



empower
ENABLING HER POWER TO DECIDE

ANNUAL REPORT 2017



EVERY WOMAN IS A LEADER.

Enabling her power to
decide leads to an inclusive,
democratic and diverse
society.



empower

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As I reflect on 2017, I realise that sometimes what is meaningful in the work that EMPOWER did is not so obvious to many, yet, critical to the growth of EMPOWER. We are certainly proud of having played a role as the secretariat of Bersih from 2010 and finally letting go of this role by the end of 2015. However, we also had to acknowledge that it came at a high cost to the visibility of EMPOWER as the only women's rights organization that works on women's political participation and the intersection of that with civil liberties. Reclaiming our identity as a credible women's rights organization and our public relevance to the peoples of Malaysia was certainly one of our strategic directions and achievements for the year.

In 2017, because of the Police raid in November 2016 and the false allegations of attempting to undermine democracy in this country through foreign funding, we had to remain vigilant in defending our valid status as a civil society organisation and as human rights defenders. We continued to face challenges from the bureaucracy and the bank with which we have been a customer since 2008, questioning our financial sources and operations. Yet, we are a small civil society organization by any standards. We are only a team of 7, and at most 8 to 9 when we are blessed with amazing interns and volunteers. I am proud to note that despite these challenges, 2017 was a year of building collective capacities within EMPOWER, and between EMPOWER and other civil society organisations, and have lived up to our belief, that "Every woman is a leader".



We played a significant role in contributing to movement-building within the Coalition of Malaysian NGOs in the UPR Process (COMANGO). Because of the vitriol from State and non-State actors in 2013 and 2014 as a result of COMANGO's stakeholders report to the 2nd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), we had about 27 organisations who were unable to continue their commitment in the UPR process for various reasons. We not only focused on building up monitoring capacities of COMANGO members, that included those who are often left in the margins, such as groups that work with migrant workers, refugees, the LGBTIQ, and foreign spouses, but we managed to strengthen the Coalition with new groups, and to further diversify and enhance the inclusive approach of COMANGO in reporting on the human rights issues in Malaysia. For the first time in 2017, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognized EMPOWER as the co-secretariat of COMANGO to facilitate the participation of members of COMANGO in their thematic discussions on the status of the implementation of the UPR recommendations accepted in full or in part by the Malaysian government and the various Ministries and line agencies. There were a number of women leaders at these consultations, from migration and foreign spouses issues to Muslim women's rights and women's public and political participation issues.

As we streamlined our Theory of Change and started to conceptualise our work through a more integrated approach of our three established programmes for women's political equality, we embarked on exciting work in relation to women's agency and how online sexual and gender-based violence is having a negative impact on women in discursive spaces that many of our male leaders have dismissed and normalised. Online spaces have helped enhance women's public and political participation, but online sexual and gender-based violence could lead to women being less able to influence the discourse on women's rights and gender equality. Our research has shown an alarming 53 per cent drop out rate from online spaces when women experience online harassment and personal attacks for their expression. Recognising that online sexual and gender-based violence masks dangerous and extremist speech and actions, EMPOWER also begun to explore the links between gender equality and preventing violent extremism.

At the core of it all, I am proud to note that 2017 saw EMPOWER steadfast and true to "Enabling her power to decide".

Janarthani Arumugam

ACTIVITIES IN 2017

JANUARY

- Visit by SAWF (South Asia Women's Fund) to EMPOWER
- COMANGO - JAG meeting on SDG strategies
- Hosted meetings for CEDAW Shadow Report working group

FEBRUARY

- Finance Training for Empower Staff
- Visit to Kampung Tering for Orang Asli dialogue with stakeholders organised by MACC and C4
- Digital Security Training for Women's Aid Organisation

MARCH

- Court of Appeal in Putrajaya on fatwa against SIS
- International Women's Day: Booth at Central Market and Panel at GerakBudaya on "Women in History"
- Booth at Art For Grabs: 50 Shades of Green
- Asia Pacific CSO Forum on SDG and Asia Pacific Forum on SDG
- RightsCon 2017

APRIL

- Outreach talk on online gender-based violence at University of Nottingham
- EMPOWER AGM 2017
- Vigil for Kidnapped Victims with Suaram & Engage
- Monitoring of LGBT Dialogue event at Assumption Church
- Draf Dasar & Pelan Tindakan Wanita Selangor
- Outreach at Majlis Perbandaran Selayang
- UPR Thematic Meeting - Migration Issue

MAY

- Digital Security Training by EMPOWER
- Outreach: Interview with Monash University students
- Stockholm Internet Forum
- Outreach: Talk at "More Women, Better Nation" event
- "Public Interest Litigation" workshop by EMPOWER

JUNE

- Pre-recording session and Live Q&A preparation at Cyber Health Summit - From Risk To Resilience
- Booth at "Women Fight Back" Campaign at Taylor's Lakeside Campus
- SUHAKAM Youth TN50 Discussion
- UPR Consultation (Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)
- Interviewed YB Teresa Kok
- Interviewed YB Chew Mei Fun
- LGBT HRDs Human Rights Violations meeting

JULY

- High Level Political Forum 2017 in New York
- Security Training by KMU
- UPR Consultation with Ministry of Foreign Affairs

AUGUST

- Meeting on Sexual Harassment Bill
- Consultation visit to Kampung Tering
- Sponsored Orang Asli women to participate in SmarterPhonics workshop in UKM
- APC Council Member meeting in South Africa
- Solidarity vigil for Ivy Josiah and Ho Yock Lin in IPD Dang Wangi
- COMANGO E&P

SEPTEMBER

- Asia Pacific Feminist Forum
- CPPS-ASLI Youth Roundtable
- Wanita Bantah Politik Toksik rally
- Australian High Commissioner Roundtable on Gender
- Community Network Exchange in India
- Violent Extremism conference in Bangkok
- CVE meeting with IMAN Research
- EMPOWER Retreat and E&P

OCTOBER

- Regional Consultation on the State of Freedoms of Assembly, Association, Expression and Religion on the Internet
- Grrlz Stories Retold Workshop
- Outreach: Anti-Sexual Harassment Campaign at Sunway University
- COCONET: Southeast Asia Digital Rights Camp

NOVEMBER

- Grrlz Stories Retold: Writer's Working Meeting
- One Day One Struggle Campaign with Sisters in Islam
- Sharing session with Dina Zaman
- NEF meeting in London
- Global Conference on Cyberspace in India
- Visit by Commonwealth Foundation to EMPOWER
- Freedom of Religion consultation in Kuching and Kota Kinabalu
- AICHR Consultation in Bohol, Philippines
- Organised UPR thematic meeting in Sandakan on Statelessness

DECEMBER

- Two consultations on SGBV communications strategy
- Living Library - Stories of Strength & Resistance by EMPOWER and MDA
- Consultation visits to Kampung Gebok and Kampung Tering
- Sponsored Art For Grabs - Laundromat of Love.
- IGF 2017 in Geneva, Switzerland
- Outreach: Interview by UM students with Empower

2017 OVERVIEW

2017 witnessed a consolidation and redefinition of EMPOWER's work in achieving women's political equality. We started moving towards a more integrated approach, drawing strategies and advantages from three established programmes: Women's Political Participation; The Net, Tech and Rights; and Human Rights and State Accountability. As EMPOWER, we not only look at where women are in decision-making, but also to creating a more enabling environment for women's public and political participation. Very much integral to this work is the promotion and defence of women's freedom of expression and internet rights as human rights. For 2017, we are particularly proud of the leading role we have played in interrogating online sexual and gender-based violence and in fueling the much needed discourse that affects women's public and political participation. For example, in December 2017, we organised two key panels during the Art for Grabs event, "Rape and Hate Online: The Hidden Costs of a Malicious Culture" (16 December) and "The Buzz in Social Media: Fake News, Propaganda or Stigma?" (17 December).



EMPOWER hosted two panel sessions in Art for Grabs: Laundromat of Love 2017, namely **"Rape and Hate Online: The Hidden Costs of a Malicious Culture"** (picture of the left) and **"The Buzz in Social Media: Fake News, Propaganda or Stigma?"** (picture on the right)

True to our belief that "Every woman is a leader", we operationalized our belief into practice. Every staff too is a leader, each contributing substantially towards the organisation's vision and mission. While finance, administration and communications/outreach staff remain the backbone of EMPOWER, programme staff take lead on the shaping and direction of their respective programmes. This demanded a more holistic outlook by programme staff in how we are "Building Leadership for Women's Rights and Gender Equality" and "Transforming Cultures and Mindsets", served by each programme's objectives.

The raid of 28th November 2016 had a significant impact on the work of the Women's Political Participation (WPP) Programme. It forced us to delay a lot of the work that we had planned but it also gave us an invaluable opportunity to revisit the design of the WPP programme. The WPP is the longest running programme in EMPOWER but it is also the longest-running programme that has been plagued with project-specific approaches rather than a programmatic one. Work has begun to rethink the WPP as a cross-fertilisation platform, to build bridges between women on the ground with women in politics so that there is a better understanding of the issues on the ground and the challenges women in politics face. We are especially gearing towards the forging of women's collective power.



Mastura M. Rashid (Communications & Outreach Manager, third from the right) and Serene Lim (Research & Resource-Development Officer, fourth from the right) attended the inaugural meeting with grassroots young women of Wanita Muda Pakatan Harapan.



Mastura M. Rashid (Communications & Outreach Manager, far left) attended a meeting with Srikandi KEADILAN Selangor to build bridges between EMPOWER and young women in politics.

The Net, Tech and Rights (NTR) Programme played a critical role in surfacing how a woman's right to her freedom of expression was integral for her public and political participation. This spurred us into the area of preventing violent extremism (PVE). The NTR programme also helped set up EMPOWER as the leading organisation in Malaysia working on digital security and internet rights from a feminist perspective. The programme is still very much research driven and in 2017, other than PVE, we have started to interrogate the discourse on cybersecurity, inculcating gender and human rights perspectives.

The Human Rights and State Accountability Programme strengthened EMPOWER's working relationship with the government. Through this programme, we focus on monitoring and encouraging accountability of the State and government agencies on the commitments made by the State to upholding human rights in Malaysia as a member of the United Nations. EMPOWER continued to play a critical leading role as the co-secretariat of the Coalition of Malaysian NGOs in the UPR Process (COMANGO) securing various fora for engagement with the State, especially in monitoring the government's commitments made in 2013 during the 2nd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council, and in facilitating a more explicit human rights interpretation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by sharing information from COMANGO members on lived realities for Malaysia's SDG roadmap. EMPOWER also continued to contribute to the monitoring of the implementation of the CEDAW recommendations as well, contributing to the 2017 shadow report by women's rights groups and allies, and engaged as well in monitoring the development of the National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP). While the programme continues to face many challenges in developing a mutually beneficial work relationship with government, it has strengthened the monitoring and evaluation capacities of COMANGO members, demonstrated by how a variety of civil society organization (CSO) members were ready to engage with the State on the different thematic human rights issues.



Rizal Rozhan (Advocacy & Capacity-Building Officer) represented EMPOWER in a discussion with Malaysian Civil Society Organizations (CSO)-SDG Alliance, to review the Malaysian Universal Periodic Review (UPR) from Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) lenses. Picture courtesy of UN Global Compact Malaysia.



Rizal Rozhan (Advocacy & Capacity-Building Officer, third from the left) sharing a moment with YB Datuk Haji Abdul Rahman Dahlan and delegates from SUHAKAM in High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2017.

2017 also saw EMPOWER focusing a lot more on outreach with the Malaysian public to help them better understand our work and who we are as an organisation. Our website in particular speaks not only to our focus and activities, but our herstory and the change we have managed to bring about.

At the end of 2017, we stood tall, exonerated of the false accusations that the State and non-State actors had brought against us which resulted in the Police raid of 28 November 2016. We collected all our documents from the Police on 22nd November, and no charges were brought against us. As EMPOWER, we ended 2017 so much stronger as a team, #TeamEMPOWER!



Serene Lim (Research & Resource-Development Officer) represented EMPOWER in the panel session on **Women's Work** in GerakBudaya, in conjunction of International Women's Day 2017. This is one of the many outreach activities done with the Malaysian public in 2017.



Left to right: Mei Yun (Finance Officer), Matt (Tan Law Practices), Rizal Rozhan (Advocacy & Capacity-Building Officer, Human Rights and State Accountability) and Angela M. Kuga Thas (Executive Director), in front of IPD Dang Wangi after collecting files confiscated by the authorities during the 2016 raids.

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS



Women's Political Participation

- Interviewed 4 female political representatives to highlight the work of women in politics
- Continued to deepen understanding of Orang Asli women's needs and built capacities
- Worked towards developing civil society's Women's Manifesto of 10 thematic areas
- Protested against toxic politics by co-organising the Wanita Bantah Politik Toksik rally



Angela M. Kuga Thas (Executive Director) interviewing Kasthuri Patto, Batu Kawan MP



EMPOWER sponsored Morni & Neo, both Orang Asli women activists, to **SmarterPhonics** training in UKM



A snippet of **Wanita Bantah Politik Toksik** rally in September 2017



Mastura M. Rashid (Comms & Outreach Manager) and Julia Gan (Intern) interviewed Teresa Kok, Seputeh MP



The Net, Tech & Rights

- Conducted groundbreaking research on online sexual and gender-based violence and the negative impacts on women's freedom of expression, and public and political participation
- Engaged in 15 international fora on the promotion of internet rights as human rights from a gender perspective
- Started engaging in the promotion of Community Networks, managed and implemented by communities, and the participation of women and girls
- Wider outreach with students and young people on the issues of online violence against women and sexual harassment



Serene Lim (Research & Resource Development Officer) talking about Internet-related women's right violation in SEANF (Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institute Forum)



Serene engaging with Orang Asli women and girls of Kampung Tering on building a community network

EMPOWER



**VOICE,
VISIBILITY
AND A VARIETY
OF VICIOUSNESS**

A MALAYSIAN STUDY OF WOMEN'S LIVED REALITIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Empower launched the **Voice, Visibility And A Variety of Viciousness (VVV)** report during Art For Grabs, December 2017



Human Rights & State Accountability

- Built up the capacity of civil society organisations on the monitoring of the Universal Periodic Review recommendations accepted in full/in part/in principle by the Malaysian government.
- Made an intervention at the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) High Level Political Forum in New York, August 2017, and worked towards the development of the “People’s Development Justice Report of Malaysia”.
- Effectively pushed for the monitoring of the Government’s implementation of the UPR recommendations through two UPR thematic meetings with stakeholders, and by engaging with the consultations conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with related government agencies.
- Raised public awareness against the idea of “fake news” by organizing a panel on “The Buzz in Social Media: Fake News, Propaganda or Stigma?” during the Art for Grabs, December 2017.



UPR Thematic Meeting on the issue of statelessness in Sabah. Picture courtesy of Haris Alimudin of Sandakan Muslim Volunteers (MUST)



A view of **High Level Political Forum 2017** in UN Headquarters, New York. Rizal Rozhan (Capacity Building & Advocacy Officer) is the first from the right, with the white laptop.



UPR consultation with civil society organisations on the monitoring of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in December 2017

BUILDING LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

We continued to work at both the individual and systemic levels for change. At the systemic level, we continued to push as a member of the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality, two critical bills: the Gender Equality Bill and the Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill. The latter is still being drafted, but the former—as a working draft—has already been floated to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. We also started developing the Women's Manifesto, drawing from past documents, such as the Women's Agenda for Change, as well as the CEDAW shadow report, highlighting not only women's rights issues, but issues that concern women across ethnicity, class, religion, gender identity and sexual orientation among other identity markers in Malaysia. The Women's Manifesto is expected to be launched in 2018 in time for lobbying during the 14th General Elections.

At the individual level, we continued to monitor how the Orang Asli women who have engaged in our programme's activities were doing. The dire situation of their native land rights has left many feeling hopeless with many expressing concern for the wellbeing of their children. To provide some support, EMPOWER sponsored Orang Asli women who run community preschools to attend the Smarterphonics training workshop for literacy teachers in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia on 12–13 August. We persisted with consultations to further refine the WPP programme in order to better serve their needs, and at the same time, remain aligned with the programme's objectives.

Wary of how women's public and political participation is being obstructed by the curtailing of women's freedom of expression, we engaged in critical conversations with government and other stakeholders, and strategic capacity-building of key actors—civil society and lawyers. We also organized consultations with key stakeholders as to why the phenomena of SGBV (sexual and gender-based violence) was predominantly directed against women, and what was fueling such phenomena (2–3 and 11–12 December).



SGBV consultation and communication strategy workshop with members of the civil society in December 2017

We did quite a bit of outreach, especially for International Women's Day at Pasar Seni and Gerakbudaya (both on 11 March) and Human Rights Day (15, 16 and 17 December), always locating gender equality issues in our conversations with the Malaysian public. Our outreach included a talk at Nottingham on 6 April with students from Media Studies; a presentation on "cybercrime issues and children" on 23 May at Majlis Perbandaran Selayang; booths for EMPOWER, COMANGO and JAG from 6 to 8 June at Taylor's University; and Living Libraries: Stories of Strength and Resistance, a collaboration with Malaysia Design Archive. We managed to speak with 308 people in 2017 who participated or approached us in events, and they are all new to EMPOWER's work.



Team EMPOWER interacted and advocated to the general public during **International Women's Day celebrations at Pasar Seni, March 2017.**



Snapshots of Team Empower in **Art For Grabs: Laundromat of Love** in December 2017. Empower co-sponsored the event, opened a booth, coordinated two forums and launched a report during the event.



Team Empower had fun organising **Living Library: Stories of Strength & Resistance**, jointly organised by Empower and MDA (Malaysia Design Archive). We recorded more than 50 attendees and 8 storytellers from various backgrounds, from women's rights activism, music and statelessness.

We have equally built up leadership for women's rights and gender equality from within. This partly centres around our breakfast mornings, where staff are encouraged to share the information and learnings they have gained in participating in various events. We also had our first retreat and evaluation and planning exercise with staff, members and Executive Committee members that centred on forging bonds and a better understanding of EMPOWER's work, with a special focus on strategy development. There were also ample opportunities for growth that were offered to those who are part of EMPOWER. For example, in June, Julia Gan our youngest volunteer to-date, joined us for a month, and was immediately tasked to secure interviews with women in politics. She interviewed YB Chew Mei Fun and YB Teresa Kok. She was thrilled to learn how to conduct such interviews and was appreciative of the time given to her by the two seasoned politicians. We also built up staff's leadership. For example, Mastura M. Rashid, Communications and Outreach Manager, participated in the Internet Governance Forum for the Asia Pacific region. It was her first time participating in such an event and learnt a lot about internet rights as human rights, gender issues in relation to information and communication technologies and lots more. However, these claims of building leadership from within are better expressed by staff themselves. Here are reflections from two programme staff who experienced tremendous growth as leaders of their programmes.



Serene Lim

Research and Resource Development Officer

The Net, Tech and Rights Programme

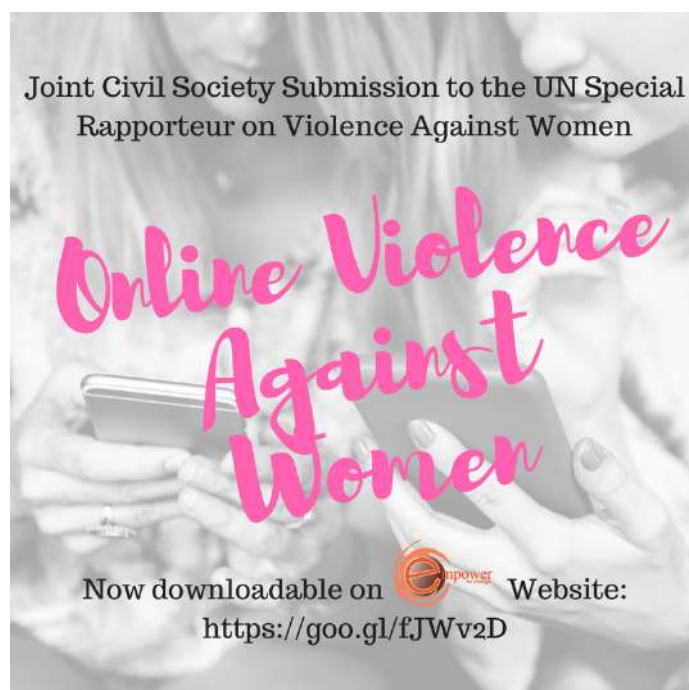
On a personal note, 2017 was a glorious year. I am proud to be part of the team that officially institutionalised EMPOWER's work on "building a feminist internet" and "internet rights are human rights" under The Net, Tech and Rights (NTR) programme – forming one of the core pillars of EMPOWER's programmatic approaches that contributes to the organisation's Theory of Change.

Gone are the days where we can distinguish what's online or offline. The internet today is a seamless extension of our lived realities. The moment we are born, our entitlements as citizens is determined by the national registration system, stored and analysed in an online server by the government. The legitimacy of our bodily existence and the ability to experience life as a

human being is determined by the validity of our digital identity embedded in that one small chip, in digits and codes. Today, in almost every part of the world, and certainly in Malaysia, to be seen as a human being is to exist digitally.

The institutionalisation of NTR is a recognition within EMPOWER that any advancement of gender equality and human rights cannot be done without looking at how our lives are interwoven with technology. Technologies and how they affect us are not natural phenomena. They have particular and often horrific histories that exclude the experiences and needs of women or gender non-conforming persons, more so those who face violence, stigmatisation and multiple forms of discrimination in society.

In November 2017, EMPOWER, in collaboration with BERSIH 2.0, Justice for Sisters, the Malaysian Centre for Constitutionalism and Human Rights (MCCHR), National Council of Women's Organisations, Malaysia (NCWO) and Women's Aids Organisation (WAO) submitted a report to the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Dr. Dubravka Šimonović, on the state of online gender-based violence (GBV) in Malaysia. The importance of this report could not be emphasized enough as it marks the first official report on online violence against women (VAW) from Malaysia to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).



In November, EMPOWER together with several civil society organisations submitted a report on online violence against women (VAW) to UN Special Rapporteur on VAW, Dr Dubrovka Šimonović. The report is also featured by mass media, including The Malay Mail Online.

In December 2017, EMPOWER launched our first research report on online sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) under the NTR programme, entitled *Voice, Visibility and a Variety of Viciousness*, capturing and elaborating on the experiences of 15 women on social media. Among others, we found that 8 out of 15 women who faced SGBV online, had either logged out for a period of time, temporarily deactivated or completely deleted their social media account as a result of bullying and harassment. Two others had considered doing the same. The study shows that online SGBV, in essence, violates women's rights to freedom of expression and negatively impacts on women's public and political participation—the latter, a core area of work under EMPOWER's Women's Political Participation (WPP) programme.

The discourse on “internet rights as human rights” is just beginning in Malaysia, but the issue is one that affects everyone, even those who do not have access to the internet. We have to be mindful that there remain voices that are still missing from the internet rights movement. Moving forward, it is pivotal that EMPOWER asks what does the future of a feminist internet entail for indigenous women and where do their experiences sit in the struggle for digital freedom. In 2017, EMPOWER started some preliminary work by looking at the barriers to access for indigenous women through the Internet Governance Forum 2017: Best Practice Forum on Gender. One important realisation is that even within the indigenous women community, they are not a homogenous group, age being one of the main differentiating factors, along with geography, the tribes they belong to, their local customs and power structures, education, socio-economic status, and the power dynamics within their communities all influence their appreciation and interpretation of online freedoms.



Serene Lim (far left) panels the **Internet Governance Forum 2017: Best Practice Forum on Gender**, speaking on access barriers for indigenous women. A report on the session can be accessed on <https://dig.watch/sessions/best-practice-forum-gender-and-access>.

Much like how the internet has already been integrated into our lives, the way forward for the NTR programme is to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to EMPOWER's research, programme activities, advocacies and campaigns. This would entail bridging existing resources and projects, within and outside of EMPOWER, and to do away with the distinction between online and offline movements.

Note: By the end of 2017, Serene Lim was recognized as an expert in her own right on online SGBV by the Due Diligence Project, Washington, DC, USA.



Rizal Rozhan
Advocacy and Capacity-Building Officer
Human Rights and State Accountability Programme

2017 was a good year. I could not be more proud to be part of #TeamEmpower.

I am grateful for the improved clarity regarding our organisation, values and spirit that sets us apart from other rights-based organisations in Malaysia. I am deeply humbled to devote my time, effort and soul to the Human Rights and State Accountability Programme. I feel that this programme strives to produce the enabling environment necessary for women's rights and human rights to be respected in Malaysia.

It is such an environment, I feel, that would help realise EMPOWER's belief, that "Every woman is a leader". While I view the Universal Periodic Review, Agenda 2030, or even CEDAW as machineries to encourage top-down change we want to see in Malaysia, I am more interested to play my part in contributing towards a paradigm shift, whether it is among the civil servants in the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), or among the people I have had the chance to meet during the Art for Grabs and other events. Patriarchy is one of the biggest systemic barriers restricting our efforts to achieve EMPOWER's agenda and we have to address the issues systemically as well. I personally think that this is best achieved by changing the perception and behaviour of people on the ground, the grassroots. We should not underestimate the people's power to push for change!

In 2017, I was humbly honoured to represent EMPOWER at a global platform during the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) for Malaysia's Voluntary National Review (VNR). The experience enriched me with advocacy, communications and language strategies. I look forward to duplicating the amazing coordination adopted by the Women's Major Group in the United Nations for COMANGO's UPR advocacy in 2018.



Rizal Rozhan (far right) in a group picture with the Women's Major Group in the United Nations, June 2017



Rizal Rozhan intervening in the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) for Malaysia's Voluntary National Review in June 2017

For our work on the UPR, I was excited that #TeamEmpower managed to coordinate the first ever UPR thematic consultation on the issue of statelessness in Sabah with SUHAKAM. The meeting was one of a kind as all the government representatives were asked to join in a site-visit to a stateless children's Alternative Learning Centre (ALC) in Sandakan. The ALC was in a landfill! The expressions of government representatives who were present showed an imperative need for us to build bridges—between people and their lived realities with those influencing policies, laws and programmes—to bring about the necessary paradigm shift among these decision-makers. We have to ensure development justice through a rights-based approach.

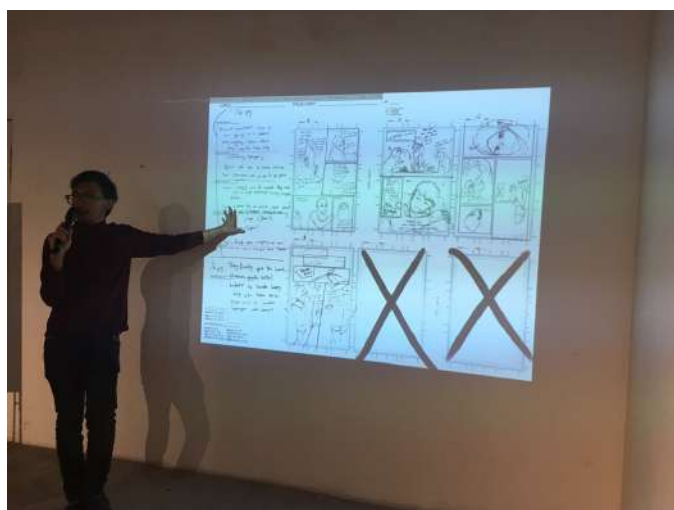
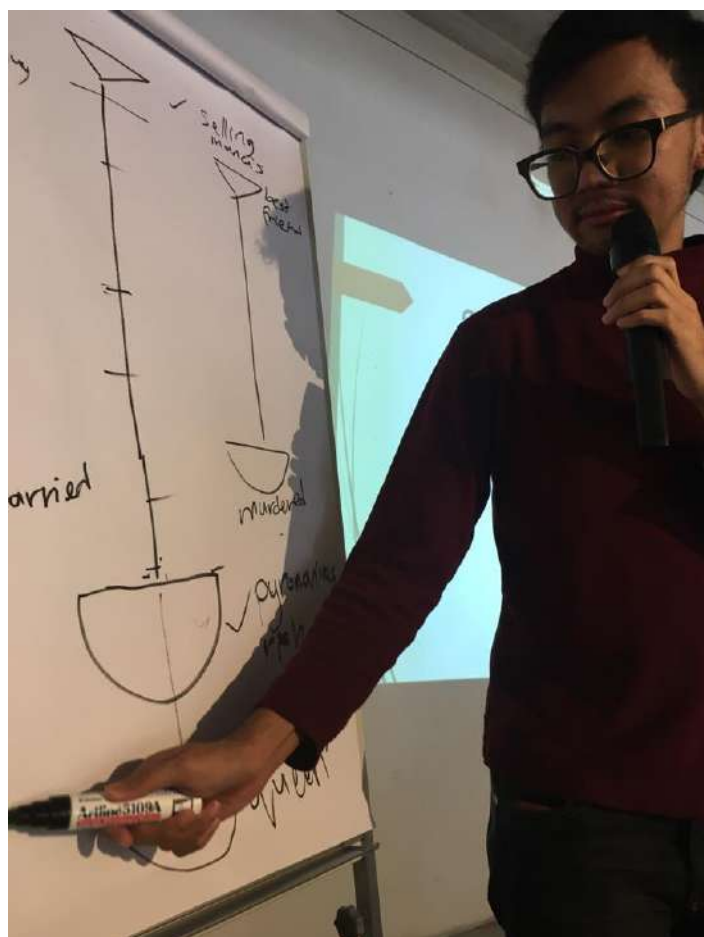
Moving forward with the Human Rights and State Accountability Programme, I can see how maintaining strong communication channels is critical for our work: between EMPOWER and our allies, or with policy-makers, SUHAKAM, and international agencies such as UNICEF and UNDP. The most important of these, I feel, are the people who have met with #TeamEmpower during our trainings, our events or our consultations, including those at the grassroots. It is only with their strength and energies and change in perceptions and attitudes can we subvert the oppression of patriarchy.



A site-visit to a stateless children's Alternative Learning Centre (ALC) in Sandakan, located in a landfill, during the **UPR thematic consultation on statelessness in December 2017**

TRANSFORMING CULTURES AND MINDSETS

A lot of the work here hinges on capacity-building and our research. In trying to enhance effectiveness of our efforts, we moved towards popular messaging to promote gender equality, and co-initiated a graphic novel project in partnership with Knowledge and Rights with Young people through Safer Spaces (KRYSS). On 16 and 17 December, we embarked on identifying volunteers for Net Rangers, a counter strategy to diffuse online SGBV.



At the **Grrlz Stories Retold** workshop. We had Zunar, Pokcik Fingernailz, Jejon, Cabai, Zan Azlee and Moone Drama Academy share their knowledge and experience with the women participants. It signalled the start of intensive work to public a graphic novel to empower teenage girls. Funded by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, the graphic novel is expected to be launched in March 2018.

We conducted a quick survey with students of Taylor's University to find out about their experiences of online SGBV. We were not surprised to find out how female students in particular have normalised their experiences of cyberstalking. Many were unaware that cyberstalking is a form of harassment. We also engaged with Sunway University with regard to their anti-sexual harassment campaign and educated the students on forms of SGBV and how a better understanding of gender equality in all spaces can help curb such forms of violence. We also participated in the 2017 Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Best Practice Forum on the topic of gender and access. We looked into the specific challenges that women from specific communities face in gaining meaningful access to the Internet. The outcome document was drafted as a reflection of an open, iterative and bottom-up process with participation from people of diverse regions and stakeholder groups.

We advocated for a better understanding of “access” issues, that access is not only about availability of connectivity services, but also about navigating the internet as a living space—that what happens online is as real as what happens offline, and that access is as much part of the power and relationship dynamics we experience as people in any form of space.



Team Empower doing outreach at Taylor's Lakeside Campus in Women Fights Back campaign. Here, we conducted a survey with students of Taylor's University to find out about their experiences in online SGBV

Youths are equally important stakeholders in our strategic approach of transforming cultures and mindsets. 2017 witnessed a variety of outreach activities that engaged with the youth, but one of our biggest milestones was our participation at the ASLI-CPPS Youth Roundtable on SDGs where we introduced the concept of development justice, a concept propagated by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) that focuses on justice for the people, a just economy, a just distribution of wealth, accountable governance and environmental justice. In the workshop, we discussed on how youths can be partners and important stakeholders to achieve the SDGs.



Rizal Rozhan (Advocacy & Capacity-Building Officer, far right) spoke on development justice in CPPS-ASLI 4th Youth Public Policy Roundtable, on 'The 'Coming of Age' Issue: Challenges Facing Youth in Malaysia'. September 2017.

To ensure that the discourse and conversations continued, we have engaged more actively on our social media accounts. On Facebook, EMPOWER's followers have increased at 23.34% from January to December 2017, with 1,918 follower count on the 31st of December 2017. Our post reaches an average of 1,500 to 2,000 people every month in this one year time frame. On Twitter follower base had increased at 37.75% to 1,800 followers in 2017. Our Twitter reach is tremendous, at 1.6 million impressions, particularly in July 2017, in which a tweet on sexual harassment in government offices reaches 1.15 million reach and around 11,000 retweets.

Top Tweet earned 684K impressions

Gangguan seksual dalam kalangan staf di pejabat kerajaan. Kalau baca komen, semua cakap benda ni biasa dalam jabatan kerajaan. pic.twitter.com/N1sDhdHCkO

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Pengalaman peneliti selaku sewaktu praktikum lebih kurang 4 tahun lalu, sampai kemudian pengawal lelaki di pejabat tersebut juga berminat dan berminat untuk...

Bukan aku dan kawan yang menjalani praktikum di situ saja yang menjadi tempat berjenaka bukah paksi-paksi pemerhati malah mencari dan siap perempaan lain di sekitar area hutan.

Aku pernah mendengar pegawai tidak bertanya staf perempuan pada bulan Ramadhan, nampak lebih saja berbeda buat proyek kami? Lampung tidak menghormati wanita itu, pribadi kelainan dan juga menyiksa, di bulan puasa saja.

Ya, pegawai gila seks ini orang Melayu Muslim yang suka dan kuasa, kemarau bersemita, terpegang dan terpelik staf perengkuhan juga aka pernah lihat. Ada nakati ba... memuatkan maklumat media sosial kuasanya di

maja aku juru mangga yang dibawa oleh seorang makcik kerani. Pegawai itu cuba meluahkan dengan aku dengan mengemukakan buah mangga tersebut sudah berot kerana kerani itu sudah tua. Aku masih ingat dia cakap, "bukan macam awai punya kan?"

Aku mengemuk dari waktu dengan dia kakak ade
 ming tua manan erwie calay manan ri dengan anak
 perempuan, bagaimana ya? Dia langsung hai
 bertakap dengan aku tapi memang aku kema truck di

Isk semua lelaki begitu sibuk itu berkaitan.
Mereka akan tak pernah berfikir jika orang lain...

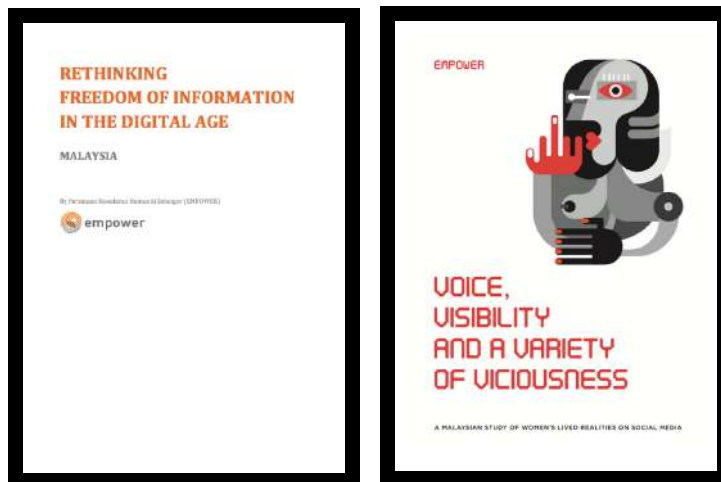
Gangguan sebegini mungkin jarang berlaku pada lelaki tetapi sangat ramai perempuan terpeka.

merupakan bagian dari budaya bangsa. Dengan demikian, maka perlu untuk melestarikan budaya bangsa agar tidak punah. Untuk itu, maka perlu untuk melestarikan budaya bangsa agar tidak punah. Untuk itu, maka perlu untuk melestarikan budaya bangsa agar tidak punah.

A screen capture of the tweet that earned 10.8 thousand retweets, and 684 thousand impressions. The tweet translates into "Sexual harassment in government offices (Referring to the pictures). If you read the comments, everyone says this is normal in government offices."

This tweet motivates EMPOWER to post more engagements online based on lived realities.

We completed three research reports that we see will contribute towards transforming cultures and mindsets. One is the Freedom of Information report, examining the issues of online freedoms in relation to freedom of information. The second is the research on online SGBV, Voice, Visibility and a Variety of Viciousness and the third is on Cybersecurity, Human Rights and Gender in Malaysia. We have especially paid closer attention to PVE work, both educating ourselves at the conference on violent extremism in Bangkok, the event on Ulama Bersama Wanita organized by Komuniti Muslim Universal (KMU) and through a number of strategic meetings with IMAN Research.



Two of the three research reports completed by The Net, Tech & Rights programme. "Rethinking Freedom of Information in the Digital Age" and "Voice, Visibility and a Variety of Viciousness", both are downloadable on EMPOWER's website at <https://empowermalaysia.org/research/>



Team EMPOWER pictured while attending Ulama Bersama Wanita training by Komuniti Muslim Universal (KMU) - Rizal Rozhan (Advocacy & Capacity Building Officer, third from the left) and Siti Nor (Operations Officer, far left) in an engaging discussion on PVE (preventing violent extremism). Picture courtesy of KMU.

STRATEGIC ADVOCACIES

As EMPOWER, we continued to engage in various fora, nationally, regionally and globally. Our role and advocacies received a boost through our membership with the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and our success in gaining consultative status with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). Both were achieved in August 2017.



A screenshot of APC (Association for Progressive Communications) official Facebook welcome message for EMPOWER

In addition to our engagement with the government on the State's roadmap for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we also participated in discussions on freedom of expression, online SGBV, media independence/freedom and illicit financial flows. Some of these included:

- RightsCon, 27 March - 3 April 2017
- Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) 2017, 29 – 31 March 2017
- National SDG Voluntary National Review Report and Roadmap Draft Verification Workshop for Cluster 1: Inclusivity, 11 April 2017
- AFEC-SEA, 13 – 14 May
- Stockholm Internet Forum 2017. 15 – 19 May
- UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2017, 10 – 19 July 2017
- Consultation with the Finance Ministry, Putrajaya, 3 August 2017.
- Briefing with SEANF (chairpersons of NHRIs in SEA) and SUHAKAM chairperson on internet rights, 8 November
- Briefing on Development Justice during ASLI-CPPS Youth Roundtable on SDG, 7 September.
- Briefing with EU delegates about Malaysia's UPR and relevant recommendations, 19 September.

- Consultation on Regional State of Internet Rights in Bangkok, Thailand with UN SR, 4–6 October.
- Briefing with the UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights
- Submission to UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women on issues and best practices in addressing online violence against women
- Global Conference on Cyberspace, 20–24 November
- AICHR's civil society roundtable consultation, Philippines, 27–29 November.
- UPR Thematic Meeting on Issues of Statelessness in Sandakan with government representatives, the police and a magistrate judge, 30 November.
- Internet Governance Forum, Geneva
- UPR Consultation with civil society, 15 and 16 December
- Article 19 Consultation, Petaling Jaya, 21 December



Top: Serene Lim (Research and Resource-Development Officer, far left) panels the forum on Net Neutrality and Its Future in Developing World, during RightsCon 2017 in Toronto

Bottom: Serene's article, "A Place For All: On Being Diverse and Inclusive" detailing her insights in RightsCon 2017 is featured in GenderIT.org

The UPR Thematic Consultation on Migration Issues that the Human Rights and State Accountability Programme started inspired the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to do their own in relation to the monitoring of the State's implementation of the UPR recommendations. As the co-secretariat of COMANGO, MOFA identified EMPOWER as their key partner to facilitate the participation of COMANGO members in thematic consultations organised by them. We engaged in the following thematic cluster consultations with MOFA and other government Ministries and agencies:

- UPR Thematic Consultation on Cluster 3: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 14 June 2017
- UPR Thematic Consultation on Cluster 4: Women, Children, Persons with Disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples & Cluster 5: Migrant Workers, Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Trafficking in Persons, 28 July 2017
- UPR Thematic Consultation on Cluster 2: Civil and Political Rights, 19 September 2017

We also provided inputs to the CEDAW shadow report on Articles 5, 7 and 8 specifically.

EMPOWER with Justice for Sisters, KMU and MCCHR documented reprisals against human rights defenders (HRDs) as part of our strategic advocacies. We documented 17 attacks, and highlighted the issue of faux HRDs that are emerging in the political and international arenas. EMPOWER has also started on promoting discussions over social media, especially centering on introducing human rights to the public, "Human Rights 101".

Towards the end of 2017, we embarked on work centering around freedom of religion issues, closely examining these issues from the perspectives of Sabahans and Sarawakians, in order to be better informed about our advocacies in this area.



Screenshot of one of EMPOWER's efforts to introduce human rights to the public, #EMPOWERTweetChat. This session on October 2017 is titled "Semua Tentang Hak Asasi Manusia" (All About Human Rights), with simplified contents on UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

GOVERNANCE & OPERATIONS

The ***executive committee members*** for 2017 were:

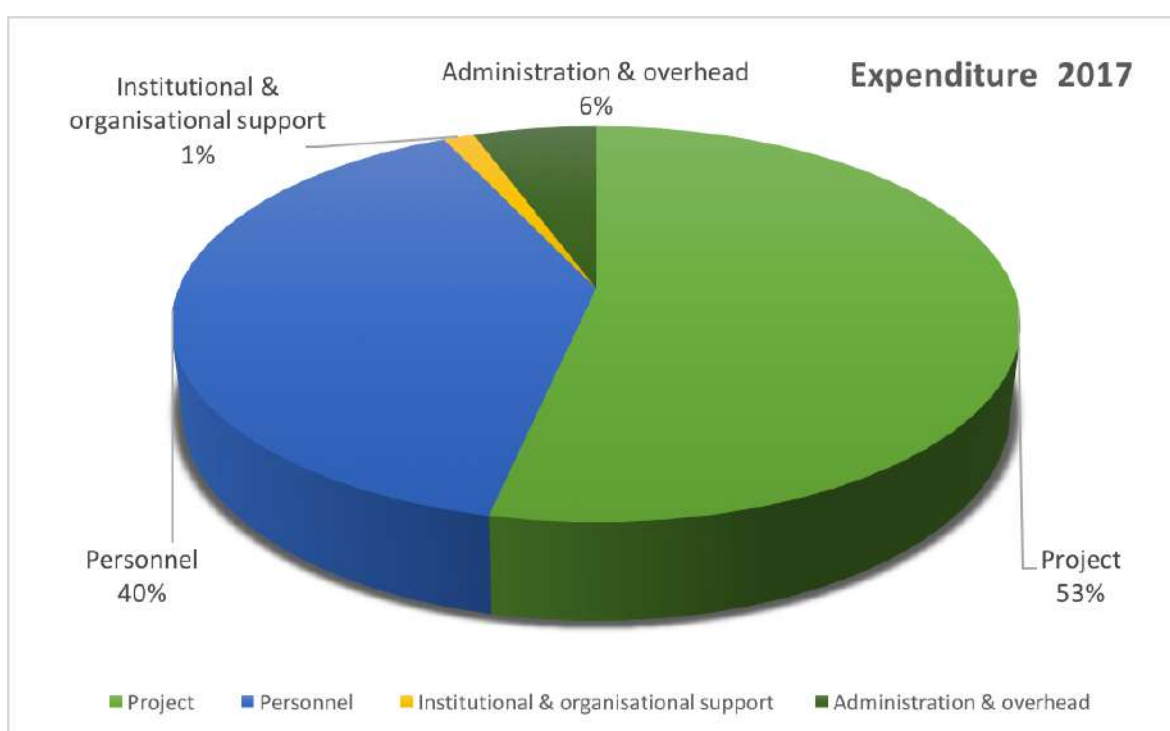
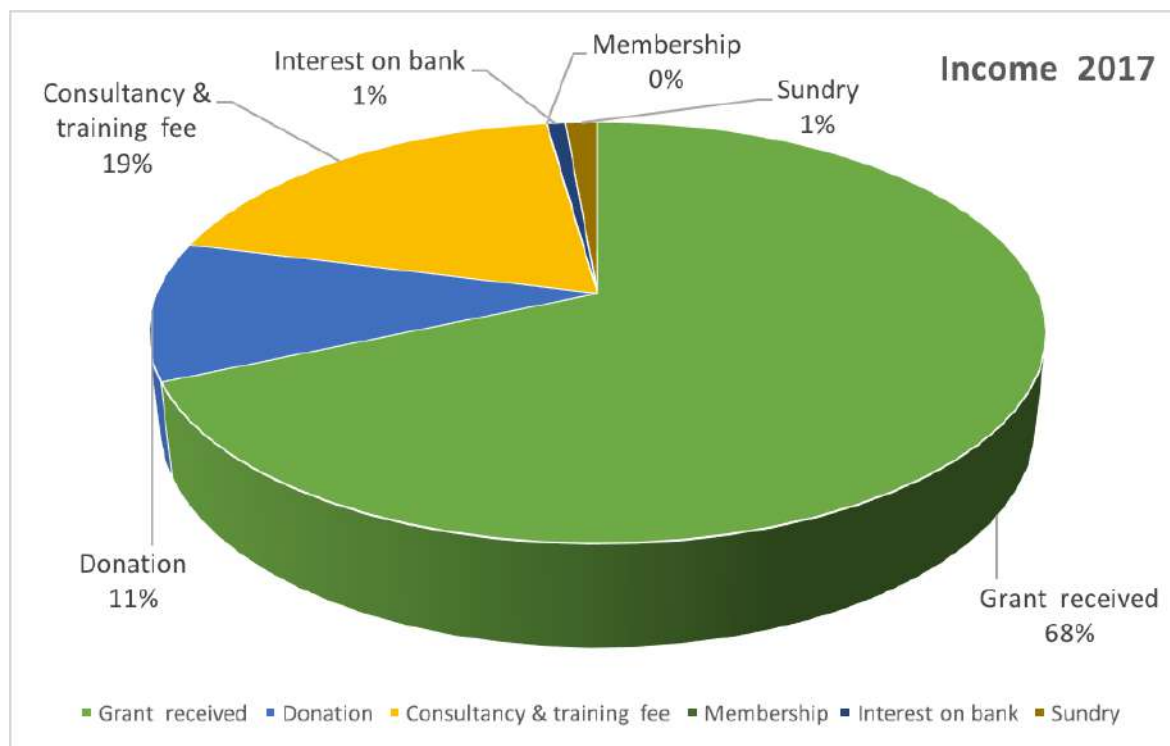
President:	Janarthani Arumugam
Vice-President:	Wong Kar Fai
Secretary:	Lau Shu Shi
Treasurer:	Normawati Ghazali
Committee Members:	Gayathry Venkiteswaran Chuah Siew Eng Pook Li Yoon

The ***staff members*** for 2017 were:

Executive Director:	Angela M. Kuga Thas
Programme Manager:	Yasmin Masidi <i>until March 2017</i>
Comms & Outreach Manager:	Mastura M. Rashid <i>from May 2017</i>
Programme Officers:	Serene Lim (The Net, Tech & Rights) Norsyamimie Rahman (The Net, Tech & Rights) <i>until August 2017</i> Rizal Rozhan (Human Rights & State Accountability)
Finance:	Leong Mee Nan @ Mei Yun
Operations:	Siti Nor Bt Yatim Mustafa
Interns:	Julia Gan Emily Chen

FINANCIAL REPORT

EMPOWER's **total income for 2017 was MYR 1,016,924.00**. This amount is largely from grants, which amounted to MYR 695,435.00. The organisation's **total expenditure was MYR 845,130**, with MYR 451,290 going to project costs, MYR 334,874 going to personnel costs and MYR 58,965 going towards institutional support and overhead costs.



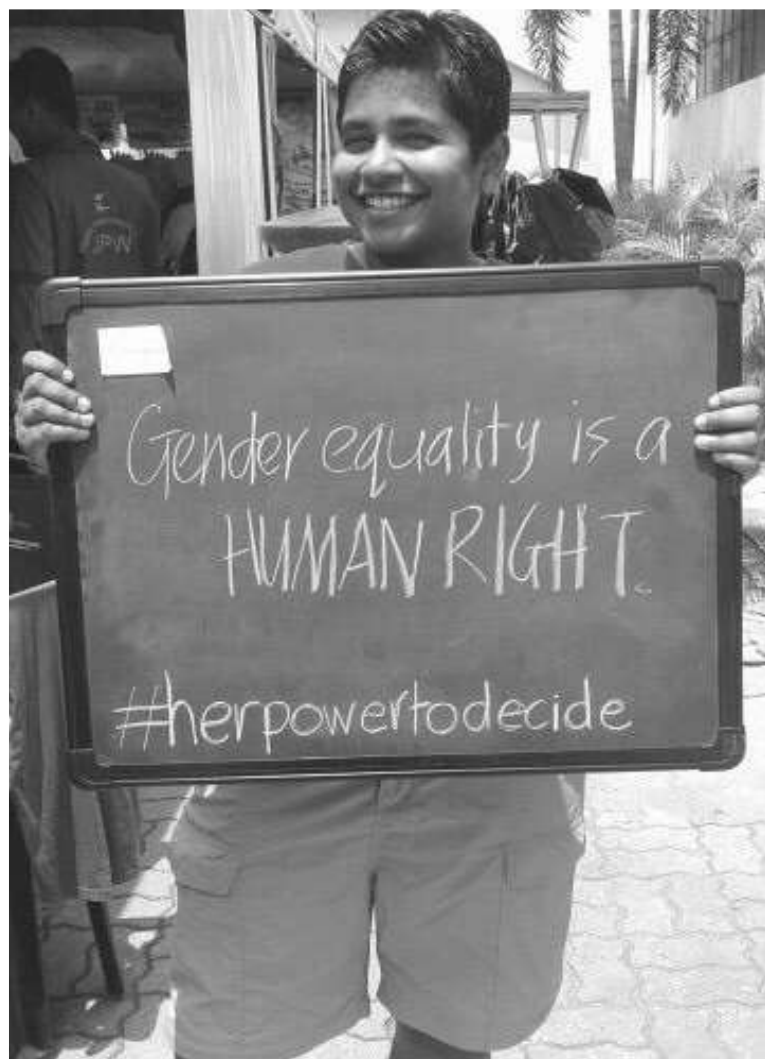
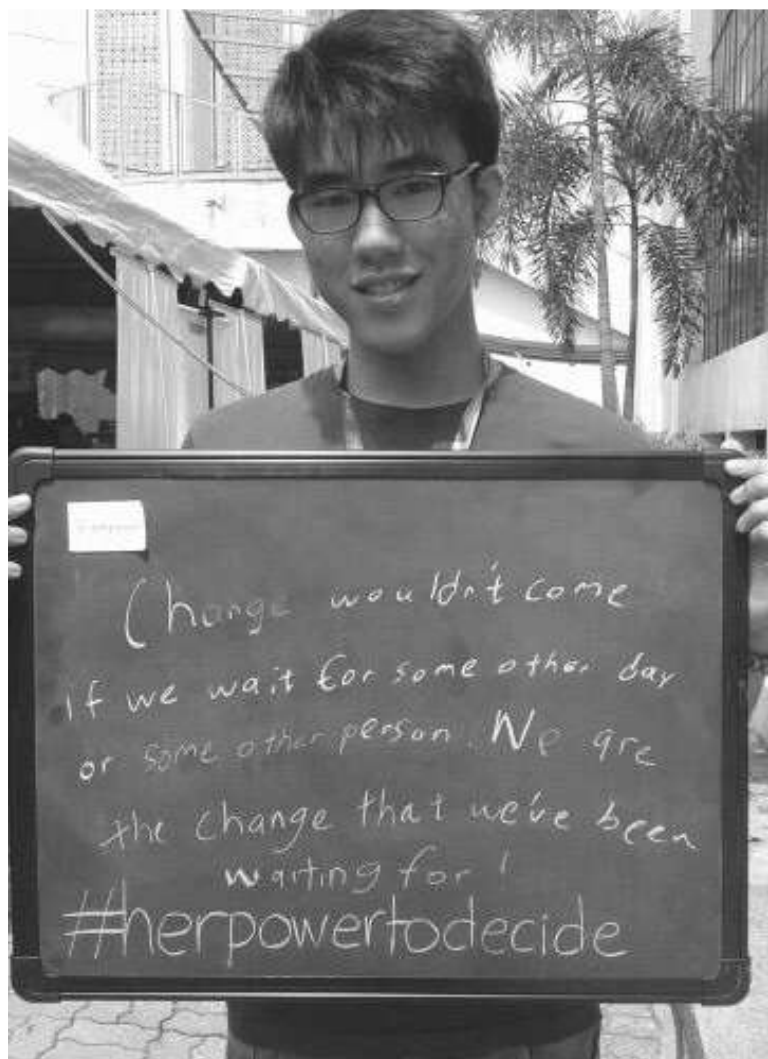
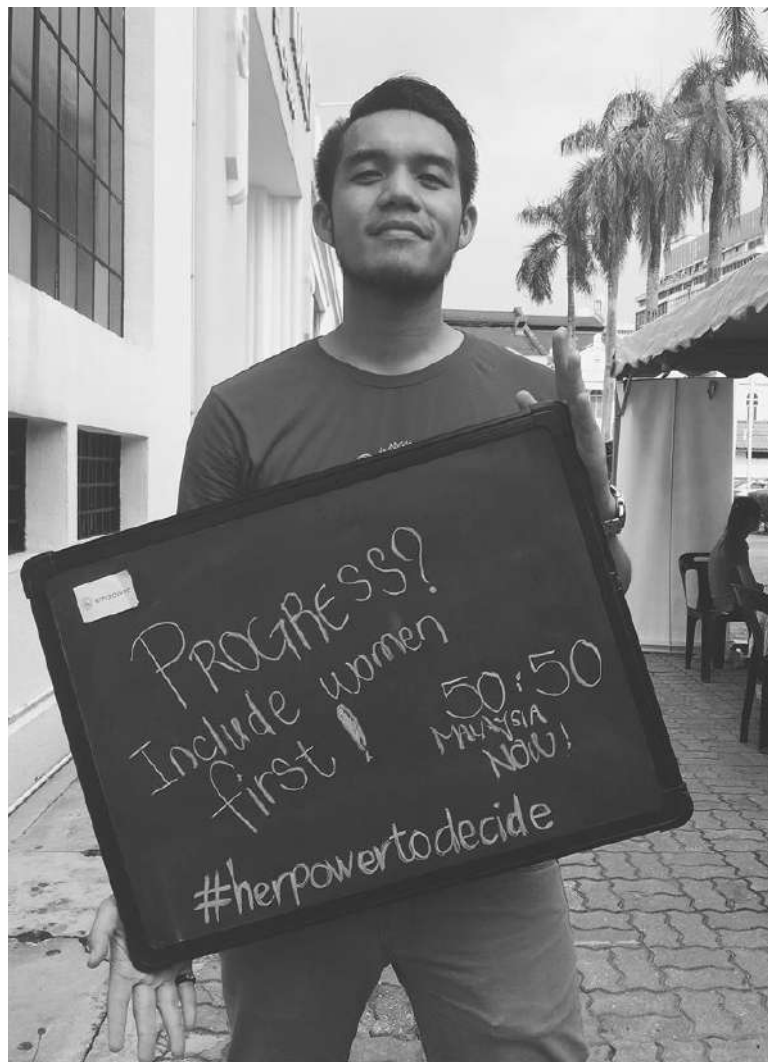
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our deepest gratitude goes out to all our funders and project partners in 2017: Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Bytes for All Pakistan, Commonwealth Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Digital Empowerment Foundation India, the American Bar Association-Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI), the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, the Edge Kuala Lumpur Rat Race 2017, Global Center on Cooperative Security, Global Partners Digital, Take Back the Tech, and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

We would also like to especially thank allies for their support and contributions such as the National Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brickfields Asia College, Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ), Jaringan Kampung Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia (JKOASM), the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG), Justice for Sisters, Malaysian Centre for Constitutionalism and Human Rights (MCCHR), Lariche Community, North South Initiative, Migration Working Group, Sisters in Islam, Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM) which also acts as our fellow co-secretariat to the Coalition of Malaysian NGOs in the UPR Process (COMANGO), and COMANGO members.

We are particularly appreciative of the participation of research respondents and storytellers in the various research and activities EMPOWER conducted/initiated in 2017. Our heartfelt thanks to all of you. We also want to make a special shout out to YB Chew Mei Fun, YB Teresa Kok, YB Kasthuri Patto, and YB Haniza Talha, team BFM, Srikandi Keadilan, Knowledge and Rights with Young people through Safer Spaces (KRYSS) and the Malaysia Design Archive.

Finally, we acknowledge and thank our interns in 2017, Julia Gan and Emily Chen for their commitment, hard work and enthusiasm.





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