



2021 FMA

ANNUAL REPORT



2021 REPORT

The year 2021, like last year, was another challenging year for the Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA), considering the continued presence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges, the organization managed to conduct project activities, published reports and briefing papers, helped capacitate partners, participated in meetings and forums and continued engaging with partners both at the national, regional and global levels.



**This report
summarizes the
achievements of
FMA for the year
2021.**

INITIATIVE FOR MEDIA FREEDOM

FMA has been a member of the Initiative for Media Freedom Consortium since 2019, and has continually contributed to the achievement of its goals, such as to improve the environment for a free press; bolster capacity of media and other organizations to address disinformation; and, strengthen self-regulation of the media.

In 2021, FMA published the *The State of the Digital Nation: The Digital Rights Report 2020* delving into the effect of technology on human rights. The report provided an in-depth study of how technology affected human rights in the Philippines, covering issues on internet access, privacy and data protection, gender and information and communications technologies (ICTs), and free expression. It was featured globally by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) – an international network of civil society organizations (CSOs) that work on peace, human rights, and ICTs. FMA also published a series of Digital Rights Roundup released twice a month to update every Filipino on issues concerning their digital rights. The Digital Rights Roundup—a collection of digital rights and ICT-related news, articles, updates, announcements in the Philippines—was created in partnership with UP Internet Freedom Network.

From February to April 2021, FMA partnered with Break the Fake to launch the Media Civics Lab Seminar-Workshop Series for Local Youth Leaders which aimed to equip Sangguniang Kabataan officials (local youth leaders), and emerging youth leaders from student and sectoral groups with crucial fact-checking, information and media literacy skills and resources.

FMA also hosted an exclusive conversation with key stakeholders and decision makers on matters concerning Internet freedom, digital rights, and ICT issues in the Philippines entitled “The Problems with #PHInternet: What can be done to improve ICT in the Philippines?”.

During the conversation, contributing experts described the Philippine Internet landscape as being primarily dependent on foreign technology, import and innovation, and faced with ICT rights issues that compromise anonymity and cybersecurity. Groups like Democracy.net and other Internet freedom advocates recommended institutionalizing the framework on rights, governance, development, and security.

FMA also hosted an exclusive conversation with key stakeholders and decision makers on matters concerning Internet freedom, digital rights, and ICT issues in the Philippines entitled “The Problems with #PHInternet: What can be done to improve ICT in the Philippines?”. During the conversation, contributing experts described the Philippine Internet landscape as being primarily dependent on foreign technology, import and innovation, and faced with ICT rights issues that compromise anonymity and cybersecurity. Groups like Democracy.net and other Internet freedom advocates recommended institutionalizing the framework on rights, governance, development, and security.

Another endeavor with the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication, Break the Fake Movement, Digital Rights Coalition, Out of the Box Media Literacy Initiative, and Yabong Philippines was also pursued by FMA by organizing a panel discussion as part of the Global Media and Information Literacy Week 2021 following the global celebration’s theme, “Media and Information Literacy for the Public Good.” “Botante na ako! Now what?”. It brought together young Filipino voters for an online discussion via ZOOM on how to practice informed voting in the upcoming May 2022 elections.

To popularize the rampant disinformation, both online and on the ground, FMA also collaborated with The Borrachos to create two songs and music videos on the topic of disinformation and the importance of critical thinking. Links to the videos can be found in these links: Kamalayan ([Facebook Watch](#), [YouTube](#)), Saysay ng Salita ([Facebook Watch](#), [YouTube](#)).

GENDER

The Gender program continued to do research, advocacy, and conduct capacity-building for FMA partners. In 2021, the organization conducted research on the Filipino Women's Digital Agenda and to date has produced a [policy brief](#) and a [policy overview](#) on gender and ICT in the country. In partnership with the Development Action for Women Network, FMA also published a [report](#) on the routes that pandemic-hit Filipino women migrant workers take for their reintegration.

FMA likewise continued mapping cases of online gender-based violence (OGBV) and has published the mid-year and year-end datamap reports. The data analysis and figures were used in various speaking engagements, consultations, and in writing reports. Blog articles on the weaponization of social media against women were also published, as well as statements in line with various observances.

The Gender program explored various formats to deliver informational and educational contents. We produced two podcast episodes on gender issues, had a live online discussion with women migrant workers, a conversation on hate speech on Twitter Spaces, and developed comic series on hate speech (yet to be published). The program collaborates with the IMF project in developing comics on gendered disinformation. It developed an online feminist resource hub (SAFeNet.asia), which continues to be populated with content.

FMA staff participated in consultation meetings with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies. We were invited to a public hearing and two technical working group meetings by the Senate Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality. We were also invited as resource persons in various forums and workshops on gender and ICT issues, digital security and online safety.

PRIVACY & DATA PROTECTION

Like in previous years, FMA's Privacy work in 2021 was centered on research and privacy-related analyses of pressing issues. A briefing paper on lending applications was released in February. Particular attention was paid to privacy and data protection issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was the focus of EXPOSÉ, a digital magazine released in July. This was followed up with another report, A Pandemic as Vector for State Surveillance and Other Abuses, which served as a comprehensive documentation of various surveillance initiatives by the Philippine government during the COVID-19 pandemic. A second volume of the compendium of research outputs produced by FMA's privacy programs over the years was also published in 2021.

This research work proved to be relevant not just in the local but also in global and regional discourses. Our analyses of the privacy impacts of Philippine government responses to COVID-19 were shared in various advocacy spaces such as the Global Digital Development Forum, the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum, and the annual Member Convening of the APC.

Along with several talks, presentations, and workshops on privacy-related topics, FMA also continued its advocacy of building the capacity of civil society organizations as privacy advocates through a four-module online privacy course that's free of charge and accessible to anyone with an internet connection.

Finally, FMA continued to engage with relevant government stakeholders in privacy-related policies and concerns. The organization participated in consultative meetings related to digital vaccination certification systems, and engaged key government offices in its research work on local identity systems.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

FMA hired a Communications officer in December 2020 to help oversee all communication needs of the organization– from management of various online platforms, developing content, support to events, partnerships, and content creation. As a result, major online platforms of the organization gained in numbers, with its Facebook page reaching a 200% increase in likes (from 3,300 in December 2020 to 9,339 likes in December 2021). Consistent and timely posting of social media contents and collaboration with local artists helped in establishing our online presence and a loyal audience. Some of the most widely spread collaborative content was made by comics artists like Tarantadong Kalbo and Kapitan Tambay on historical distortion (with 637,005 total engagements) and on online privacy (with 1,798,891 total engagements), respectively.

The organization also maximized the use of Spaces feature of Twitter to hold quick events called FMA Twitter Hour, including sessions on comics culture in the Philippines, privacy in the time of COVID-19 and the launch of the EXPOSE magazine, community moderation, the launch of report on the Pandemic as a vector for state surveillance and other abuses, advocating for a free and open internet, and understanding hate speech in the Philippines. Twitter helped us in boosting these events through the \$10,000 ad credits they awarded to the organization.

Timely crossposting of contents in the website, including blog articles, official statements, briefing and research papers, digital rights roundup, as well as establishing new pages to house news articles where the organization is mentioned was also secured. FMA's instagram account was also active throughout the year, starting with 22 posts and ending the year with 293 posts on different ICT issues, calls, celebratory cards, and comics, among others.

FMA also explored other platforms such as Spotify and LinkedIn. The organization launched its podcast named Ano'ng Konek? The Podcast published three episodes in the last quarter of 2021.

Aiming to target a more professional audience, a LinkedIn account was created to crosspost contents, especially briefing papers and studies published by the organization. Several video campaigns were also published on YouTube, including the #BabaeMakapangyarihan during the women's month, the Digital Rights Coalition recruitment video #BeADigitalRightsAdvocate, highlights of podcast episodes, and other relevant issues.

In order to ensure that our online platforms are protected, a crisis management manual was also drafted to serve as a reference to address arising issues. The organization also developed a virtual event management manual for a quick reference in mounting smooth and successful online events.

GROWING OUR PARTNERSHIPS

At the beginning of 2021, FMA became a Global Network Initiative (GNI) fellow. GNI works to protect and advance freedom of expression and privacy rights in the ICT industry by setting a global standard for responsible company decision making and serves as a multi-stakeholder voice in the face of government restrictions and demands. FMA also joined the Movement against Disinformation, a broad coalition of members of the academe, the legal profession, civil society groups, international and local non-government organizations and other advocacy groups that are united to prevent the systemic and unregulated spread of disinformation in social media. Partnerships with local student organizations and women's groups also materialized. At the regional level, FMA joined the South East Asia Coalition for Tech Accountability or SEACT. The coalition aims to demand greater accountability from tech companies whose presence in the region have effects on human rights and democracy.

FMA hosted interns from Alternatives Canada and the Ateneo de Manila University in 2021. It also developed a 6-part module on Human Rights and ICT for the online human rights academy of the Commission on Human Rights.

Grants from the following organizations helped sustain the work of FMA: Access Now, Association for Progressive Communications, Global Partners Digital, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, Internews, Privacy International, and the Web Foundation.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on the work of FMA, as it has affected our ability and mobility to conduct activities. Most of our activities still had to be conducted online. FMA staff maximized the available tools and applications to support our work and activities. Despite these, there were of course issues of health and wellbeing of the staff and our partners.

The availability of the vaccines for COVID-19 were not evenly distributed all over the country. It was only towards the third quarter of the year when all FMA staff were fully vaccinated. During our bi-monthly meetings with the staff, we made sure that there is time for a regular check in to find out how they are coping on a personal level. We had one workshop with AHA on well-being, and FMA also partnered with PECOJON for the conduct of one online discussion to discuss mental health, which focused specifically on trolling.

The growth and development of the staff are important to FMA. It conducted an organizational risk assessment in early 2021, and a capacity building on physical security during the second quarter of the year, to complement the digital security training it conducted in 2020.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR 2022

FMA will continue its work and advocacy to promote human rights, especially in the digital sphere. It will strive to improve and strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones.

The Philippines will hold its national elections in May 2022. In 2021, the election fever was already felt, and FMA came up with a video campaign to encourage young people to register for the upcoming elections. In 2022, we will come up with advocacy materials to help promote voters' education, as well as partner with advocacy groups to ensure fair and safe elections in the country.