



# Women at the Forefront

Popularizing Community Struggles  
Through Digital Media



**I**n the Philippines, women often play an important role in the various struggles faced by marginalized communities. Men are usually away working or looking for work, and women are usually the ones left at home and who become involved in the affairs of the community. They play active roles in struggles for social services, disaster relief and rehabilitation, and rights to land and livelihood. Many women become community leaders and get involved in policy advocacy.

However, despite their crucial role in effecting social change, women at the forefront remain invisible to the public. While media attention sometimes come their way when issues become “newsworthy” (using media standards of violence and sensationalism), reporting on local struggles and policy advocacy is largely absent or unsustained. Thus, it cannot be expected to raise public awareness on these issues, much less draw out lessons that can be of value to other communities facing similar struggles, contribute to policy changes, and lead to the social recognition and empowerment of women.

On the other hand, women in communities have not been able to maximize the potential of digital media to communicate their stories to a wider audience, because of lack of education, skills and access to resources. In general, digital media in the Philippines remains the platform of digitally savvy middle to upper class professionals, and excludes the voices of the poor.

With the generous support of the World Association for Christian Communication, PinoyMedia Center launched the project ***Women at the Forefront: Popularizing Community Struggles Throuh Digital Media***. This project aims for the recognition of women’s leadership

role in development by popularizing women leaders in poor urban and rural communities and training them to become effective digital communicators.

Over all, this project is expected to encourage the effective use of digital media by women community leaders, reveal best practices and lessons in community struggles and policy advocacy, highlight women’s leadership role in development, and garner popular support for their struggles and advocacies through inclusion in the digital media landscape.

This report shows how seven community leaders from different marginalized sectors and communities in the Philippines used digital media to become connected to the world, publicize their thoughts and experiences, and reveal practices in advocacy and struggles that can prove inspiring to other women and communities. Each woman has a different story that reveals their bravery and how they fulfilled roles outside the confines of convention and patriarchy. Each woman has a story of how they contributed to various types of change, as well as registered their voices in the vast digital world that tends to exclude them. May their stories and voices continue to inspire inclusion, empowerment, and social change.



## **Marissa Cabaljao**

### **The woman leader:**

Marissa Cabaljao came from a poor family of farmers in the province of Pinabacdao, Western Samar, one of the poorest provinces in the Philippines. Among eight siblings, she was one of the two who was able to finish high school. In her upland village, social services like basic education are neglected. Her family owns one hectare of land but 25% of their harvest go to their landlord; costs of agricultural input are also high so they are always in debt. Thus she became active in organizing among farmers, as leader of Magdawat Farmers Association and Pinabacdao Farmers Association.

When the powerful typhoon Yolanda struck on November 8, 2014, Marissa and other villagers took refuge in the makeshift shelter they built, because of the lack of evacuation efforts by the government. The villagers all lost their crops. "In circumstances like that, even if you see everyone sad and demoralized, you have to stay strong for your fellow farmers, to help them see the crisis through," she said.

As a leader of People Surge, she saw how help mostly came from non-government organizations instead of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). "The DSWD only gave us 2.5 kilos of rice and two cans of sardines," she

said. There is also a bureaucratic process that prevents the delivery of relief to residents.

### **Issues tackled:**

Disaster relief, climate change, climate justice

### **Insights gained in citizen reports:**

Through her citizen journalism advocacy, Marissa was able to continue forwarding the still urgent demands of disaster victims, a year after the storm—especially since more natural disasters, such as Typhoon Nona, came that further devastated the lives and livelihoods of people living in Eastern Visayas.

Their demands include resistance to demolition of their homes and the "No Build Zone" policy, which Marissa says allows businessmen to take over their land for commercial purposes. Marissa was also very active in leading women who are demanding the release of the promised P10,000 Emergency Shelter Assistance (ESA). Social media became an effective platform wherein she revealed that the assistance has not reached survivors, or that there is discrimination in its distribution. She exposed the tactics of the DSWD, such as moving the deadline of application so that survivors cannot avail.

In her citizen reports, Marissa revealed the extent of the suffering of families in temporary bunkhouses put up by the government, as well as the lack of livelihood that would help them get up their feet. For instance, she took a photo of undistributed fishing boats. She interviewed families who suffer from lack of clean water and ventilation, and those who do only odd jobs to survive.

She was also able to document the militarization of communities in the pretext of disaster relief. In these military operations, she said, "women are the most affected," as they are the ones being

left in homes and terrorized along with their children.

More importantly, Marissa was able to document how the people mobilized among themselves to push for their demands, through signature petitions, community meetings, and mass actions. Her reports and insights also became the basis of advocacy work on climate change.

She also used social media as a platform to announce schedules of mass actions, which the media also picked up and found useful.

### **Best practices in advocacy:**

Marissa said that as a community leader, an important skill is to be able to mobilize, inspire, and make leaders out of people who will be key persons in long-term education and organizing. For instance, in a village, she will talk to elders and heads of village councils to become members of the organizations and take on certain responsibilities, like leading discussions and doing house-to-house education campaigns. These discussions are crucial, because through them the organization is able to know about the problems of the people and respond to them.

For instance, in the bunkhouses provided by the government, the problems are usually the lack of clean water and lack of ventilation because of the unusually tight spaces families and cramped

into. These unsanitary conditions often led to illnesses, especially of children. Thus, it was usually the mothers who were most active in pressing for demands for financial aid and better living conditions from the local government. "In our signature campaigns demanding the government to release the Emergency Shelter Assistance, women were the most active and got the most number of signatures," Marissa said.

Instrumental in their struggle for rehabilitation and relief were mass actions in front of government offices like the town hall and offices of the Department of Social Welfare and Development and National Food Authority. In these actions, women played a big role in mobilizing villagers, making placards out of available materials like rice sacks, and preparing petition letters.

Marissa also learned that it is crucial for advocacy to link the conditions of the community to broader issues like climate change, and to be part of the global discussion on the issue. Together with other sectors like the church and academe, People Surge represents survivors in various fora where climate change & disaster risk reduction are discussed. Marissa for instance attended and took the floor at the International League of People's Struggles International Assembly last November 2015.



*(Left) Protest action of typhoon survivors. (next page, clockwise) Conditions in bunkhouses, Call for emergency shelter assistance, Advocating for higher selling prices of produce, Different snapshots of livelihood, Lack of water supply*





**Marissa Cabaljao**

25 November 2015 · Twitter ·

Dito kinukuha ang tubig sa Abucay Bunkhouse buti nalang daw maulan at may tubig sa "bubon". citjournpmc <https://t.co/7L47MkR7nd>

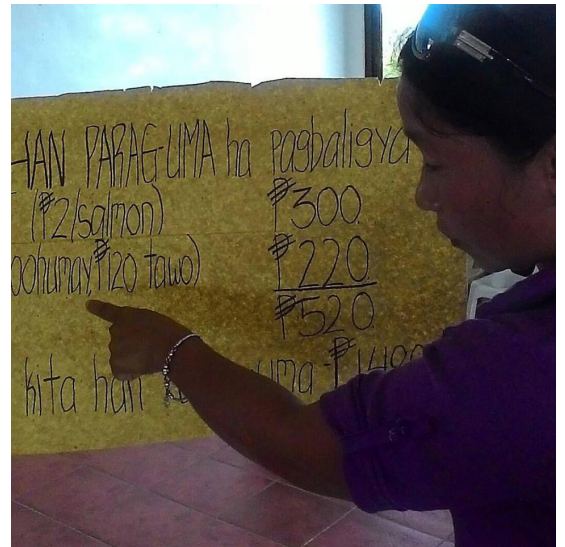


Marissa Cabaljao (@marissacabaljao) posted a photo on Twitter

Get the whole picture - and other photos from Marissa Cabaljao

PIC.TWITTER.COM/7L47MKR7ND | BY MARISSA CABAL...

Like Comment Share







## Florida Sibayan

### The woman leader:

Florida “Ka Pong” Sibayan is a survivor of the Hacienda Luisita massacre that took place on November 16, 2004. She was among the hundreds of striking farmworkers in the vast plantation estate owned by the family of Philippine president Benigno Cojuangco Aquino III. “I remember the day in front of the sugar mill, many of my fellow farmers who were crying because of those who were shot. I was one of those who was shot,” she said. At present, despite of a Supreme Court ruling awarding the 6,453 hectares of land to the farmers under the agrarian reform program, Florida and thousands of farmers still have to fight for the land they till. Under the tamblo system enacted by the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), farmers are “assigned” lots far from where they live. Many are also either forced or lured by sugarcane planters controlled by the Cojuangco family to “lease” their lands. Also corporate landgrabbing schemes are being enacted to circumvent the court’s decision.

Ka Pong is among those farmers who have chosen to stand their ground. They have organized a “bungkalan” or collective farming to exercise their right to the land and livelihood. They grow organic rice and vegetables, and together market their produce.

But they also face the worse forms of harassment and threats of eviction, including the burning of their huts and the bulldozing of their crops by goons of the Cojuangco family and corporate entities. “At present, we women are still the ones being harassed, jailed, threatened. In 2012, while we were defending our bungkalan, the police shot at me and dragged me away like a pig,” she said.

In 2013 too, she and a 76-year old grandmother was hurt again by goons who burnt huts. In 2014, she was even arrested when she resisted the fencing off of their land by the private company TADECO.

### Issues tackled:

Land reform, human rights violations

### Insights gained in citizen reports:

Ka Pong’s reports reflected her work as a dedicated woman mass leader. It showed their local mass actions to defend their land, as well as their lobbying efforts at the national level for a Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill.

Some of her reports were instrumental in exposing how the Cojuangco family connives with the government and other corporate entities to retain control of the vast estate. For instance, when security guards and contractors put up a concrete wall to fence off the farmers from their land in Brgy. Mapalacsiao, apparently for a solar project that the Department of Energy entered into, Ka Pong was the one who took the photos that were picked up by the media, and showed the harassment of farmers.

She also documented how women leaders, including herself, were very active in the organization Ambala (Alyansa ng Magbubukid sa Asyenda Luisita) and in collective farming.

## Best practices in advocacy:

“The role of women is very important. Last December 2013, we were the ones who faced the bulldozers and prevented them from destroying our crops. Our crops then were to be harvested in a week’s time. So we lay down in front of the bulldozers.

She said the the bungkalan was very effective in preserving their gains in land reform. “Each farmer was given by the organization 0.7 hectares each. My family—my silbling’s children and I—we till the land together. We relied on farming for our own food,” she narrated.

The women play a very important role in agriculture, from tilling, sowing seeds, harvesting, and bringing the produce to the market. They also take care of animals like pigs and goats.

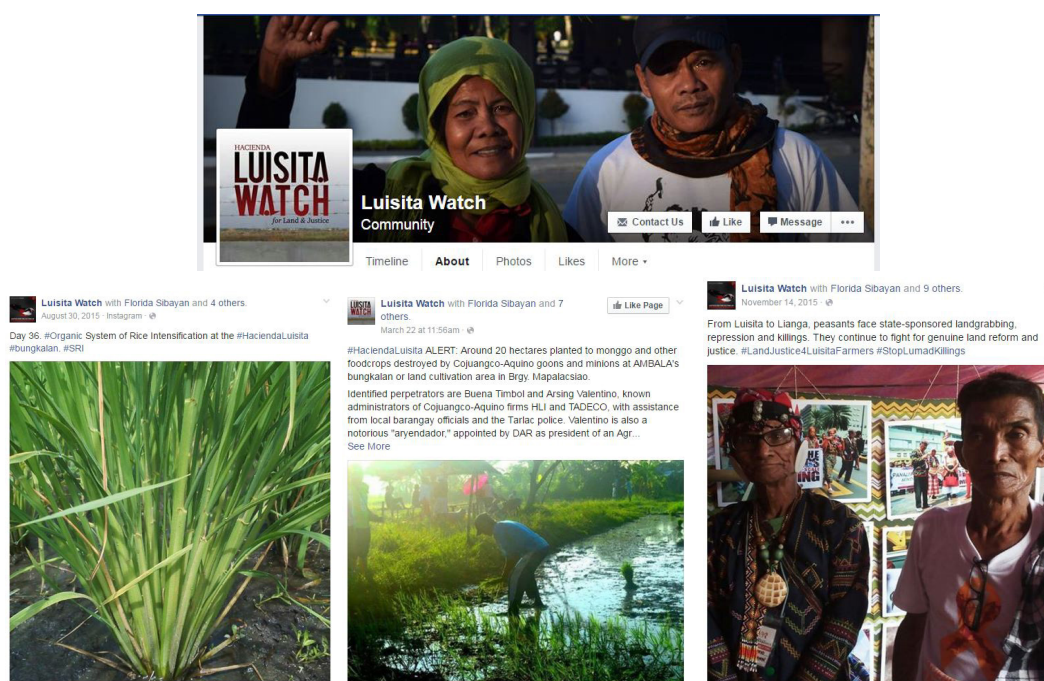
The biggest threat to the women farmers in Luisita is the fencing off the land that they have occupied. This has prevented them from farming. They also cannot avail of the land given by DAR because the lots are too far and with no irrigation. They are also given fake Certificates of Land Ownership Awards. Women are the most

affected by the forced displacement—many of them, instead of farming, are forced to enter into odd jobs like laundry, househelp, or reverting back to becoming mere farmhands.

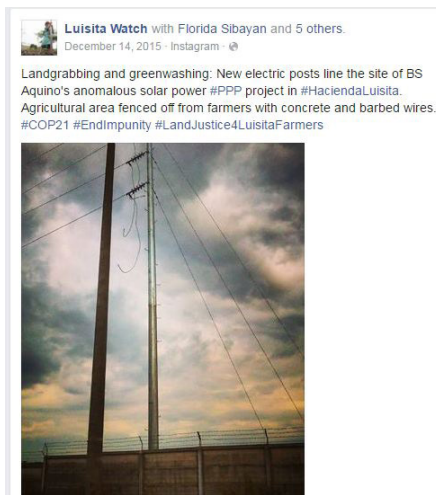
While they battle it out with security forces on the ground with mass actions, they also continue to battle the moves of DAR in the Supreme Court and win the court of public opinion through advocacy.

Ka Pong is very active in speaking in fora, Congress hearings, assemblies, and other venues where she can amplify the voices of farmers in her community.

She said that the best advocacy practice is to have a strong organization on the ground with members that resist threats to their livelihoods as they happen. “We cannot give them an inch of ground. And women are very much part of our strongest forces,” she said. At the same time, she said that the community organization should be part of a strong national network, like the Peasant Movement of the Philippines, so that lobbying efforts can be done to support their cause and historical quest for land reform and justice.



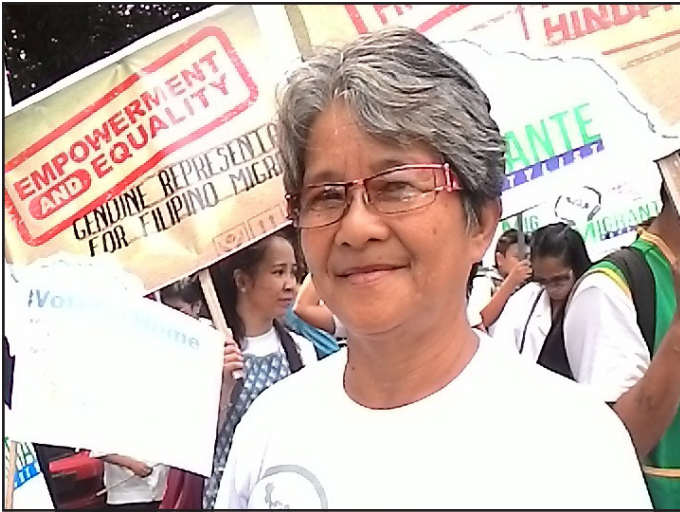




(Above) Photos by Florida Sibayan that was disseminated by the farmers' organization and then picked up by mainstream media. (Below, clockwise) A meeting of the local group Ambala composing of mostly women, Farmers working at the Bungkalan or collective farm







**Estrelieta Bagasbas**

### **The woman leader:**

Estrelieta “Nanay Inday” Bagasbas is a native of North Cotabato province in Mindanao. She sought greener pastures in Metro Manila because of poverty and internal conflict in the Southern Philippines.

The lack of employment opportunities in Metro Manila forced Nanay Inday to become an Overseas Filipino Worker in the early 90s. For three years, she worked as a domestic helper in the Middle East. When she came back to the country, she was happy selling rice cakes for a living, until the threat of demolition came to their community. She became an active leader of Sitio San Roque in North Triangle, Quezon City. Their community—which they built in the early 80s—was being demolished to give way to a commercial complex by Ayala Land, one of the biggest real estate developers in the country.

She became the national spokesperson of Alyansa Kontra Demolisyon, a broad formation of groups and supporters against forcible eviction of the urban poor, as well as vice-chairperson of Kadamay (Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap), a national alliance of urban poor organizations in the Philippines.

### **Issues tackled:**

Urban poor demolition, unemployment, access to social services

### **Insights gained in citizen reports:**

Nanay Inday’s social media posts about informal settlers trying to make a living despite lack of employment opportunities and demolition threats humanized the urban poor. Traditional media has often portrayed informal settlers as lazy people. Through her posts, Nanay Inday was able to show that they work hard doing informal jobs like selling in the market and making rags they sell to passersby. “Through hard work, we are able to eat and send our children to school. But the commercial projects that threaten to displace us want to put us somewhere where there is no livelihood, no other population than our fellow poor and unemployed,” she said.

Her reports also show the high level of willingness of women to be more daring in confrontations with authorities. For instance, women are willing to lie down on the road to press their demands, as shown in their protest in front of the Quezon City Hall. In the campaign to save the Balintawak Market from demolition, a lot of the participants were women. Many of those who also speak to the media about their situation are women.

She also reported on the fire that razed hundreds of houses in a community in Brgy. Tatalon, Quezon City. Through social media, she forwarded the belief of the people that their houses were intentionally burned to forcibly evict them. Such was not an isolated case—in North Triangle, in fact, the residents have established a “Fire Watch Brigade” that puts out fires because of several attempts from arsonists. Nanay Inday’s report shows that the heartless practice continues. The dwellers in Tatalon were initially not allowed by authorities to attempt to build back their homes. By exposing the issue and

helping the community get back on their feet, Nanay Inday was able to be of help. Kadamay was able to provide immediate relief and stop the forced relocation of the residents.

### **Best practices in advocacy:**

Nanay Inday was able to show that through a strong local organization supported by a larger network or alliance, a community can effectively defend itself against demolition. The North Triangle community was first evicted in 2010—today, it still stands. Although thousands of families have already forcibly relocated, many continue to come back because of lack of jobs in relocation sites. The organization, aside from consolidating the residents who chose to remain, also embraced back those who left but chose to come back. Women in the organization, because they often mediate between villagers who naturally come to conflict with each other, are looked up as leaders. Their leadership role is also natural, as mostly it is the men or their husbands who remain in the breadwinners, working as construction workers or pedicab drivers.

Another good practice in advocacy that Nanay Inday was able to show was going beyond her own community and being an urban poor leader that lends her time and support to other communities facing similar struggles. That way, she is able to share the experience of their own community in resisting demolition, to give others inspiration in their struggle. She was also able to share to them the experiences of relocatees, so that other informal settlers would be informed of the difficulties they would face there in case they decide to relocate. She was also able to learn of how other communities defend themselves—in Navotas, for instance, they also assert their legal claims to the land because the former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo already issued them land rights under an executive order. Asserting

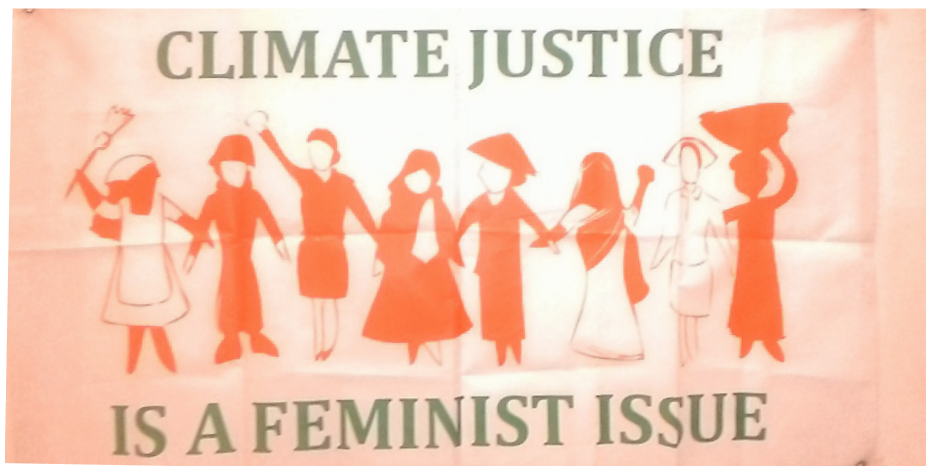
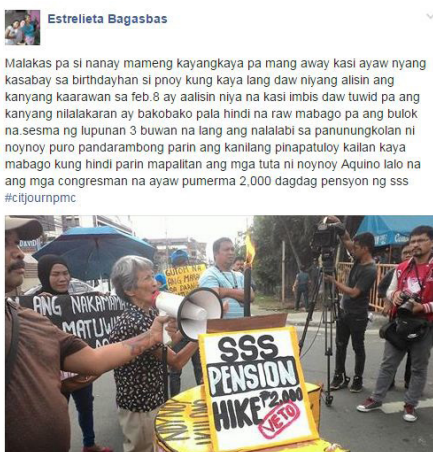
these legal claims can delay their eviction, while local organizations gather strength and expand membership.

Meanwhile, in relocation sites, dialogue with officials of the National Housing Authority, with accompanying mass action, is the best tactic to achieve demands in relation to social services, Nanay Inday said. In relocation sites, there is no water and electricity in some areas, or the electricity rates are high. In Montalban, there have been cases where the residents were successfully given electricity lines because of negotiations and mass actions. Nanay Inday was able to document some of these events. “In dialogues, you have to be respectful to authorities, but also be firm in your stand,” she said.

Also a good practice in advocacy is participating in solidarity actions and initiatives with sympathizers from other nationalities. In not a few instances, foreigners from various organizations met with Nanay Inday to learn about the situation of the urban poor. This helps generate support for their struggle. She also participates in national and international assemblies, like the Gabriela National Assembly, where she was able to learn about the issue of climate justice. As urban poor, they are always victims of heavy flooding whenever there is a huge storm. “I was able to voice our concerns about flooding and climate change,” Nanay Inday said.







(Previous page) Community exposure by friends abroad  
 (Above) Posts by Nanay Inday that expresses her opinion on various issues (Above right) A poster on climate justice  
 (Right, clockwise) Die-in at a protest against the Balintawak Market closure, Livelihood at the market, A fire in a Quezon City community suspected to be for demolition.







**Sol Pillas**

### **The woman leader:**

Sol Pillas was a domestic worker in Hong Kong for 25 years. Her becoming a community leader started when she became a volunteer counselor and case officer of the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) and the the Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge. The Bethune House is where migrant workers, mostly women, run to when they encounter abuse from their employers or other problems. From 2004 to 2006, she was the Vice Chairperson of the Association of Concerned Filipinos (ACFIL), a founding member of the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-Migrante-HK). She was also the Vice Chairperson of the Association of Concerned Migrants in Discovery Bay from 2008 to 2013. As a long-time officer of UNIFIL-Migrante-HK, the foremost alliance of Overseas Filipino Workers in Hong Kong, she served many women migrants, advising them on what to do when abused, and leading their fight for economic rights such as wage increase and benefits, as well as anti-discrimination measures.

In 2014, Pillas decided to go home “for good” to the Philippines. She was elected Secretary General of Migrante International on its 7th Congress last December 2014. She led several successful campaigns for overseas Filipino workers' rights and welfare, among them, the

#HandsOffOurBalikbayanBox, #StopTanimBala and #SaveMaryJane. Last September, while in a congressional hearing for the case of Mary Jane Veloso, the OFW victim of drug trafficking fighting against a death sentence in Indonesia, she suffered a massive stroke and went into a coma.

### **Issues tackled:**

OFWs in death row, taxing of Balikbayan Boxes, human trafficking, voter's education

### **Insights gained in citizen reports:**

In her citizen reports, it was apparent how in the Filipino migrant community, families of OFWs who remain in the country, as well as OFWs who have returned, play a big role in pressuring the Philippine government for services due to them. “Neglect” of OFWs by the government is a common sentiment among the more than 10 million Filipinos working abroad. Thus the role of organizations such as Migrante International in pushing for OFWs' welfare is crucial. In Sol's reports, the organization is seen as leading various struggles for welfare and economic rights, as well as political rights such as voting in the upcoming elections.

Her reports publicize little-known cases of OFWs who have been abused or who died under mysterious circumstances. An example is Romina Ignacio, a physical therapist who was found dead in Kansas, USA. Only Migrante International commemorated her death and pressed the call for reinvestigation of the case and justice for the woman victim. Reports from Sol affirm that it is often migrant women workers who are the most vulnerable to abuse overseas.

### **Best practices in advocacy:**

Sol, as a migrant leader, is seen leading many kinds of engagement—mass actions, consultations with OFWs and their families,



dialogues with government officials, and fora with other concerned sectors such as the church. These multiple engagements show that arousing and mobilizing is not confined to a single or a few tactics, but rather should be creative and aimed at reaching the most number of people and engaging the government.

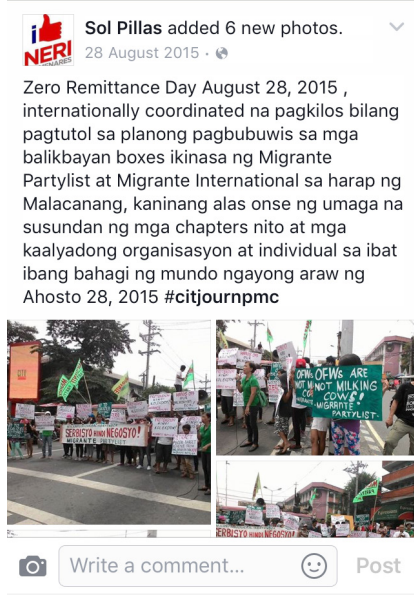
On the issue of the government's plan to increase taxes on the Balikbayan Boxes (or boxes sent home by OFWs to their families), Sol showed that the worldwide action called Zero Remittance Day (wherein OFWs for one day refrain from sending home remittances as a form political protest) is effective. The plan to tax Balikbayan Boxes sparked a flurry of anger from OFWs—which were expressed through viral videos posted online—and Sol showed that there must be an ability to translate this anger into political action. The Philippine government later backtracked on its plan, and the campaign against taxing of Balikbayan Boxes was considered a success.

Another triumphant campaign was the one to save the life of Mary Jane Veloso, a victim of drug trafficking sentenced to death in Indonesia. Through strong appeals by citizens led by

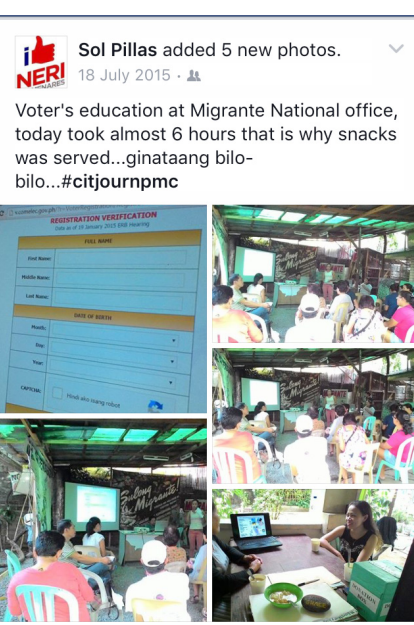
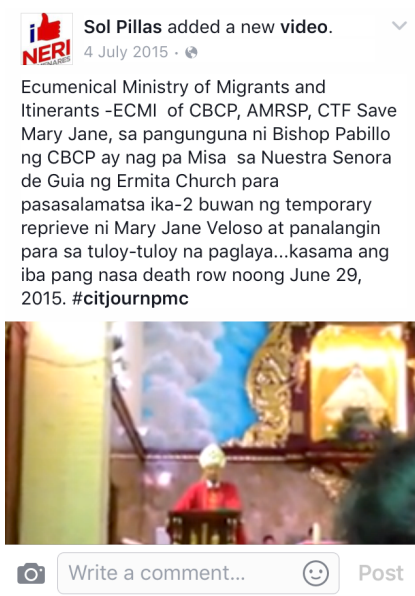
Migrante to Indonesian president Joko Widodo, Mary Jane's life was spared. But Sol showed that persistent lobbying efforts are needed, as Mary Jane remains in jail and in danger. She showed that it was important not just to file a case against Mary Jane's illegal recruiter, but also to follow it up with the highest government officials possible so that the case will prosper. In a photo she posted online, she showed Migrante conducting a dialogue with DOJ Secretary Leila de Lima, who then promised to give due attention to the case. The lesson from this practice is that media attention when the issue is hot is not enough to save OFWs in death row—persistent lobbying efforts are needed to ensure that they come home safely to their families.

Another best practice is using a single case to push for investigation and attention to all other similar cases. There are hundreds of OFWs languishing in jails abroad, many of them in death row. Because of the Mary Jane Veloso case, Sol and other migrant advocates were able to push for a congressional investigation in how the government is providing legal and welfare assistance to OFWs who are on death row or in jails abroad.





Various social media posts by Sol Pillas (Clockwise): Calling for justice for OFW Romina Ignacio, Protest actions with families of OFWs against Balikbayan Box tax, Mass with church leaders for Mary Jane Veloso, Meeting with justice secretary Leila de Lima, Meeting with other civil society groups, Forum on human trafficking, Voter's education, Sharing advocacies with Sr. Mary John Mananzan







## **Marra Macaspac**

### **The woman leader:**

Marra Macaspac is the spokesperson of Migrante Youth, an organization of children of OFWs fighting for migrants welfare. As a student of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, she used her learned skills in communicating to advocate for migrant issues, and upon finishing her studies decided to devote her time to organizing migrant families in the country, especially the youth. “The children of OFWs really have one yearning: that is, to be reunited with their parents in a society that cares for them, where there are jobs that can sustain the Filipino family,” she said. A critic of the government’s labor export policy, she is able to articulate well the impacts of forced migration to the youth and to the media, especially when there are issues like OFWs dying under mysterious circumstances or circumstances of abuse abroad. “I can relate very well to families of victims. I think it is important for children of OFWs to have a support system they can rely on especially in times of crisis,” she said. She added that organizations like Migrante Youth provide that kind of support.

### **Issues tackled:**

Labor export policy, mysterious deaths of OFWs, OWWA Omnibus Policies

### **Insights gained in citizen reports:**

In her reports, she was able to articulate how the Overseas Workers and Welfare Administration (OWWA) Omnibus Policies have failed to protect OFWs and only makes them as “milking cows.” The policy effectively made the \$25 OWWA contributions mandatory per contract, and revoked lifetime memberships of Filipino migrants and families. Meaning, those who are unable to pay will not be entitled to benefits and support from the government, which migrant advocates say is unconstitutional, as every Filipino worker must be protected, regardless of capacity to pay.

### **Best practices in advocacy:**

A good practice in advocacy shown by Marra through her citizen reports is how OFWs must press the government for their demands. A series of actions were made in front of the OWWA office to demand the release of benefits from OFWs who have been victims of illegal retrenchment and abuse by employers.

Another practice shown is how Migrante leaders like Marra go to urban poor communities where many children of OFWs are, to explain the labor export policy, the situation of OFWs, and what can be done. They also conduct psycho-social therapy among children. “These therapy sessions are important because we allow children to define what their parents, mothers especially—mean to them despite being away. And what their role are in changing society, so that families do not have to be torn apart. It also encourages them to be politically engaged at a young age, and teaches them to struggle for their rights,” she said.





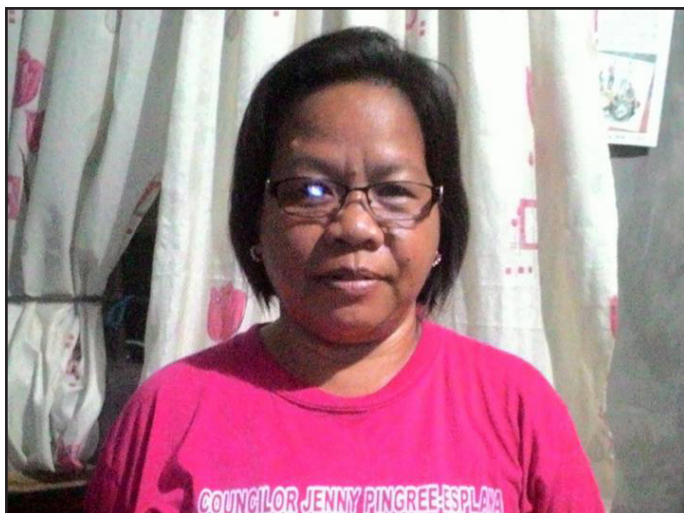
Si Celia Veloso (gitna) kasama ang abogado si Josa Deinla (kaliwa) at Rebecca Lawson ng Church Task Force to Save Mary Jane. **Marra Macaspac**



(From top) Marra's photo used in a Pinoy Weekly news article, Community educational discussion, Guesting at Sr. Mary John Mananzan's show, Protest action calling for justice for woman OFW







**Marina Bozar**

### **The woman leader:**

A housewife and a mother whose “place” in society used to be confined to her home, Marina Bozar, through the local chapter of Gabriela, became a highly active community leader making significant changes in her neighborhood. Originally from the poor agricultural province of Samar and coming from a family of farmers, Marina went to Metro Manila seeking a better life. Currently living in a relocation site for former informal settlers, Marina is the vice-chairperson of the Gabriela chapter of Brgy. Bignay, Valenzuela City.

### **Issues tackled:**

Unemployment, housing, women’s access to social services in relocation sites, K-12 program

### **Insights gained in citizen reports:**

New insights gained in Marina’s reports is the underreported fact that the urban poor living in relocation sites struggle with access to basic services, commercialized housing, and lack of employment opportunities.

Marina reported that even if they were given housing by the government, the amortization that they are required to pay increases, as set by the National Housing Authority. Failure to pay this amortization leads to the threat of eviction.

“In the community, majority of women depend on their husbands who are factory workers in nearby factories. However, workers receive less than minimum wage and are often contractuels. That’s why women have to augment their wages through informal jobs like outsourced repacking of factory goods, which they do for very little pay,” Marina said.

Marina was also able to report on cases of violence against women, such as that of a woman worker being beaten by her employer in a jellycups factory. Gabriela was able to assist the woman in getting back to work and confronting her employer about the abuse. These reports show how women are more vulnerable than men inside the workplace, and that much more needs to be done, policy-wise, and in implementing the Anti-Violence Against Women Act to ensure workplace equality.

### **Best practices in advocacy:**

Through her reports, Marina was able to show that house-house discussions with women do a lot in educating them about their rights to social services, such as health, education, and non-commercialized housing.

Marina also became active in the Parents Movement Against K-12. K-12 is an educational program that adds two more years to high school. This is seen as an additional burden to parents, who can barely afford to send their children to school. “There is a lot of anger among parents about the implementation of K-12. It is through alliances that we are able to mobilize, for instance, in order for the Supreme Court to issue a Temporary Restraining Order against K-12,” she said. The activities also served as a way to unite women in the community, who have a common interest in the continuing education of their children.

It is also easy to mobilize women in pressing for health care. As Marina's reports show, women were at the forefront in mass actions against the privatization of a local hospital, which would make services even more inaccessible to the poor.

Citizen journalism also served as an effective way to have women's organizations known to the local government, and as a way for women to express grievances. For instance, discrimination and slow service in the village health center was reported through Marina, and the village captain took action. The clean-up drive held by women was also able to attract attention because of the information being spread through social media. Now, the village captain is more attuned to the demands and concerns of the community.

Another good practice shown by Marina is how community women are valuable in efforts to have marginalized women representation in the Philippine Congress. Community women are shown campaigning for Gabriela Women's

Party, which have lobbied consistently for pro-women laws, such as laws on anti-discrimination, reproductive health, and divorce. Electoral campaigning was seen as a platform as well to educate women on the programs and vision of Gabriela, which is an equal society wherein women are given the same economic and social opportunities as men, and are free from patriarchal bondages inside and outside the home.



(Above right) Protest action calling for justice for more than 80 workers who died at a slipper factory in Valenzuela City  
(Above) Gabriela members putting up posters against Violence Against Women and hotline for abused women





(From above, clockwise) Parents' action against K-12 program, One Billion Rising Philippines, Confronting police at action demanding justice for WW2 comfort women, Livelihood at Brgy. Bignay







## Bai Ali Indayla

### The woman leader:

Bai Ali Indayla is a Bangsamoro from the Maguindanaon region, Mindanao. As a Moro woman growing up in a patriarchal, Muslim society, she always felt “out of the mold” of what a girl was expected to be. She studied mathematics in college, a track dominated by male students. While still a university student, Bai Ali was elected as president of the student body, the first female student to hold this position.

After graduation, she became active on issues of militarization, peacebuilding and documentation of violations against the Bangsamoro communities. These activities were risky, especially in the context of the ongoing conflict between the national government and insurgents seeking regional autonomy. A peace process has been ongoing since 1976, and an Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, or ARMM, was established in 1996. However, many indigenous activists have been disappointed with how the ARMM was implemented and governed. High rates of poverty remain, and basic social services are not reaching the Moro communities. This region is rich in natural resources and agricultural land; as a result, clashes between various armed groups, land grabbing conflicts and inter-communal violence continue and contribute to the heavy militarization of Mindanao.

Bai Ali became the Secretary General of KAWAGIB – Alliance for the Advancement of Moro Human Rights, a position she still holds today. In 2009, an intelligence agent interrogated Bai Ali’s teacher, family members and friends, to get more information about her, and her activities. “My family was afraid on possible plans of abduction or even killing. So my friends and colleagues gave me suggestions to ensure my security. There would be times when my family would ask me to stop being an activist. But I remained firm on my beliefs, and continue to do what I have been doing.” Bai Ali continues her work, but not without fear, and not without being careful. Recently, recognized for her advocacy work for Moro women’s rights, she was selected as third nominee of Gabriela Women’s Party and hopes to gain a representational seat in Congress.

### Issues tackled:

Moro people’s right to self-determination, human rights violations, Violence Against Women and Children, Lumad killings

### Insights gained in citizen reports:

Bai Ali was very active in posting social media updates about the human rights violations against the Lumad, or the non-Christian and non-Moro indigenous peoples of Mindanao. As a Moro leader, she also participated actively in the call to stop Lumad killings, and in the grand journey of around 600 Lumad from Mindanao to Manila, dubbed as “Manilakbayan 2015.” This shows how interlinked the Moro struggle for self-determination is to the struggles of indigenous peoples in Mindanao, and how they have a common unity in terms of their desire for their ancestral lands against the encroachment of mining companies, plantations, and other corporate interests.



In her posts about Violence Against Women and Children, it can also be deemed that there are many cases of rape that are underreported; among them are those perpetrated by the military in Moro and Lumad communities. For instance, a 14-year old girl who was “rescued” by the military from the Lumad evacuation center in Davao City became a victim of rape.

As a form of protest against rape and other VAWC cases, Bai Ali showed that dancing—such as that advocated by the One Billion Rising global campaign—can be very effective in fostering unity and projecting a loud cry against rape.

### **Best practices in advocacy:**

Advocacy against VAWC is best undertaken through an educational campaign among women themselves—this is shown by Bai Ali through consultations and meetings of Gabriela among its members. The women’s partylist group is the author of several bills that seek to push for the Philippine government’s compliance to the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) including amendments to the Anti-Rape Law that will give further weight to the victim’s testimony and lack of consent. While seeking a Congressional seat to further her advocacies, Bai Ali shows that mobilizing grassroots women is still most effective.



*(Above) Bai Ali Indayla bringing movie and television actress Maria Isabel Lopez to a Lumad evacuation camp  
(Right) A shot by Bai Ali showing Lumad making their own placard with the call to end impunity and human rights violations*







**Bai Ali Indayla**

14 September 2015 · 🌐

#CNNPHCA #StopLumadKillings



### Bai Ali Indayla on Twitter

"Traditional baganis of lumads use bangkaw & othr tradit'l weapons bt nt firearms.AFP supplied firearms 2 baganis turned paramilitary lumads."

TWITTER.COM | BY BAI ALI INDAYLA

Like Comment Share

Benjie T. Badal and 12 others

Bai Ali Indayla added 2 new photos.

ATM: Manilabayan 2015 Forum @ Kabacan, North Cotabato.  
#StopLumadKillings #citjournpmc



Bai Ali Indayla added 3 new photos.

Visiting us to show solidarity this morning at Kampuhan sa Liwasang Bonifacio is Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, Archbishop of Manila. Thank you Cardinal Tagle for urging the government to act and stop the killings of Lumad, pull-out of military troops from Lumad communities, Disbandment and disarming the paramilitary groups, support for the Lumad evacuees, and Justice for the victims. I hope with your support, BS Aquino's administration will at least think that they can no longer hide the attacks on Lumad and they must end the injustices. Or at least with the support you've shown to us, many Filipinos will also be in solidarity with the Lumad. #StopLumadKillings #Manilabayan2015



Bai Ali Indayla  
24 November 2015 · 🌐

Launching of One Billion Rising: Revolution 2016 today at Rizal Park, Davao City with Monique Wilson Luz C Ilagan Grace Mahinay #LabananAngAbuso #ProudGabriela



Like Comment Share

Tyrone Velez, Marissa Cabaljaio and 90 others



(Left) Bai Ali Indayla reporting human rights violations on Twitter (Below, clockwise) A forum on Lumad killings, Accompanying church leaders to the Lumad camp, One Billion Rising launch in Davao City, Manilabayan camp with Lumad talking to students, A press conference with church people on a recent spate of HRVs, Photo exhibit showing HRVs against the Moro people



## Some scenes from the seminar-workshop





## Some scenes from the seminar-workshop

