

2018-2019

# ANNUAL REPORT

**Shaping Our Feminist Practices**



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## REFLECTIONS FOR THE YEAR

The inaugural year of any non-profit organization is possibly the most difficult. However, I believe we started out on the right foot when we decided to establish ourselves as a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) in August 2018.

My repeated description of the organizational culture I had wanted to foster for KRYSS Network was that of the “knights of the round table”; that power would be equally distributed not because of one person’s benevolent practice, but because those who wield power would be obliged, culturally and legally, to distribute it equally. The structure of an LLP allowed us the necessary room to grow and learn, while still enjoying the flexibility to build a sense of ownership and leadership that consciously strived towards achieving equal outcomes and being participatory. The assurance and realisation of equality, not only on paper, but in practice, was something we persistently worked on. We fully recognised that experience, knowledge, social status and position privileged the few of us within KRYSS Network.

It was not smooth sailing. There were perceptions and misperceptions of motivations and interests, and how power manifested and was wielded. We had learnt too much from patriarchy and we had to actively unlearn all of this, while simultaneously learning to trust our feminist selves, despite our flaws and weaknesses. This required us as partner-directors to express ourselves frankly, and to actively listen to each other and to consciously do the same with others.

Our experience informed our analysis of freedom of opinion and expression in Malaysia, and what that looks like in real terms, especially from a gender and feminist lens, as we unpacked our privileges and assumptions. We identified the changes we sought for Malaysia if we hope to realise equal access to freedom of opinion and expression for women, girls and for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) and gender non-conforming persons, and of course, the challenges in making these changes a reality. The identification and articulation of the changes get refined as we better defined our work, direction and added value in advancing freedom of opinion and expression with a gender (and feminist) lens in Malaysia.

Our Annual Report for 2018-2019 speaks to the start of what we expect to be a long and arduous, but exhilarating journey.

**Angela, Co-Founding Partner**

The change in government had inevitably opened up dialogues and the possibility for reforms including the discussion for a Sexual Harassment Bill. Women's rights groups had been pushing for the recognition of sexual harassment and the enactment of the Bill for up to 20 years but were halted numerous times because of resistance from employers, policy and lawmakers. The proposed Sexual Harassment Bill is much needed and would also recognize sexual harassment occurring in the digital sphere — a significant recognition of online gender-based violence (OGBV).

As I reflect on our work in 2019, I realise it was a year of grounding and finding our own people. We focused most of our work on evidence-building through research and we organized several consultative workshops with civil society, media, activists, content creators etc. to better understand the gaps in current efforts of feminist advocacy and how can we further strengthen our movement for gender equality.

Most of all, we have learnt so much from our research that looked at how women and girls experience freedom of expression differently on social media, and the impact of unequal access to this freedom. We interviewed 23 women (LBQ women included) and 5 persons who had participated in mob attacks against women. It was clear to us that social media is a highly contested space where gender norms are persistent and yet, women are constantly pushing back and disrupting the normative discourse. OGBV is a highly personal experience for the survivor and it is an indication of a deeper systemic issue in our society. Aggressors are also grounded in their own realities and some of these are coming from a place of insecurity over their national identity as a man, more so if they are Malay and Muslim in Malaysia, where the politicisation of a purist, non-feminist, non-liberal Malay Muslim man is the only version of a Malay Muslim man that is acceptable. While aggressors of OGBV should be held accountable for the harm they have caused, structural inequalities, the underlying economic structure of social media and discriminatory cultural beliefs that facilitate the violence are equally culpable.

The process of the research was enriching, and we gained a more nuanced understanding as to how violence and harms are experienced, perpetrated and mitigated. On a personal note, the process was humbling and a much-needed reminder that there is no one essential truth and not recognizing the limitations of our assumed knowledge and blindspots may lead to excluding the lived realities of others.

I am awed by the stories shared by all the women in the research we did. They are precious and unique in their own way. Many had shared stories of how they resist patriarchy and I remember feeling humbled by how they are dedicated to doing this despite their many experiences of violence. And it is their stories that will continue to ground the work in KRYSS Network.

**Serene, Co-Founding Partner**

## OUR HERSTORY

KRYSS Network evolved from Knowledge and Rights with Young people through Safer Spaces (KRYSS), which acted more as an incubation platform and worked on promoting non-discrimination on the intersectional issues of ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gender. KRYSS was established in 2002 as a non-registered non-partisan civil society organisation. By 2005, KRYSS honed its expertise and focus on gender equality and non-discrimination in relation to the issue of sexuality rights.

The late Toni Kasim was one of the best, if not the best, feminist, sexuality rights and human rights trainers Malaysia ever had. When she passed away on 4 June 2008, Angela, the co-founder of KRYSS, made a promise to herself that there would always be good, if not great, gender and sexuality rights trainers in Malaysia. So from 2008, greater and more conscious efforts were made in the training-of-trainers on human rights and sexuality, and in advancing the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) persons.

KRYSS became active in the organising of Seksualiti Merdeka in 2008 until the annual event and related capacity-building activities suffered from police harassment in 2011. While there were a few but very significant achievements in advancing the human rights of LGBTIQ persons in Malaysia, KRYSS observed that challenges persisted, especially in the lack of understanding of freedom of opinion and expression from a gender and feminist lens.

We realised that this lack of understanding and gender analysis has brought about persistent obstacles to the public and political participation of women, girls, and LGBTIQ and gender non-conforming persons. The negative impacts of the lack of public participation of these groups was significantly harder to articulate and enumerate in the Malaysian context compared to issues of economic and political participation. These insights informed the direction and focus of KRYSS Network. KRYSS's collaborative approach too became part and parcel of KRYSS Network's organisational culture.

Using an intersectional analysis, KRYSS Network recognised how digital rights and citizenship rights were so intertwined with the exercise of freedom of opinion and expression in Malaysia. These realisations began to set the parameters of what KRYSS Network would work on as we embarked on our journey as a young feminist organisation.

## OUR VISION

KRYSS Network adopted the vision that KRYSS was first founded on, "We are committed to a world where young people, both young women and men, feel safe and empowered to be themselves, to define and express their own hopes, dreams and realities, and act upon them without fear of discrimination or violence. Where diversity, creativity and personal capacities are celebrated and nurtured, and each person regardless of gender is empowered in body, mind and spirit".

## OUR MISSION

KRYSS Network’s mission: “We work towards increasing the individual and collective agency of both young women and men in the full exercise of their freedom of opinion and expression through conscious strategy development that is supported by evidence-based knowledge, networking and advocacy; and guided by the principles of upholding dignity, equality, diversity, respect and choice”.

## PROGRAMMING TOWARDS OUR VISION AND MISSION

KRYSS’s inclusive and intersectional work approach centres on three main strategies: “knowledge”, “voice” and “collective action”. The first of these three strategic approaches has the dominant theme of “knowledge” and seeks to enhance human rights advocacy and communication strategies through knowledge-building towards ensuring equality and non-discrimination in Malaysia. The second embraces “voice” and focuses on expanding the discursive space for equality, non-discrimination and human rights in the country. The third strategic approach is about movement-building and focuses on strengthening collective action, recognising and acknowledging that every single woman, man and gender diverse person is a catalyst for social change. All three strategic approaches have a deliberate emphasis on gender.

## OUR WORK AND THEMATIC THREADS OF 2018–2019

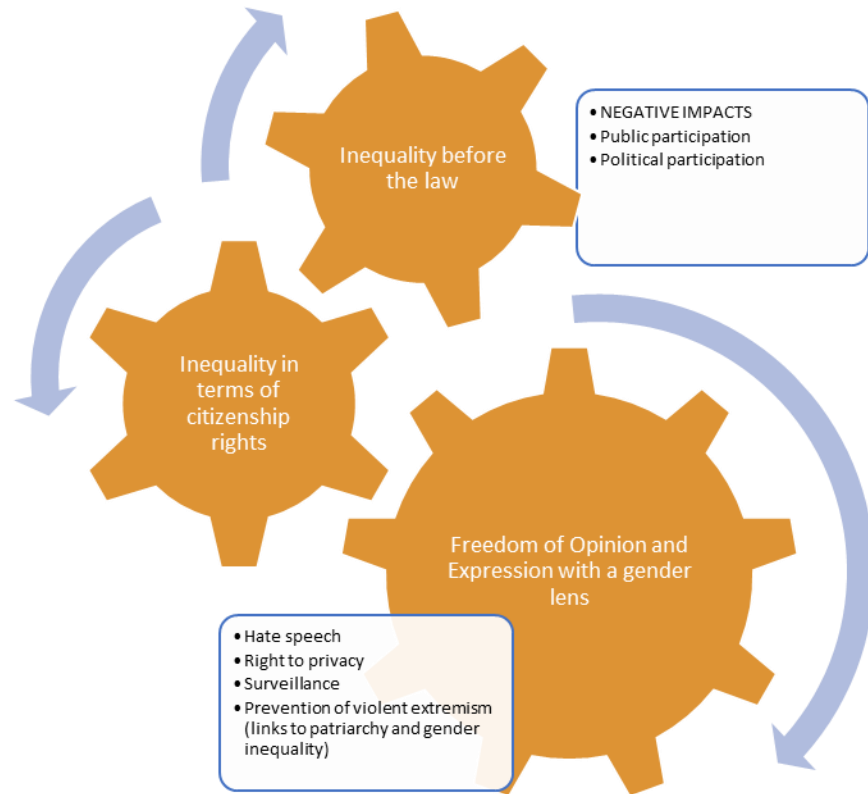
The work for the year evolved, guided by both KRYSS Network’s mission and value statement.

The first year saw us consistently unpacking what exactly does it mean to understand freedom of opinion and expression through a gender lens. We used an intersectional analysis and soon realized that the work on better enabling freedom of opinion and expression for women, girls and LGBTIQ and gender non-conforming persons was vast. In a lot of ways, it was a “learning” year. We started to build our knowledge base in three ways.

1. To better understand the phenomenon of online gender-based violence and the motivations of perpetrators
2. To re-examine gender issues in media especially within the new media landscape, where “news” and information in general is highly manipulated and politicised in Malaysia
3. To explore ways of mainstreaming alternative narratives using popular culture

We undertook three projects in 2019, with two continuing in 2020. These were supported by:

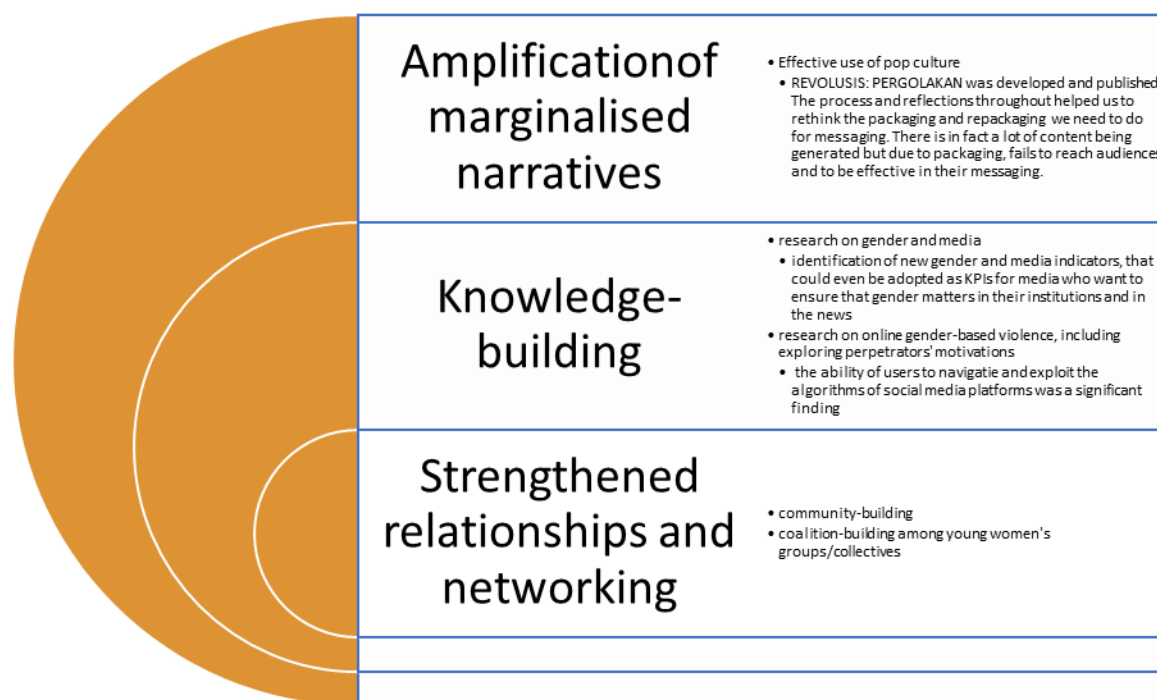
1. The Association for Progressive Communications’ Feminist Internet Research Network (2019-2020)
2. The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) (2019-2020)
3. UNESCO (2019)



The timely support of the Association for Progressive Communications Feminist Internet Research Network, UNESCO and the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives helped boost our work in the right direction. It was through these projects that we began to lay the groundwork and make inroads in understanding freedom of opinion and expression with a gender lens.

We were very excited that a major part of our work could focus on communication and strategies to make human rights content accessible to a wider audience, especially with younger women.

## OUR ACHIEVEMENTS



## NETWORKING

KRYSS Network was accepted as a member in the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG), and became a member of APC's Feminist Internet Research Network and the Malaysian CSO Platform for Reforms.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

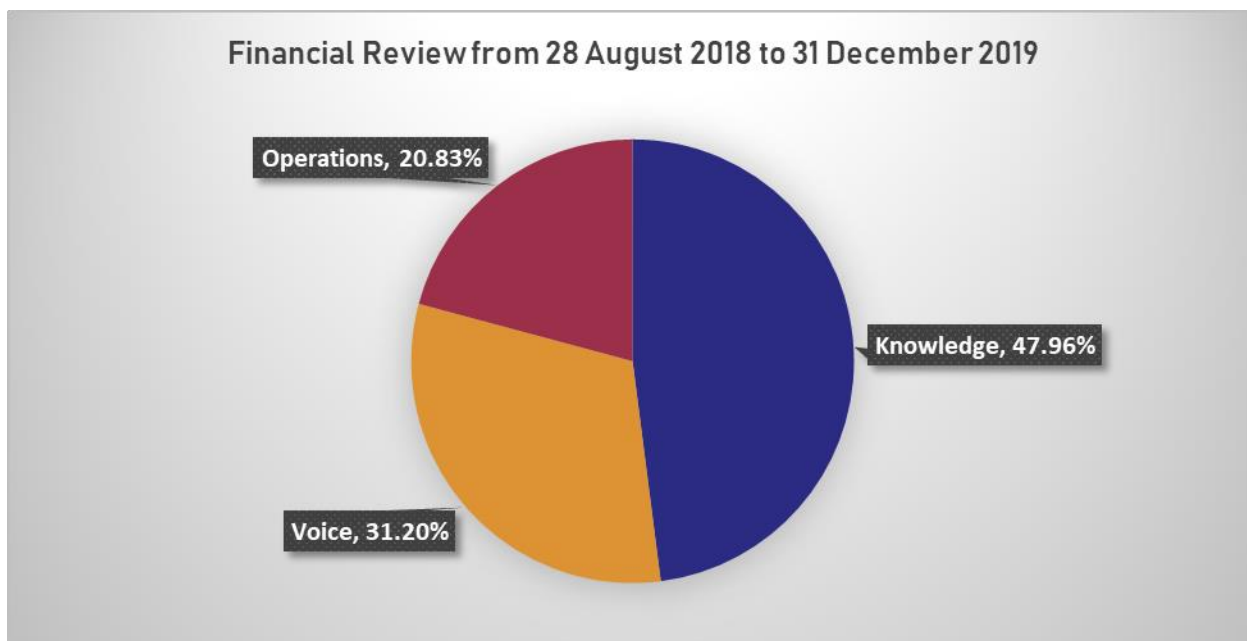
We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all who have supported us in different ways, as funders, as collaborators, as resource persons, as allies, as fellow human rights defenders and as friends.

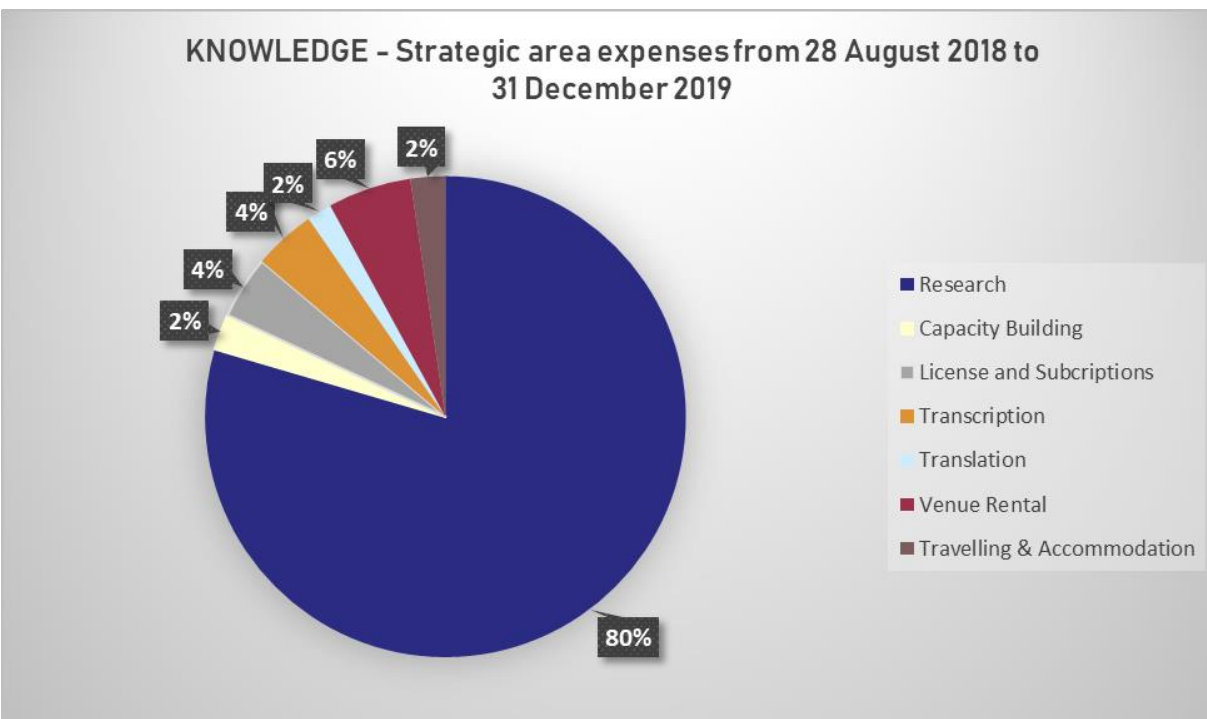
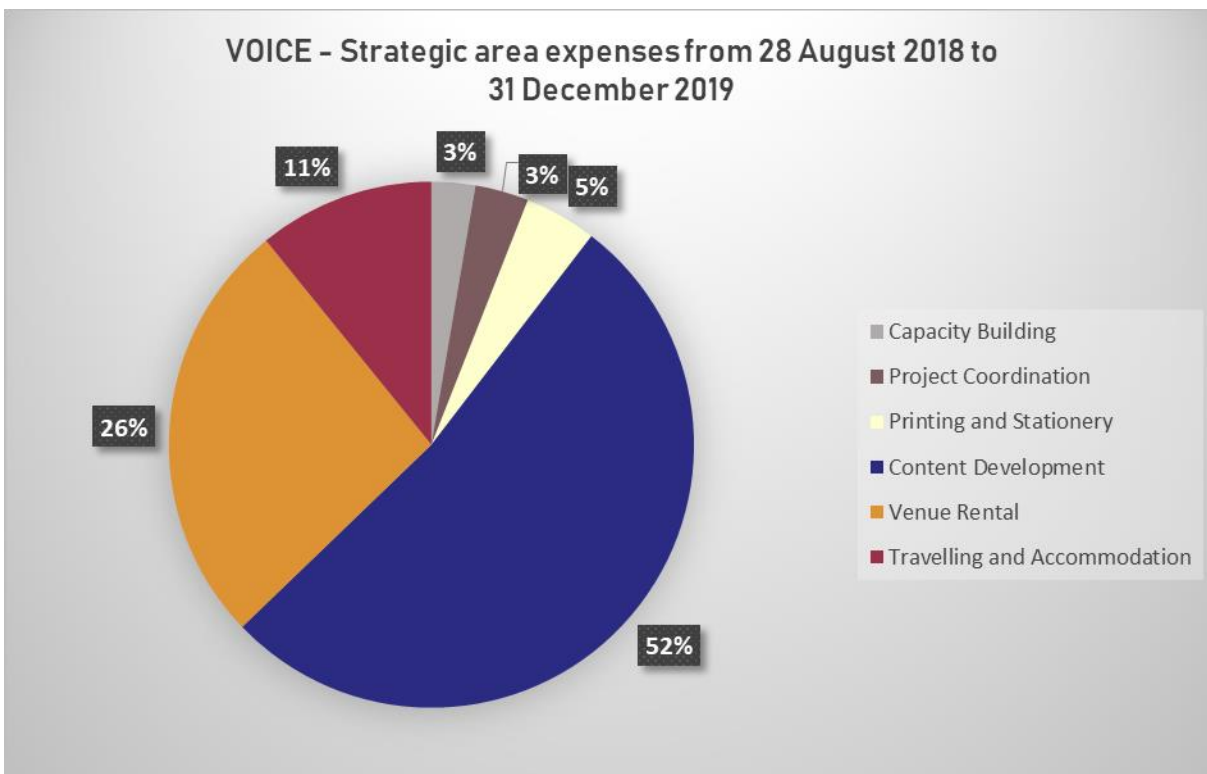


## FINANCIALS

For the period from 28 August 2018 to 31 December 2019, we managed a total of MYR252,313 for the year with the following breakdown of how funds were used to support our strategic approaches:

1. **KNOWLEDGE** – MYR121,017 or 47.96 per cent
2. **VOICE** – MYR78,734 or 31.20 per cent
3. **OPERATIONS** – MYR52,562 or 20.83 per cent





The focus on building knowledge and enabling voices to be heard and counted reflects the type of groundwork that is essential in strengthening our future initiatives in collective actions.

## THE YEAR IN PICTURES

A lot of work happened behind the scenes and because of security issues in relation to the consultations we organised, we could not take pictures as wildly as we wanted. However, here are four pictures that we found in storage that we almost forgot about!



Angela and Serene at the 2019's Women's March Festival, Kuala Lumpur

Mapping the domains of change at Feminist Internet Research Network workshop, Pahang, supported by International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Canada) through the Association for Progressive Communications (APC)





Participants at our gender and media workshop and consultation, supported by UNESCO





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