



MAKING A  
**FEMINIST  
INTERNET**  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA



Foundation for Media Alternatives



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# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>APC</b>	Association for Progressive Communications
<b>ARROW</b>	Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of South East Asian Nations
<b>COVID-19</b>	Corona virus disease 2019
<b>FEM</b>	Free Expression Myanmar
<b>FMA</b>	Foundation for Media Alternatives
<b>FPI</b>	Feminist principles of the internet
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>GEM</b>	Gender Evaluation Methodology
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technology
<b>IFI-SEA</b>	Imagine a feminist internet in South East Asia
<b>LGBTQI</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex persons
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>OGBV</b>	Online gender-based violence
<b>SPT</b>	Spanning Tree Protocol
<b>STEM</b>	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
<b>UN</b>	United Nations



# ABOUT FMA

## FOUNDATION FOR MEDIA ALTERNATIVES

The **Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA)** is a non-stock, non-profit organization founded in 1987 soon after the People Power Revolution in the Philippines.

Its mission is to assist citizens and communities - especially civil society organizations and other disadvantaged sectors - in their strategic and appropriate use of various communications media for democratization and popular empowerment.

In 1996, FMA focused on information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the emerging phenomenon of the Internet, and began to frame communication rights as human rights.

Today, **FMA continues to focus on policy research and progressive agenda-building towards engaging the State and the private sector in democratizing Philippine information communications policy and internet governance.** It has represented civil society in the ICT policy-making bodies in the Philippines and abroad. It has written numerous policy papers on the Philippine information society and has led a national effort to codify a Philippine Declaration on Internet Rights and Principles: *Isang Internet na Ipaglalaban* (An Internet to fight for).

FMA is a founding member of the Philippine Internet Freedom Alliance, a member of the Philwomen on ASEAN, and the Philippine National Organizing Committee for the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum. It is a member of the global Association for Progressive Communications (APC). FMA is also a member of the Women's Rights Online Network of the World Wide Web Foundation, and partners with Privacy International in regional and local initiatives on privacy rights. It plays a leading role in campaigns both at the local and international levels. In March 2015, it co-organized and served as the local host of RightsCon Southeast Asia held in Manila.



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# INTRODUCTION



# INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the internet is one of the more exciting developments of our time. It afforded us with a new space to exercise our freedoms of speech, assembly, and association. It has given voice to people we have not heard from before. Finally, the internet provides an opportunity to engage with such a wide and diverse individuals and groups, including influential people and those in power, and demand accountability from them, if need be. In the internet, women, LGBTQI persons, and other minorities have found a space to communicate and express themselves. For feminists, the internet has provided a space to amplify feminist discussions and discourses that are often ignored and suppressed. It provided a space to organize movements and protests, whether on the streets or online through the use of hashtags.

Being online and connected to the internet is now woven into the fabric of the daily lives of many women. As feminist activist Jac Sm Kee says, the internet is “not just an inert tool that we wield when we have access to it, but a space where things happen, where identities are constructed, norms reified or disrupted, action and activities undertaken. As such, it cannot help but be a space of intersectionality where many things collide and connect.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the internet has made many things possible; having access to it has enabled the realization of our rights, not to mention the opportunities to connect, to organize, to earn. The internet has also made it possible for individuals to become content creators and not just users. But at the same time, it is also a space that replicated the offline oppression and discrimination of women and LGBTQI persons. The internet has become a site for bullying, hate speech, sexual harassment, and online gender-based violence (OGBV).

In many instances, women, who have been subjected to harassment and threats of rape and death in different social media platforms, tend to shy away from using the internet because of such harrowing experiences. One of the findings of a 2014 Pew research on online harassment is that those who have experienced harassment respond in several different ways, including their withdrawal from the online space.<sup>2</sup> The finding is similar to a recent survey conducted by Plan International that says one in five girls left or significantly reduced their use of social media platforms after being harassed online.<sup>3</sup> A research study in Myanmar also found out that

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<sup>1</sup> See interview with Jac sm Kee at <http://ignite.globalfundforwomen.org/gallery/building-feminist-internet>

<sup>2</sup> Maeve Duggan, “Online Harassment,” October 22, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/10/22/online-harassment/>

<sup>3</sup> Plan International, “Abuse and harassment driving girls off Facebook, Instagram and Twitter,” October 5, 2020, <https://plan-international.org/news/2020-10-05-abuse-and-harassment-driving-girls-facebook-instagram-and-twitter>



human rights activists, journalists, and others who have experienced being harassed online resort to self-censorship; and among those who self-censor, seven in ten are women.<sup>4</sup>

The internet enables individuals to exercise their freedoms and rights. Even if people experience their rights being trampled upon online, they can still reclaim the space to express themselves, to amplify their voices and fight back. Because of its transformative nature, a United Nations (UN) report declared access to the internet as a right.<sup>5</sup> As such, all states should adopt “effective and concrete policies and strategies ... to make the internet widely available, accessible, and affordable to all.” If the internet is for all, how do we then ensure that it is an equal and safe space for all, including women and queer people?

## *BEING FEMINIST IN THE TIME OF THE INTERNET*



What is it like to be a feminist in the time of the internet? What kind of internet will be beneficial to women, LGBTQI people, indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups? If we were to create a feminist internet, how would it look like?

Feminism is a belief in the political, economic and cultural equality of women. Bell Hooks defines it as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.”<sup>6</sup>

Women’s struggles against discrimination, oppression, and exploitation have been around for ages. All throughout history, there have always been individual women and women’s groups who advocated for equality and fought such discrimination and oppression. For example, the women’s strike in Iceland in 1975, also called the “Women’s Day Off,” protested the unequal pay gap in the country. In 2016, the women of Argentina took to the streets to condemn the violent killing of women using the hashtag #NiUnaMenos or “not one less.” There were also women’s suffrage movements in different countries that resulted in women being granted the right to vote.

Feminism has typically been separated into three waves: the first wave dealt with property rights and the right to vote; the second wave focused on equality and anti-discrimination; and the third wave started in the 1990s as a backlash to the second wave’s perceived privileging of white, straight women. There have been discussions of a fourth wave of feminism that calls for

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<sup>4</sup>Phyu Phyu Kyaw (2020). The rise of online censorship and surveillance in Myanmar: A quantitative and qualitative study

<sup>5</sup>“Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue,” [https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27\\_en.pdf](https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>Hooks, B. (1984). Feminist Theory: From margin to center. Pluto press: London

gender equality, and it is said that this wave is being shaped by technology and is characterized by social media activism, including hashtag movements.<sup>7</sup>

Over the past 20 years or so, the internet has become part of our lives and feminists have been appropriating it in their work. It has given feminists a platform to express and amplify their issues, as well as connect with other feminists and solidarity groups.



Campaigns and movements have benefited from the internet. APC in 2006 launched the Take Back the Tech! campaign which calls on all ICT users, especially women and girls, to take control of technology and use it for activism to help end violence against women

and girls.<sup>8</sup> At the time of this writing, the campaign is still active in several countries in different continents. Another example is the #FBrape campaign. In 2013, Women, Action and the Media, the Everyday Sexism Project, and activist Soraya Chemaly, backed by over a hundred organizations, targeted Facebook advertisers to bring to the fore the issue of content condoning violence against women that appeared on the platform. They sent an open letter to Facebook, and using the hashtag #FBrape on Twitter, they called on Facebook advertisers to withdraw its ads related to violence against women until Facebook addresses the issue.<sup>9</sup> This campaign resulted in Facebook agreeing to update its policies regarding gender-based hate speech.

Social media have enabled new forms of protests. They have made it easier to organize and coordinate large groups. For instance, the umbrella protest in Hong Kong in 2014 used the online forum HKGolden to communicate plans. They also used peer-to-peer messaging apps like WhatsApp, FireChat, and Telegram. Again in 2019, in protest of the Fugitive Offenders amendment bill, Hong Kong citizens once again organized demonstrations to put pressure on the government to withdraw the bill. In 2020, despite the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that gripped the world, several protest actions were organized in Thailand against the government of Prime Minister Prayut, and demands were made to reform the Thai monarchy. Similar to the Hong Kong protests, the Thais utilized social media to mobilize and organize. They used hashtags to air their demands, and to make known what they are fighting for. The internet was a means for them to reach the media as well, not just in Thailand but internationally.

The internet has transformed feminist movements. An example of this was during the International Women's Day 2017, where a group of young feminists in Kuala Lumpur quickly

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<sup>7</sup> Martha Rampton, "Four waves of feminism," July 14, 2019,

[http://gdelaunier.pbworks.com/w/file/134554611/Four%20Waves%20of%20Feminism%20\\_%20Pacific%20University.pdf](http://gdelaunier.pbworks.com/w/file/134554611/Four%20Waves%20of%20Feminism%20_%20Pacific%20University.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.takebackthetech.net/>

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Zara, "Facebook rape campaign ignites Twitter: Boycott threats from #FBrape get advertisers' attention," *International Business Times*, May 24, 2013, <https://www.ibtimes.com/facebook-rape-campaign-ignites-twitter-boycott-threats-fbrape-get-advertisers-1278999>

organized a march that was very well-documented because of the presence of smartphones and internet. What's important to note too, however, was that although the march was highly visible on Twitter, it was backed up by equally strong offline feminist organizing.

In recent years, hashtag movements and campaigns similar to the #MeToo movement emerged in other countries and these have helped amplify issues of rape and other forms of violence against women and girls, and made authorities and media pay attention to the plight of women.

This paper will take a look at the making of a feminist internet in Southeast Asia. It aims to deepen our understanding of how the digital landscape has affected feminists, women's rights and sexual rights, and intersectional movement building work in the sub-region, and shed light on what the feminist principles of the internet are and how they can be used towards a transformative internet. It will explore current efforts and initiatives in Southeast Asia that contribute towards building strong and resilient feminist movements, both offline and online.



## WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

The field of computer science is currently male-dominated, but history tells us that women played a significant role in the development of technology, including the internet as we know it today.<sup>10</sup> However, many women who contributed to the internet's development were practically invisible. These included the many programmers and coders. For example, the first programmers of the ENIAC or the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer were women, whose contributions were not recognized until recently.

A few women, though, have gained attention for their contributions to computing. These include Ada Lovelace, who is sometimes called the world's first computer programmer for writing the first algorithm designed for a computer; Grace Hopper, who developed the first program compiler and whose work led to the development of the COBOL, an early programming language that is used until today; Radia Perlman, who is called the “mother of the Internet” for her invention of the algorithm behind the Spanning Tree Protocol (STP); and Elizabeth Feinler, who created the first directory of the ARPANET's people and databases. Feinler's organization, the Network Information Center, also developed the domain naming scheme of .com, .edu, .gov, .net.

In Asia, the internet developed later than its counterparts in the west.<sup>11</sup> The first Asian institutions to use something that resembled the internet were Japanese universities that linked themselves up through a computer network in 1984.<sup>12</sup> Ang and Loh (1996) in a study on the development of internet in Asia noted that governments in the region want to use the internet as “a form of control for national development” and as such are looking for ways to regulated it.

According to a UNESCO study, there is underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) globally.<sup>13</sup> In East Asia and the Pacific, only 23 percent of STEM researchers are women. In 2013, only 20.7 percent of science researchers in Cambodia, 29.6 percent in Singapore, 49.9 percent in Malaysia, and 52.3 percent in the Philippines were female. However, women comprised 86 percent of science researchers in Myanmar.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “The women who made the internet,” Science Friday, March 3, 2018, <https://www.sciencefriday.com/segments/the-women-who-made-the-internet/>

<sup>11</sup> Peng Hwa Ang and Chee Meng Loh, “Internet Development in Asia,”

[https://web.archive.org/web/20160103054146/http://www.isoc.org/inet96/proceedings/h1/h1\\_1.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20160103054146/http://www.isoc.org/inet96/proceedings/h1/h1_1.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Lammers, 1995 as cited in Peng Hwa and Chee Meng Loh, “Internet Development in Asia.”

<sup>13</sup> “Women in Science,” <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/women-science>

<sup>14</sup> UIS Factsheet, November 2015, <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs35-human-resources-in-rd-2015-en.pdf>. While the numbers in Myanmar are high, a UN report notes that a vast majority of start-ups in Myanmar are run by men.

Recently, a number of Asian countries such as India, Malaysia, and Singapore have established themselves as technology hubs in the region,<sup>15</sup> and such might be a good opportunity to create awareness and encourage more women and girls to choose careers in STEM. A research from the Boston Consulting Group found that women's representation in the technology sector in South East Asia compared with other countries is higher; but compared with other industries in the region, the tech industry is still lagging behind companies with more women in their workforces and leadership.<sup>16</sup> Other notable findings of the said study are as follows:

- Singapore and Vietnam have the lowest share of women with technology majors in the region, yet both have higher shares of women working in technology, with Singapore among the highest of the six countries studied, at 41%.
- The Philippines and Thailand have the highest share of women technology graduates across Southeast Asia (48%); Thailand also has the highest percentage of women in the technology workforce (42%).
- Indonesia has the lowest share of women at technology companies (22%), in line with the lowest percentage of women in the overall workforce (32%).

The disparity in the number of female and male STEM professionals in South East Asia is something that has to be addressed. Governments, the academe, and other sectors need to collaborate to encourage more women and girls to pursue careers in STEM. But other than this, having female role models are crucial. Documenting the contribution of women and LGBTQI persons in the development of technology in the region may be a first step to inspire young women and girls to consider careers in STEM.

There are women in the sub-region who have contributed to the history of technology. These include the following: Merle Opena, who made sure that the Philippine internet was documented and put in the cloud; Dr. Kanchana Kanchanasut, who brought the internet to Thailand when she hosted the first server in the country and registered its first country code top-level domain; Audrey Tang, who is active in supporting social and digital innovation in Taiwan and was appointed to the country's Ministry of Technology; and Limson Pong, who was the first person in Cambodia to invent a medical reporting system that was installed all over the country. Powerful women in the technology industry in the region include, among others, Tan Hooi Ling, who is co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of Grab; Lucy Peng, who is Chief Executive of Lazada; and, Dorothea Koh, who is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Bot MD, an AI assistant for doctors.

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<sup>15</sup> "Why we need more women in tech: Voices from SE Asia," ITU News, July 18, 2017, <https://news.itu.int/why-we-need-more-women-in-tech-voices-from-se-asia/>

<sup>16</sup> Vaishali Rastogi, Michael Meyer, Michael Tan and Justin Tasiaux, "Boosting Women in Technology in South East Asia," bcg.com, October 192020, <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2020/boosting-women-in-southeast-asia-tech-sector>

# THE FEMINIST PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNET



# THE FEMINIST PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNET

**“A feminist internet works towards empowering more women and queer persons – in all our diversities – to fully enjoy our rights, engage in pleasure and play, and dismantle patriarchy. This integrates our different realities, contexts and specificities – including age, disabilities, sexualities, gender identities and expressions, socioeconomic locations, political and religious beliefs, ethnic origins, and racial markers.”**

*– Preamble of the Feminist Principles*

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE FPIs



The Feminist Principles of the Internet or FPIs started with a Twitter conversation among feminists using the hashtag #ImagineAFeministInternet. The conversation continued during the Global meeting on Gender, Sexuality and the Internet that was led by the Women’s Rights Program of the Association for Progressive Communications in Malaysia in 2014 to explore and develop a collective understanding of what a feminist internet looks like. Over fifty individuals from different countries consisting of academics, feminists and queer activists, and internet rights and policy specialists from diverse

organizations and networks came together to reflect on and analyze various issues of gender, sexuality and the internet, such as gender-based violence, sexual rights, hate speech, and pornography, among others. All of this was done in order to define the kind of internet that feminists want, and what it will take to achieve such.

The meeting resulted in the fifteen Principles of a Feminist Internet, an evolving document, that analyzed the role of technology in shaping the lived realities of women, LGBTQI persons.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.genderit.org/articles/feminist-principles-internet> for the initial 15 principles



In 2015, another meeting was held to further understand the role of technology in our lives, and this resulted in the 17 current principles that were clustered into five areas – access, movement, economy, expression, and embodiment. The principles are “an articulation of key issues and feminist politics and approach.”<sup>18</sup> They are the results of conversations, sharing of experiences, and interrogations among feminists.

As technology grew and developed, there have also been changes in the digital landscape that women and queer persons traverse. These have resulted in new and emerging issues relevant to their enjoyment of rights both online and offline. Such developments have likewise meant that there are more women, queer persons, and internet rights activists discussing various issues and being part of the FPI conversations. Since 2015, there have been such gatherings in Asia, Southeast Asia, South America, East Europe, and Africa that brought together women and queer persons from diverse origins and fields of work.

## ACCESS



Access to the internet means “enabling more women and queer persons to enjoy universal, acceptable, affordable, unconditional, open, meaningful and equal access to the internet.”<sup>19</sup>

Studies have shown that many women and girls are being left behind in digital development. According to the International Telecommunications Union, globally, women are 12% less likely to use the Internet than men; whereas in low- and middle-income countries, the gap between women’s use and that of men is 26%.<sup>20</sup> This is not only a question of connectivity, but about using the internet in a meaningful way.

Globally, men are 21% more likely to be online than women, and this percentage rises to as much as 52% in the world’s least developed countries.<sup>21</sup> Nearly two billion women around the world don’t have access to the web at all, depriving them of opportunities to use the web to learn, earn, and have their voices heard.

When we talk about internet access, what kind of internet access are we talking about? Access is not just about having a device and being able to connect to the web. It is also about access to information that is relevant to women and queer persons. This includes the availability of information on issues that are of interest to women and queer persons, such as sexual and

<sup>18</sup> Jac sm Kee. 2018, “Imagine a feminist internet,” <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-017-0137-2>

<sup>19</sup> Feminist Principles of the Internet, <https://feministinternet.org/>

<sup>20</sup> International Telecommunications Union, “ICT Facts and Figures, 2017,” <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2017.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Carlos Iglesias, “The gender gap in internet access: using a women-centered method,” Web Foundation, March 10, 2020, <https://webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-gender-gap-in-internet-access-using-a-women-centred-method/>

reproductive health and rights, pleasure, safe abortion, access to justice, and LGBTQI issues, as well as the availability of such information in a language that is understood by all.

Women and queer persons are not just users of technology and users of information already available online. They also have the right to be creators of content, coders, developers of technology, and designers of devices that they will eventually use.

While access is relevant, discussions about access to the internet also include the right not to connect. Not everyone, for instance, would like to be on Facebook because it has features that compromise the safety of women and other marginalized groups. There are individuals who may not want to connect as a matter of choice. For example, indigenous communities who want to preserve their culture may not want to connect to the internet.

## *MOVEMENTS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION*



The internet is a space where one can participate in discussions and build movements. It is a site of resistance. It can transform the political space that people engage in. It facilitates new forms of citizenship that enable individuals to claim, construct, and express selves, genders, and sexualities. This includes connecting across territories, demanding accountability and transparency, and creating opportunities for sustained feminist movement building.

From the Yellow Umbrella pro-democracy movement in 2014 up to the 2019 demonstrations in Hong Kong, to the 2020 Thai protests, we have seen how technology can be used for mobilization and protection. The experiences of Hong Kong and Thai activists have highlighted the role that the internet plays in creating movements and in organizing protest actions. Social media platforms played a big role in galvanizing support to these movements. They were used to communicate and share information and live updates of what was happening on the ground. Social media was also used to heighten awareness of cybersecurity. Technology has also made it possible for the protestors to remain anonymous and avoid being identified or arrested by the police, and also to have a “leaderless” movement.

We have also seen the power of using hashtags to amplify feminist issues. In the Philippines #BabaeAko made it to TIME Magazine’s list of 25 Most Influential People on the Internet in 2018 for the movement’s impact in calling out the misogyny and sexism of President Rodrigo Duterte and his allies.

Another issue for discussion under the theme of movements is governance of the internet. Who governs the internet? Who should have control of it? When policies and decisions about the

internet are made, who are given a seat at the table? Are women and the feminists invited and asked to say their piece? The FPIs call for the democratization of policy-making that affects the internet, as well as the diffusion of ownership and power in global and local networks

## ECONOMY



“The feminist principles on internet on economy assert our resistance to corporate control of the network and our struggle for an internet that facilitates economic cooperation and collaboration.”<sup>22</sup>

The internet was developed by different stakeholders that collaborated on many fronts and layers to achieve the internet that we have at present. Throughout history, there were many women who helped shape the internet that we know today. Feminists have rallied behind the belief that the internet should be a public good that should benefit all. However, capitalist interests have taken over and are currently monopolizing online platforms.

There are issues within the digital economy that should be interrogated. For one, in tech industries, women are the minority and many also do not get equal pay with their male counterparts. Women are consumers of digital products and yet they do not have a voice in the kind of products developed. Having more women creating products perhaps can also help create better products.

Feminists recommend looking into alternative forms of economic power that are grounded in principles of cooperation, solidarity commons, and environmental sustainability, so that everyone benefits from the internet. The FPIs advocate for the use of free and open source technologies as against proprietary ones. Open source technologies ensure that a wider community is able to look into the source code of a software for access and modification.

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<sup>22</sup>Feminist principles of the internet, <https://feministinternet.org/>

## EXPRESSION



The internet has helped amplify feminist discourse. The state, the religious right, and other extremist forces should not have a monopoly of discourses of morality; they should not silence feminist voices and persecute women human rights defenders. Women and queer persons need to claim the power of the internet to amplify women's narratives and lived realities.

The right to sexual expression as a freedom of expression issue is of no less importance than political or religious expression. The FPIs object to the efforts of state and non-state actors to control, surveil, regulate and restrict feminist and queer expression on the internet through technology, legislation, or violence, because they are part of the larger political project of moral policing, censorship, and hierarchization of citizenship and rights.

The issue of pornography online has to do with agency, consent, power, and labor. The FPIs reject simple causal linkages made between consumption of pornographic content and violence against women. They reject the use of the umbrella term "harmful content" to label expression on female and transgender sexuality. Feminists support reclaiming and creating alternative erotic content that resists the mainstream patriarchal gaze and locates women and queer persons' desires at the center.

## EMBODIMENT



There is a need to build an ethics and politics of consent into the culture, design, policies, and terms of service of internet platforms. The agency of women lies in their ability to make informed decisions on what aspects of their public or private lives to share online.

The FPIs support the right to privacy and to full control over personal data and information online at all levels. We reject practices by states and private companies to use data for profit and to manipulate behavior online. Historically, surveillance is a tool of patriarchy, used to control and restrict women's bodies, speech, and activism. We pay equal attention to surveillance practices by individuals, the private sector, the state and non-state actors. In Indonesia, for example, surveillance cameras are deployed in many ubiquitous areas under the pretext of protecting women. However, they are also used to surveil LGBTQI communities.

We have the right to exercise and retain control over our personal history and memory on the internet. This includes being able to access all our personal data and information online, and to be able to exercise control over this data, including knowing who has access to it and under what conditions, and the ability to delete it forever.

Individuals should have the right to be anonymous. The FPIs reject all claims to restrict anonymity online. Anonymity enables our freedom of expression online, particularly when it comes to breaking taboos of sexuality and heteronormativity, experimenting with gender identity, and enabling safety for women and queer persons affected by discrimination.

Unfortunately, some people hide behind anonymity to perpetuate abuse.

This brings up the need to exercise anonymity responsibly.



Children and young people make up a large portion of internet users worldwide. But who should speak for them, especially when it comes to policy issues? The FPIs recognize the need for the inclusion of the voices and experiences of young people in the decisions made about safety and security online and decisions made to promote their safety, privacy, and access to information. Children have a right to healthy emotional and sexual development, which includes the right to privacy and access to positive information about sex, gender, and sexuality at critical times in their lives.

The FPIs call on all internet stakeholders, including internet users, policy makers, and the private sector, to address the issue of online harassment and technology-related violence. The attacks, threats, intimidation and policing experienced by women and queers are real. In the Philippines for example, FMA has been mapping cases on online gender-based violence for many years and an analysis of the cases show that OGBV poses numerous types of harm to victims.

# **FEMINIST INTERNET INITIATIVES IN SOUTH EAST ASIA**



## *IMAGINE A FEMINIST INTERNET WORKSHOP – SOUTH EAST ASIA (+TAIWAN)*



The Imagine a Feminist Internet (IFI) workshop was held on November 14-16, 2019 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The workshop was attended by 52 participants from South East Asia, South Asia, Taiwan, and one participant from Latin America.

On the first day, the participants kicked off the workshop with an avatar exercise that aimed to make them reflect and evaluate their notions of power.

The participants then learned about how the internet works, first through a group activity, then through an open discussion where everyone was given a chance to ask questions. Some of the questions that were raised during the session were clarifications on terms such as internet exchange points, possibilities of surveillance, and ways by which the structure of the internet can be abused by States and malignant actors. The facilitators wrapped up the session by explaining the various layers of the internet.

The facilitators provided an overview and history of the Feminist Principles of the Internet - from the first global meeting on gender, sexuality, and the Internet in 2014 to the development of the twenty principles, to more regional and global meetings in the succeeding years.

The second day of the workshop started with an exercise called the Museum of Movements, which aimed to highlight the women and LGBTQI persons who have made significant contributions throughout the history of technology and the internet. Particular recognition was given to personalities from Asia, such as those mentioned in an earlier section of this report.

The exercise also walked participants through key events throughout history that have defined and shaped the feminist internet movement: starting from the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, where a key point of discussion was the intersection of work on gender and ICTs and gender in the media and where many women activists got to use email for the first time; to the development of the Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) in the late 1990s; to the formation of the Gender Caucus of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the eventual breaking out of the NGO gender caucus; to current work leading up to Beijing +25 in 2020.

Finally, the timeline exercise also traced the evolution of discussions about online gender-based violence, specifically in the Take Back the Tech campaign. The facilitators closed the exercise by emphasizing that everyone in the room is building on the work of other people, and that they are part of a proud history of feminist organizing in this space. The session was a

demonstration of the importance of collective memory and the need for collective processes to document and write down the history of the feminist internet movement.

The facilitators then explained the open-space methodology, where participants co-create the agenda and define the topics to discuss. After agreeing on the rules for the open-space discussions, the following were decided to be the topics for the afternoon:

- 1. China's influence on infrastructure and internet governance**
- 2. Gender portrayal in online advertisement**
- 3. Digital identities, collective bodies, and anonymity**
- 4. Sharing circle of experiences**
- 5. Forms of fake news and its effects on women**
- 6. Internet as public space, civil disobedience, and more strategies**
- 7. Aesthetics, art, and documentation of movement building**
- 8. Collective care among feminist activists**

After the open-space discussions, the facilitators introduced a feminist hack game that was originally developed by Coding Rights. The game was combined with the FPIs to get participants to imagine scenarios and possibilities of using tech towards each of the principles by coming up with tech prototypes that would solve a given problem. To encourage creativity, each group was given two random objects to use for their prototype and one principle or problem to solve. Some of the prototypes that emerged from the exercise were “empathy glasses” that would help indicate consent; “open source orgasms” that make use of open source designs to respond to individual sexual needs; and a headgear that scrambles the wearer’s physical and gender expression when they do not want to be seen.

At the start of the third day, participants were invited to share what they liked about the first two days of the workshop, as well as the things they wanted to change. For the first matter, participants shared that they liked the timeline exercise and that they enjoyed the second day more than the first one because it allowed more space for sharing and discussion among groups. Participants also expressed appreciation for the workshop’s use of playfulness as resistance. On the other hand, they suggested incorporating more synthesis after sessions, better time management, and finding a venue with more interactive spaces and that uses less plastic for future events. Everyone also took the time to express appreciation for those who hosted and attended the Feminist Night School.



## Movement Building in the Digital Age



The term movement means "a group of committed people oriented toward social change" or "a collective of people to change the existing power structure. Srilatha Batliwala identified the elements or movement building as the following:

1. **Outrage**
2. **Organize**
3. **Shared political vision**
4. **Build community**
5. **Strategies to take action**
6. **Impact**
7. **Backlash**
8. **Back to the start**

The internet has made significant difference on movements because it is not stuck to a single geographical location and therefore expands the potential reach of movements and allows access to communities that some groups might not have been able to reach before. Hence, movements are urged to continually rethink and reinvent the ways they mobilize. At the same time, backlash on movements and accountability mechanisms have changed as well. At the age of the internet, one person can change the world with a “like” because a like is not private; it’s a like that is very networked.

The internet also plays a critical role in queer organizing, where it is often difficult to organize offline.

The internet transforms the idea of a “public space” but at the same time, social media platforms blur the lines between public and private. Although the spaces provided by these platforms are very much public in terms of the access it allows, they are still owned and controlled by private corporations that are usually outside the jurisdictions of most of their users.

The internet has changed the constellation of actors within movements, which now include activist techies, social media activists, content creators, and new consortiums and transnational alliances. As such, one can say that because of the internet, the feminist movement is shifting and maybe even expanding.

One set of actors that has particularly benefited from the internet is the group of “free radicals,” those individuals that have one foot in formal organizing and another in informal organizing. These actors serve as critical translators or nodes between different sectors. They are the ones paying attention to both online and offline spaces and are often well-connected but lack the power of formal institutions.

A third shift brought about by the internet is that in organizing, there is now a meshing together of social and political capital. This means that a lot of people who are shifting things are not those with a lot of followers but those who are feeding them with information.



During the session, several important questions were raised on infrastructures and resources - how are we thinking about resources being distributed and shared within the movement? How do we deal with capitalist funding and what are our alternatives? In an attempt to better contemplate these questions, participants were again made to break out into several groups. Below are some insights reported back by the groups on the questions presented:

1. Who are the “grassroots”? - Members of the grassroots were characterized as having no access to education, internet, or data. They are represented by community leaders. An outsider of a community cannot represent it, but can create space for that community to let them tell their own stories. Other ways to form a relationship with the grassroots are to gather and share information.
2. Who are less visible actors in the movement and how do we strengthen our relationship with them? - Some less visible actors that were identified are low-income individuals, people living with HIV, and people with no internet access.
3. How do we build cross-generational spaces? - Participants expressed the sentiment that the existing binary between older and younger feminists has to stop. This gap can be bridged through observation and sharing of ideas (e.g., storytelling sessions about history of movement and current issues).
4. How do we build anti-capitalist structures in our organizing? - We must explore alternative economic structures and address the usual issues on transparency with regards to the cost of services and labor conditions. Feminists should also be encouraged to use alternative platforms and services when possible.
5. How do we build and maintain accountability processes and mechanisms beyond institutions? - To address accountability, we must first evaluate and identify our shared values. When designing accountability processes and mechanisms, we must ask: how should these make us feel safe to report? How do we reimagine the economics of care?
6. How do we integrate and make visible relationships between infrastructure, organizing, and environment? - One gap identified in this matter is that governments, businesses, and movements are all working in silos. Participants also identified the need to add a feminist internet principle for the environment. One way to start this is to create a working group.
7. How do we take care of our collective memory-making? - in a way, collective memory can be described as mushrooms. They are decentralized and resilient. Movements happen very fast, and it is therefore crucial to step back and reflect on the importance of what we are doing .

Finally, to bring these insights forward and inspire action, participants were again asked to break out into groups, based on a project idea that they are interested to work on after the workshop. Some of the ideas pitched were a zine about feminist history, an online network of free radicals, a Feminist Peace Network, a research project about FPI in Southeast Asia, an online feminist library and repository of resources, and a working group and network on Queer Feminist Internet in Southeast Asia. The workshop ended with hopes of participants following through the planned collaborations on their own and keeping in touch with the network through the mailing list and similar future events.

### *MANIFESTATIONS OF FPIs IN SOUTH EAST ASIA*



FPI workshops and discussions have been held in different parts of the world – in India, in South Africa, in South East Asia, mostly led by APC or its member and partner organizations. In internet governance spaces, sessions on the FPIs have also been organized.

In South East Asia, the FPIs are spreading as well. Aside from the IFI South East Asia workshop held in Malaysia in 2019, APC partner organizations in the region have conducted activities to promote the FPIs. With the occasional FPI meetings and workshops and a growing network of advocates, it is clear that the feminist internet movement will continue to thrive in the sub-region. Furthermore, apart from those that are part of the FPI network, many other movements and organizations in the region are espousing the FPIs in their respective ways. It is interesting to look at these various manifestations as they demonstrate how the FPIs can manifest differently depending on the context and the specific needs of a locality. Below are just some of the notable manifestations.

In the Philippines, the Foundation for Media Alternatives has conducted several briefings and discussions with young women on the FPIs. The organization has partnered with other groups to engage university students, especially young women, on various issues confronting them when it comes to the access and use of the internet. FMA has likewise initiated efforts in social media to promote the FPIs. In 2019, it featured the contribution of Filipino women scientists in the country. For the 16-day campaign to end violence against women in 2020, FMA developed social media cards highlighting the initiatives of individuals and groups in South East Asia to promote women's rights in digital space.

The Purple Code Collective leads the discussion on FPIs in Indonesia. Founded by feminist activist Dhyta Caturani, the group recognizes the urgent need for women and girls to have a safe space where they can express themselves. The group provides internet technology

classes, such as coding classes for girls, and have discussions on feminist and social justice issues.

The KRYSS Network in Malaysia has long been conducting research and campaigns on issues such as violence against women, etc.

On December 5, 2020, FMA in partnership with KRYSS Network of Malaysia and Purple Code Collective of Indonesia, with support from the Henrich Boll Stiftung, conducted an online discussion on the state of online gender-based violence in South East Asia, and how they are being addressed in specific countries. Another online discussion on the issue of indigenous peoples and the environment was organized by FMA.

Aside from APC members, other feminist and women's groups have initiated activities and work that resonate the feminist principles.

In March 2020, a WhatsApp group was created by female vegetable vendors in Jakarta to source goods and generate income. These enabled the women to feed their families and become supplementary sources of income during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>23</sup> This speaks to the principle of *Economy*, which challenges capitalist logic and corporate control.

Free Expression Myanmar (FEM) is one of the civil society organizations pushing back against human rights abuses on Rohingya Muslims and media censorship in Myanmar. In a report, FEM assessed the risks faced by Myanmar's women human rights defenders as they challenge gender taboos. Some of the risks identified in the report are online manifestations of gender-based violence.<sup>24</sup>

Alternative Solutions for Rural Communities, a community wireless cooperative, expands internet connectivity to rural, remote and underserved areas in Myanmar. They also organize basic computer and mobile training workshops on how to use the internet and social media.<sup>25</sup>

Sangsan Anakot Yaowachon, a civil society organization working with young people from marginalized and indigenous communities in disaster-prone Thai villages at the border with Myanmar, supports women to become leaders. The organization has organized discussions and built community schools to raise their awareness regarding human rights and gender equality.

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<sup>23</sup> Inaya Rakhmani, et al, "Women reorganising local food networks with technology in Jakarta," *Pursuit*, August 31, 2020, <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/women-reorganising-local-food-networks-with-technology-in-jakarta>

<sup>24</sup> Free Expression Myanmar, *Daring to define Myanmar's patriarchy: An assessment of the risk of challenging gender taboos for Myanmar's women human rights defenders*, 2018, <http://freeexpressionmyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/daring-to-defy-myanmars-patriarchy.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> ASORCOM, "Community Networks Stories: Knowledge and experience sharing among networks brings the spirit of teamwork and the power of collaboration," Association for Progressive Communications, June 26, 2020, <https://www.apc.org/en/blog/community-networks-stories-knowledge-and-experience-sharing-among-networks-brings-spirit>

As the COVID-related lockdowns led to a spike in cases of gender-based violence, many initiatives were launched to address the principle of *Violence*. In the Philippines, the *Bantay Bastos* (Guard Against Misogyny) Group was created in May this year when incidents of online gender-based violence in the country increased at an alarming rate. *Bantay Bastos* began as an advocacy Facebook Page that called out various forms of violence against women offline and online.<sup>26</sup> The Page also shares online discussions, research, and developments on ordinances and laws that aim to provide safe spaces for women and queer folks.

One of the most powerful feminist tools is the ability to tell our own stories. Narratives of history, of economy, and of culture have historically been dominated by the male gaze. So when women break these barriers to tell their own stories, create their own narratives, and frame their own issues, they push the movement forward. The Women for Tax Justice movement demonstrates the *Amplify* principle through the #8for8 social media campaign to raise awareness on tax justice for women's rights. In 2020, the group utilized its online platforms to provide information on how the COVID-19 pandemic affects women.

Similarly, the Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW), based in Malaysia, has been maximizing online platforms to provide accessible information about safe abortion and comprehensive sexuality education, among others. In November 2020, ARROW launched a virtual exhibition that featured knowledge materials on sexual and reproductive health.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Bantay Bastos Facebook group, <https://www.facebook.com/bantaybastos/>

<sup>27</sup> "Asia and the Pacific Multi-stakeholder Dialogue and Exhibition on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in the context of COVID-19," <https://apa.sdg4education2030.org/asia-and-pacific-multi-stakeholder-dialogue-and-exhibition-comprehensive-sexuality-education-cse-context-covid-19>



## WAYS FORWARD – HOW TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN AND PROMOTE THE FPIs

The feminist principles of the internet have made feminists and queer people rethink knowledge, power, and social change. They have strengthened awareness and understanding of gender issues, including online gender-based violence, and built capacities of activists to combat such on the internet.<sup>28</sup> The principles have likewise helped guide feminists and activists to engage policy makers and other stakeholders on issues relating to rights in the digital sphere.

As technology continues to develop and the way we use the internet changes, so will the FPIs evolve. From the time that the APC Women's Rights Program started the discussion on making a feminist internet, the digital landscape has changed and evolved. For one, the number of people connected to the internet has increased and technology has likewise advanced. Further, the contexts of each country, of different sectors also differ. There are also new and emerging issues that have to be discussed and interrogated as the principles evolve, such as environment and climate change, crises and emergencies, etc.

Discussions need to happen in many places, in many spaces in order to delve deeper into women's rights, queer persons' rights and issues. Young people need to participate in the discussions. Solidarity and partnerships between and among feminists and other groups are crucial.

After the regional workshop in Malaysia and especially considering the restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting lockdowns, what's crucial for the movement is how the regional network is sustained.

In November 2020, those who participated in the first IFI-SEA+ workshop held a virtual meetup to catch up on one another and discuss possible plans for the network. Some of the concerns raised were about expanding the network and developing a vetting process for such. For purposes of sustaining the network, the group is considering setting up a Mattermost Team and a Signal group, as well as organizing periodical online meetings to remain updated on one another's activities and opportunities for collaboration.

The COVID-19 pandemic surfaced both new and longstanding issues for women, and it is more crucial than ever to amplify feminist voices on the most pressing issues and facilitate support among feminist networks in need. The discussion during the IFI-SEA++ workshop on what

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<sup>28</sup> "Feminist internet: What did we achieve from 2016 to 2019?," <https://www.apc.org/en/news/feminist-internet-what-did-we-achieve-2016-2019>

“grassroots” means and who comprises the marginalized population should be an instructive jump-off point for how to expand the network.

Another need that was identified during the workshop is documenting the history and successes of the movement. This is also particularly important at this time, as so many things happened all at once in different places during the pandemic, and an archive of the many feminist initiatives during this challenging time would benefit future projects. This report is a preliminary attempt to create such an archive, but further work is needed to collect more information from a wider circle of feminists.

The year 2020 has been pivotal for many individuals, groups, and movements. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the relevance of being connected. And as more people go online, there needs to be more voices in the conversations to articulate how technology is impacting lives and what needs to be done to create that internet that women and queer persons aspire for.



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