what steps we would be taking – AWDF gave us USD 20,000.

“This allowed us to continue to keep our doors open with a skeleton staff to ensure that our pending cases could continue being heard. But we had also been speaking to other donors and AWDF’s funding showed their faith in us and encouraged these other donors to support us,” she said.

“We also had time to reflect as an organisation and got into serious reflection about how we would grow. Today we have a USD 1.5 million budget and a range of programmes that support women,” she said, adding that they now have multi-year grant funding.

Wachira said AWDF also supported training for three staff members on resource mobilisation and these skills were used in building the organisation’s resilience.

“If AWDF had not given us the funding during our time of crisis then other donors would have also shied away if it was not for AWDF sticking their neck out there, we probably would have shut our doors,” Wachira said. “We are in a better place today.”

Grantee Information

The Centre for Rights, Education and Awareness (CREAW) is a registered, non-profit national women's rights non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1998 by women lawyers who had common goals and a shared purpose to confront the low awareness of women's real needs and rights in Kenya. It was registered in 1999 as the Centre for Rehabilitation and Education of Abused Women. It later changed the name to reflect its wider focus on women's rights in society.

CREAW is open to membership of both men and women who share in the same vision and mission and who are driven by positive values for women's development and empowerment.

The Board of Directors is the overall executive organ responsible for CREAW's policy direction while the secretariat ensures that the policies are executed and the programmes implemented.

CREAW's programmes are politically non-partisan. However, they are anchored on enthusiastic lobbying and advocacy to support the interests of its constituents - the women of Kenya.

CREAW's vision statement: Our vision as an organisation is 'A transformed just and equal society'

CREAW's Mission Statement: To champion expand and actualize women's rights

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