

SRI LANKA



Photography: Dominic Sansoni

The Asia Foundation's programs in Sri Lanka support local efforts to strengthen democracy, human rights, and access to justice; manage and resolve conflict; promote greater citizen participation in policymaking and governance; and promote private enterprise policy reform.

Since 1983, Sri Lanka's civil war has claimed a terrible toll in lives and in damage to the economy. The ceasefire and negotiations between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam that began in 2002 has broken down, but finding a permanent settlement to more than 25 years of civil strife remains Sri Lanka's central development challenge. Recognizing that a sustainable peace is tied to overcoming deeper problems of a weakened democracy, lack of justice, and human rights violations, The Asia Foundation's program in Sri Lanka seeks to identify and support organizations and institutions that promote democratic governance and the rule of law as essential for lasting peace and prosperity.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The Asia Foundation's local governance program demonstrates that devolution to elected local authorities can bring tangible benefits to citizens. The Foundation has formed partnerships with 35 local government authorities (*pradeshiya sabhas*, urban councils, and municipal councils) in six provinces to demonstrate models of effective local governance. The program supports capacity-building for local authorities in four broad areas: leadership and local development planning, financial management, service delivery, and community participation. Through training and technical assistance, local authorities learn how to manage their finances and increase revenue, provide better services to citizens, and facilitate meaningful two-way consultations with citizens. In tsunami-affected areas, program activities enabled local government and communities to work together to meet the challenges of post-tsunami recovery. A policy component supports the government and political

parties in developing a reform agenda that will delegate more responsibility and authority for government functions to the provincial and local levels. Finally, the program helps to develop and document models of effective democratic local governance so they can be replicated in other parts of the country.

ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

The Asia Foundation works to ensure that the interests of the private sector are reflected in economic policy and local government planning. Activities strengthen the capacity of local business associations to undertake effective policy advocacy based on the needs of small and medium enterprise owners (SMEs). In order to identify specific barriers to growth that the private sector faces, the Foundation has conducted surveys of the enabling environment for micro, small, and medium enterprises (SMEs) in towns such as Kegalle, Nuwara Eliya, and Kurunegala. SMEs constitute the vast bulk of Sri Lanka's economy, and findings on the regulatory environment for these towns have implications for others. The Foundation supports dialogue between local government authorities and business owners to understand and remove the impediments to growth and investment in SMEs in municipalities and towns throughout the country. It works with government and private sector stakeholders to identify critical reforms for business growth and develops national and local advocacy strategies to pursue them. The Foundation is embarking on a landmark survey that ranks municipalities and towns by the business-friendliness of their infrastructure, public services, and development policies. The survey is intended to help government and the business community to



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The Asia Foundation programs in Sri Lanka date back to 1954.

The Foundation has been a pioneer in strengthening community-based legal services and mediation for the poor in Sri Lanka.

The Foundation supported a definitive study on the relationship between aid, conflict, and peace-building in Sri Lanka, and a follow-up study on the United States' involvement in Sri Lanka's peace process.

The Foundation distributes some 80,000 new English-language publications a year to libraries throughout Sri Lanka.

better focus reform efforts and to motivate local governments to create a more conducive environment for all businesses.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The Asia Foundation's programs aim to improve access to justice by making legal and administrative institutions more responsive to citizens' needs and interests, while at the same time developing the capacity of disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities, to realize their rights. Foundation programs are clustered in three areas: language rights, legal empowerment, and mediation. The Foundation provides training in the Tamil language for court and police officials. In Sri Lanka, language barriers prevent interaction and communication between local communities and government officials who are supposed to provide basic services. Increasing Tamil-language fluency among government officials can help reduce feelings of alienation among the ethnic Tamil and Muslim minorities in the northern, eastern, and central provinces, while strengthening access to justice. Through Foundation-supported legal empowerment programs, the Foundation works with partner organizations to help vulnerable groups develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence to redress their grievances and access the benefits, protections, and opportunities to which they are legally entitled. The Foundation is also continuing more than a decade of support for the community mediation boards program of the Ministry of Justice. The mediation boards provide an affordable, quick, and accessible means for citizens to resolve disputes that might otherwise go without redress. The Foundation has helped to maintain the high quality of mediation training and supported the program's expansion in the north and east. There are now 273 mediation boards throughout the country and 5,860 mediators, all of whom have benefited from Foundation-supported training and technical assistance programs.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The Asia Foundation supports applied research to identify effective, culturally appropriate psychosocial interventions for torture survivors in Sri Lanka. The Foundation supports partner organizations to provide more effective psychosocial treatment,

including counseling, medical care, physiotherapy, and other essential services for victims of torture and their families, as well as legal research, public outreach and advocacy to stimulate debate and influence policy aimed at reducing the incidence of torture in Sri Lanka. The Foundation has also supported more effective NGO monitoring and documentation of human rights based on common definitions and standards of reliability and employing statistical tools to identify patterns and trends in human rights abuses.

CONFLICT ANALYSIS

In cooperation with the World Bank and the governments of the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, The Asia Foundation supported a definitive study on the relationship between aid, conflict, and peace-building in Sri Lanka referred to as the *Strategic Conflict Assessment 2005*. The study analyzes political events since the Ceasefire Agreement and identifies how the international community can better support domestic efforts to find a political solution to Sri Lanka's conflict. The Foundation supported a follow-up study on the United States' involvement in Sri Lanka's peace process and plans more supplementary studies to examine the role of key members of the international community and other issues related to the peace process that could not be fully investigated in the *Strategic Conflict Assessment*.

BOOKS FOR ASIA

Through its Books for Asia (BFA) program, The Asia Foundation distributes some 80,000 new English-language publications a year to libraries throughout Sri Lanka. The BFA program dates back to 1956. Since 1980, BFA has distributed more than 2 million books to approximately 10,000 institutions including libraries of universities, technical and vocational colleges, primary and secondary schools, government institutions, NGOs, and public libraries. Throughout the years of conflict, the Foundation continued to distribute books to the north and east and provided thousands of books to the Jaffna Public Library as part of its rebuilding efforts. Since 2002 the Books for Asia program has been partially funded by donations from the Sri Lankan private sector, led by Sri Lanka Telecom.

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